

LT 166 UTOPIAS

Seminar Leader: Dr. Ramona Mosse

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Seminar times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:45am – 12:15pm (online)

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:15-13:15pm or by appointment (please request a Zoom meeting)

Course Description

How do we imagine alternative forms of political community? Utopia, as a literary genre and as a radical thought experiment that describes the possibility of a perfect society has a long tradition in Western culture. It has offered a possibility of critiquing existing social structures but has also served to justify authoritarianism and racism, particularly in the context of 20th century socialist and fascist ideologies. This contradiction between the good place and the no-place that utopia implies raises the question whether utopia necessarily implies its opposite, dystopia. We will examine this tension throughout the seminar and trace how utopia responds to the historical developments of its day, responding to issues such as collectivity, feminism, colonialism and environmentalism. We will also probe the idea that utopia is an entirely Western phenomenon by expanding our reading list beyond the classical utopias to include authors from non-Western contexts. In doing so, the course provides a survey of utopias as a form of speculative fiction that hovers between fantasy novel, political pamphlet, satire, and science fiction. Beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), we will read examples from various centuries but focus particularly on the 19th and 20th century. Readings will include works by Margaret Cavendish, Karl Marx, Samuel Butler, Karel Capek, Aldous Huxley, Ursula LeGuin, Buchi Emecheta, and Abdourahman A. Waberi. We will be supplementing these readings with utopian examples from architecture, urban planning, the visual arts and film.

Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of the history and genre of literary utopias.
- Understanding of the theoretical debates on gender/sexuality, political communities, economic theory and philosophy related to utopia.
- Awareness of how literature and cultural expression interact with social history and continue to impact current debates.
- Awareness of the role of media and other forms of representation in processes of political and economic developments.
- Ability to frame and express arguments clearly in written and oral form.
- Creation of intellectual connections with professors, students and programs of study across the Bard network.

Bard Network Participation

Our seminar will be participating in some joint events and assignments (film screenings, guest lectures and joint assignments) with other Bard campuses across the network, which are also part of the 'Alternate Worlds'-Cluster. This will give students the chance to enhance their interactions with each other beyond the frame of the classroom and relate the genre of utopias to related 'Alternate World'-topics.

Online Seminar Format

Utopias will run as a fully online seminar for at least the first half and likely for the entire semester. That means that we will meet for joint weekly synchronous zoom meetings that will employ a joint discussion format as well as work in smaller groups during the given class times; we will also reserve some of the class time for asynchronous individual and group assignments (within the seminar and some across the Bard network). We will be using the following online platforms and tools to create our very own utopian version of a virtual classroom.

- **Google Classroom** as a platform for the seminar, which will gather all information regarding the schedule, any updates to the seminar schedule as well as links to the guest talks and film screenings. Most of the readings and links will be stored here in pdf format (unless a link is provided in the syllabus) and I as well as you can post additional materials that emerge from our classroom interaction.
- **Padlet** as a posting platform that allows us to engage in asynchronous discussions, upload of smaller presentations and virtual collaborations. If you have not used Padlet yet, imagine it as an online notice board to which you can post text, visual, and audio files as well as comment and interact with your peers at BCB and across the network.
- **Flipgrid** is a video platform, which allows you to create video files as an alternative assignment format. We will use this for class presentations and as an option for the final 'Create-Your-Own-Utopia'-Assignment.
- **Office Hours:** I will have Zoom office hours on Wednesdays but you can also request an appointment at any time via email.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is expected. More than **two absences** (i.e. absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will affect your participation grade for this course. In accordance with the Student Handbook, a failing grade for the course will be given if absences reach 30% of the course meetings. Please make sure that you join the class prepared, willing to actively participate, to formulate questions, to challenge ideas that are presented and to engage with the material on multiple levels, be it in class discussion, close reading and argument analysis, informal written exercises or by working as part of a group. Please also respect the online environment by joining from a calm location such as your study, where you will not be disrupted during the class time. All of these aspects contribute vitally to your class participation grade. In order to prepare adequately for class, you need to read the material thoroughly and critically, highlight important passages and use marginalia to keep track of your thoughts.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2020: This class will be run remotely to account for and support students that will not be able arrive on time in Berlin to due travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Requirements

- Active and informed participation in all class sessions (both in live zoom sessions and in a/synchronous online assignments), including weekly padlet postings and video presentations
- A written analytical midterm essay and a creative final essay
- Utopia-Mindmap Group Assignment

- Cross-Campus “Create Your Own Alternate World/Utopia -Group Project

ASSIGNMENTS

Virtual Video Assignment: Introducing Utopia

In the Virtual Video Assignment, you will post a short video (about 2min) on Flipgrid, in which you introduce yourself briefly, choose an object that encapsulates the idea of Utopia to you, and explain why you chose it. Finish with a question or issues you have with the topic of Utopia that you hope to discuss over the course of the semester.

Weekly Padlet Postings

Each week, you will submit a Thought Question about the readings and materials to share with the class. You should situate and explain your question in a couple of sentence and you can focus on evaluating the arguments of the text, offer critique or observations, mention something that puzzled or surprised you, or something new you have learned. The Padlet postings will contribute to your participation grade.

In-class presentations

Each student will offer one short presentation to the class via Flipgrid (4-5min maximum) and post their presentation via the platform ahead of the class. Presentations should begin with a summary of the readings, offer some details about the author in question and identify one or two interesting points of comparison to previous Utopias we have encountered. Finally, “kick the class off” with a question and a specific passage you would like to discuss.

Essay Assignments

There will be two essay assignments for the midterm and the final essay. The midterm essay is analytical in scope and you will have a selection of three thematic options (2000 -2500 words – around 5 pages) to explore. The final essay is creative in outlook and will be a part of the “Build Your Own Utopia-Project (1500 words).

Mindmap Project

With the mindmap, you will gather and visually organize the most important concepts related to utopia and create a visual representation of its possible features. The mindmap will be created in groups, including an explanation of all relevant terms and be presented to the remainder of the class.

Build-Your-Own-Utopia-Group Project offers a creative opportunity to engage with the notion of utopia and set out to make your own vision of the future either as an audio-play or as a video project. The final essay is part of this project and allows you to reflect and comment on the process of what it means to attempt to make a utopia.

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

Academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise; it is important to keep that in mind as you enter into a scholarly discussion with scholarly work. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. At the same time, it is your obligation to document every occasion when you use another’s ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another’s ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by referencing it. To do so, please use the Chicago Manual of Style format (Author/Date: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). If you are uncertain

about any aspect of citation practices, please feel free to stop by my office hours. The importance of correct citation cannot be overstressed! Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in reporting of the offense to the Exam Board and may result in failure for the entire course.

Grade Breakdown

Virtual Video Introductions	pass/fail
Midterm Essay	30%
Final Create-Your-Own-Utopia-Project	30%
Mindmap Project	10%
Participation:	30% (15% per half-term)

The participation grade includes your active participation with regular postings on interactive online platform such as Padlet, and Flipgrid.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please ensure to submit your essays in a timely manner. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If I agree to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Readings

Please purchase the following books:

- Karel Capek, *R.U.R.* (ISBN-10: 1557422559; Kindle or print edition)
- Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000 - 1887* (ISBN-10: 0199552576; Kindle or print edition)
- Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism – A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN-10: 0199573409)
- Buchi Emecheta: *The Rape of Shavi – A Novel* (ISBN-10: 0807611182)

Personal copies of books should be purchased at a local bookstore or on-line. There are also some relevant course materials in the library on the Reserve Shelf.

SCHEDULE

Please note that this schedule is subject to change and it is your responsibility to keep up with the latest assignments and deadlines. Please also note that classes may be rescheduled for Completion Week so you must plan to stay on campus until December 18, 2020

MAPPING UTOPIA

WEEK 1

Monday, August 31

Introduction

Assignment: Post a short Flipgrid video of yourself, in which you introduce yourself and explain the idea of utopia with the help of any object of your choice. Finish with a question you hope to discuss about utopias over the course of the semester.

Wednesday, September 2 – Founding the Genre

Thomas More: *Utopia* – Book I (1516); available on: <http://theopenutopia.org/home/> (Read from: Title Page to Book I)

Lyman Tower Sargent: *Utopianism - A Very Short Introduction* (excerpt GC)

WEEK 2

Monday, September 7 – Founding the Genre

Thomas More: *Utopia* – Book 2 (1516); <http://theopenutopia.org/home/> (Read: Book II and Thomas More to Peter Giles)

Louis Marin: “The Utopic Stage” (GC)

THE GENDER OF UTOPIA

Wednesday, September 9 – Re-writing the Story of Women

Christine de Pizan – *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1404) – Excerpt (GC)

WEEK 3

Monday, September 14 – Unruly Bodies

Margaret Cavendish – *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* (1666) – on Google Classroom (GC)

Wednesday, September 16 – Feminist Interventions

Mina Loy, “Feminist Manifesto” (1914) – (GC)

Ursula LeGuin, “The Day Before the Revolution!” (1974) – (GC)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “We Should All Be Feminists” (TEDxEuston 2013): https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists?language=en

