

Sylvia Szykowna

A graduate of Polish Studies and Cultural Studies at AMU, Poznań, doctor of the humanities in the field of Cultural Studies, assistant professor in the AMU Institute of European Culture. A holder of a 2010 scholarship of the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

Researcher of contemporary culture, media and artistic practices, cultural education and institutional criticism. Since 2014 a member of the Centre of Education Practice in the ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań, researching animation and cultural education. Coordinator of animation and cultural projects. Author of publications on contemporary culture, media science, the aesthetics and art of new media, and cyberculture.

Weather as an Art Medium

– Changes

in Artistic Culture

in the Era of Posthumanism

When the Circle Meets the Sky by Carla Chan is my point of departure for regarding the phenomenon of meteorological art, with the weather in all of its changeability and unpredictability as its medium. The video was made by combining a weather vane with a camera that recorded the landscape reflected in the mirror, modified by wind direction and velocity¹. The wind, or rather its natural strength, contributes to the end result, i.e. a footage that tries to capture the variability of the landscape in front of the camera lens. The invention of the still camera or the movie camera liberated humans from the universe of a single point of view. *The Man with the Movie Camera*, a manifesto by Dziga Vertov, redefined the relationship between man, technology and nature in the context of artistic creation. Going beyond the anthropocentric view of the world, Vertov exceeded the limitations of human vision. In this article I look at the weather in a broader perspective, treating it both as an atmospheric and cultural phenomenon, which takes on a new meaning in the context of post-humanistic deliberations.

The new phenomena of contemporary art, changing the classically understood notions of the creator, artist, subject, and finally the human being, fit into the broader context of the crisis of humanities. Since the 1970s, the emergence of successive critical currents fed by the experience of social and emancipatory movements resulted in a shift in thinking about the place and role of man in the world. The existing anthropocentric model of reality was eroded by an inhuman perspective that gives voice to other forms of organic life (concepts by Donna Haraway – *naturesculture*;

» 1 See *Katalog WRO_ on Tour. Draft Systems 2017*, ed. V. Kutlubasis-Krajewska, P. Krajewski, K. Dobrowolski, Centrum Sztuki WRO, Wrocław 2018.

Jussi Parikka – *medianatures* or Rosi Braidotti – *medianaturecultures*). Meteorological art fits into this post-humanistic – reflection on the place and role of man in the post-human world and points to the causality of the inhuman factors that influence our everyday life. The weather determines organic life on earth, influences its status, sustaining it and providing conditions for its survival. As a communication medium, it transmits and receives data from the environment and is naturally variable. In her book *Weather as Medium. Towards Meteorological Art*, Janine Randerson draws attention to the relational nature of the weather, which “joins us with the world and with one another”². She outlines the history of meteorological art starting from ritual traditions, when the weather as an intermediary of spirits was manifest in artefacts, performances and rites. In European culture, the interest in weather is connected with natural philosophical thought and the development of landscape painting. The figures who contributed to the development of meteorological art include e.g. Joseph Wright of Derby, Angelica Kauffmann, John Constable, William Turner, and the entire Impressionism, which he inspired. The genealogy of meteorological art on the one hand is linked with the shifts in human philosophy, which tries to define man’s position in the universe, and on the other hand is a history of the affinities of art and science, demonstrating deep-rooted relationships that transcend disciplinary divisions. The emergence of new media has enriched the artistic perception of reality, offering artists new opportunities to experience it. An example of a new look at art is the oeuvre of Hans Haacke, which includes inhuman actors of the aesthetic situation. Atmospheric phenomena were a key element influencing the way the audience has experienced this art³. Over time, the art of new technologies has taken on a critical function by actively participating in the debate on the changes taking place in the world. Technology has become an “invisible” yet tangible element of our lives, which both determines and mediates⁴ our way of acting in the world. The meteorological art of the twenty-first century manifests the presence of the weather in various ways as a creative element of artistic practice. Artists very often use research tools reserved exclusively for scientific purposes, mapping and visualizing data harvested from the environment (*Cyano-*

» 2 J. Randerson, *Weather as Medium. Towards a Meteorological Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England 2018, p. XVII.

» 3 *Ibidem*.

» 4 Mediation, in the sense adopted by Bolter and Grusin, refers to the changes brought about by the medium, as a result of the technological and cultural processes taking place within it. See J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA-London 2000. Mediation for Żylińska and Kember is a “complex and inherently diverse process that combines the social, the economic, the technological, and the mental”. Quoted after: A. Nacher, *Media lokacyjne. Ukryte życie obrazów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2016, p. 27.

meter. Monument to the Blueness of the Sky by Martin Bricelj Baraga). Others reflect critically on the place of the human being in the post-humanist world, making it one of the beings making up our common universe (*Dear Climate* project).

Meteorological art is an example of a new look at artistic practice in the era of posthumanism. The growing interest in nature among artists went hand in hand with the development of human philosophy and technology, which registered shifts in the way we understand the place and role of man in the universe. Contemporary artists use the weather as an artistic medium to draw attention to the ongoing climate crisis and attendant risks. By giving it a voice, they broaden our perspective with a new network of relations in which we function and for which we also take responsibility. Thus meteorological art tries to build a vision of a common world, in which the social, the mental, the ecological and the technological intertwine. ●