

Theme Three: “Environmental Futures”

Theme leader: **Gregg Mitman** (Professor, History of Science, Medical History, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies)

Key campus faculty:

William Cronon (Professor, History, Geography, and Environmental Studies)

Anna Gade (Professor, Environmental Studies and South Asian Studies)

Elizabeth Hennessy (Assistant Professor, History)

Richard Keller (Associate Professor, Medical History and Bioethics)

Sabine Mödersheim (Associate Professor, German)

Sarah Moore (Assistant Professor, Geography)

Art and science, literature and film, history and policy; all have been important tools upon which to build imagined environmental futures. “Environmental Futures,” has brought together scholars in the humanities and social sciences, filmmakers, and writers to explore the intersections of artistic, humanistic, and scientific representations of environmental and societal change for future generations. In the rapidly expanding field of environmental humanities, we have initiated international and interdisciplinary conversation on the material impacts of representational forms and have forged a strong working relationship between our Center for Culture, History and Environment (CHE) and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. Activities over the past two years have established a strong foundation for future international collaborations with RCC and other German and European academic units. These include the overwhelming success of our 2013 CGES-sponsored event, “Tales from Planet Earth,” the DAAD visiting professorship of **Wilko Graf von Hardenberg** (who had been a post-doctoral researcher at the Rachel Carson Center), and the excitement building around our theme’s capstone event for 2014, “The Anthropocene Slam: A Cabinet of Curiosities” in a partnership with CGES, CHE, the Rachel Carson Center, and the Environmental Humanities Laboratory in Stockholm.

In 2015-2016, the group will build on prior successes and develop new initiatives around the theme of “Knowledge, Belief, and Action” with colleagues working on related topics at the Rachel Carson Center and the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Munich, the University of Freiburg, and other institutes at German and European universities. For our first major event in the 2015-16 funding cycle, the CGES thematic group will collaborate on the fifth biennial “Tales from Planet Earth” and will invite students and faculty from the Rachel Carson Center and the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Munich to participate. For our second event we will conduct two related site-based seminars, one in Wisconsin and one in Germany, that will involve the participation of students and faculty in Germany and the United States to perform comparative studies of approaches to waste and recycling. In this growing consortium, we will investigate how different cultural values, beliefs, and ways of knowing affect the interactions among people and the environments in which they live, work, and play. Indeed, one of the fundamental challenges for addressing any issue of environmental or social justice is reconciling

the situated knowledge and beliefs of the many different groups involved. How do we make sense of and balance these different ways of knowing? How can we foster understanding and dialogue between scholars, laborers, faith communities, filmmakers, tourists, local residents – all of whom have conflicting yet valid claims of knowing and understanding places in their own ways? The events of 2015-2016 will begin to cultivate a lasting collaboration between our Center and engaged students and scholars in Germany, fostering an active dialogue and creating networks for future endeavors.

Over the past two years, the major events of the “Environmental Futures” theme have demonstrated success in raising awareness locally as well as forging strong ties with German collaborators. In November 2013, CGES witnessed the success of its best attended, co-sponsored event to date, as the “Environmental Futures” research group participated in the curation, organization, and institutional support of the international environmental film festival, “Tales from Planet Earth,” under the direction of theme leader **Gregg Mitman**. Leading up to the festival was the UW-Cinémathèque’s retrospective of films by Werner Herzog that focused on environmental themes (Herzog unfortunately had to withdraw from his planned keynote address at the last minute), and the festival itself, which took place at several venues on the UW campus and in the city of Madison, attracted more than 3,500 festival-goers, featured 35 films, and was host to more than three dozen speakers and filmmakers. Of the 35 films screened, 20% were either German-themed or German-produced. Three-dozen speakers and filmmakers, among them several CGES affiliated faculty, introduced screenings and discussed environmental issues.

The other major event coming out of the research group and its expanding collaboration between CHE and RCC, to take place in November 2014, was inspired by the impact of the Anthropocene as a scientific concept on the force fields of environmental imagination. The Anthropocene Age was a concept coined in 2000 and popularized by Paul Crutzen, the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist who directed the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Mainz from 1980 to 2000. In an effort to capture a new way of looking at both earth’s future and its past in an era of accelerating hydrocarbon extraction and consumption, Crutzen’s neologism sought to register how, for the first time in planetary history, a species, homo sapiens, has impacted earth’s life systems as a geomorphic force. The upcoming event, “The Anthropocene Slam: A Cabinet of Curiosities,” will operate in the spirit of poetry/spoken word slams, with contributors asked to pitch in a public fishbowl setting an object for the Anthropocene that asks us to rethink humanity’s relationship to time, place, and the agency of things that shape planetary change. Contributors, including members from the Rachel Carson Center (director Christof Mauch and four doctoral candidates), will participate in the design of an Anthropocene cabinet of curiosities as part of a larger exhibit on the Anthropocene scheduled to open at the Deutsches Museum in Munich in December 2014. Presentations will also be featured in a catalog accompanied by a series of short essays to be published by University of Chicago Press in 2016.

