

## Cinema, meteorology, and the erotics of weather

by Emil Leth Meilvang

### Abstract

This article explores the notion of a meteorology of cinema. Through the close reading of a string of books – with subjects such as clouds, rain, and snow – the article conceptualises an approach to weather on film, and grounds this approach in the anti-hermeneutics of Susan Sontag, André Bazin’s geography of cinema, and the movement philosophy of Gaston Bachelard.

### Keywords

meteorology, cinematic weather, Gaston Bachelard, Susan Sontag, anti-hermeneutics, André Bazin, Dominique Païni

The birth of cinema is clouded in myth. Dramatised anecdotes speak of the mythical screening of Louis Lumière’s *Le Repas de bébé* (1895), this fragment of early film in which a baby is being fed in a windy, sunlit garden. The story goes that the properly captivating aspect of the fragment was not the family gathering in the foreground but instead the wind shaking the leaves in the trees at the end of the lawn. Georges Méliès, in an often told anecdote, famously stated that he sensed the revolutionary potential of moving images in the swirling bushes and foliage of Lumière’s film, and ever since, these wind-rustled leaves have been part of the inventory of early film.<sup>1</sup> The ur-legend of *Le Repas de bébé*, then, is often retold as a point of departure for excavations into the depths of the ontology of the moving image. But beyond the mythical, what do these images actually show? We can certainly say that they provided the cinematic appearance of *weather*, vibrating slices of *meteorological movements*.

In this article, I will seek to flesh out the questions implicitly posed by *Le Repas de bébé* and its rattling leaves. How can we begin to conceptualise weather on film? What would a meteorology of cinema look like? The present article approaches these questions through a string of smaller books which take weather on film as their primary object of investigation. I will try to sketch out the contours of a cinematic meteorology by synthesising and critically engaging with a book series, titled *Côté Cinéma / Motifs* (CCM) and edited by Dominique Païni, that so far features works on shadow, light, clouds, rain, snow, and wind.<sup>2</sup> By thinking through these books – squarely overlooked in Anglophone scholarship – I hope to carve out an interrelated sequence of meteorological film-thinking, one that is, as we shall see, predicated on the consonance between weatherly and cinematic movement. Simultaneously, I will try to tease out the intellectual roots of this meteorological approach to cinema, seeing as it engages with a deep web of philosophical and aesthetical *a-prioris*. This will lead us to Susan Sontag’s ‘erotics of art’ as a helpful tool in conceptualising cinematic meteorology and to the (mystico-)phenomenology of André Bazin and Gaston Bachelard as a way of historically and theoretically thickening this meteorology. I thus hold that one cannot fully grasp the cinematic meteorology of CCM without grappling with its implicit intellectual heritage and that an unearthing of such heritage in turn will elucidate the theory itself. My search for a meteorology of cinema in CCM is in other words both endogenic – in the sense that I seek to synthesise the books into an interconnected, theoretical model – and exogenic –

in the sense that I let certain key points of aesthetic thinking ground and further said model, the point being that these two sides are co-constitutive.<sup>3</sup>

### **Erotics of the cloud, poetics of the cloud: Delineating cinematic meteorology**

In his book on cinema and clouds, scholar and former director of the *Cinémathèque française*, Dominique Païni describes an analytic position which can be taken as a starting point for the entire meteorology of CCM. He wants the viewer to surrender to ‘the contemplation of a shot’s *secondary* elements’.<sup>4</sup> Païni wishes for us to pay closer attention to the objects and phenomena that we tend to deem unworthy of theoretical or analytical interest, that which constitutes the banal and the everyday, the simple stuff of realism. A meteorology of cinema must, according to Païni, start by de-familiarising weather. It must move towards the margins of the image and to the edges of the narrative. A theoretical prerequisite for CCM thus involves a reversal of primary and secondary elements. The weatherly phenomena that merely seem to facilitate the blank, realist space in which the plot is inscribed with its characters, lines, and cues hold a sprawling vitality, a non-narrative abundance saturated with their own inversed form of significance. Weather on film signifies but not in any allegorical, directly interpretive sense. Rather, the weatherly cine-phenomenon is an end onto itself and according to Païni, cinematic weather can never be fully instrumentalised in narrative. For this reason, as Benjamin Thomas states in his book on wind, the interest is in ‘all that is visible in itself but is not revealed by that which we spontaneously would qualify as “plot or theme”; all that *expresses* itself outside of the verbal or the rational, through the *sensible*’.<sup>5</sup> We thus get a reversal that is not a simple mirroring. It is not that the secondary weatherly elements unaffectedly become primary, that the rain drenched skies of a Béla Tarr or Tsai Ming-liang are infused with a meaning reducible to a string in the plot as in, say, natural disaster movies. It is not *meteoros* turned into *logos*. Rather, in the very act of making the meteorological primary the whole notion of primacy – thematically, semantically, narratively – also mutates. One could say that the writers of CCM move from textual semiosis to sensible experience. But how can we speak about cinematic weather if we necessarily, according to Païni and Thomas, have to broach it as a phenomenon outside of language, narrative, and text?

One way for us to approach such inversed signification and its opposition to narrative is to stress its similarities with the anti-hermeneutical model of Susan Sontag. Sontag’s well-known attack on hermeneutics and interpretation is of course based on her diagnosis of a certain critical conception which seeks to divorce content from form – making the latter less true, less important – which for Sontag amounts to a de facto sterilisation and ultimately reactionary academisation of art. To her, such a strong, interpretative impulse turns every artwork into a detective story – with the answers to the riddle already built into the interpretative framework’s theoretical point of departure.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the fact that Païni’s primary and secondary elements do not translate directly into Sontag’s content and form, his and the CCM way of developing a cinematic meteorology do share Sontag’s scepticism towards hermeneutics and her encouragement toward a criticism devoid of the mechanical need for interpretation that would ultimately result in a ‘textualisation’ of cinema. Rather, this meteorology savours sensuous, cinematic immediacy; what Mathias Lavin, in his book on snow, describes as ‘a return to a world prior to signification’.<sup>7</sup> This ultimately entails, as Sontag underlines, an *erotics of art*, as opposed to a hermeneutics of art.<sup>8</sup> It calls for the viewer to cast aside any preconceived, interpretive framework, indeed any notion of an underlining, supposedly more essential subtext in need of translation. One must instead invest oneself in the manifest, cinematographic forms by way of careful descriptions – not unlike

the thick description of phenomenology – and try to illuminate how the work displays itself and appears to our senses. Sontag’s erotics of art is calling for an intensified sensitivity and receptivity towards the appearance of the work of art, comparable to the heightened sensitivity of the aroused body during the sexual act. It is precisely such a notion which Păini seems to hint at when he declares himself to engage with an ‘erotics of clouds’.<sup>9</sup> It is a sensible engagement with the cinematic appearance of weather that acknowledges images of wind-swept plains or misty landscapes as proper, singular expressions of meteorology. If rain continues to fall in nearly every image of a Béla Tarr film, then we must accept this as a cinematic world in which it always rains and try to sharply describe such a world – irreducible to ‘plot’ or to our own sense of meteorology.

By this slanted reversal the meteorology of CCM travels from narrative and text to form and movement. The books in CCM, with their focus on marginal, weatherly elements, are undertaking a distinctly *formal* and *figural* type of analysis.<sup>10</sup> When analysing and theoretically conceptualising that which moves outside of narrative, and thereby runs on the verge of discourse, one is impelled to a formalist, descriptive methodology. Questions of composition, framing, and relief become all-encompassing. To CCM, these formal aspects of cinematic meteorology infuse the image with a specific *dynamics*.<sup>11</sup> Slowly descending snowflakes, heavy rain, breezes of wind all set the fabric of film into motion. Two decisive concepts for the meteorology of cinema thus become *movement* – motion on the screen, motion of the screen and the frame – and *plasticity* – the malleability of the substance of film.<sup>12</sup> The writers of CCM all locate – and this will be further explicated later – a deep connection between meteorological and cinematic movement, carefully interpreting how the two superimpose, as when Benjamin Thomas, by way of Gilles Deleuze, underlines how cinematic wind reveals each photogram to be ‘literally charged with movement’.<sup>13</sup>

Through this dynamic setting into motion of the image, CCM distinguishes one of the key effects of weather on film as a subtle undermining of cinematic transparency. Quite simply, weather often obscures our vision, it confuses our sense of orientation and it hereby poses an insistent challenge for mimetic representation. This of course not only pertains to light or wind – two phenomena that are in themselves invisible – but to the whole range of weatherly occurrences. Art historian Kenneth Clark, as referenced by Păini, once sought to explain why representations of clouds arrived surprisingly late in Italian painting. It was only towards the end of the renaissance that clouds figured in Italian art even though one finds them in far earlier Dutch paintings. According to Clark this delay was caused by the Italian notion of ‘*certezze*’. That is, the need for and rigid attention to steady, geometrically solid forms which determined the Italian worldview at the time. The moveable, variable plasticity of clouds simply did not correspond to the strictly mathematic perspectivalisation of the world that ‘*certezze*’ entailed. In continuation with this line of thinking, Păini seeks to elaborate – and I would argue that this goes for all of the books in CCM – cinematic weather as a potential crisis in renaissance perspective, a breakdown within a mathematised, squarely structured idea of visuality.<sup>14</sup> He consequently also seems to equate the very opticality of the cinematic image with renaissance perspective as it has been done in more recent visual theory from Jean-Louis Baudry and onwards. One should, however, not take this as an attempt at locating a potential non-perspectivity in every sequence of moving images that includes weather. Rather, the books in CCM seek out and bind together those directors who most drastically have taken the formal and intellectual consequences of the specific optics inherent in weatherly phenomena and thereby put the language of cinema at the mercy of meteorology – or more precisely, directors who complicate the language of cinema through weather. Such a formal, meteorological collapse of the renaissance system challenges not only perspective in

the strict sense but also the very aura of a tightly structured mastery of the visual. From this comes another decisive duality that cuts across the books of CCM: the tension between the film studio and the outside, between interiors and exteriors.<sup>15</sup> The meteo-theoreticians of CCM champion directors who – to a large extent – shoot their films outside and thus at the mercy of weather. From this way of cinematically engaging with the natural world grows an image that is free and unrestrained, an image that is not subjugated to the mechanics of the studio, an image which effectively gains a shine of autonomy and formal agency.<sup>16</sup> In the meteorology of cinema, then, arises a moving image whose movements cannot be bridled. The writers of CCM sees meteo-cinema as something akin to what W.J.T. Mitchell once called ‘vital signs’: images vibrating with ‘agency, motivation, autonomy, aura, fecundity’.<sup>17</sup>

Such a way of conceptualising images would seem to hold a whole range of political implications. Yet on first reading, CCM presents itself as almost devoid of politics. This clearly begs the question of what it means to do cinematic meteorology in our ecological age with increasingly extreme weather conditions. Is it even possible to do this a-politically?<sup>18</sup> On close reading, however, a meteo-politics does emerge from the depths of CCM’s aesthetic formalism. Running through the entire series as a poetological undercurrent is cinema’s ability to produce not only intensified forms of meteorology but whole representational ecologies. Here, the meteorology of CCM hints at an intuition similar to the one put forth by eco-cinema scholar Adrian Ivakhiv, for whom cinema can come to function as a creator of worlds, as a coming into form of worlds and in this reveal its political charge. Ivakhiv’s eco-philosophy of cinema seeks to unearth how film ‘makes, or takes the shape of, a world, a cosmos of subjects and objects, actors and situations, figures moving and the grounds they move upon’.<sup>19</sup> In line with the film-philosophy of Siegfried Kracauer and Gilles Deleuze this results in an ethical imperative to ‘revivify our relationship to the world’.<sup>20</sup> Such an ecological imperative is also heard in CCM when Corinne Maury, in her book on rain, speaks of the ‘spiritual meditation on the world’, or when Benjamin Thomas talks of cinematically re-establishing the ‘world’s texture’ or ‘augmenting sensible knowledge’.<sup>21</sup> Through cinema’s framing and creation of meteorology arises a potential for ecological and ethical commitment. In this sense, the meteorology of CCM also seems to share some of the concerns found in contemporary studies of *atmosphere*, especially as developed by Gernot Böhme and Tonino Griffero. Here atmosphere is conceptualised as a ‘quasi-object’ or an in-between phenomenon which shapes the emotional tonality of the viewer. The atmosphere is itself the relation between the subjective and the objective; it is that which ‘mediates the objective qualities of an environment with the bodily-sensual states of a person in this environment’.<sup>22</sup> Böhme has precisely stressed that his theory is an outgrowth of ecological thinking, and in building his ‘aesthetics of atmosphere’ he underlines how it opposes conventional hermeneutics and semiotics and zooms in on aesthetic experience – close to the line of thought found in Sontag. Beyond the obvious differences between the notion of a spatially extended, emotionally charged atmosphere, and the two-dimensional frame of film, cinematic meteorology as developed in CCM could perhaps be thought of as the starting point for a fruitful dialogue between the theory of cinema and the theory of atmosphere, as a representational subgenre of an aesthetics of atmosphere. Cinematic meteorology would then inquire into how a weather phenomenon modulates the emotional temperament of the viewer as is strongly implied by both Lavin and Païni.<sup>23</sup> Even though it might seem the intuitive conclusion, it would be mistaken to think of these theoretical descriptions as inherently advocating a pure, theoretical realism in which the world transparently makes itself visible through film. Instead it is the transformative aptitude of cinema that is stressed as the moment of potentiality in CCM. When cinema cuts a meteo-phenomenon out of the world then this very phenomenon gets framed anew, converted, and modulated. Cinema constructs new

perceptual ecologies, it potentially builds distinctive and singular meteorologies which equally modulates the viewer ecologically.

As Païni states it, he is trying to re-formulate the ‘hermeneutical status of description’ – bearing in mind that hermeneutical, as already demonstrated, does not equate to narrative signification, but rather to sensuality and experience. He goes on to cite art historian Michael Baxandall (‘description is a demonstration’)<sup>24</sup> in arguing for the implicit, analytical surplus value of detailed, finely-tuned descriptions of different cinematic sequences. In this way, the theoretical scaffold delineated above is again to be stressed as fundamentally descriptive but equally *comparative*. All of the books are indeed structured as a meteorological journey into the history of cinema through the lens of one particular weather phenomenon. To give just one example of this, one can turn to Maury’s *L’attrait de la pluie*, a book that is brimming with expansive descriptions and plotted out as a montage of rain sequences from a vast range of film. By thickly describing films as diverse as Jean Renoir’s *Partie de campagne* (1936), Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* (1950), and Blake Edwards’ *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), Maury maps out affinities and dissimilarities between artworks and directors with a penchant for the rainfall, and she seems to precisely imply meteorology as a way of finding new trajectories in the history of cinema. Maury, for instance, stresses how it was precisely his pulsating images of rain which led the French surrealist Germaine Dulac to champion the work of Joris Ivens as a cinema of the future given over to – in Dulac’s words – ‘the sensibility and the intelligence of the eye’.<sup>25</sup> By subtly and richly describing images, Maury and the other theoreticians of CCM aim at finding minor, understudied threads in film history. In doing this, CCM is effectively given over to an erotics art that actively verifies a specific theoretical model that once again comes into contact with Sontag who similarly called for a new, expansive way of speaking about art; ‘a vocabulary – a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms’.<sup>26</sup>

To recapitulate, the meteo-formalism of CCM is unfolding cinematic weather as secondary, reversed significance, opened up by a sensible erotics in which weather is grasped as an undermining of a tightly-structured visuality. Built around an emphasis on movement, cinema is seen as simultaneously being at the mercy of weather and as itself transforming weather; therein giving rise to new, distinctly singular forms of meteorology. In the cinematic meteorology of CCM, description, formalism, and alternative routes of film history thus intertwine around a pertinent alternative to a textualised model of moving images. With this definition, we can begin to investigate the deep intellectual roots of the series.

### **The earth and the myth: Bazin and Bachelard**

Besides the correlations with Sontag’s erotics of art, as well as the overlapping with strands of eco-cinema and theories of atmosphere, two intellectual kinships will help frame and ground the cinematic meteorology of CCM.<sup>27</sup> All of the books in the series are, in the very fabric of their arguments, influenced by phenomenology (we find references to both Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>28</sup> and to the early phenomenological writings of Christian Metz<sup>29</sup>), yet one particular cine-phenomenologist provides a vital language with which to further articulate the meteorological theory: the *éminence grise* of French film theory, André Bazin. Bazin’s branch of phenomenology, with its religious and existential overtones, has of course its own intricate connections with the mainstream of the phenomenological tradition. It would be going too far for me to map out these interconnections in the present article, so suffice it to say that Bazin’s way of thinking plays an important role in CCM as a sort of filmic extension of the phenomenological stance.<sup>30</sup> More than anything, however, it is Bazin’s surprising and

often overlooked rootedness in the earth sciences – a disciplinary umbrella which includes meteorology – that will prove pertinent with regards to a meteorology of cinema.

One of the most interesting contributions to the ongoing re-actualization of Bazinian theory comes from Ludovic Cortade who, in his article ‘Cinema Across Fault Lines: Bazin and the French School of Geography’, convincingly argues for a geographical, geological, and topological perspective in Bazin’s writings. Bazin had an extensive schooling in these disciplines, and Cortade effectively shows how they later influenced his way of speculating on cinema.<sup>31</sup> According to Cortade, Bazin analyses film as he was taught to analyse landscapes: topological analysis is mirrored in style and *mise-en-scène*, the analysis of geological layering is mirrored in the moral significance of films, the analysis of erosion, geomorphology, is mirrored in the evolution of cinematic forms.<sup>32</sup> Such reflections on the appearance of nature and landscape that are at the core of Bazin’s writings tie up productively with CCM, as when Cortade writes on Bazin that ‘the potentiality of movement helps inscribe reality’s ontological priority over human meaning onto the plastics of the image’.<sup>33</sup> The absence of human interference, which is of major importance to Bazin’s ontology of cinema as well as to the meteorology of CCM, is exemplified in everyday expressions as ‘*it rains*’ and ‘*it snows*’. Our very way of talking attests to the absence of subjectivity vis-à-vis the weather.<sup>34</sup> For Bazin, analysing moving images that are in themselves independent of human interaction therefore does not prove much different than working in the earth sciences. We could say that both the film critic and the meteorologist are trying to grasp the phenomenon of moving form beyond textual semiosis. As Bazin states with baffling directness in his essay ‘Cinema and Exploration’, the cineaste is an ‘official witness, so to speak, along with the meteorologist or the geologist’.<sup>35</sup>

What Cortade finds in Bazin’s geo-cinema is thus the idea of *viewing geographically*, transplanting geography into film analysis, in which ‘the question “what is cinema?” echoes another question: “what is geography?”’<sup>36</sup> Which is to say, that the interpenetration of cinema and the earth sciences opens a position informed by geography but separated from any geographical mimesis (geography informs cinematic thinking beyond geographical motifs). Furthermore, the appropriation of geography into the domain of cinema necessarily furthers reflections on the ontology of cinema and vice versa. As will be explicated shortly, one also finds such ‘ontologisation’ in cinematic meteorology. Let me stress, however, that the meteorology of CCM cannot be thought of as divorced from cinematic motifs. It is indeed one of the film historical benefits of the meteorology of CCM that it provides the possibility of creating – through the prism of motif, be it rain, snow, or clouds – new historical constellations in which works from diverse areas or traditions suddenly move into proximity with one another, excavating unforeseen kinships through meteorological topoi.<sup>37</sup> Yet, what Bazinian geo-cinema illuminates is that the question of cinematic ontology is thoroughly ignited by the cross-pollination with the earth sciences. As will become clear through the last point in the intellectual itinerary of CCM, revolving around the thinker Gaston Bachelard, ontology and cine-meteorology are indeed co-dependant.

Bachelard’s enigmatic speculations, also from a phenomenological genus, hold an absolutely decisive place in the theoretical infrastructure of CCM. This is despite the fact that Bachelard himself very seldomly wrote about cinema; he preferred to think of, in, and through *mental images*.<sup>38</sup> Allusions to the works of Bachelard, in particular *L’Eau et les rêves* (1942) and *L’Air et les songes* (1943), are scattered all across the series, and it is thus Bachelard’s poetics of the elements and not his historical epistemology that are taken to vivify the attempt at theorising cine-meteorology.<sup>39</sup> To put it in overly simple terms, Bachelard offers a way of

thinking mobility, transformation, process, and conversion that is fundamentally tied to both matter and imagination (the latter is evidently *the* key term in his philosophy). This provides CCM with a productive way of approaching the relations of imaginative materiality to moveable form. Beyond the simple influence of motifs, the real intellectual kinship, I would argue, between Bachelard and CCM is thus to be located in Bachelard's insistence on speculating within the 'mysteriously living matter'<sup>40</sup> of the world, as well as his constant emphasis on movement as a most precious and pivotal moment in the very act of thinking. As he harshly accentuates it, since it is simply much easier to describe, remember, or analyse a stable form than it is a movement, we have forgotten or done away with the vital importance of movement itself.<sup>41</sup> Yet for Bachelard there is no critical and imaginative enterprise without movement, there is no substance that is purely inert stasis.<sup>42</sup> With such a philosophical outlook Bachelard becomes a highly functional thinker for theorising cinema, his philosophy could be described as a thinking in moving images, and he becomes especially poignant for a meteorology of cinema that undertakes the excavation of the tangled strings tying movement to sensibility, mutating form to filmic substance.

