

Utopia, Now!

The sixth symposium of the Imaginaries of the Future Leverhulme International Research Network, Chelsea College of Arts, 29th- 31st August 2017

*All sessions will be held in Chelsea's **Lecture Theatre**, in C Block, unless otherwise stated. We're also delighted to announce **Concrete Utopias: An Education of Desire**, an exhibition of models and film drawn from the work of MArch Architecture students and staff of Newcastle University's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. This can be found in the **Library** display cabinets and on TV screens around the symposium (see p.13 for more info). This will be accompanied by a publication edited by Amy Butt.*

NB: Utopia, Now! will be a small, intimate affair that allows for discussion to develop across the three days as well as within panels. Whilst this will not be devoid of critique and disagreement, we very much want this to be conducted in a convivial and mutually supportive manner.

Tuesday 29th August

13.00: Coffee

14.00: Welcome

14.30: Looking Backwards/Looking Forwards: Imagining the Future and the Utopian Impulse

Chair: Amy Butt

Imagining utopia, imagining ruins: reflections on Imaginaries of the future
Adam Stock

The Imaginaries of the Future research network was originally conceived as a means “to ask epistemological questions about the nature and understanding of how we can conceptualise the future while moving beyond the sorts of abstract visions which tend to be self-justifying (as visionary), and thus make it impossible to convincingly draw lines from the ‘is’ (the given of the current condition) to the ‘ought’ (how we might want things to be).” I was co-organizer of the first two symposia and also attended the third meeting; this paper addresses themes common to all three.

The inaugural event of the network was a symposium in Montreal in October 2014 on the theme of “social bodies and media”. To ask questions about future social formations, the network turned to the subject: not as a means of Cartesian introspection, but rather in order to think about the embodied and social subject and its potential futurity in a world of geopolitical, medical, technological, climatic and economic change. At the second symposium (June 2015), the Network considered the “regions of utopia”: the embodied social subject of the first symposium was thereby positioned in relation to a globalised world. The continuing relevance of the local and regional to social dreaming about alternative futures was central to discussion. The network then moved on to discuss modes of representation and discourse in a consideration of “Politics and Poetics” (Belfast, January 2016). Participants were challenged to “explor[e] the poetics of utopian desire, affect, and agency vis-à-vis the politics of contestation, challenge, and transformation.”

In this paper, I draw on issues raised during these early symposia in order to interrogate the figure of ruins in literature. I am particularly concerned with the politics of the language of “ruination” at the level of individual bodies, the ways in which material (architectural) ruins are managed in the landscape of northern England, and how the language which we use to discuss ruins has a material effect on social relations as well as environmental change. Moving beyond programmatic utopian literature, I aim to show the continuing importance of the literary imagination to utopian desire and political action.

Further Reflections on Being a Utopian in These Times

Tom Moylan

As the Imaginaries of the Future Network meetings draw to a close, I want to offer a situated commentary (by “me”) on “ourselves” (and I know that category has to be deconstructed, complicated, exploded, erased, and yet retained) as utopians and on the work “we” do, and can do (for this is a utopian conference). Some of the matters that I will address are as follows: the role of the utopian as scholar and as intellectual; the context and import of our work, in the academy and in the world; the utopian problematic (in its inclusion of the utopian object of study and utopia as method); and the necessity, indeed urgency, of “our” work in these critical times. My aim will be to tease out the utopian surplus within the utopian formation; however, I will also speak more directly to the current mobilization of the term dystopia as a signifier for our times, and as I do so I will offer a response to the somewhat comfortable ideological appropriation of dystopia by way of my own argument for the militant pessimism of the critical dystopia.

15.30: Coffee

15.50: Challenges to Power, Knowledge and Futurity

Chair: Michael Kelly

Seeing like a State in a Society of States: Epistemic authority and the ecological outer limits in the northwards expansion of international society

Justiina Dahl

This presentation investigates changes in the current discussion of the future possibilities, opportunities, and challenges for human activity in the Arctic in the light of a process that within International Relations is discussed as “the expansion of international society”. Existing research of this phenomenon focuses on how peoples and polities have been gradually integrated into the expanding club of sovereign states – a process involving the recognition of polities as sovereign, and the expansion of a distinctive configuration of political authority globally. This presentation expands this discussion to the study of how states in this European-origin international society have - at different times – organized and justified the expansion of their territorial authority into previously little-known and sparsely populated areas, slowly blanketing the globe. It argues that the contemporary consistency in the presentation of the material world and what is regarded as “rational” and “good” governance of the material world in contemporary global governance is not due to some inherent superiority of Western technologies and sciences in the governance and understanding of the material world. It is rather the result of four peaceful international-system-wide revolutions in what is known, how it is known, and what knowledge is deemed to be ‘good for’ in the European-origin international society. In the history and philosophy of science these revolutions – and the associated temporary crises of plurality in legitimate and ‘rational’ natural knowledge production – have been conceptualized as the Scientific Renaissance and the Scientific, Industrial, and Environmental Revolutions. I conceptualize the international institutional innovation associated with their solution as the periodically stable but historically variant ‘epistemic authority structure of international society’. The main phenomenon through which the changing nature and discursive power of this fundamental international institution and the associated hegemonic norm - ‘the material morality of the state’- are studied in this paper is the ebb and flow of sovereign state-interest for the exploration and eventual settlement of previously unknown or little-known Arctic regions. I consider these failed attempts to settle the Arctic as cases in which the ecological outer limits of the new developmental paradigm were found the North.

