Anthropology 289: Utopias (and Dystopias)
Spring 2014
Professor Keith M. Murphy

Time: Tuesdays, 9:00am—11:50am
Place:
Email:
Phone:
Office:
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 2-3 & Thursdays from 11-12; or by appointment
Course Webpage:

Course Description

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.

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 option s 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.

- More, Thomas (2001) *Utopia.* Yale University Press.

- 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]

- Turner, Fred (2008) *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism,* University of Chicago Press. **[Not at the bookstore]**

- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins (1998) *Herland.* Dover Thrift.

- 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

- Levitas, R. (1979) "Sociology and Utopia," *Sociology* 13(1), 19-33.
- Plato, *The Republic* (excerpt), in *The Utopia Reader* (1999, G. Claeys and L.T. Sargent, eds.), New York: New York University Press; pp. 27-56.
- More, *Utopia* (the whole thing)

Week 3: Utopias, Communes, and Communists

- Moore, H (1990) "Visions of the Good Life: Anthropology and the Study of Utopia," *Cambridge Anthropology* 13(3), 13-33.

- Owen, R. (1844) "The Book of the New Moral World" (excerpt), in *The Utopia Reader* (1999, G. Claeys and L.T. Sargent, eds.), New York: New York University Press; pp. 207-219.

- Fourier, C. (1971) "The Communal Counting House" (pp. 131-136), and "The Phalanstery" (pp. 137-154), in *Design for Utopia: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*, New York: Shocken Books.

- Marx, K. and F. Engels (1978) "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader* (R.C. Tucker, ed.) New York: W.W. Norton & Company; pp. 469-500.

- Spiro, M. (2004) "Utopia and Its Discontents: The Kibbutz and Its Historical Vicissitudes," *American Anthropologist* 106(3), 556–568.

  Recommended:

  - Harvey, D. (2000) "The Geography of the *Manifesto*," in D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press; pp. 21-40.

  - Kett, R. J. and Kryczka, A. (2014) *Learning by Doing: Craft, Science, and Counterculture in Modern California.* Chicago: Soberscove Press.

Week 4: Utopia and Social Engineering

- Popper, K. (1971) "Aestheticism, Perfectionism, Utopianism," in *The Open Society and Its Enemies Volume 1: Plato*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; pp. 157 - 168.

- Podgorecki, A. (1996) "Sociotechnics: Basic Problems and Issues," in *Social Engineering* (A. Podgorecki, J. Alexander, R. Shields, eds.), Montreal: McGill-Queens Press; pp. 23-58.

- Hirdman, Y. (1992) "Utopia in the Home," *International Journal of Political Economy* 22(2), pp. 5-99.

- Greenhalgh, S. (2003) "Planned Births, Unplanned Persons: 'Population' in the Making of Chinese Modernity," *American Ethnologist* 30(2) 196-215.

  Recommended:

  - Scott, J.C. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Week 5: Utopia and Design, Inside and Out

- Key, E. (2008) "Beauty in the Home," in *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts* (L. Creagh, H. Kåberg, K. Frampton, & B. M. Lane, eds.), New York: The Museum of Modern Art; pp. 32–57.

- Fehérváry K. (2012) "From Socialist Modern to Super-Natural Organicism: Cosmological Transformations through Home Decor," *Cultural Anthropology* 27(4), 615–640.

- Bristol, Katharine (1991) "The Pruitt Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44(3), 163-171.

- Harvey, D. (2000) "Spaces of Utopia," in D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press; pp. 133-181.

  Recommended:

  - Tafuri, M. (1976) *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

  - Mumford, L. (1922) *The Story of Utopias: Ideal Commonwealths and Social Myths*. London: Harrap.

  - Weizman, E. (2007) *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. New York: Verso.

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:

  - Jameson, F. (1981) "Conclusion: The Dialectic of Ideology and Utopia," in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; pp. 281-300.

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

- Berlant, L. (2006) "Cruel Optimism," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17(3), 20-36.

- Burridge, K. (1960) *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium*, London: Methuen and Co; preface. pp. xv-xxiii.

- Lattas, A. (2000) "Telephones, Cameras, and Technology in West New Britain Cargo Cults," *Oceania* 70(4), 325-344.

- Balch, R.W. and D. Taylor (1977) "Seekers and Saucers: The Role of the Cultic Milieu in Joining a UFO Cult," *American Behavioral Scientist* 20, 839-860.

- Bartholomew, R.E. (1991) "The Quest for Transcendence: An Ethnography of UFOs in America," *The Anthropology of Consciousness* 2(1-2), 1-12.

- Wallace, A. (1956) "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58(2) 264-281.

Recommended:

- Lawrence, P. (1967) *Road Belong Cargo: A Study of the Cargo Movement on the Southern Madang District, New Guinea*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Worsely, P. (1968) *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia* (2nd ed.), New York: Shocken.

- Lattas, A. (1998) *Cultures of Secrecy: Reinventing Race in Bush Kaliai Cargo Cults*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- Festinger, L., H. Riecken, and S. Schacter (1956) *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World*, New York; Harper-Torchbooks.

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:

- Coleman, E.G. (2012) *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Mayer-Schönberger, V., and K. Cukier (2014) *Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think*. New York: Eamon Dolan/Mariner Books.

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

- Mead, M. & R. Modley (1968) "Communication Among All People, Everywhere," *Natural History* 77(7), 56–63.

- Leibniz, G. (1679) "On the General Characteristic," in *Philosophical Papers and Letters* (1970, L. Loemker, ed.); pp. 221-228.

- Pool, J. (1991) "The World Language Problem," *Rationality and Society* 3(1), 78-105.

- Zamenhoff, L.L. (1889) *An Attempt Towards an International Language*, New York: Henry Holt & Co.

- Helfman, E.S. (1981) *Blissymbolics: Speaking Without Speech*. New York: Elsevier-Dutton; Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 15-29.

- Bliss, C. (1965) *Semantography (Blissymbolics)*, Sydney: Semantography (Blissymbolics) Publications, pp. 1-100 + 120-141.

- Okrent, A. (2010) I*n the Land of Invented Languages: Adventures in Linguistic Creativity, Madness, and Genius*, New York: Spiegel & Grau.

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

- Gilman, *Herland* (the whole thing)
- Lowry, *The Giver* (the whole thing)
- Forster, E.M. (1909) "The Machine Stops"
- Jackson, S. (1948) "The Lottery"
- Vonnegut, K. (1968) "Harrison Bergeron"

Recommended:

- Hawthorne, N. (2003/1852) *The Blithedale Romance*. New York: Dover.
- LeGuin, U.K. (1974) *The Dispossessed*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Skinner, B.F. (1976) *Walden Two*. New York: Macmillan.
- McCarthy, C. (2007) *The Road*. New York: Vintage.
- Jameson, F. (2005) *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso.