

Brandeis University
Spring 2020
GECS 188 *Human/Nature—European Perspectives on Climate Change*

Professor Sabine von Mering
vonmering@brandeis.edu
Office: Shiffman 209
Phone: (781) 736-3227
Office Hour: T5-6:30pm,
W2-3:30pm, and by
appointment

Course Assistant: Ann Ward
agward@brandeis.edu

a German and European Cultural Studies course
cross-listed with International and Global Studies (IGS-Economy/Health/Environment)
and Environmental Studies (ENVS)
also fulfills School of Humanities requirement (hum)

Course Description:

Climate Change is here. Whereas not too long ago it was discussed as something our grandchildren would have to worry about we are now already feeling the effects of it here in the US and around the globe. From increased storms, fires, and flooding to melting ice caps, rising sea levels to ocean acidification—the loss and damage are devastating. Ever since NASA’s James Hansen informed Congress of scientists’ growing consensus about the manmade nature of climate change in 1988, and since the UN began its struggle to address the problem with its climate summit in Rio in 1992 nations around the world have grappled with how to maintain/improve living standards while reducing their carbon footprint. The most recent report by the IPCC (2014) confirms that prior estimates were too conservative. Scientists now believe that we may only have until 2030 to completely stop pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere if we want to avoid catastrophic warming. Yet emissions continue to rise, and despite the fact that China and India are seeing the highest increases in emissions overall, Americans continue to be by far the biggest polluters per capita (apart from very small countries like Qatar).

The United States continues to be held hostage by a fabricated “debate” about the facts: From President George W. Bush’s decision not to ratify the Kyoto protocol in 2001 to the Koch brothers’ massive sponsorship of climate denial (see *Merchants of Doubt*) to the US media’s problematic predilection for “balanced” reporting on the issue. After significant progress was finally achieved by President Barack Obama and the historic Paris Agreement of 2015 ratified in record time, Donald Trump’s administration has from day one been systematically undoing all progress on climate, from approving the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines to undoing the clean power plan, and explicitly supporting the fossil fuel industry, culminating in the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in June 2017. Despite promising developments on the local and state level, the Trump administration’s actions have isolated America from important international cooperation.

The Paris Agreement acknowledges the “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” of countries in the global North and South. In other words: Climate change will hit those countries the hardest that have contributed the least to the problem and have the least resources to protect themselves. And climate denial is highest in countries with the most resources that have contributed the most to the problem. Like the Paris Agreement, climate activists are calling for global climate justice. Inspired by Greta Thunberg from Sweden, many young people are mobilizing around the globe to demand action. Their actions revolve around demands for fossil fuel divestment, 100% Renewable energy, and a just and livable future for all.

The high cost of addressing the problem has long been used as an argument by opponents of climate action. Yet the cost of damages caused by extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change is rising every year: In the US alone such costs accumulated to a total of \$1.3 trillion between 1980 and 2017 according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ([NOAA](#)) – not even including the damages incurred in second half of 2017.

Many Americans are looking to Europe for guidance and inspiration on how to tackle the problem of climate change differently. Contrary to North Americans, Europeans have largely accepted the reality of climate change, and many European governments are contributing significant funds to study climate change mitigation to curb CO2 emissions and adaptation to build resilience. The European Union is committed to spending at least 20% of its budget on climate. Denmark plans to be 100% powered by renewable energy by 2050. Many countries have committed to phasing out gas-powered cars.

How is it that Germany is able to produce more than twice as large a portion of its electricity needs from renewables than the US in far less favorable conditions? How come The Netherlands are so much better prepared than the US for the kind of flooding we are likely to see in the coming years? What preconditions must be met that politicians will act in the best interest of the people? What can we learn from Europe?

An issue like climate change suffers in part from the fact that those who understand its intricacies best (the scientists) tend to be least prepared/willing to communicate them. Indeed, the problem of climate change is the ideal case to be made for a liberal arts education: Only through close cooperation of science, social science, humanities and creative arts can a problem of this magnitude be appropriately addressed.