Limits of the Horizon: Epistemological Paths of Utopia

Noa Cykman

This paper examines a link between existing utopian practices and alternative or emerging epistemologies. Assuming an ongoing paradigmatic transition in the societal and

epistemological fields (as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Michel Maffesoli and other authors point out), the aim is to identify imminent parameters of new power-knowledge relations. Starting from a critique of the epistemological canons of the Enlightenment and the analysis of the bankruptcy of the modern project, of which the most apparent symptoms are the degradation of the social and environmental scenario, the intention is to identify and to systematize new and/or marginalized social and epistemological dynamics.

The modern tradition has generated social and epistemological systematic violence due to its universalist pretensions and its colonialist methods. For the European rationalist narrative, emancipation would be the last stage of a linear progress of universal history. After contesting the modern project, the identifying of emerging utopias requires to review the very concept of utopia. Authors as Santos, Edson Sousa and Fredric Jameson propose a new concept: utopia in the present, as a perspective of nonconformism and creation; a tool for the invention of futures that shall be different from that which the dominant system proposes. As such, utopia is no longer postponed – the world is full of utopian experiences, in which lay plural hints for social and epistemological dynamics that feed harmony and sustainability.

The fermentation of such practices requires, on the part of theory, a reconstruction of the margins of knowledge, aiming to change the privilege of academia and extend legitimacy. Contesting the privilege given to science and to rationality, the search is for an open epistemology that can encompass and reflect the diversity of experiences and social forms in the world, including those which have been historically stifled or ignored by traditional institutions.

Postmodern and postcolonial epistemological productions are mobilized to draw new avenues for knowledge, related to new forms of sociability, particularly those that subvert conventions such as hierarchy, authority, money, and exploitation (of people and of nature). Through the integration of epistemological analysis and the observation of utopian experiences, in a recursive way, it seems possible to articulate types of knowledge that can both be a resonation of utopia and a contribution to its plural construction.

16.50: Closing Discussion

17.20: Break

17.30: Films and Performance

Miranda Iossifidis – Under the Volcano

A short film in response to themes from ‘Utopia at the Border’, the fourth Imaginaries of the Future symposium held at the University of Regensburg, September 2016.

Camilla Brueton - *YOU ARE HERE: now, not then*

YOU ARE HERE: now, not then is a visual essay created in response to the complex regeneration process of the Aylesbury estate in South East London and was made for ‘Acts of Searching Closely’ a group show at ASC Gallery. Touching on modernism, housing policy (both present and historical), activism and the role of artists in regeneration, quotes from theorists, artists, and research into the housing situation in London (and specifically the Aylesbury) are juxtaposed with creative responses from Camilla Brueton, in both written and visual forms.

Ada Cable – *Refugia: transfeminist domestic space across the end of the world*

Trans women have long built hidden spaces in the cracks of the city to help others survive the violence of society. These intensely sheltering and caring spaces exist across the world, and exist not just in geographic space, but cultural and digital spaces too. Into these crannies, or ‘refugia’, trans women retreat to survive hostile periods and to strike from as possible.

The creation and maintenance of these spaces suggests a radical praxis of reproductive labour

for transapocalyptic survival and action. The film examines these spaces, the work of making them, and their failings, understanding them as a practical tactic for oppressed groups to act across the apocalypse.

18.30: Close

Wednesday 30th August

10.00: Welcome

10.10: Utopian Struggle and Organization

Chair: Tom Moylan

Unions as Utopian Spaces: Narratives of Potentiality in the fight against Marketised Education

Heather McKnight

Both the Students' Unions and the Trade Unions in the UK view government changes to Higher Education in the UK as damaging for both staff and students. It has been viewed as a plan for a marketised edu-dystopia where people are reduced to their possible future salaries, with little space for risk, creativity, or new knowledge that does not have provable, risk-mitigated economic value, and where assessing quality will focus on metrics and outcomes, not on the value of learning and the personal development of the students. We see contradictory process of universities and colleges becoming part of a quasi-marketplace, which submits itself to the mechanisms of consumer choice and competition, while at the same time being subject to increased monitoring and evaluation processes dictated by government in the name of public accountability.

Today, on a national level at least, there is an optimism drawn from this relationship between Trade Unions and Students' Unions, but it is not unbound, more aligned with Bloch's category of militant optimism. Through joint statements of intent, at National Conferences, though shared approaches to boycotts, and social media campaigns we are seeing allegiances being drawn between these potentially powerful partners. There is no belief that they will necessarily will succeed, the utopian horizon is unconditioned and even fearful, grounded in action, self-reflection and critique. These spaces and structures are themselves legislatively restricted, and also suffering from their own internal conflicts and contradictions. However, there are shared utopian horizons and new spaces and structures breaking through at the edges of these movements' realities that are able to reach beyond what we might see as mere resistance, into constructing ideas for an alternative future, an emergent pre-consciousness of a reimagined sector.

This paper looks at the spaces where trade unions and students' unions intercept as narrative sites of potentiality that are pivotal to the resistance of the increasing marketisation of the education system. Using a framework that uses heterotopian categories as exploratory rather than distinguishing features, and positioning unions as conflicted spaces in which the critical utopian process can occur, allows us to identify both agency and the existence of a potential future becoming concrete in these spaces.

Plurality in Pursuit of Utopia: tensions in tackling Section 377 in the Commonwealth of Nations

Ibtisam Ahmed

In 1860, the British Empire introduced Section 377 as an anti-sodomy law in what was then the Raj before exporting it to the rest of Britain's colonial outposts. It became firmly entrenched in the legal and social fabric of those countries. Since that time, the law has evolved into becoming a specific anti-homosexuality clause that is practiced in 38 countries today, each with its own context of queer history, suppression, and resistance. This means that

the 52-strong Commonwealth of Nations contributes to more than half of the 73 nation states in 2017 that continue to criminalise homosexuality, due to one common law.

In 2018, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHoGM) will be held in the UK. 35 (at the time of writing this proposal) LGBTQ+ grassroots groups from as many Commonwealth states are working with the UK charity Kaleidoscope Trust to get support for a transnational initiative that would utilise CHoGM as a platform to recognise queer rights. This is a utopian endeavour in every sense of the word – tackling a very real problem, doing so in a way that initiates mass mobilisation and solidarity, and moves towards an ideal or perfectible global society.

However, there are some tensions that are present in this project and examining them highlights the importance of tempering utopian idealism with successful pragmatism. In this paper, I will explore the following issues as a means to understand the importance of a pluralistic approach to utopias:

- The importance of avoiding the neo-colonial trap of alleged post-colonialism when asking for solidarity for the Global South. This is especially pertinent because the LGBTQ+ groups on the ground are navigating a position of being illegal in their own home countries (thus requiring UK solidarity) but do not want the role of the UK to be that of a white saviour (which would be most ideal for an interventionist UK Government's image).
- The need to consolidate different histories when tackling the legacy of Section 377 and understanding that traditionalism and conservatism are not challenges to progress. This means that the pre-colonial narratives need to be highlighted without them falling into the same uncritical nostalgia of remembering Empire itself.
- The need to ensure terminology and activism is applicable to different approaches to queerness, class, anti-ableism, gender equality, and nationalism.

Some of these challenges will be bitter pills to swallow, but the timeframe and the cause make this a crucial discussion.

'Getting On' and 'Giving Up': Dialectics of Subaltern Utopias

Patrick Gnanaprasam

Living in a subordinated condition, the subaltern self in India, uniquely represented in a Dalit self, has been seeking relentlessly to dissolve the caste-hierarchy into an egalitarian system. Beginning with the traditions of dissent in Jainism and Buddhism, which threw the first stones at the caste-hierarchy, the movements of devotional piety (*Bhakti* traditions) of the medieval era and the socio-religious movements of the modern era have endeavoured to interrogate and weaken the caste-hierarchy. In the context of the caste-based *dharma* (ethics), ritually reinforced by the Vedic priesthood, seers like Buddha and Mahavira propounded alternate ontologies of the human self for the achievement of inner harmony, free from the hierarchy of caste; saints and saint-poets of the medieval India, emerging mostly from subaltern life-context, expressed the subaltern angst combined with egalitarian utopia, through their devotional poetry; a good number of socio-religious movements, born at the intersection of Indian tradition and western modernity of the colonial modern times, sought to deconstruct the hegemony of dominating symbols, myths, and narratives and reconstruct emancipatory identities for subaltern selves. Whether they have succeeded completely is a mute question; but, what is relevant here to note is that the quest for emancipation and egalitarian society has been kept alive in the subaltern mind. The strength of the utopia is not so much in its actualisation as in sustaining the quest for the utopia or 'getting on' with the quest induced by the utopia. But what happens during the present times, characterised by the 'tyranny of the now' induced by extreme forms of historicism and horizontal consciousness, combined with consumerist gratification impulse and atomising individuation, are occurrences of 'giving up' in the face of the persistent or transmuted forms of caste-hierarchies. The shocking fact that an increasing number of Dalit students at Indian higher educational institutions are committing suicides is an indication of the failing power of emancipatory utopias. *Catchnews*, an on-line journal, accessed on 26 April 2017, gives a statistics of 23 Dalit students having committed suicides in less than a decade, on account of caste-based discrimination and ill-

treatment in Indian premiere institutions of higher education. How does the power of the emancipatory utopia face its dialectics in the contemporary era is a line of enquiry relevant for today? My paper wishes to undertake this enquiry, based on case-studies.

11.40: Coffee

12.00: Architectural Utopianisms

Chair: Michael Kelly

Introducing Concrete Utopias: An Education of Desire

Amy Butt

Amy will introduce the exhibition of works by Architecture students from Newcastle that accompanies this exhibition. She will outline the rationale for the project and the pedagogical processes through which the works have been produced.

Modernism Now: In Praise of a Utopian Survival for the City that Never Was

Giorgia Aquilar

The contested past embodied by the built legacy of Modernism, nestled in the tissues of the contemporary city, shows the 'fierce urgency of the now' in the tangible form of an oxymoronic encounter. Being itself a contradiction in terms, the notion of Modern heritage reveals its inherent contradiction, where issues of iconicity, authenticity, and historicity collide against those of ordinariness, commodification, and transitoriness. But right inside this paradox a utopian potential can be identified for the urban landscape of the contemporary cities, by manipulating the concrete remains of a less-distant past, hanging between the risks of neglect and those of utter demolition. At the same time, a number of initiatives for the salvage of the brutalist legacy are spreading. Conceived to break free from tradition, brutalism suggested an idealistic future full of promise, imagined as the backbone of entirely new cities that supported utopian ideals. It was accompanied by vivid debates about its aesthetic and cultural values.

Starting from these premises, this paper will trace out a growing environment of potentially linked objects and landscapes – either utterly neglected, profoundly altered, partially demolished, surviving, or no longer existing – through a series of urban narratives. In so doing, the presentation will explore the forces and forms of a potential utopian landscape, its threats and hidden possibilities; and how spatial devices may negotiate the paradox of a modern heritage, which becomes 'historic' despite its belonging to a more recent past. It is from this assemblage that it may be possible to find an emergent 'historic urban landscapes' at work in the making, unmaking, and remaking of spaces and environments across existing, emerging, and future afterlives. Identifying issues and synergies in the current challenges facing the conservation of the Modern 'historic' urban environment, a physical and theoretical map will emerge, as a framework of conceptual and spatial thinking on the significance of this oxymoronic heritage.

Utopia, Now! A Response in Love

Andrea Wheeler

The paper is a spoken word performance, a study in affective power, an evocation in love, in the love of now, in the love of the living. It is a pro-human and pro-sexuate performance and it is an architecture made in feeling, a choreography of space in words, body, movement, breath, touch to nurture the who you can become. The embodied performance is not made by a distant body of the future, nor in a collaboration with a fictive companion body far away in touch. It is about bodies of the now in relationalities of feeling on a path opened in the darkness of the folds, now.

So how do I feel? How do I feel about the fierce urgency of the now, about the tomorrow that is today? How do I feel when there is no acknowledgment from you? No feeling? I feel only the vulnerability of the world around me. Fragile bodies, passing in feeling, the material of perfume on a tiny breath of air. This is not utopia, not hope in impossibly illuminant visions,

but a now in love. What my paper calls for is a recognition distinguishing the artificiality of the future and the artificiality of the past. It examines the philosophy of love in the work of Luce Irigaray to address materiality and affect through an architecture imagined by at least two different relational bodies. It is a poetry of the four-fold as an at least two of sexuate feeling. In that sense it is an immaterial production, speaking, making so you can become. A performance that evokes architecture, but an architecture that responds to our questions now: environment, climate change, and the endless reassertions of inequalities. It stands in refusal, resistant, especially to the technological and architectural futures proposed that tell us impotently of a better world. This is a paper for utopia, now, a building and a living now, in a continued poetry of words of love.

13.30: Lunch
Canteen

14.30: Utopian Openings, Utopian Methods
Chair: Brian Greenspan

Silly Dreams to Fight the Absurd
Céline Keller

Should we abandon the idea of utopia because it's been abused? Being certain where we should be heading and how, is dangerous. Certainty always is. Rebecca Solnit writes that hope is being uncertain. It means your actions might be important. It's radically different to the optimism of technological utopianism or the pessimism of apocalyptic visions of the future exploited by the bullshit artists of today, populating not only the realm of politics. The present seems absurd, the media out of control: what we need is to find ways to reclaim Utopia. Because if we don't we leave the future colonized by a seemingly inevitable progress that doesn't care about actual human beings.

I will present to you some of the fantastic methods to bring back Utopian thought into the public sphere, developed by Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert, founders of the Center for Artistic Activism. They claim Utopia is No Place To Reach, but should instead be a spectrum: inclusive and diverse, a thinking space, and a means for communication and discovery of what we really want. After presenting some of their powerful tools, I will propose that these tools not only can be used for successful communal activism, but also in smaller (but valuable) ways in our daily, personal life. Let's reframe our quest for finding solutions from questioning everything that is, to wondering about a future that we all might want to live.

The 'Same Old' Against a Better Backdrop - Utopia Shouldn't Be Boring
Sam Bunn

Why do we want to talk Utopically? To affect change. As Oscar Wilde said, 'Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.' For Ruth Levitas, the aim of creating utopias is to critique the present and to present new possibilities for the future.

The right-centric tendencies of contemporary Britain make utopian ideas more vital than ever, but also more outlandish and less possible. Countering this requires identifying the right structures to infiltrate, and finding the correct position to place utopic ideas. This paper argues that the right mediums are those of the mainstream - advertising, blockbuster movies, news media etc. These visual languages are in daily mass use, and can be understood, and hence absorbed, without further mediation.

Taking blockbuster movies as an example, we can observe: i) negative end of the world scenarios, ii) dystopic futures or iii) a world just like our own. One rarely - if ever - sees positive future world scenarios.

In the first of these the end of the world is generally aborted by a lone individual or a small group, which we know to be impossible in reality - encouraging the viewer's subconscious to maintain an unresolved image of a world that is breaking. Dystopian future scenarios suggest a world more broken than today, implying that current problems are unsolvable and getting

worse. Alternatively, in technological dystopias, the future shown is so shiny and new that it proves difficult to map onto today's problems in meaningful ways. In movies where the world is shown as it is today confirm what we all want to see and believe, that our world can continue as it is. But in accepting the reality of climate change and the principles behind the International Declaration of Human Rights, we know that it cannot.

This critique reveals a hole in the filmscape. We can see that it is the backdrop that should behave utopically. Examining More's *Utopia* and Morris' *News from Nowhere* we see that they are not suitable for the blockbuster movie format. Crudely put, they are all backdrop. Returning to Levitas' description of utopia as something critical, unfixed, but possibly better, we can ask, 'Must humans be perfect in an imperfect utopia, or might there be room for Shakespearean drama?'. For if there is, then utopia can go to Hollywood.

Bad Utopias: the “Dialectical Images” of the Situationist International
Dan Barrow

'Present culture as a whole', wrote Guy Debord and Pierre Canjuers in 1960, 'can be characterized as alienated in the sense that every moment of life, every idea, every type of behavior, has a meaning only outside itself [...] a utopia, in the literal sense of the word, dominates the life of the modern world.' For the Situationist International the form of consumer capitalism that prevailed in post-war Europe – the economic structure of 'the society of the spectacle' – was a parodic image of utopia as delivered by capitalism, that fragmented and standardised society's desires in the course of realising them. At the same time, it was an increasingly image-based form of social production, whose promise of abundant leisure time was 'in the narrow sense [...] the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and, in the broadest sense, [...] the image of the consumption of time'. Critical theorists and scholars of visual culture alike have frequently criticised this analysis as iconophobic, overly negative or merely dystopian. Drawing on theoretical work by Jonathan Crary, Tom McDonough and Benjamin Noys, this paper will argue that this critique can rather be seen in the context of a tradition of Marxist scholarship on representation and aesthetics that works to excavate a positive, even utopian kernel to commodity culture and technological reproduction. Relating this to Walter Benjamin's analyses of 'dialectical images' and the historical transformation of the structure of perception under modernity, I will show that the work of Debord and the SI presents useful critical tools for unearthing the transformational potential within contemporary spectacular culture.

