This is a course about utopias and — somewhat begrudgingly — dystopias. The term *utopia*, originally coined by Thomas More in his book of the same name (first published in 1516), etymologically signals a “non-place” set off from the space of lived reality. Because of this isolation (and concurrent presumed autonomy), utopias are typically considered particularly unbound to the various rules and norms of the social world, and thus stand as crucial sites for re-imagining, if not actually re-constituting, new kinds of social order. Over time the term *utopia* has taken on a more specific, positively-inflected sense of “goodness” and “ideal” — or even “idealistic” — which, when combined with its original meaning, transforms the adjectival form of the word (“utopian”) into a synonym of “unrealistic” or “impossible” or “naive,” a neat descriptor for an unattainable pipe-dream. Nevertheless, both utopias (real and imagined) and utopian thinking have historically played critical roles in the cultivation of different social forms at practically all scales, and as such they deserve a little anthropological attention.

I should note that I am no expert on this topic. My interest in utopias, and in teaching this class, stems directly from my experiences trying to deal with certain kinds of material that kept reappearing in my own research — that is, a recurrent stream of utopian thinking stretching between and tying together seemingly disparate ethnographic domains. Thus this course is largely exploratory, in nature, a motivated attempt to figure out what utopias are, what forms they take, and what they are doing in and for the social world.

The structure of the course is pretty straightforward. We’ll start by spending a few weeks covering some of the most significant thinkers and texts that laid the groundwork for constructing and developing the contours of utopian thought. We’ll then spend the remaining weeks exploring utopias as they relate to particular themes, including, design, language, ideology, and more. We’ll even read some fiction. The goal is to come away with a better sense of how utopian thought and practice have influenced the creation of different sociocultural forms, and how best to confront utopian thought and practice in the context of our own ethnographic projects.
Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following components:

> Participation (30%)

You’re expected to show up prepared to participate fully in every seminar meeting. Our main goal each week is to engage in interesting and lively conversation about the class materials. This means the success of the course rests largely on your collective shoulders. I’ll of course bring my own input, but I expect the bulk of the discussion to be self-generated and self-propelled. The best approach is to come prepared to every meeting as if you were responsible for leading the discussion.

Luckily, you will have some practice with this. As part of your responsibilities you will (in a small group) help facilitate at least a portion of a few seminar meetings during the quarter — we’ll figure out the exact number when we see how many people enroll. These groups are responsible for leading the entire class through their assigned readings. On the first day of class I will give specific instructions for how to organize your presentations and facilitations.

> Very Short Assignments (20%)

I will set up a EEE message board for the course, and it will contain a different forum for each week. Four (4) times during the quarter you are required to post a brief note in which you detail an example of “utopian” thinking or practice that you’ve come across somewhere outside the context of the course. These examples could come from the news, your own research, a television show, readings for other classes, novels, whatever. On the forum for the week you’re choosing, describe (with links, if available) the phenomenon you’re looking at, and spend a little time talking about how you think it relates to some of our course concepts. But don’t stress out about it — I’m very open about how this will work. The idea is to informally explore how some of the course concepts manifest in the world around us, especially in what are often really subtle ways.

You can choose any weeks you want, so long as you have 4 entries by the end of the quarter, and you can do more if you’d like. They don’t need to be very long, and you don’t need to tell me ahead of time which weeks you’re choosing. Your entries also don’t necessarily have to relate to a given week’s reading. But if they do, you can feel free to incorporate them into your discussion-leading, if you’re leading discussion, so long as we all have enough material to make sense of it in class (which is to say, let us know beforehand so we can read your entry before we drink our morning coffee).

> Final Paper (50%)

You must also complete a final assignment, due to me by email on Thursday, June 12, by midnight. This can take one of three forms, but no matter which you choose, it must in some way deal with material we’ve covered in class, and also include some material from outside sources.

A) a paper on a topic of your choosing (including something you’re already working on)
B) a research proposal relevant to your own research (I’ll provide guidelines)
C) a paper based on a specific question I give you, sometime towards the end of the quarter
If you’re choosing options B or C, let me know by Week 7. The paper should be between 4,500 and 6,000 words, though I’m more interested in the quality and usefulness of what you produce than its length. We’ll negotiate the specifics as the quarter progresses, but again, remember that whichever option you choose it must deal with utopias or dystopias in some way, and draw heavily upon the course readings.

Course Readings

There are five (5) books you need to purchase or borrow, most of which are available at the UCI bookstore, but definitely on various online retailers. They are also available at the library.

- Mannheim, Karl (1955) *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Mariner Books. [There is also a Routledge edition, which should work, but it has different pagination]
- Lowry, Lois (1993) *The Giver* [Not at the bookstore, but easily findable on Amazon]

The rest of the readings can be found on the course webpage:

Schedule of Topics and Readings

**Week 1: Introductions and Orientations**

- No readings due for today

**Week 2: The Seeds of Utopia: Plato and More**

- More, *Utopia* (the whole thing)
Week 3: Utopias, Communes, and Communists


Recommended:

Week 4: Utopia and Social Engineering


Recommended:

Week 5: Utopia and Design, Inside and Out


Recommended:


**Week 6: Utopia and Ideology**

• Mannheim, K. “Ideology and Utopia” (pp. 55-108) and “The Utopian Mentality” (pp. 192-263), in *Ideology & Utopia*.

• Ricoeur, P. (1986) “Mannheim” (pp. 159-180); “Geertz” (pp. 254-266); and “Mannheim” (pp. 269-284), in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Recommended:


**Week 7: A Better Life to Come: Millennial Cults, both Cargo and Saucer**


Recommended:


**Week 8: Digital Utopias and the Salving Power of Technology**

- Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (the whole thing)

Recommended:


**Week 9: Utopia and Code: A Language For All, Both Spoken and Written**

Recommended:


**Week 10: Utopian Fictions: Two Short Novels and a Few Short Stories**

- Gilman, *Herland* (the whole thing)
- Lowry, *The Giver* (the whole thing)

Recommended: