

Co-Convener: UNC–Chapel Hill, Center for European Studies

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5:30–7:00 pm | UNC–Chapel Hill | Hamilton Hall 569

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Twentieth-Century Anti-Utopianism and its West German Antidote

A melancholic thread in assessments of the end of the Cold War, the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism over “really existing socialism” led academics and public intellectuals to pronounce the end of utopian ambitions. Some West Germans, however, resisted this logic and refused to abandon hope for a superlative existence. But they also recognized that old paradigms of utopian thought had lost their currency, jettisoning the conviction that society marched incrementally and inexorably toward an ideal form. Instead, they developed a new temporal sensibility that stressed action in and for the present. Beginning in the 1980s and 90s, this attitude generated a series of grassroots projects, which touched West German political, aesthetic, and intellectual life. Not simply reformist visions for a future deferred, these projects aimed for nothing less than the total transformation of those jurisdictions. This talk highlights the resilience of utopianism in the late twentieth century and charts the development of a new utopian imagination in the 1980s that relied on practice over anticipation.

JENNIFER ALLEN is Assistant Professor of modern European history at Yale University. Her research and teaching focus on the history of modern Germany with an emphasis on cultural history, the theories and practices of memory, counterculture and grassroots activism, and utopianism/anti-utopianism. She has published in the *Journal of Modern History*, *Central European History*, *German Studies*, and the *Journal of Urban History*.

Moderator: KAREN HAGEMANN | UNC–Chapel Hill, Department of History

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