16.00: Coffee

16.20: How Soon is Now? Utopian Temporalities

Chair: Kenneth Hanshew

The World is Yours': Utopian Time as Social Dreaming in Nas's Illmatic (1994)

Dara Waldron

Queensbridge is the largest government-housing scheme in the US. The building opened in 1939 and has since housed lower income families. In terms of its initial architectural design, the building was set out in such a way as to capture natural sunlight, and can be considered a typically modernist state funded venture typical of its time. This paper begins with an evaluation of the Queensbridge project, considered as a building of the future, and its formative modernist design, as a backdrop to the hip-hop artist Nas's 1994 masterpiece *Illmatic*. *Illmatic* has been the focus of academic studies in recent years, many of which hail Nas for the formal ingenuity of his lyrics as well as their socio-political content: many of which deal with the systematic perpetration of criminality among black youth in the post-Reagan period. Nas's account of growing up in Queensbridge, his immersion in crime to his discovery of hip-hop as an art form, has since assumed legendary status. A secondary aim of the paper is to explore this status from the perspective of a utopian 'time,' a time interrupting hegemonically rendered time-structures. The paper therefore fleshes out a theory of 'time' specific to *Illmatic* (oppositional to conventional renderings of time as 'this' or 'that'). The utopian underpinnings

of the Queensbridge project, considered as a modernist building *of* the future, transmute into a specifically time-based aesthetic: in this case music that represents the Queensbridge community now.

I then work through this analysis in the remainder of the paper with reference to the album and the idea of social dreaming. Each song is considered to concern itself with Nas's upbringing in the Queensbridge Project, his involvement in drugs and crime, to his evolution as a rapper. Time materialises, at first, as 'time' of the other: in this case, police, prison systems; the entire disciplinary infrastructure that produces and controls the movement of youth around the Queensbridge area. Tracks such as 'New York State of Mind' and 'Memory Lane' address this hegemony of time most succinctly rendered in the vernacular expression 'doing time.' Other songs such as 'Halftime' and 'Represent' invoke time, however, specific to the 'flow' of the album, and therefore particular to *Illmatic*, I argue, as social dreaming. The album, as such, I argue in conclusion, is a model for what can and should happen in a utopian context now.

Let's pull the breaks and visit Walter Benjamin at Faubourg St. Honoré - A utopian time for the utopian now!

Mikkel Jørgensen

My presentation seeks to illuminate a critical concept of 'utopian time' and why such a concept is necessary in order to formulate radical utopian politics in contemporary society. I will point to how images of revolutions have been used by capitalism to promote a kind of coolness, as argued by Danish scholar Mikkel Bolt in his book *Crisis to Insurrection*, which in turn have destroyed the utopian impulse of these images. I will use American scholar and poet Joshua Clover's line from his collection of poems *Red Epic* to set the scene for my presentation:

We are the words of others still unaligned still stumbling and uncertain having seen
only the billboard for Utopia.

Clover's line shows a certain relationship between commercials and utopia that points to a sense of estrangement from an authentic sense of utopia, something that is lost and can only be found on billboards. But the line also holds an idea that something is keeping us from reaching this utopian impulse. The purpose of my presentation will be to investigate how this billboard utopia can be turned into a critical utopian concept of the now.

In order to do so I'll visit Walter Benjamin's critique of fashion from convolute B in the *Arcade Project* and his utopian philosophy of history from his *On the Concept of History*, in order to argue how another sense of the utopian time is available, if one critically engages with the capitalist sense of time that fashion reproduces. Benjamin writes in *On the Concept of History*:

Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past. This jump, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical one, which is how Marx understood the revolution.

Working from Benjamin's quote and his thinking in general, I will try to point to how the 'arena of the ruling classes' is visible in modern fashion images, and how this in turn can show signs of a useful utopian sense of time in the 21st century.

17.10: Closing Discussion

17.40: Musical Performance

CLG001 Canteen Annexe

Natalie Hyacinth - *Utopia Dub*

18.30: Close

Thursday 31st August

10.00: Welcome

10.10: Utopian Gaming

Chair: Brian Greenspan

Utopoly as Utopian practice

Neil Farnan

This paper will present my research regarding the use of Utopoly, a utopian version of Monopoly. The ubiquitous game Monopoly is a celebration of the worst aspects of our economic system, it normalises socially useless *rentier* behaviour and rewards land grabbing. However its origins were intended as a lesson on how landlords and monopolists accumulate wealth and impoverish society.

My research involves using this familiar game as a model of the economy to invite utopian thought and to create a utopian version. It draws on Robert Jungk's methodology of the Future Workshop to re-engage peoples imagination and to encourage discourse about the values they would like to see represented and recognised in a better future. Players are able to determine the properties, chance cards and rules of the game.

