

# Utopia, Now!

The 6<sup>th</sup> symposium of the Imaginaries of the Future Leverhulme International Research Network  
Chelsea College of Arts, 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2017.

*"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now." - Martin Luther King*

*"We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings" –  
Ursula Le Guin*

Is it not crass to talk of utopianism at this time of crisis? Is our situation not too urgent to engage with such far-off fripperies?

Quite the opposite, we think. Our situation demands utopianism. This symposium is dedicated to thinking through what this might entail. It will explore utopianisms that connect with 'the fierce urgency of the now' by struggling within, against and beyond that now.

*Common sense tells us that this is impossible, of course.* We respond by saying that utopianism makes the impossible possible and the possible impossible.

*Common sense tells us that utopianism is necessarily violent.* We respond by saying that this may be so, but that it pales into comparison with the ongoing violence of anti-utopianism. Piecemeal is complicity.

'Common sense' has led us to ecological crisis, rising fascism, white supremacy, ongoing colonialism and growing inequality. It is not just realistic to demand the impossible, it is impossible to demand the realistic. Yet there are, of course, many groups who *do* — as well as demand — the impossible: activists carving out spaces of solidarity and hope; queers and gender non-conforming people whose very existence rejects and transforms the here-and-now; artists and musicians whose works gesture to unimaginable worlds; Black Lives Matter; squatters who rethink notions of housing, property and family; Indigenous peoples resisting ongoing colonialism in defence of their lifeworlds; and survivors of abuse who generate new forms of justice and accountability. In this, they reject the hegemony of 'the now', opening up a terrain of multiple *nows* upon which we might act.

For 'Utopia, Now!' we invite proposals for presentations, performances or media works (maximum of 20 minutes) that address or contribute to a utopianism that operates within, against and/or beyond these *nows*. We will also consider workshop proposals (up to an hour). Proposals may be from any academic discipline but we are equally welcoming of proposals from outside/against the academy. We particularly welcome proposals for presentations by groups experiencing oppression at this current moment. Many such subjects have been excluded from and by various forms of utopianism: we choose instead to celebrate the utopian potentials of their praxis.

'Utopia, Now!' will be a small, intimate symposium with no parallel sessions. Participants are expected to attend all of the two and a half day program so that discussions can develop across the whole symposium. Consequently, we will not accept virtual presentations unless this forms an integral part of the presentation's content, and where

someone will be able to be physically present during the symposium. We have also commissioned film and musical performances, which will make up part of an evening programme during the symposium.

Specific topics may include, but are not limited to:

**Utopian Bodies: race, gender, class, (dis)ability**

Embodied and affective power in utopianism. To include co-constitutions and intersections of the above; and inclusive of trans, non-binary and agender knowledges, experiences and approaches.

**Queer Utopianism; Queering Utopianism**

Queer spatiotemporalities, queer lives, queer struggle, queer art.

**Utopia(nism) and Emergent and Ongoing Struggles**

Black Lives Matter, anti-fracking campaigns, Sisters Uncut, Indigenous struggles, No Borders, etc.

**Decolonial Utopianism; Decolonizing Utopianism**

Is utopianism a workable framework for decolonial/Indigenous struggle? What other concepts might be utilized?

**Beyond Eurocentric Utopianism**

Who gets to think the future?

**Utopian Infrastructures**

The built environment; solidarity and care networks; physical and virtual spaces.

**Utopia and Violence**

Antifacist resistance, nonviolence, decolonial violence, armed struggle.

**Utopia, Religion and Faith**

Organised religion, fictional religions, religion and hope, Indigenous cosmologies, religion and sf.

**Beyond/Neighbouring Utopia**

Heterotopia, nowtopia, disutopia, anti-anti-utopia, comparable non-Western concepts.

**Utopian Creativity**

Artwork, music, film-making, theatre, creative writing, design fiction, performance.

**Utopian Praxis**

The relationship between utopian theory, utopian fiction and material utopianism.

**Utopian Aesthetics**

Utopia and design; the 'feel' of utopia, the dangers of aestheticization.

**Utopian Fabulations and Fictions**

How do utopian fictions connect with struggles within, against and beyond our present moment?

**Proposals/Deadline**

Please send proposals (200-400 words)

to utopianow2017@gmail.com by 5pm (GMT) **Tuesday 2nd May, 2017**. Proposals should specify how long you would *ideally* like to present for, but *be aware that we may ask you to reduce this should we be short of time and space*.

## Special journal issues

The *Imaginaries of the Future: Historicizing the Present* network is producing four special issues of the open access *Open Library of Humanities* journal. These will feature versions of papers presented at our six symposia. There is no obligation to publish, but we hope that many presenters will consider submitting a paper for consideration. We are open to non-traditional formats as far as the journal's editorial board allows, and would also be interested in interviewing those who do not wish to write a full article themselves.

## Costs and Bursaries

There is no cost to present at 'Utopia, Now!'. Lunches and refreshments will be provided. In addition, we are pleased to offer a number of bursaries: at least three of up to £350 and two of up to £1,000. These can be used to reclaim costs accrued through travel, food and accommodation (regrettably, bursaries cannot be paid in advance). We may also be able to pay for time and costs incurred in the production of work, but please email us informally to discuss this before applying. We particularly welcome applications for these from people of colour; people from Indigenous backgrounds; women and those whose gender identities do not conform to hegemonic gendered norms; people from poor and working class backgrounds; and disabled people.

To apply for a bursary please include the following with your proposal:

- An estimation of your costs for the trip and details of any other sources of funding available to you.
- A mini-CV (maximum two sides A4) *or* a brief account of any information pertinent to your application (maximum one side of A4). This might include information on current, former or future projects (academic, artistic, activist, literary, etc.).

If you have any queries about any aspect of this call please email utopianow2017@gmail.com.