



# HIAS

## The Meteorological Body

Workshop  
7–8 May, 2026  
HIAS

### The Meteorological Body

Workshop @ HIAS May 7/8, 2026, Mittelweg 161, 20148 Hamburg

organized by Eva Horn (HIAS/University of Vienna) and Maximilian Hepach (Durham)

The human body has always been exposed and attuned to weather. Whereas earlier approaches saw weather and health holistically—drawing connections between physical and mental health, well-being, and meteorological conditions—, present-day attention tends to focus more narrowly on extremes, such as heavy air pollution or severe weather events worsened by climate change, such as heatwaves. The historical attentiveness to the body's immersion in and porosity to surrounding atmospheres was grounded in a different conception of the body and its environment, shaped by humoral theory and (neo-)Hippocratic medicine. Today, in order to conceptualize how bodies and souls are sensitive to meteorological events, we are left with marginalized scientific fields such as human bio-meteorology and statistical surveys of “weather sensitivity” (“Wetterfühligkeit”) or “seasonal affective disorder” (SAD) with limited impact on medical practice.

Reconstructing the history of the meteorological body is not only worthwhile in practical terms, but resonates with contemporary theoretical debates around immersion, transcorporeality, bodily entanglement, and (feminist) new materialism. In an era of air pollution and extreme weather, the “weathered” nature of human experience is drawing renewed attention, underscoring the increasing impact of weather-related illnesses and fatalities.

Bringing together expertise from across history, anthropology, geography, literary studies, philosophy, and the history of science, the workshop interrogates the multidimensionality and heterogeneity of the meteorological body in its historical depth and cultural breadth. It examines how weather shapes human health and well-being and aims at reconstructing the historical and cultural frameworks that once sustained the intensive link between meteorological and physical states. It also asks how bodies today are imagined in relation to weather, and what political and social implications these understandings carry.

On a more general level, we expect the workshop to advance our understanding of neglected aspects of human-climate relations and to make a substantial contribution to both the medical and environmental humanities as well as to the emerging field of the *atmospheric humanities*.

## Program

Thursday, May 7, 2026

HIAS, Mittelweg 161, 2014-8 Hamburg, 5th floor

- 13:00            **Welcome and Introduction**  
Eva Horn, Maximilian Hepach
- 13:30–14:30    **Feeling with a Warming Word**  
Michael Schnegg (Hamburg)
- 15:00–16:00    **Heat. Literary Landscapes and the Thermic Body**  
Cornelia Zumbusch (Hamburg)
- 16:30–17:30    **Weather without a sky: Meteorological Artifice and the Production of Environmental Experience**  
Fiona Amery (Cambridge)

HIAS, Rothenbaumchaussee 45

- 18:00            **Keynote**  
**GoreTex Dreams: Outdoor Brands and the Sensory Production of Weather**  
Vladimir Janković (Manchester)

*Reception*

Friday, May 8, 2026

HIAS, Mittelweg 161, 2014-8 Hamburg, 5th floor

- 10:00–10:30    **Welcome and Introduction**  
Eva Horn, Maximilian Hepach
- 10:30–11:30    **From zodiacs to cyclones: A short history of medical meteorology**  
Maximilian Hepach (Durham)
- 12:00–13:00    **Sirocco. Winds, meteorological sensitivity and aisthesis around 1900**  
Eva Horn (Vienna)
- 13:00            *Lunch Break*
- 14:00–15:00    **Theatre and ambiance. Air as an actor in Shakespeare and Goethe**  
Juliane Vogel (Konstanz)
- 15:30–16:30    **'Tempered by crafte' Atmospheric health and Atmospheric design in medieval medicine**  
Thomas Banbury (Cambridge)
- 17:00–18:00    **Unequal Breaths: Air, Embodiment, and Urban Life in Delhi**  
Aman (Hamburg)

Ristorante Da Mario, Milchstraße 28, 2014-8 Hamburg

*End and farewell dinner*

## Abstracts and Bios

### Feeling with a Warming Word

Michael Schnegg, University of Hamburg

Damara pastoralists in northwestern Namibia are living through intensifying climate-change droughts. Rainfall failure threatens livelihoods, weakens herds, and causes widespread animal deaths. Yet pastoralists do not understand drought as an external “environmental problem.” Rather, it unfolds within a relational ontology linking humans, grasslands, cattle, and weather. In experiencing a warming landscape, people feel with winds, grass, and cattle as beings with needs of their own. Drawing on Edith Stein, I conceptualize this relationality as empathy: an embodied, pre-reflective attunement to more-than-human others. During drought, these relations generate an atmosphere of loneliness and loss. At the same time, they ground care and, eventually, hope through practices such as moving herds, sharing resources, and containing panic amid recurring loss.