There have been a few attempts at combining Bachelardian philosophy with a theory of cinema.<sup>43</sup> Chief among these is perhaps the work carried out by Éric Thouvenel. In his 2010 cross-reading of Jean Epstein and Bachelard – 'two men with common daydreams, intuitions, influences'<sup>44</sup> – Thouvenel focuses on Bachelard's epistemological texts, and he most elaborately proposes a Bachelard-infused film theory in his 2012 piece 'Is Cinema Bachelardian?' The latter fleshes out the possible philosophical interrelations of cinema and Bachelard's philosophy of the elemental, finding both a vector of materialised reverie in the very process of knowledge creation and a vector, an 'alchemic model', that interrogates the images themselves.<sup>45</sup> Going further, I would argue that a Bachelardian view on cinematic transformation also corresponds partially, yet productively with Ivakhiv's eco-philosophy and its basis in what Ivakhiv calls a 'process-relational' model: 'a model that understands the world, and cinema, to be made up not primarily of objects, substances, structures, or representations, but rather of relational processes, encounters, or events'.<sup>46</sup> A way of thinking that ultimately makes it possible for cinema to reactivate our relationship to our ecologies or meteorologies and to show us that everything indeed is moving, that nothing is truly inert or static, and that 'the universe has been motion all along'.<sup>47</sup> These ever-evolving processes of our planet, revealed and theorised by the moving image, are precisely the prerequisite for philosophising according to Bachelard. This is something which (cinematic) weather has the ability to make manifest in what Benjamin Thomas calls 'pure movement' – virtual movement, a constantly movable potentiality of both the spirit and the world.<sup>48</sup> According to CCM, it is in weather, made explicit by cinema, that we find virtual motion in its purest state: snow, light, wind, fog are all trembling with the very potentiality of movement itself. And through an erotics of art we are potentially affected by and drawn into this very movement as a congruency of the movement of weather and the movement of cinema.

It is by recourse to Bachelard and his philosophy of movement, then, that one arrives at the radical end point for the meteorology of CCM: cinema *as* weather. Seeing cinema itself as something resembling a weatherly phenomenon, somehow sharing the same motional substance and begging for a mutual kind of reception, is, as with the case of Bazin, a merging of filmic ontology and a thinking informed by the topos of the earth sciences. Thomas directly spotlights his project as a way of beginning to think of film as something resembling wind, and as Mathias Lavin equally accentuates it, cinematic snow is a 'possible materialisation of the proper flow of cinematographic duration' – thus making manifest what was there all along.<sup>49</sup> We are here arriving at the very core of the meteorology of cinema by

way of CCM. By engaging themselves in the weatherly margins of film, the meteo-theoreticians of CCM are arguing for an ontology of film that is not made up of narrative or interpretive cues, but entirely of sensation, immersion, and movement. Something close to what Sontag distinguishes as pure experience. It is a state of artistic perception that is prior to interpretation. It is not only a way of broaching weather on film – even though one can certainly stick with the methodological framework defined above, staying clear of these speculations – it is also a strong, ontological claim on cinema itself. This, according to CCM, is the final consequence of contemplating, sensing, and giving entirely in to weather on film.<sup>50</sup> It is also, I may add, a move which turns the artwork into something prior to and different from the idea of art itself.

Through a carefully mapped out formalism in the erotics of art, through an intense speculation on cinematic ecologies by way of decisive touches with Bazin and Bachelard, this cine-meteorology works to permeate the barriers between image and experience. The meteorology of CCM starts and in a certain sense ends with the mythical leaves of *Le Repas de bébé*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Doane 2002, p. 177. Leaves rustled by wind also reappear in D.W. Griffith's well-known cry for cinematic beauty – 'beauty of moving wind in the trees' – and one could also consider the end of the introduction of Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film*: 'Let me conclude with a personal reminiscence. I was still a young boy when I saw my first film. The impression it made upon me must have been intoxicating, for I there and then determined to commit my experience to writing. To the best of my recollection, this was my earliest literary project. Whether it ever materialized, I have forgotten. But I have not forgotten its long-winded title, which, back home from the movie house, I immediately put on a shred of paper. *Film as the Discoverer of the Marvels of Everyday Life*, the title read. And I remember, as if it were today, the marvels themselves. What thrilled me so deeply was an ordinary suburban street, filled with lights and shadows which transfigured it. Several trees stood about, and there was in the foreground a puddle reflecting invisible house facades and a piece of the sky. Then a breeze moved the shadows, and the facades with the sky below began to waver. The trembling upper world in the dirty puddle – this image has never left me.' (Kracauer 1960, p. xi)

<sup>2</sup> The CCM series does not only contain books on weather. Rather, the series is framed as a study in cinematic motifs and it also includes works on such topoi as the ruin, the telephone, and mirrors. The series could consequently also be said to take part in theories of motifs. I am here only focusing on the books on meteorology and film. As we will see, these books conceptualise weather – in opposition to other 'epiphenomenon' in cinema such as buildings or interiors – as having a distinct relationship to cinema and especially to cinematic movement.

<sup>3</sup> Since 2000, we have seen a handful of works that place cinematic weather at the centre of thought. This is exemplified by the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the French journal *Cinergon* titled 'Météorologie' (2000) and Kristi McKim's *Cinema as Weather* (2013). One can also find isolated articles on the subject. It must be said that the theoretical differences between Kristi McKim's *Cinema as Weather* and the 'French School' of *Cinergon* and CCM are severe to the extent of being almost mutually exclusive. This is reinforced by the fact that McKim apparently is not familiar with the French writing. She laments 'the absence of scholarly attention to cinematic weather' (McKim 2013, p. 21) and never references the books from CCM, even though several of them, not to mention the *Cinergon* issue, were published years before her own work. Put briefly and in admittedly reductive terms, McKim is trying to give an account of the narratological functions of weather in film. She investigates how weather may function as a narrative motor (a form of causality) – how it 'continually informs narrative, style, and spectatorial experience' (McKim 2013, p. 2). McKim thus builds her line of reasoning around a narrative form of cinema and its foundation in the continuity system (broadly understood as style and narration) and she tries to broaden the narratology of cinema from the inside out by broaching weather as an integrated part of its way of telling. Her interest is in the narrative functioning of weather and not in its very act of appearing and its immanently vibrating image-forms which I take to be the primary focus of CCM.

<sup>4</sup> Païni 2010, p. 13 (his emphasis). Translations from CCM are mine and all possible shortcomings are thus my responsibility.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas 2016, p. 72 (his emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> Sontag 1990, p. 5. It must be stressed that Sontag does not object to all kinds of hermeneutics but to a certain, hermenutical reductionism.

<sup>7</sup> Lavin 2015, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Sontag 1990, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Païni 2010, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> As Païni says of shadows: 'it is what pulls every figuration towards the figurable'. (Païni 2007, pp. 19-20). See also Aumont 2010, p. 47. One can also sense a theoretical echo of Nicole Brenez' influential book *De la figure en général et du corps en particulier – L'invention figurative au cinéma* (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Maury 2013, p. 10; Païni 2007, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas 2016, p. 27; Païni 2010, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas 2016, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Païni 2010, pp. 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Maury 2013, p. 7; Aumont 2010, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Aumont 2010, pp. 72-74; Thomas 2016, pp. 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell 2005, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> As McKenzie Wark has put the complete entwinement of the human and the natural, of the cultural and the elemental, in our ecologised ontology: 'Perhaps cinema is not just *about* the Anthropocene, but *of* it.' Such a view on cinema is for Wark tied to a reversal of figure and ground not unlike Païni's reversal of primary and secondary elements: 'Perhaps it's time for new worldviews. Or new old. Perhaps it's a question of re-edit how we see worlds. And how we see cinema. In this case, it would be a matter of shifting focus firstly from foreground to background, of seeing what cinema has to say about ground rather than figure.' (Wark 2014)

<sup>19</sup> Ivakhiv 2013, p. 6.

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- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. x.
- <sup>21</sup> Maury 2013, p. 27; Thomas 2016, pp. 9, 82. Indeed there are several, partial overlaps between CCM and eco-cinema studies (eg. Ivakhiv, Sean Cubitt). As when Salma Monani and Stephen Rust declare that eco-cinema seeks to develop an approach which enables ‘ways of seeing the world other than through the narrow perspective of the anthropocentric gaze that situates individual human desires at the centre of the moral universe.’ (Rust & Monani 2013, p. 11).
- <sup>22</sup> Böhme 2014, pp. 96-97.
- <sup>23</sup> Lavin 2015, p. 5; Païni 2010, pp. 5-7. In this regard, one should also mention Robert Sinnerbrink’s work on cinema and *Stimmung* or mood (which he traces to Lotte Eisner and Béla Balázs), although Sinnerbrink does not directly reference either Böhme or Griffero (Sinnerbrink 2012, pp.149-150). These theoretical affinities evidently also gesture towards current interest in *affect* which potentially could prove a fruitful path for further investigations into the nexus between cinema, meteorology, and atmospheric experience, as well as the work done on *landscape* in cinema, see: *Les Paysages du cinéma* (ed. Jean Mottet, Champ Vallon, 1999), *Landscape and Film* (ed. Martin Lefebvre, Routledge, 2006), *Cinema and Landscape* (ed. Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayne, 2010) and *L’Image-paysage. Iconologie et cinéma* by Maurizia Natalis (Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1996).
- <sup>24</sup> Païni 2010, p. 7. CCM is fundamentally informed by phenomenology and one should therefore also keep in mind that Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in 1945, explicated his method as ‘a matter of describing, not of explaining or analysing.’ (Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. ix)
- <sup>25</sup> Maury 2013, p. 48.
- <sup>26</sup> Sontag 1990, p. 12.
- <sup>27</sup> Both Bazin and especially Bachelard are (as opposed to Sontag and Ivakhiv) directly referenced in the series.
- <sup>28</sup> Aumont 2010, p. 60; Maury 2013, p. 77.
- <sup>29</sup> Thomas 2016, p. 20.
- <sup>30</sup> see Lavin 2015, pp. 89-90. Bazin’s relationship to phenomenology is, as mentioned, not entirely clear. Dudley Andrew, in his book on Bazin, puts a strong emphasis on its importance to the formation of Bazin’s thought: ‘In 1938, when Bazin entered St. Cloud, Merleau-Ponty was just coming to his phenomenology, while Bergson’s influence pervaded such popular philosophical movements as Louis Lavelle’s “Philosophie de l’esprit” and Mounier’s “Personalism.” French phenomenology developed within the very atmosphere that Bazin sought out as relief from the stale air of the classrooms at St. Cloud. In effect, Bazin was present at the handing of the Bergsonian torch to phenomenology. His entire life was thus led amid the light and the shadows cast by that torch.’ (Andrew 1978, pp. 14-15).
- <sup>31</sup> Cortade 2011, p. 17.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25, 27.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>34</sup> A premise that perhaps needs to be re-written with the arrival of the Anthropocene.
- <sup>35</sup> Bazin 1967, p. 159. The French original makes this even more explicit – without the ‘so to speak’ of the English translation: ‘Le cinéaste [...] était le témoin officiel comme le météorologue ou le géologue.’ Bazin was clearly aware of the disciplinary proximity between geography and meteorology, a proximity which sometimes finds meteorology described as a sub-discipline of geography, at other times simply classifying both of them as part of the earth sciences.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>37</sup> What Païni himself stresses on the last page of the first book in the series where he proposes to have made a program – as in a cinematheque – of cloud-films ‘as montage’ (Païni 2007, p. 60).
- <sup>38</sup> Thouvenel 2012, pp. 132, 133.
- <sup>39</sup> Thomas 2016, p. 104; Païni 2010, p. 7; Païni 2007, p. 30; Maury 2013, p. 27.
- <sup>40</sup> Bachelard 1942, p. 20.
- <sup>41</sup> Such an idea partially coincides with the recent turn towards the question of movement in the early, presemiotic writings of Christian Metz, chiefly carried out by Tom Gunning (see his ‘Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality’).
- <sup>42</sup> Bachelard 1943, pp. 6-8.
- <sup>43</sup> Vivian Sobchak has sought to incorporate Bachelard’s philosophy into film studies, especially in the chapter ‘The Expanded Gaze in Contracted Space’ in *Carnal Thoughts*.
- <sup>44</sup> Thouvenel 2010, p. 58.
- <sup>45</sup> Thouvenel 2012, p. 145.
- <sup>46</sup> Ivakhiv 2013, p. 12.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>48</sup> Thomas 2016, p. 13.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.; Lavin 2015, p. 7.

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<sup>50</sup> See for instance Păini 2007, p. 27 and Thomas 2016, p. 84.