

(Un)Fair Cities. Equity, Ideology and Utopia in Urban Texts

University of Limerick, 12-13 December 2019

(Un)Fair Cities - Equity, Ideology and Utopia in Urban Texts seeks to explore relations between the urban and the utopian, as manifested and explored in literary and cultural practice understood broadly, along another strand of the utopian problematic: that of the complex relations of the utopian and the ideological. These can be understood as antagonistic, with utopian departures challenging and undermining dominant ideological structures, of which the city is both producer and product. But they may also be analysed as dialectically conjoined, whereby utopian projections or disruptions form the basis upon which ideological reformulations are subsequently imagined and put in place.

Key, in this respect, is the problem of representation along both spatial and temporal axes. Writing the city in the light of utopia can thus result in a focus on nonconformist or disruptive spaces within the urban fabric, an attention to spatial discontinuities and their textual correlates, their accompanying discourses and poetics. But it can equally lead to a focus on singular experience; on the event and its after-life; on memory and anticipation of that which itself evades satisfactory representation. These are challenges which speak to the specific concerns of generic and experimental textual practices in an inclusive way – and this conference seeks to explore the full variety of responses elicited, across and between languages and traditions of practice, and in deep historical perspective.

Our title gestures towards a further ambivalence that is arguably key to the writing of the city and the urban experience – the ‘fair’ is what links the equitable and the beautiful, and the indissociably ethical and aesthetic challenge of imagining and writing the city – both inside and beyond ‘literature’ – thus makes such writing an especially fraught ideological space. This being so, the conference will seek in particular to re-visit the perceived ‘end of utopia’ in urban planning and contemporary literary fiction (see e.g. Baeten), and to think about new examples of both ‘spaces of hope’ (see Harvey), ‘utopic degeneration’ (see Marin), and ‘utopia, limited’ (Nersessian) in the textual worlds of urban planning, futures studies, literary fiction, and utopian studies.

We invite sessions and individual papers on subjects engaging with, but not limited to, the following themes:

- Representations of equity, equality and inequality in city writing
- Radical urban futures
- Geographies of hope in the context of 20th and 21st-century dystopia
- Afrofuturism and the city
- Urban segregation and future cities
- Representations of freedom in urban texts
- Novel forms of interaction and encounter in urban writing
- Representation of urban mobilities and large-scale infrastructure – from the industrial revolution to hyperloops
- Rule, Utopia! Class struggles in urban political fiction

- Techno-utopia and the representation of 'smart cities'
- Governing Ecotopia in climate fiction
- Self-organization in 20th and 21st century dystopia
- Urban commons in near-future fiction
- Urban fables and cautionary tales
- Methodological approaches to interdisciplinary research bridging utopian studies, future studies and literary urban studies

The deadline of the call for papers is **15 June 2019**. Please submit proposals (not longer than 300 words) together with a short bio to: unfaircities@gmail.com

The language of the conference will be English, but papers focusing on material in any language from any part of the world are very welcome. The organizers plan to publish a selection of the work issuing from the conference.

Confirmed keynote speakers: Prof **Antonis Balasopoulos** (Associate Professor in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, University of Cyprus); Dr **Caroline Edwards** (Senior Lecturer in Modern & Contemporary Literature, Birkbeck, University of London).

(Un)Fair Cities. Equity, Ideology and Utopia in Urban Texts is the second international conference of the Association for Literary Urban Studies and is organized in association with the Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Limerick.

The Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS), founded in 2015 (formerly HLCN), is an international and interdisciplinary platform for scholars studying the city in literature, which aims to foster interdisciplinary research on city literature, including literature written in all languages and encompassing all historical periods. ALUS organizes regular symposiums and conferences, with recent events in Essen (2019), Stockholm (2018), London (2018), Tallinn (2017), and Tampere (2017), amongst others. More information at <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/hlc-n/>

The Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies was established at the University of Limerick in 2003 to pursue innovative research across disciplines on utopian thought and practice. The Centre's research and service agenda is based on the premise that social values, policies, and practices are shaped by hopeful, utopian visions, and that this dimension is critical to the betterment of life for all members of society. The Ralahine Centre has been instrumental to the development of the (inter-)discipline of utopian studies in Irish, European and international contexts of the past fifteen years. More information at <https://ulsites.ul.ie/ralahinecentre/about-ralahine-centre-utopian-studies>

Sources:

Baeten, Guy (2002). 'Western Utopianism/Dystopianism and the Political Mediocrity of Critical Urban Research.' In *Geografiska Annaler B*, 3-4: 143-152.

Harvey, David (2002). *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press.

Marin, Louis (tr. Robert A. Vollrath) ([1973] 1984). *Utopics. The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*. Humanity Books.

Nersessian, Anahid (2015). *Utopia, limited. Romanticism and Adjustment*. Harvard University Press.