Iterations of the game have produced new models of economy. For instance instead of a winner takes all mentality players collaborate to bring privately controlled properties back into the commons to generate wealth for all, referencing Elinor Ostrom's debunking of the 'tragedy of the commons' myth. Currency is also an important feature. Utopoly uses currencies developed for '#TransActing a Market of Values' (a project from the Critical Practice research hub at Chelsea College of Art) generating an ecosystem of value exchange. And this has similarities with Bernard Lietaer's research suggesting that value extractive mono-currencies are responsible for cycles of boom and bust and that an ecosystem of complementary currencies can work in a counter cyclical way producing a more resilient economy. Utopoly also allows for economies of gifting and sharing and is looking at modelling innovations such as blockchain and associated currencies. It has recently inspired researchers from the ValueModels project France, concerned with modeling evaluative communities using blockchain technology, to adapt it for their own institution.

These features give players the opportunity to reflect on currently unpaid valuable activities and to appreciate the network of unrecognised contributions and exchanges in society. A currency can be considered as societal DNA it shapes and informs behaviour and by changing the currency we could change the DNA of society to facilitate better exchanges, values and relations. Modelling new economies could prepare the way for utopian possibilities and the construction of new social contracts.

Utopia in Tandem: Ludo-Narrative Synchronicity

Eoin Murray

Video Games lend themselves to the experience of utopia in ways others media cannot. This paper examines how the game Atlus' *Persona 5* (Hashino, 2017) creates multiple examples of 'utopic change' over the course of both its narrative and gameplay elements to provide its player with a multi-faceted utopic experience which other media is yet to create. Utopia manifests while working towards a goal, therefore its zenith is reached in tandem with the goal being achieved. By accomplishing a chosen goal a person will experience a kind of change; this may be emotional or physical, but that split second of completion is the most utopic, and then the slate is wiped, and a new goal is born. That is utopic change. Despite the morose nature of this statement it does confirm the existence of utopia; as Le Guin argues, 'Utopia is uninhabitable. As soon as we reach it, it ceases to be utopia.' (2016: 166)

These goals people seek to fulfill in life are all generated under the notion of becoming 'more.' This idea of 'more' is established in our need to better ourselves, to find new and improved ways to live our lives, generating greater comfort for our successors and ourselves. Quarta and Procida argue humanity as a whole experiences an "original yearning to know more, to be more," (1996: 162) and goals appear to aid in this, linking back to Le Guin's notions on the subject. Both these elements can be seen in everyday life, such as working overtime to purchase a new appliance affording more leisure time in the home.

Persona 5 is a game that, to some extent, imitates life. Within my current paradigm real life is moments of utopia experienced over and over again. *Persona 5*'s 'real life' utopia is then mixed with fantasy, such as venturing into palaces and battling monsters to steal people's hearts, actions that affect the 'real world'. Carol Feldman's work on mimesis (2005) describes elements of everyday life reimagined as forms of play. Video games are also forms of play and in this case the player will experience utopic change from both sides: as a player and as the character whose role they've taken on. This ludo-narrative synchronicity highlights how video games lend themselves to being utopic in ways other media cannot.

11.10: Break

11.30: Contemporary Literary Utopianism

Chair: Kenneth Hanshew

More than this: utopian anticipation and generic discontinuity in the YA fiction of Patrick Ness

Caroline Edwards

This paper will consider the relationship between utopian anticipation and genre in Patrick Ness' fifth novel for teenagers, *More Than This* (2013). Like William Morris' utopian traveller in *News From Nowhere* (1890), at the start of this novel Ness' protagonist appears to have woken up in the future. His exploration of this ambiguous landscape soon strikes the reader as also conforming to the generic tropes of post-apocalyptic literature. Given the popularity of post-apocalyptic narratives in the twenty-first century, Young Adult (YA) readers would recognise the staples of the subgenre in the early chapters of *More Than This*: a near-futuristic world that appears to have run out of petrol, in which the population has been decimated by some obscure apocalyptic event and suburbs sink back into a state of rampant dilapidation. As the novel progresses, however, Ness' reader is confronted with additional generic signifiers, including the Bildungsroman, the Robinsonade, the near-future dystopia, the adventure narrative, and the sci-fi thriller (through intertextual allusions to a number of well-known SF films, including *Terminator* [1984] and *Robocop* [1987]).

I will consider the effect of what Jameson would call this "generic discontinuity" on Ness' YA readership. If the generic discontinuities of *More Than This* serve to unsettle any stable referential framework within which the reader can contextualise the novel, they also work to undermine our supposed sureties concerning death and dying. Despite its violently dystopian narrative content, I will argue that there is a subtle utopian logic at work in Ness' novel. As critics like Jack Zipes have shown, children's and Young Adult literature has a long tradition of incorporating utopian elements, particularly in classical secondary-world fantasies such as Narnia, Middle Earth, Oz and Neverland. This fine balance between the utopian and the dystopian in children's and YA fiction hinges on the coming-to-consciousness of the young protagonists of Ness' *More Than This* in a twofold sense. Firstly, that the dystopian present can only be perceived as such from the vantage point of something better; and, secondly, that the dystopian present should motivate the characters to bring about change in their world.