With DAAD funding in 2015-2016, we will be able to incorporate a much more robust participation of German partners in our two principal events. In 2015, the “Tales of Planet Earth” festival will once again serve as the launch for the thematic cluster. Curated around the theme “Knowing and Believing,” the festival will feature keynote speakers; panel discussions led by filmmakers, academics, and leaders from the community; and 30 screenings of films – revivals

and works-in-progress, fictional and documentary. In drawing upon films from different cultures and places, and with a strong representation of German films and filmmakers in the mix, the festival will serve as a crucible for thoughtful dialogue on how different epistemologies, faith traditions, and communities have come together or diverged in addressing important environmental issues, at local, regional, and global scales. At the 2015 festival, we hope to coordinate the participation of students and faculty from Rachel Carson Center and the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Munich, who will screen original environmentally-oriented films and will engage in discussions with advanced film students and environmental activists on the Madison campus.

For its second major initiative in the 2015-16 funding cycle, the research group plans to sponsor a site-based, mobile seminar comparing waste and recycling practices in Wisconsin and Germany. This will build on the longstanding program of CHE “place-based workshops” conducted annually since 2006, in which we identify a key environmental phenomenon that is expressed in especially rich and analytically interesting ways in particular places and landscapes, and take a group of faculty members and graduate students to those places to explore the environmental, cultural, and historical relationships we encounter. Past themes have included the recovering cutover forests of northern Wisconsin; organic agriculture in the upper Mississippi Valley; urban-rural relationships of ecology and environmental justice in the vicinity of Chicago; energy infrastructure in the Upper Midwest; environmental health in rural and urban settings; landscapes of underground extraction; and, this year, expressions of sacred space, place, and time in different landscapes. Because our budget is typically quite modest, our usual format is to take about forty people on a bus tour that lasts for 4-5 days, and only once before were we able to organize a larger-scale collaboration with Montana State University thanks to outside funding from the National Science Foundation. With co-sponsorship from the CGES, however, we will once again be able to organize a large-scale undertaking, this time partnering with our German colleagues for a pair of trans-Atlantic workshops.

As the theme for this 2016 place-based workshop we plan to focus on waste, visiting sewage treatment plants, agricultural manure storage units, recycling centers, waste-generating industrial production facilities, and so on, so as to give participants a better understanding of both the practical and theoretical issues raised by waste in a modern capitalist consumer culture. Since Europeans and Americans have historically often approached waste in quite different ways—Europeans have been commenting on the wastefulness of American resource use since at least the eighteenth century!—we intend to organize a pair of workshops, one in Wisconsin and one in Germany. Using resources made available by CGES, we can enable half a dozen or so Germans to join the CHE place-based workshop, and then do the same for a comparable number of Americans from CHE to participate in the workshop in Germany. A select group of advanced students and faculty will first meet for 5-7 days in summer 2016 at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in a series of workshops on the campus and at key waste recycling facilities to focus on new technologies and policy challenges in the American context; then the group will move to southern Germany for 5-7 days to engage in parallel seminars and site visits organized through the Rachel Carson Center and the Quartier Vauban in Freiburg (Madison’s sister city), designated and built as a model sustainable urban district. Drawing on both the theme of waste and the theme of “knowledge, belief, action” (the focus of our next “Tales from Planet Earth” film festival), activities in Freiburg can investigate the impact of grass roots activism since the

mid-1960s, notably the famously successful opposition against the nuclear power plant in Wyhl in 1975 that became the catalyst for the transformation of the city / region to one of the greenest in Europe. Not only was the term "Energiewende" (energy transition) coined here - already in 1980 - but the commitment to principles of ecological stewardship and grassroots democracy continues to shape urban planning, energy transition solutions, policy decisions, and applied research. Freiburg can serve as a case study of over 40 years of continued civic engagement and citizen involvement, holistic and long-term thinking, and the determination to find practical and affordable solutions to the challenge of providing viable alternatives to nuclear energy and coal, backed by open-access science and research.

The benefit of these place-based workshops is enormous. Not only do they force participants to shed academic abstractions as they try to understand environmental phenomena in real ecosystems involving real people and organisms, but the extended group tour encourages the formation of genuine collegiality and friendship among students and faculty members from radically different disciplines who might never otherwise meet, let alone engage in genuine dialogue. The place-based workshops lie at the heart of CHE's vitality as a close and lively intellectual community: the friendships formed during these tours extend well beyond the workshops themselves to encourage the kind of generosity and mutual understanding that happen best when people know each other as more than just intellectual interlocutors or adversaries. By teaming up with partners in Germany, we expect to extend this nurturing of intellectual communities to build long-term relationships among environmental historians in Germany and United States.

Theme Three Alphabetical List of Guest Scholars and Environmental Practitioners:

Franziska Breyer (City of Freiburg, Sustainability Council)

Rolf Disch (architect, solar pioneer, PlusEnergy house)

Wilko Graf von Hardenberg (Visiting Professor, History)

Rainer Grießhammer (Öko-Institut and University of Freiburg Center for Renewable Energy [ZEE])

Christoph Mauch (Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at the Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich)

Axel Mayer (activist since 1974, Freiburg chapter, Friends of the Earth/Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland)

Ursula Sladek ("energy rebel" and founder of Schönau Power Supply, Goldman Prize 2011)

Heiner Stadler (Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film, Munich)

Eicke R. Weber (Director, Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE, and University of Freiburg Center for Renewable Energy [ZEE])