**Michael Schnegg** is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Hamburg. His research focuses on political ecology, economic anthropology, climate change, and social networks, with regional expertise in southern Africa (especially Namibia) and Latin America. Among his key publications are the monograph *Das Fiesta Netzwerk. Soziale Organisation einer mexikanischen Gemeinde 1679–2001* (2005) and the edited volume *Pastoralism in Africa: Past, Present and Future* (with M. Bollig and H.-P. Wotzka, 2013). More recent work includes influential articles such as “The Life of Winds” (*American Anthropologist*, 2019), “Ontologies of Climate Change” (*American Ethnologist*, 2021).

### Heat. Literary Landscapes and the Thermic Body

Cornelia Zumbusch, University of Hamburg

While many meteorological phenomena, such as air pressure, electrical charges and magnetic fields, escape human perception, the human body is rather well equipped to sense temperature. This talk will explore literary traditions of perceiving temperature and examine the links between literary landscapes and depictions of thermic experiences. Drawing on bucolic poetry, narrative fiction, and nature writing, it will contrast highly idealized Mediterranean landscapes with descriptions of the desert. To what extent are the specific aesthetics of these landscapes not only characterized through visual or acoustic properties, but also shaped by the experience of heat? And how do the restricted range of tolerable temperatures for the human body and the limits of human adaptability come into play?

**Cornelia Zumbusch** is Professor of Modern German Literature at the University of Hamburg and Codirector of the CAS »Imaginaria of Force«. Her work focuses on German literature from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, especially the relations between literature, knowledge, science, force, and form. Among her recent books are *Romantische Thermodynamik. Dichtung, Natur und die Verwandlung der Kräfte 1770–1830* (2023) and *Natur und Askese* (2022)

### Weather without a sky: Meteorological Artifice and the Production of Environmental Experience

Fiona Amery, Cambridge

My talk explores the staging of meteorological phenomena dislocated from their ordinary settings, tracing how weather, often considered ephemeral and ungraspable, has been rendered legible, transportable, universal, and manipulable. Artificially constructed atmospheres, whether in chambers, simulations, visualisations, or staged spectacles, do not merely represent meteorology but instantiate a mirrored, chiasmatic relationship in which the real and staged weather mutually inflect one another. The distant is made proximate, vast phenomena are rescaled, and the unfamiliar or fetishised is rendered tangible. From the mirages conjured in the Palace of Illusions (Paris, 1900) to the refracted polar lights of the return of the Vega celebrations, these

environments both echo and elucidate the phenomena they stage. Crucially, many staged atmospheres functioned as instruments of epistemic and affective control, allowing observers to apprehend, order, and domesticate climates that were otherwise overwhelming, dangerous, or resistant to European forms of knowledge. Creating artificial atmospheres is not merely a technical exercise but a form of transpositional imagination, producing knowledge, affect, and sensory experience. Far from passive copies, staged atmospheres operate as catalytic mirrors, refracting perception and imagination back onto the natural world and revealing how meteorology is simultaneously performed, and collectively, politically, and socially enacted.

**Fiona Amery** is a historian of science and a Fellow of Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge. Her current research focuses on nineteenth-century epistemic and visual engagements with the atmosphere, specifically the challenges of representing and interpreting ephemeral phenomena, with particular attention to the aurora. She completed a PhD in 2022 *Visualising the Aurora: Embodied and Instrumental Sensing throughout the International Polar and Geophysical Years (1880–1960)* at the University of Cambridge. She is currently writing a monograph with the University of Chicago Press on this topic.

### **GoreTex Dreams: Outdoor Brands and the Sensory Production of Weather**

Vladimir Janković, Manchester

Contemporary advertising for outdoor garments plays a significant role in reshaping public perceptions of weather, reframing it from a natural and potentially disruptive force into an experience that can be controlled, optimized, and even transcended through technological design. This paper examines how marketing campaigns – particularly those highlighting advanced fabrics such as GoreTex and promoting ‘seasonless’ apparel – construct weather as a manageable variable within consumer lifestyles. Through discourses of technical performance, comfort engineering, and realtime, weatherresponsive advertising, brands position clothing as a solution to meteorological uncertainty. This framing encourages consumers to interpret weather as a choice rather than a constraint, normalize expectations of ‘absolute comfort,’ and adopt technical outdoor gear as both functional equipment and everyday fashion. Furthermore, by depicting even moderate conditions as requiring specialized apparel, advertising contributes to an inflated sense of environmental extremity. These dynamics collectively foster a modern, embodied understanding of weather in which sensory experience is mediated through technologically enhanced garments rather than direct interaction with the elements.

**Vladimir Jankovic** is Reader in History of Science and Atmospheric Humanities at the University of Manchester. His research explores the intricate ways humans have tangled themselves up with weather and climate since the 1700s. Among his major publications are *Reading the skies: a cultural history of English weather, 1650–1820* (2001) and *Confronting the climate. British airs and the making of environmental medicine* (2010). More recently, his work has turned to the modern history of urban climatology, contrails, and, more generally, to what he grandly refers to as ‘Weather in Late Capitalism.’

### **From zodiacs to cyclones: A short history of medical meteorology**

Maximilian Hepach, Durham

Tracing changes in health and well-being back to changes in weather has a long history, back to the inception of Hippocratic medicine itself. This early humoral medicine rested on the idea that health can be restored through a balancing of the four humours, which served as a scaffolding for relating changes on the scale of the body and mind to those of the atmosphere, with its changing winds and seasons, and even to those of the celestial sphere. In their various and sometimes incommensurable forms, these theories sought to establish a predictable order over capricious minds, bodies, peoples, and weathers. With the success of the germ theory of disease in the late 19th century, key explanatory models of how weather, body, and mind are intertwined fell out of favour, relinquishing early medical meteorology to the epidemiological collection of mortality and disease incidence statistics, correlated with either the simple passing of time (seasons) or with individual meteorological variables, like temperature. Medical meteorology matured into a field in

the early 20th century with the help of the Bergen school, which introduced into meteorology proper concepts such as weather fronts and air masses. This allowed medical meteorologists to explore weather's impact on health and well-being across new spatial and temporal scales: human (and animal) bodies and minds were no longer thought to be affected by changes in a single meteorological property, but by the complex combination of many in synchrony with cyclonal weather. This talk explores this emergence of medical meteorology as a field in the first half of the twentieth century, tracing its maturation under the auspices of the German Weather Service in the 1970s and 80s. It focuses on difficulties of and suspicions around medical meteorology: What changes in weather, bodies, and minds are being measured, and to what end? What would a world look like in which these sometimes radical results were taken seriously? And why has this scientific tradition been considered and called a 'borderline science', a *Grenzwissenschaft*, operating not just at the border between meteorology and medicine, but at the border/edge between science and superstition?

**Maximilian Hepach** is Assistant Professor (Research) in Geography and Wellcome Trust Early Career Fellow at Durham University. He finished his PhD *Is climate real? A phenomenological approach to climate and its changes* at Cambridge University in 2023. His research explores the historical and cultural geographies of weather and health. He is co-lead of the *Weather, Climate and Health* research theme and member of the Measurement Lab at the Institute for Medical Humanities (Durham).

### **Sirocco. Winds, meteorological sensitivity and aisthesis around 1900**

Eva Horn, University of Vienna

At the turn of the twentieth century, around 1900, everybody complains about the weather, but most vocally artists and intellectuals such as Morgenstern, Rilke, Nietzsche, and Wagner. A heightened sensitivity to atmospheric conditions appears to be directly linked to aesthetic creativity. One particularly unsettling phenomenon is the sirocco, which emerges as a key symbol of the disturbances air can inflict on both body and mind. Literature, too, takes up this powerful wind as a force that drastically transforms both the world and the human relation to the it. My talk will examine contemporary theories of these relations between humans and their atmospheric environments (e.g. W. Hellpach), focusing on how they conceptualize the effects of air on body and psyche. Literary texts dealing with the effects of the wind explore the transformation of bodies and subjectivities thereby offer an "aisthesis" of atmospheric surroundings. I will discuss works that address the impact of the sirocco on affected societies (Hebbel, Morgenstern, Gordon) and the affective and aesthetic strategies developed in response. Emphasizing its physical and psychological effects, the wind becomes a cultural figure of "decadence," creating an attitude of affective detachment and laissez-faire. Building on this cultural semantics of sirocco, I will conclude with a short reading of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* as the story of a "meteoathic" artist, Gustav Aschenbach, who ultimately succumbs not so much to his homosexual desires but rather to the atmospheric influences of the South. This narrative unfolds, however, against the backdrop of the emerging paradigm of germ theory, which would ultimately displace the idea of atmospheric influence on body and soul, recasting weather as a mere externality to human culture and subjectivity.

**Eva Horn** is Professor of Modern German Literature at the University of Vienna and is the co-director of the Vienna Anthropocene Network. She is currently a fellow at the HIAS. Her research focuses on a perceptual history of climate, the Anthropocene and the relation between the history of science and literature. Her recent publications are *The Anthropocene. Key Issues for the Humanities* (with Hannes Bergthaller) (2020), and *Klima. Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte* (2024).

## **Theatre and ambience. Air as an actor in Shakespeare and Goethe** Juliane Vogel, University of Konstanz

Looking at Shakespeare and Goethe, the talk will ask how meteorological forces act upon their dramatic characters. Despite their very different historical backgrounds, I would argue that both dramatists envisaged a theatre of ambience that recognised the effect of the elements on the human body and its actions. Furthermore, I would suggest that Shakespeare inspired Goethe to transform the stage into an atmospheric space and treat air as a character. In the first part of my talk, I will provide an overview of the epistemological debates that shaped the dramaturgy of meteorology in the early modern period and around 1800. In the second part, I will discuss the relationship between tragedy and air, presenting air as an anti-tragic force. Through a comparison of Shakespeare's Ariel in *The Tempest* and Goethe's Ariel in *Faust II*, I will demonstrate how open air can expand the tragic space, enabling tormented characters to breathe. Air provides recreation and regeneration, which tragedy withholds. Finally, I will consider how the dramaturgy of the elements relates to the question of whether they should be enslaved or released — a theme that plays an important role in both plays.

**Juliane Vogel** is Professor of Modern German Literature at the University of Konstanz. Among her major publications are *Die Furie und das Gesetz* (2002) and *Aus dem Grund* (2017), and most recently *Nehmt Scheren. Ansichten eines Werkzeugs im Zeitalter der Collage* (2026), as well as numerous edited volumes and essays on modern drama, aesthetics, and literary form.

## **'Tempered by craft' Atmospheric health and Atmospheric design in medieval medicine** Thomas Banbury, Cambridge

Peter Sloterdijk has described the confluence of environmental thought and a philosophy of design as an exclusively modern phenomenon, embodied in what he calls 'air design'. Recent research on the medieval world, particularly from within the 'healthscaping turn' proposed by Guy Geltner and Janna Coomans, has indirectly challenged this view, by showing a vigorous concern with shaping the natural world to promote community health. I, in turn, apply the healthscaping turn to questions of the atmosphere, and argue that the medical practice known as the 'rectification of the air' constituted a form of medieval atmospheric healthscaping, or 'air design', which sought to make a targeted intervention in the nature of the local atmosphere to promote health and forestall the spread of disease. Such a practice was made possible by a meteorologically informed understanding of the nature of the air, not as a simple and pure substance, but as a mixed medium, constantly saturated in a range of vaporous substances. This paper traces methods of 'rectification' aimed at altering the primary qualities of the atmosphere, and the growing interest in applying antidotal medicines to aerial rectification in the sixteenth century.

**Thomas Banbury** is a historian of science and medicine, and has recently completed a PhD in the History and Philosophy of Science, *The Air and the Body in Late Medieval English Medicine, 1300–1600* at the University of Cambridge. His research focuses on the role of the 'bad air' in medieval and early modern science and medicine, and the cultural construction of air-body interactions. With Fiona Amery, he convenes the *Cambridge Atmospheric Humanities Reading Group* and was recently Taylor-Wei Fellow at the University of Oklahoma.

## **Unequal Breaths: Air, Embodiment, and Urban Life in Delhi**

Aman, University of Hamburg

In my presentation I explore how, in one of the world's most polluted capitals, life and emotions are felt and negotiated across societal and professional divides. Based on 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork across multiple sites in Delhi, including sustained engagement with autorickshaw drivers, bus conductors, medical doctors, respiratory patients, students, and activists, I examine how air pollution, which has become a 'season' in the popular imagination, is embodied, interpreted, and endured as people navigate their lives in the city.

While some interlocutors mourn the loss of a once beautiful and liveable city, others articulate pollution through failures of the post-colonial state or neoliberal planning, alongside bodily symptoms like constant coughing and irritation in eyes. A large majority of my interlocutors however frame the toxic exposure as an inevitable compromise. It is something they adapt to or get habituated to, despite bodily symptoms and disease, which they describe as a cost of income, opportunity, or (future) mobility. Rather than a shared environmental state that invites a common response, air pollution in Delhi emerges as a deeply unequal condition, lived and justified differently across social worlds. These different justifications allow me to show how life and health in a polluted city is shaped by uneven positionalities, situated biologies, and the limits of aspiration. By conceptualising air as both a material and political medium, I show how life in a toxic atmosphere produces fractured yet enduring forms of coexistence in contemporary urban India.

**Aman** is a Research Associate and PhD candidate at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Hamburg. His ethnographic research focuses on Delhi's environment, especially air pollution, and how people living and working in different parts of the city and across various spectrums make sense of and experience this phenomenon. Aman's theoretical interest lies in combining theory from political economy and phenomenology to discuss his research.