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### **Paper:**

Doel, M. (in press). Review of 'Weathered: Cultures of Climate,' by Mike Hulme (London: Sage. 2017). *The Holocene*

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Mike Hulme, *Weathered: Cultures of Climate*. Sage: London, 2017; xvi + 178 pp.: ISBN 9781473924994, \$39.00 (pbk); ISBN 9781473924987, \$111.00 (hbk)

**Reviewed for *The Holocene* by:** Marcus A. Doel, *Department of Geography, Swansea University, UK*

The blurb for Mike Hulme's *Weathered: Cultures of Climate* says that it 'opens up the many ways in which the idea of climate is given shape and meaning in different human cultures – how climates are historicised, known, changed, lived with, blamed, feared, represented, predicted, governed and ... re-designed.' This climatic multitude is evident in the book's index, which runs from 'acclimatisation routines' and 'Acts of God' to 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' and 'World Meteorological Organization.' The contents page calls this potentially sprawling and cacophonous multitude to order by imposing a clear and concise narrative structure that moves from *knowledge* of climate in part one, through the *power* of climate in part two, to the *future* of climate in part three, which thereby lends the book a certain Foucaultian flavour (Foucault, 1980). The climates and cultures of *Weathered* are suffused with power and knowledge, each of which is as changeable as the proverbial weather itself.

The narrative opens with a blunt ontological question, 'what is climate?' (chapter 1), and ends with a troubling answer courtesy of a brief dip into the Anthropocene: climate is becoming a 'zombie concept' (152) – practically dead, but lingering on, perhaps only for memory's sake. In just 154 pages, the book's narrative arc spans twelve chapters: 'historicising climate' (chapter 2), 'knowing climate' (chapter 3), 'changing climates' (chapter 4), 'living with climate' (chapter 5), 'blaming climate' (chapter 6), 'fearing climate' (chapter 7), 'representing climate' (chapter 8), 'predicting climate' (chapter 9), 'redesigning climate' (chapter 10), 'governing climate' (chapter 11), and 'reading future climates' (chapter 12). Each of these chapter titles is essentially self-explanatory, and the associated content largely self-contained, with helpful precursors and apposite echoes judiciously scattered throughout the book. *Weathered* is a well-orchestrated text.

In moving so briskly over so much varied and interdisciplinary ground, the book will be welcomed by students and researchers alike. *Weathered* is well crafted and lucidly written, with little if any unexplained jargon and almost no acronymic clutter. The book also benefits from the inclusion of a smattering of figures, frequent cinematic and literary references, text-boxes that flesh out key points, further readings for each chapter, and a rather shallow yet serviceable index. Consequently, the book can easily be read in whole or in part, giving course instructors, students, and other readers great flexibility in how to consume the text. *Weathered*, then, is essentially a primer for the vast range of possibilities that are opened up once it is appreciated that climate and culture need to be thought together. Every culture is acclimatized; every climate enculturated. There is no culture without climate; no climate without culture.

Few would quibble with the claim that every culture is acclimatized. Societies are 'weathered,' and people tend to carry their 'weather-talk,' 'weather-ways,' and 'weather-worlds' with them from time to time and from place to place. Memory and mobility are the axes around which the idea of climate rotates and evolves, inscribing specific configurations of climatic power/knowledge in particular places at particular times for particular ends. The tragicomic history of European exploration, colonialism, and imperialism provides *Weathered* with a rich vein of wonderful examples, from seemingly dreary conversations about the aptitude or inaptitude of today's weather to racist fantasies of temperate and intemperate societies. Clifford Geertz (2005: 84) once quipped that 'every people ... loves its own form of violence.' After reading *Weathered*, one may be tempted to add that every people also loves its own form of climate, which partly explains why the idea of climatic change invariably provokes fear, anxiety, and even existential threat, often in apocalyptic terms. Obviously, such narcissism does not

preclude casting either desirous or disparaging eyes over ‘other’ climates, especially those that have been obligingly exoticized, eroticized or estranged.