In the coming weeks we will investigate how this works in the European context: How did European discourses about climate change evolve? How have Europeans addressed the issues in the media, in politics, economics, art, literature, and film? What are the historical roots of these discourses? How did these result in political and policy directions? What role do the humanities play in helping us understand the problem and develop solutions?

Goals/Outcomes:

This class aims to introduce you to the global problem of climate change and proposed solutions through the lens of the humanities, highlighting German/European perspectives. You will leave this class with an understanding of the specific historical trajectory of German and European responses to environmental challenges in general and climate change and climate justice in particular, and how these responses are different from and also in conversation with those in the US and in other countries around the globe. You will learn about the connection between ethics and aesthetics and recognize how forms of humanistic inquiry like documentary film, nature writing, and ecocriticism complement scientific, artistic, and journalistic work, providing much needed critical reflection of the socio-political and economic processes affecting humanity today. In your own written responses, op-eds, oral presentations, and in the final group projects you will use what you have learned and harness your own creativity to explore new avenues for change inspired by European artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, and activists.

Semester Syllabus

n.b.: This may change over the course of the semester.

Changes will be discussed in class, and updated versions made available on LATTE

Please be prepared to discuss the films/readings listed for each date! See ‘How to prepare for class’ below!

Week One:

I. Climate Change in Europe and the US – an Issue for the Humanities

T Jan 14 Introduction: How do we communicate about climate change? Oral communication instruction.

Th Jan 16 Imagining Climate Change. Philippe Squarzoni: *Climate Changed. A Personal Journey Through the Science*. Graphic Novel. (2014), 6-131. First Reading Response due on LATTE before class. **Op-ed writing training.** [[Guide to a good op=ed](#)]

Week Two

Tu Jan 21 Philippe Squarzoni: *Climate Changed*, pp.132-467. Op-ed writing training, part II

Th Jan 23 Amitav Ghosh: *The Great Derangement*.

Week Three

II. How we got here: The Age of the Anthropocene

Tu Jan 28 Human and Nature before Industrialization: Joseph von Eichendorff: *Life of A Good-for-Nothing* (1826). Novella. **First Paper due on LATTE by 5pm.**

Th Jan 30 Timothy Snyder: ‘Conclusion: Our World’ in: *Black Earth. The Holocaust as History and Warning*. p.319-344.

Optional: Franz-Josef Brüggemeier et al: “Introduction” of *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*. Ohio University Press 2005, p.vii-17; Frank Uekoetter, *The Green & The Brown. A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (2006) Also [available online](#). Excerpt. [LATTE]

Week Four:

Mon Feb 3 7-8:30pm in Mandel G03: *Merchants of Doubt*

Tu Feb 4 Matthew Lockwood: ‘Right-Wing Populism and Climate Change: Exploring the Linkages.’ (Paper presented at Political Studies Association Annual Conference, Glasgow, UK, April 2017) [LATTE]

Optional: Film: *Merchants of Doubt*; Naomi Klein: *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs the Climate*. (2014). [LATTE]

Wed Feb 5 4-5pm SCC 313 Divestment Teach-In

Th Feb 6 Christa Wolf: *Accident. A Day’s News*. A Novel. (1989);

Th Feb 6 12-1pm SCC 313 Divestment Teach-In

Week Five:

Tu Feb 11 Germany’s Climate Leadership: Craig Morris/Arne Jungjohann, *Energy Democracy. Germany’s Energiewende to Renewables* (2016); Carol Hager, Christoph H. Stefes, *Germany’s Energy Transition. A Comparative Perspective*. (2016) Excerpts [LATTE]; **First Paper revision due**

Th Feb 13 Germany’s Climate Leadership: Craig Morris/Arne Jungjohann, *Energy Democracy. Germany’s Energiewende to Renewables* (2016); Carol Hager, Christoph H. Stefes, *Germany’s Energy Transition. A*