WEEK 4

Monday, September 21 – Alternate World Event

TBC: Bard Alternate Worlds Guest Lecture with Neil Gaiman

UTOPIA BETWEEN CONSTITUTION AND REVOLUTION

Wednesday, September 23 –

Imagining Political Community I

Jean-Jacques Rousseau – *The Social Contract* (1762) – GC -excerpt

Immanuel Kant – *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795) – (GC)

WEEK 5

Monday, September 28 – Socialism and Utopia I

Karl Marx – *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) – Preface, Preamble, Section I and II, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

Martin Puchner - “Marxian Speech Acts” (GC)

Wednesday, September 30 – Socialism and Utopia II

Karl Marx – *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) – Chapters III and IV, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

Edward Bellamy – *Looking Backward – 2000-1887* (1888), chapters 1-8

WEEK 6

Monday, October 5 — Socialism and Utopia III

Edward Bellamy – *Looking Backward – 2000-1887* (1888), chapters 9-28

Wednesday, October 7 – Revolution and Ruin

Wim Wenders: *Wings of Desire* (1987) - DVD

Ernst Bloch: *The Spirit of Utopia* (excerpt on GC)

WEEK 7

Monday, October 12: Imagining Political Community II

Milo Rau – *The General Assembly / Charta for the 21st Century* (2017)

Available at: <http://www.general-assembly.net/en/>

Frederik LeRoy, “The Documentary Doubles of Milo Rau”:

<https://thetheatretimes.com/documentary-doubles-milo-rau/>

Richard Falk and Andrew Straus: “Toward a Global Parliament” (GC)

Wednesday, October 14: Workshop

Workshop: Creating a Mindmap of Utopia

Padlet Assignment: In preparation for the workshop, please post at least three crucial terms that you would relate to the idea of utopia and that you think would need to be part of a mindmap that explores this concept.

Due: Midterm Essay by Friday, August 16,

WEEK 8

Midterm Break

UTOPIAN BODIES & SPACES

WEEK 9

Monday, October 26: Utopia as Nature

Henry David Thoreau – *Walden* (1854) – Excerpt (GC)

Documentary, Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAXIWh4afjw>

Wednesday, October 28 – Technotopia I

Samuel Butler, “The Book of the Machines” from *Erewhon* (1872)

Karel Capek, *R.U.R.* (1920)

Ray Kurzweil: “The Accelerating Power of Technology” (TED Talk 2007):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=>

WEEK 10

Monday, November 2 – IfbOyw3CT6A Technotopia II

Watch: Fritz Lang: *Metropolis* (1927) - DVD

Nick Bostrom: “Letter from Utopia” (GC)

Wednesday, November 4: Technotopia III

Jules Verne – “In the Year 2889” (1887): <http://wondersmith.com/scifi/2889.htm>

Fred Turner – From Counterculture to Cyberculture (Excerpt on GC)

Listen: Intelligence Squared Podcast – “The Internet is a Failed Utopia” (Link on GC)

WEEK 11

Monday, November 9: Utopian and Dystopian Ecologies I

Watch: Christopher Nolan, *Interstellar* (2014)

Padlet Assignment: Please compose a post on the following question: Does utopia have a future or is dystopia the more relevant format for our contemporary context?

Wednesday, November 11 - Utopian and Dystopian Ecologies II

Alan Weissman, *The World Without Us* (2007) (Excerpts on GC)

Donna Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene"

WEEK 12

Monday, November 16: Workshop

'Create Your Own Utopia' - Workshop

IDENTITY AND EXCLUSION IN UTOPIAS

Wednesday, November 18: Postcolonial Utopias 1

Buchi Emecheta: *The Rape of Shavi* (1983)

Lyman Tower Sargent: "Indigenous, colonial, and post-colonial utopianisms" in *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*

WEEK 13

Monday, November 23 Postcolonial Utopias 2

Buchi Emecheta: *The Rape of Shavi* (1983)

TBC

Wednesday, November 25: Postcolonial Utopias 3

Buchi Emecheta: *The Rape of Shavi* (1983)

TBC

WEEK 14

Monday, November 30 – Bard Alternate Worlds Event

TBC: Prof. Peter L'Official, Bard Network 'Alternate Worlds'-Guest Lecture on Afro-Futurism (Zoom)

Wednesday, December 2 – Activism and Utopia

Black Lives Matter

Charles Mills: *The Racial Contract* (Excerpt on GC)

Deva Woodly: "#BlackLivesMatter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements":

<http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/uprising1313/deva-woodly-blacklivesmatter-and-the-democratic-necessity-of-social-movements/>

UTOPIA RE-IMAGINED

WEEK 15

Monday, December 7 – Activism and Utopia

Final Presentation of Alternate Worlds/Utopia-Group projects

Wednesday, December 9 – Closing Matters

Final Discussion

WEEK 16 – Completion Week! Due: Final Essay on Wednesday, December 16!