If few are likely to quibble with the claim that every culture is weathered and acclimatized, then the converse claim that every climate is enculturated is likely to be a much more disputative assertion. In *Weathered*, this latter claim hinges on a sharp distinction between weather and climate. ‘Weather captures the instantaneous atmospheric conditions in which sentient creatures live, sense, imagine and build. Weather can be seen, heard and felt’ (3). Climate, however, has none of these quotidian characteristics. ‘Climate is something else, hinting at a physical reality that is both more stable and durable than the weather. Unlike the weather, climate is therefore an idea of the human mind’ (2). In other words, while weather is experienced by the body directly, climate can only be known through abstraction and mediation, such as through memory, narrative, and myth or calculation, modelling, and simulation. For if weather is immediately given over to embodied experience, then climate must be made to appear by ‘the cultures within which the idea takes shape’ (xii). This essentially phenomenological argument presents a double challenge to the ‘primacy of natural science definitions of climate’ and ‘climate-change’ (xii), which tend to obscure both their own cultural embedment (and relativity) and their own peculiar forms of abstraction (such as ‘global average surface temperature’ and the fetish of 2°C). Moreover, since *Weathered* associates weather with the ephemeral and climate with the durable, there is a tendency for the idea of climate to be normalizing, anxiety provoking, and even paranoid. Indeed, the idea of climate seems compelled to elide the is/ought distinction.

Accordingly, Mike Hulme proposes that climate is best ‘understood as an idea which mediates the sensory experience of ephemeral weather and the cultural ways of living which humans have developed to accommodate this experience’ (2). The particular type of mediation that he has in mind is where the idea of climate functions as an abstraction that ‘helps stabilise the human experience of weather and allows humans to live culturally with their weather’ (xv). Indeed, stabilization is the leitmotif of *Weathered*, which explains not only why the idea of climate is essentially governmental and judicial, but also why formations of climatic power/knowledge – such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), and the UN–WMO Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – lend themselves so readily to being incorporated as ideological state apparatuses into the wider international ‘police war’ on all sources of instability and insecurity (Neocleous, 2014). Climate control is homeland security par excellence, in which everything can be recast as an agent of ‘atmospheric terrorism’ (Sloterdijk, 2009), from the humblest of plastic bags to the most gargantuan of fossil-fuelled military–industrial complexes. To put it bluntly: the atmo-terrorist par excellence is you.

*Weathered* presents climate as an eternal idea of the mind, and while its content has evolved over space and time, its form has remained constant. Climate is ‘an *idea* invented by people to help stabilise one form of physical chaos – the weather – in order for them to live stably and creatively amidst this uncertainty’ (91, original emphasis). In other words, climate functions in *Weathered* as a Platonic Idea. Yet in the closing sub-section of the book (entitled ‘Post-Climate’) this Platonic Idea finally breaks down, as a host of distinctions, such as human/nonhuman and culture/nature, deconstruct. ‘The central idea of the Anthropocene is that *change* is now inescapable and perpetual. There is no normal’ (152, original emphasis). Having finally embraced change and instability, the Idea of climate qua stability no longer has a social security function. ‘Rather than being useful as an imaginative way of, first, separating weather and culture and, then, of stabilising relationships between them, climate may become a zombie concept – an idea which is apparently dead, but which continues to “live-on” through its cultural and imaginative legacy’ (152). So, *Weathered* ends by self-consciously pulling the rug from under its own feet. ‘Maybe the human condition has outgrown the usefulness of climate as an idea which stabilises and sustains

human life. The new “normal” of climate is simply that there can be no normal. And this is unsettling. New concepts and metaphorical ideas, beyond climate, will be needed’ (154). If *Weathered* had taken the notions of abstraction and mediation in a direction other than stabilization, then perhaps it would have found some of those new ideas and concepts. For instance, a dialectical conception of climatic abstraction and mediation could have averted the implosion of the Platonic Idea of climate as a force of cultural stability. Indeed, a climatic explication of Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) dialectic of the lived, the imagined, and the conceived may prove to be especially fertile ground. Climate would then appear neither as a Platonic Idea, nor as a phenomenological outcast, nor as a stabilizing abstraction, nor even as a zombie concept, but as a ‘concrete abstraction’ that is rendered real through practice. The trouble with ‘climate’ as an abstraction is neither its alienation from lived experience and embodied knowledge nor its illicit trafficking of stability and durability, but its real subsumption by yet another concrete abstraction: capital. Climate and weather have become cogs in what Naomi Klein (2007) memorably called ‘disaster capitalism,’ which is profiting from the increasingly lucrative business of cultivating risk, embracing insecurity, and exploiting all manner of disasters, emergencies, and ‘peak perils.’ For while the social security function of climate as an Idea may be on the wane, the investment frontier of climatic tail events is yet to bloom: carbon credits, weather derivatives, catastrophe bonds, and other insurance-related securities dimly illuminate the increasingly neo-illiberal way ahead. Hereinafter, the Apocalypse will be capitalized and financialized. *Worstward Ho!* as Samuel Beckett (2009) once said.

## References

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*Last Revised: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2017*