Comparative Perspective. (2016) Excerpts [LATTE]

Optional: Sabine von Mering: *International Green Politics* (2002)

WINTER BREAK

Week Six:

Tu Feb 25 Climate Change Debate

III. The Ethics and Aesthetics of Climate Change

Th Feb 27 Harald Welzer: *Climate Wars. What People Kill For in the 21st Century*. (2011; Excerpt on LATTE); Film: *The Age of Consequences* (2016); **Second Paper due on LATTE on Sunday at midnight**

March 2 Last Day to elect P/F or drop a course without a 'W' notation in the transcript

Week Seven:

Tu Mar 3 Film: *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004)

Th Mar 5 Film: *Thule/Tuvalu* (Germany/Tuvalu, Greenland, 2015)

Week Eight:

Tu Mar 10 Cli-fi: Emmi Itäranta: *Memory of Water* (Finland; 2012); Tatty Hennessy: *A Hundred Words for Snow* (UK; 2019);

Th Mar 12 Panel Discussion: Power to the People: Building a 'People's Atlantic Bridge' to Fight Climate Change. Connecting the Dots of the Protests Against Gas Infrastructure. With Andy Gheorghiu, Ya'ara Peretz, and Nathaniel Phillips.

IV. Climate Justice and the Economy

Week Nine:

Tu Mar 17 Food, Consumption, Bioversity.

Group 1: Film: *Meat the Truth* (2007, by the Party for the Animals, The Netherlands) Group 2: [Our Daily Bread](#) (dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter, Austria, 2006); Group 3: Film: *Plastic Planet*. [LATTE] (dir. Werner Boote, Austria, 2011); Group 4: [Banking on Nature](#). (dir. Denis Delestrac, France, 2016); Philip Lymbery: *Dead Zone. Where the Wild Things Were*. (UK, 2017) Excerpts. [LATTE]

Th Mar 19 Postgrowth/Degrowth: Niko Paech: *Liberation from Excess: The Road to A Post-Growth Economy*; Giacomo D'Alisa et al, *Degrowth. A Vocabulary for a New Era*. (2015); Giogo Kallias: What is Degrowth? Christian Felber, *Change Everything. Creating an Economy for the Common Good*. (Vienna, 2012) Excerpts [LATTE]

Week Ten:

V. A World of Solutions

Tu Mar 24 NO CLASS

Th Mar 26 Film *Demain* [Tomorrow] (France; 2015)

Second Paper revision due.

March 30 Last Day to drop a course with a 'W' notation in the transcript

Week Eleven:

Tu Mar 31 *This is not a drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (2019); Roger Hallam: *Common Sense for the 21st Century* (PDF); Climate Justice Activism: From 'Transition UK' to *Ende Gelände* to Sunrise to Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future [watchdisobedience.com]

Th Apr 2 Reducing carbon in our lives: ecovillages and urban solutions. Film: *Menschen—Träume—Taten* [Humans—Dreams—Actions] (Germany; 2007)

April 1-6 Early Registration for Fall 2020 Term

Week Twelve:

Tu Apr 7 The Transition Movement; Systems Thinking; Danish Architect Jan Gehl, *Cities for People* (2010) Excerpts [LATTE] **First draft of third Paper due on LATTE by midnight.**

Th Apr 9 PASSOVER BREAK

Week Thirteen:

Tu Apr 14 Group Presentation

Th Apr 16 PASSOVER BREAK

Tu Apr 21 Group Presentations

Second draft of third paper due on LATTE by midnight.

