

German Program

Topic Courses

2019-20

GR220 & GR320 Green Germany

Professor Christiane Steckenbiller – Block 4

Course Description

In recent years, Germany has attracted a lot of global attention for its green policies and aiming to switch to a 100% renewable economy. Angela Merkel's decision to phase out nuclear energy in the wake of the Fukushima disaster in 2011 (originally an idea proposed by the red-green coalition in conjunction with the Clean Energy Act in the early 2000s) is today complemented by a renewed focus on coal amid growing concerns regarding recent IPCC reports and the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. Germany also has one of the highest solar power outputs and is leading in other cutting-edge research regarding renewable energy. Yet why has Germany embarked on such an ambitious path? What have been some of the struggles surrounding the *Energiewende* and what are the challenges that lie ahead? How does Germany compare to other countries and the United States? What can we learn from Germany? And how can we identify and tackle current threats to sustainability on a global scale?

Through the lens of cultural studies, during this block we will try to answer these questions by analyzing cultural, historical, and political developments as they relate to environmental concerns. We will start with the motif of wandering and the mythical idea of the forest that can be traced back to the 18th century before we move on to the 19th and 20th century. We will, for instance, explore new trends concerning nature, conservation, and protection in the early 1900s such as the *Lebensreform* and other early environmental movements, green ideas during National Socialism, environmental concerns after WWII, the ecological and other social movements of the 1970s and 80s, the birth of the Green Party, and, finally, current goals and initiatives in Germany, such as the *Energiewende*. Throughout the course we will draw on a variety of material (newspaper articles, climate reports, scholarly articles etc.), which will help students reflect critically on global and local issues, promote awareness of their own role in their communities, and foster a culture of respect, social responsibility, and environmental ethics. We will supplement those readings with poetry, fairy tales, short stories, novels, and other cultural products to learn about the social and cultural impacts of environmental issues and practices. **Course work will be in German for those students taking course as GR320.**

GR220 & GR320 Italian and German Culture through Film

Professor Christiane Steckenbiller, co taught with Amanda Minervini – Block 5

From World War II to Today. Since 1945, the end of World War II, European society has experienced deep socio-political changes that have affected people's lives and culture. This class examines the way film directors have represented these changes, focusing on Germany and Italy, two countries that were allies during the war and that faced problematic reconstructions after the Nazi and the Fascist regimes. Starting with an Italian representation of Germany, this course walks you through mirror-image representations of German and Italian major political and cultural events, including post-war reconstruction, immigration, and romance. With the help of the lenses of cultural history and film studies, you will gain a good understanding of the socio-political milieu of these two European countries in the aftermath of World War II and in the present day. We will discuss each film in light of its aesthetic relevance, as well as its historical and cultural significance. The parallel study of Germany and Italy is particularly fruitful and it shows how the path two countries diverged noticeably after the Second World Conflict. Screenings will be preceded by readings and a brief lecture that will profile the historical background and illustrate some of the most important debates for each event. Among other questions, we will ask: How can film open a window on a country's cultural, social, and political history? Which challenges did the first directors grappling with issues of cultural and political reconstruction face? How was the transition from dictatorship to democracy represented shortly after the war? How did German and Italian cinematic productions look at each other? No prior

knowledge of German or Italian is required. You will keep a journal with your screening notes, and you will post on Canvas post-screening reflections for each film. **Course work will be in German for those students taking course as GR320.**

GR220 & GR320 Fascist Modernism

Professor Chet Lisiecki – Block 6

In 1981, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* published a controversial cover image that suggested a link between the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (the “thinker”) and the extreme bigotry and violence endorsed and perpetrated by Hitler (the “actor”). Since the decline of fascist movements such as National Socialism, there has occurred an ongoing scholarly discussion regarding the complicity of certain writers, and their literary and philosophical work, in the rise and success of these movements. This notion of “fascist modernism” is rooted in philosophies of irrationalism and what the intellectual historian Isaiah Berlin has called the “Counter-Enlightenment.” But are there cohesive categories of thought and/or art that are consonant with, even foundational for, the ideals, policies, and practices of fascism? If so, are these categories thematic, rhetorical, ideological, formal, historical, political, or something else? As a survey of modernism, this class will cover major works of literature from the late-nineteenth century to the end of World War II. As a way of interrogating the category of “fascist modernism,” our readings on art and politics will be organized around literature, film, and philosophy of both the political left and right. In order to gain a better historical understanding of German modernism, we will study texts from specific philosophical and aesthetic movements including nihilism, futurism, expressionism, aestheticism, the Frankfurt School, the conservative revolution, and the problematic category of “inner emigration” writing. By analyzing these texts in the context of National Socialist literature and literary policy, as well as reading habits and publication records from 1933-1945, our class will investigate the historical and aesthetic foundations and limits of “fascist modernism,” questioning both the critical and historical implications of this concept. **Course work will be in German for those students taking course as GR320.**

GR 220 = topics course that students can take in English

GR 320 = topics course in which students must read and write in German