Lines of Flight: The Utopian Escape in Contemporary Speculative Literature

Raphael Kabo

Nadia and Saeed, the protagonists of Mohsin Hamid's 2017 novel *Exit West*, trapped in an unnamed Middle Eastern country during an immediate-future civil war, discover that certain doors have become 'special doors' that open onto faraway countries and cities. Through a

series of such doors, Nadia and Saeed travel to Greece, the UK, and the USA, tracing, along with thousands of other refugees, a line of a movement away from precarity and towards an increasingly communal and arguably utopian restructuring of the contemporary world. In Colson Whitehead's 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad*, set in the early 1800s, Cora, an escaped slave, boards the Underground Railroad — transformed by Colson into a literal railroad of unknown provenance — for a chance at freedom and emancipated community in a North echoic of the continuing sufferings and victories of the Black American present. Like the doors of *Exit West*, Colson's railroad destroys and blurs the conceptual limitations of real space in the service of extending a new spatiality of emancipatory possibility, where movement itself becomes a prefigurative utopian process.

This paper situates Hamid and Whitehead's novels in the newly accreting literary field of speculative realism, defined by the use of sf techniques in a realist setting, generating a utopian imaginary of an alternative present. Interrogating these recent manifestations of contemporary utopian literature as part of a wider field of cultural responses to the precarities of the present, the paper adapts and utilises the philosophical concept of the line of flight, first articulated in the work of Deleuze and Guattari as '*ligne de fuite*', with *fuite* signifying both escape from and a flowing or broaching towards. Rendered as lines of flight, or prefigurative escapes, the movements of the protagonists of Hamid and Whitehead's novels generate a politics of escape — whether it occurs in the nineteenth century or the immediate future — which creates a specifically and powerfully utopian imaginary in our contemporary moment.

12.30: Closing Discussion

13.00: Lunch/Close

Concrete Utopias: An Education of Desire

“the designation of utopia as a space for the education of desire underlines the point that the imagination of society otherwise involves imagining ourselves otherwise” (Levitas, 2005)

The work displayed in *Concrete Utopias*; in the exhibition of models, film, and accompanying publication, is drawn from the work of MArch Architecture students and staff of Newcastle University SAPL from 2016/17. A misunderstood and maligned term within architectural education, these projects followed studio leader Nathaniel Coleman’s ongoing research on the problematics of utopia, requiring students to engage with the notion of Utopia and confront their own utopia-anxiety.

In response, these projects resist the establishment of totalising architectural visions. Rather, as described by Coleman in one of his design briefs, they reflect David Harvey’s conception of dialectical utopia, examining how architecture might develop “spatial closure to establish settings for open ended social processes”. They reassert the role of architecture as a social art, critiquing spaces of exclusion or alienation, and developing spatial frameworks which support social fulfillment.

Following Levitas, these works chart nine individual approaches towards an education of desire, both establishing a personal aspiration for a project and addressing architecture’s complicity in dominant modes of spatial production. In doing so they evaluate the potential for individual architects, and for architectural practice, to imagine itself otherwise.

David Boyd (MArch yr 2)

Project title: The Draughtsman's Quietus: Methodologies Towards a Counter Architecture

The projects of this studio engage in an ongoing spatial dialogue, between and across theory and design work, developing an ideological argument through the making of an architectural response. This process of architectural design is directly addressed by David Boyd in ‘The Draughtsman's Quietus: Methodologies Towards a Counter Architecture’. By moving between VR and hand-drawing techniques, Boyd examines the impact of standardization, in both processes of representation and processes of material construction. Boyd uses this dialectic process of design development to explore the limits of CAD technologies as a system of mass-production that potentially restricts spatial vibrancy, and reflects on the impact technological change has on the remaking of architectural thought.

Alex Blanchard (MArch yr 1)

Project title: Van Nelle Technê Fabriek

Alex Blanchard excavates the layers of authorial and architectural intent which underpinned the design and construction of the Van Nelle factory in ‘Van Nelle Technê Fabriek’. This project traces the alienating spatial layout of the factory and the implicit subservience of the worker to the means of production back to the functionalist school within the Bauhaus, and sets this against the lofty spiritual intentions of the building’s architect. Blanchard proposes a corrective, drawing on the alternative spiritualist school within the Bauhaus to develop a Theosophic monastery and synesthetic discothèque, creating a site for spatial transcendence which elevates the individual rather than place him in the service of the machine.