Week Fourteen:

Th Apr 23 Group Presentations

Th Apr 28 What's next? [The Future of the Paris Agreement](#)

2-page reflection papers for group projects due on LATTE. Concluding Discussion

April 29 First Version of Final 12-page Research Paper due for **graduating seniors**

May 2 First Version of Final 12-page Research Paper due for non-seniors

May 3 Final Version of Final 12-page Research Paper due for **graduating seniors**

May 10 Final Version of Final 12-page Research Paper due

These seven books will be made available in paperback at the Brandeis bookstore. A copy of each will also be made available on Reserve:

This is not a drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook

Joseph von Eichendorff: *Life of a Good-For-Nothing.*

Amitav Ghosh: *The Great Derangement.*

Emmi Itäranta: *Memory of Water*.

Tatty Hennessy: *A Hundred Words for Snow*

Philippe Squarzoni: *Climate Changed. A Personal Journey Through the Science*.

Christa Wolf: *Accident. A Day's News*.

All other Readings and Films will be made available on LATTE. Some readings listed for certain days will be optional/assigned to groups.

The following books have been placed on Reserve for this class:

Broome, John, *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World*. 2012

GE42 .B77 2012

Franz-Josef Brüggemeier; Mark Cioc; Thomas Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*. 2005

HC290.5.E5 H68 2005

Buell, Lawrence, *The Future of Environmental Criticism : Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. 2005

PS169.E25 B837 2005

Giacomo D'Alisa et al, *Degrowth: a Vocabulary for a New Era*. 2015

HD75 .D4375 2015

Joseph von Eichendorff, *Memoirs of a Good-For-Nothing*.

PT1856.A9 E5 1964

Jan Gehl, *Cities for People*. 2010

HT166 .G438 2010

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. 2016

PN56.C612 G48 2016

Michael Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*.

QC981.8.C5 H825 2009

Emmi Itäranta, *Memory of Water*.

PH356.I78 T4413 2014

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs the Climate*.

HC79.E5 K56 2014

Bjørn Lomborg, *Cool It!*

QC981.8.G56 C68 2011

Philippe Squarzoni, *Climate Changed. A Personal Journey Through the Science*.

QC903 .S6813 2014

Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars: Why People Will be Killed in the 21st Century*.

QC981.8.C5 W4513 2012

Christa Wolf, *Accident. A Day's News*.

PT2685.O36 S713 1989

Sabine von Mering et al, *International Green Politics*.
JA75.8 .I59 2002

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. (2000)
D13.5.E85 C43 2000

Other Resources:

John Parham, Luise Westling, *A Global History of Literature and the Environment*. 2017
Online access: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/global-history-of-literature-and-the-environment/688F9013D7B2D73685EE2E14730018D8>

My Expectations of Your Work

Success in this 4-credit-hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend an additional minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class.

Participation

The minimum for successful participation is attendance. I expect you to attend class regularly. If you have a medical emergency, please send me an e-mail ahead of class so I can make sure you are not penalized for your absence. This course is meant to provide you with an opportunity to engage in discussion with your peers. Pedagogical research has shown that students retain a lot more when they have to articulate their own thoughts instead of only “absorbing” a lecture by someone else. If you wish to obtain a high grade in this class your participation must be active, regular, and productive. Please come see me in my office hour if you have any difficulty participating in class. Please note that more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. If you accumulate more than five unexcused absences you may fail the class.

How to prepare for class

In order to be an active, productive participant, students should expect to spend at least nine hours every week preparing and reviewing material. What you should do to come to class well-prepared:

- always review the syllabus to ensure you know exactly what readings will be discussed that day, and how they fit within the larger context of the class
- review powerpoint slides posted on LATTE for previous sessions
- read assigned texts/watch assigned films and take notes while doing so
- use your note taking to formulate questions about the readings so you are ready to pose them in class [it is perfectly ok to write them down ahead of time!]
- careful note-taking will also help you to write better reading responses and op-eds.
- seek out additional background information about the topic as needed (for example: If we are discussing the work of an author/a topic you have not encountered before, google them and make sure you have some idea of the basic background information. Such research, too, can be used to formulate questions for discussion)
- prepare written assignments in a timely manner – don’t leave it up to the night before the due date. Make sure never to submit a first draft. Always edit your writing carefully (it helps to put it aside and sleep over it!) and try to exchange written work with a fellow student for peer review before submitting it.
- Ideally you should also set aside an hour after class to review material covered. This will help you retain information and also give you another opportunity to come up with questions for discussion.

Written Assignments

1. Three one-paragraph Reading Responses and Commentary to be posted on LATTE. Responses and comments should be critical and reflect upon a particular point/issue raised by the reading. Student must post five reading responses and reply to at least three responses.
2. Three short (800-word “op-eds”) in which you use your own voice and experience to engage with the material. Instructions on how to best write an op-ed will be given in class. Students who feel uncomfortable writing op-eds can also choose to write regular close-reading analyses instead. You will be asked to revise three of your op-eds once.
3. 2-page Group Project Reflection Paper: As part of the group project each student will independently write a 2-page paper reflecting upon the experience on the project. The paper will be due at the end of the term. Students will also submit a self- and peer review as part of the group project.
4. Final 12-page research paper. Your final research paper is an opportunity for you to dig deeper into one question. You are welcome to use one of the short papers as your point-of-departure.

This course is a writing intensive course. You will have a chance to revise your papers, and you are also encouraged to do peer-reviews before submitting them. We will strive to get op-eds written in the course of the semester published in the student newspapers. Please make ample use of study partners, the writing center, and office hours. Due dates are spelled out in the syllabus. Exact assignments will be given in class. Late papers will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

Ann Ward will serve as Course Assistant for this class. She will grade some of your work and also help you with your preparation of assignments. She can be reached at agward@brandeis.edu.

Group Project

In your experiential group project you will have the opportunity to delve into a particular issue more deeply, using your imagination, creativity, and research skills. Group members will present their projects to the entire class at the end of the semester. Exact assignments for all written and group work will be given in class.

Oral Communication

This course fulfills the “oral communication” requirement of the Brandeis Core. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, “oral communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.” Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to give two short individual oral presentations about the readings/films. You will be graded based on the following criteria: organization, language choice, delivery, supporting material, general message. You will submit one of the two presentations on video.

Grading

Participation in class discussion: 25%

Five reading responses (two are oral presentations): 15%

Three 800-word op-eds/papers: 30%

Experiential learning group project; including 2-page project reflection paper: 15%

Final 12-page research paper: 15%

Communication

In order for you to have a successful learning experience it is important that we communicate well. Please be in touch via email or come to my office hour so I know everything is going well, you're having fun, and life is good. I will post all in-class powerpoint slides on our LATTE page. All announcements will also be collected there. Please feel free to use our LATTE forum to communicate with your classmates.

The syllabus may change during the course of the semester for a variety of reasons (including student requests for changes). An updated version will always be uploaded to our LATTE page. I ask that you please check your

email regularly. If you have multiple email accounts, please make sure they are connected so you receive emails sent to your brandeis.edu address.

When emailing me please make sure to include your name - especially if it is not part of your email address.

A Note on Academic Honesty

The work you submit for this course should be completely and solely your own. Any and all quotations from the works or thoughts of others should be appropriately acknowledged in your written assignments. Any evidence that you have failed to follow these rules will be immediately and thoroughly investigated according to University procedures. Be forewarned: I consider cheating to be a serious and utterly avoidable offense. Expect no leniency from me in cases of suspected cheating/plagiarism.

Accommodations

Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, I want to support you. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability of requesting accommodations, please contact [Student Accessibility Support](#) (SAS <https://www.brandeis.edu/accessibility/>) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

Course Materials

If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

A Note To Graduate Students:

Graduate Students are welcome to take this class for credit. They would be asked to complete all requirements listed. In addition, they would be required to attend a bimonthly discussion section, and the expectations for the Final Research Paper would be 25 pages.