

## ABSTRACTS: THURSDAY SESSIONS

### Session I 1:45-3:15

#### 1.A. Looking Backward at *Daedalus*, Spring 1965 (Colonial East)

This panel consists of three graduate students in the Doctor of Liberal Studies program at Georgetown University, along with their professor as the moderator. The papers will reflect on a summer class called *Utopia-Dystopia: Surveillance, Control, Tyranny, and Hope*, in which the students are reading, among other works, all of the essays in the Spring 1965 issue of *Daedalus*, titled "Utopia." The essays in *Daedalus* will serve as a springboard for both preserving and repairing/building upon what has gone before. Papers will reflect on insights from scholars like Lewis Mumford, Judith Shklar, Crane Brinton, Adam Ulam, and George Kateb (among others) and, through the lenses of recent scholarship, the U.S. political landscape, the pandemic, and current global affairs, assess the current place of utopian thought what revisions might be fitting as we look back at the scholarly visions of 1965.

Each paper will be guided by a unique disciplinary perspective so as to ensure diversity of critical angles, but they will also pursue intersections, one to the next, so as to challenge the very concept of disciplinary boundaries and to foreground the fluidity of a utopian academic landscape. Individual paper topics are expected to include values-based architecture in urban design models, the global rise in nationalist movements, and the dystopic space of social media.

Chair: Scott Krawczyk, Georgetown University

Luisa Aleman Hernandez, Georgetown University, "Learning to Live: Minor Campus Utopias in the Anthropocene"

Kate Hilts: "Unmaking the Precincts: Police Abolition from Fiction to Action"

Joey Hiles: "Making Suburbia: From Utopia to Dystopia"

#### 1.B. Nineteenth-Century Visions and Contemporary Legacies (Colonial West)

Justin Chandler, Miami University, "Incorporated Selves: Looking Backward, Perspectival Captivity, and the Process of Utopia"

In a 2016 essay, Lyman Tower Sargent traces the development of Edward Bellamy's utopian thought from the publication of *Looking Backward* (1888) to the publication of *Equality* (1897), concluding that utopian scholarship often hinders robust readings by isolating popular

texts from relevant contexts. This paper accepts Sargent's charge and builds on his reading by highlighting unique strategies these two novels offer for unmaking and remaking the world. I explore *Looking Backward's* synthesis of self and society (as recursively interdependent and therefore contingent), its facilitation of a dialectic (whereby readers occupy a liminal space between the real world and that of the novel), and its perspectival reorientation (shifting our focus from the "real" onto the "practical effect" of Bellamy's vision). Having done so, I argue that Bellamy's novel is a work of American pragmatist philosophy, one that challenged readers to recognize the value in reseeing and remaking their world through renderings that are not true in either a rational or empirical sense but in a pragmatist sense. The development of Bellamy's vision from *Looking Backward* to *Equality* showcases a further pragmatist process, wherein a community of readers were incorporated into a shared dialogue of continuously reimagining the future. This paper thus offers space to reflect on speculative fiction as a unique tool for navigating and interrogating life and considers how readers use and continue to modulate speculative imaginings.

Jonathan Neufeld, College of Charleston, "'By Means Impossible to be Anticipated': Aesthetics and Democracy in *Benito Cereno* & *Billy Budd*"

Aesthetic and artistic expression play a central role in the plots of *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*. Famously, Billy Budd has difficulty speaking because of his stutter but he sings beautifully. It is his song that binds people to him (in particular the mutinous men below decks), and in which everyone hears him to be good. His inability to speak before the law or of the law to hear his singing, however, is at the heart of his tragic downfall. It is tempting to think of Billy's song in utopian democratic terms but, I will argue, this would be a mistake—though an interesting one. Babo, the leader of the African mutineers aboard *Benito Cereno's* slave ship provide a counterweight to a utopian democratic vision of Billy's song. The African mutineers present on a stage they design especially for Amasa Delano, the supposedly benign New England Republican who offers the ship help. Delano proves to be utterly incapable of grasping the performances he sees before him. Once again aesthetic and artistic expression play a pivotal role in Melville's depiction of democracy but this time it seems that there is no question that the picture of democracy is an anti-utopian one. Or is there? In this paper I will explore the vision of aesthetic democracy Melville presents to us in these two works and what kind of hope (if any) might emerge from it.

## Session II 3:30-5

### 2.A. Finnish Utopian Communities: Paper and Documentary Screening (Colonial East)

**Paper:** Teuvo Peltoniemi, Independent Scholar, "'Three Centuries, Six Continents and Four Main Ideologies': The History of the Finnish Utopian Communities"

Finnish Utopian communities are not often mentioned with More's *Utopia*, or with Fourier, Owen, Cabet or Oneida, but they have a history reaching back to the 1734 Eriksson' Sailing

Sect, antislavery “New Jerusalem” in Sierra Leone in 1792, and socialist whaling company Amurland in Pacific Russia in 1868. The main wave of Utopian emigration was already over when the Finns established more Utopian communities. Later Finnish communities were in the Americas, like Sointula in Canada, and Penedo in Brazil. Altogether 20 ventures around the world represent nationalism, socialism, cooperatives, “tropic fever” and religious ideas. The Finnish Utopian communes were considerably more numerous, and ideologically and geographically broader than those of other Scandinavian countries. There were altogether 20 ventures in Australia, USA, Canada, Soviet Russia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil and Israel. Also those are well linked to the great ideologies behind the great Utopian communities. After a short presentation of the most important Finnish Utopian communities, they are compared by their ideological background, and by the existence of Utopian features in practice. Reasons of the end of the settlements are analyzed and compared with some US traditional utopias. Finally possibilities for future Eco, Virtual and Space Utopian communities are briefly discussed.

For more information, see:

[www.facebook.com/groups/finnutopias](http://www.facebook.com/groups/finnutopias)

[www.teuvopeltoniemi.net](http://www.teuvopeltoniemi.net)

## **Screening: HÖÖK documentary film**

Finnish-Russian documentary film "Fridolf Höök – from Ocean to Ocean" (2020, 26 min., subtitles in English)

During the worst famine years, in 1868, Finnish sea captain Fridolf Höök founded a Utopian colony of Amurland near Vladivostok the Czar Russia. Finland was then an autonomic part of Russia. The group consisted of a hundred well-to-do Swedish speaking Finns from Helsinki, and the main idea was whale hunting. At the same year, about 50 Finnish speaking peasants from Turku immigrated to the same area. Departures aroused a great media debate in Finland.

Captain Höök stayed in the Far East area after the quick end of the Utopian community, and became a local celebrity for decades. Many members of his group returned eventually to Finland. Some remained on the area, as did all the Turku peasants.

The Höök film has been produced in 2020 as a Russian-Finnish collaboration. It has been filmed in Finland and Russia. Scientific material, photos and interviews are from Helsinki, Turku, Nakhodka and Vladivostok museums and archives.

Director Mila Kudryashova (St. Petersburg)

Producer Merja Ritola (Helsinki)

Scientific adviser Teuvo Peltoniemi (Helsinki)

## **2.B. On Modernity, Utopianism, and the University (Colonial West)**

Benjamin Schewel, Center on Modernity in Transition (COMIT), “Lewis Mumford's Path to the Axial Age”

The presentation examines the intellectual trajectories that led Lewis Mumford, the prominent 20th century urbanist and scholar of utopianism, to embrace Karl Jaspers's notion of a mid-millennial BCE "axial age" of religious metaphysical transformation. The presentation begins by examining the influence of Patrick Geddes in shaping Mumford's path toward the idea of an axial age. It then traces Mumford's intellectual biography as it leads up through the 1954 book, *The Transformations of Man*, wherein he first deploys the idea of an axial age. The presentation considers the crucial role that this book played in orienting Mumford's late works, *The City in History* and the *Myth of the Machine*. The presentation concludes by considering how the broader legacy of utopian organicism out of which Mumford's reflections on the axial age emerged enabled him to advance ideas the nature and implications of this distinctive period of parallel socio-spiritual effervescence that are still in many ways superior to those presented by the likes of Karl Jaspers, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Robert Bellah, and Charles Taylor.

Joe Kelly, College of Charleston, “Utopia and the Liberal Revolution”

In 1927, Felix Frankfurter, then a professor at Harvard Law, published a somewhat obscure article about administrative law in the *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*. That same year, John Dewey published his book, *The Public and Its Problems*. Frankfurter and Dewey were writing the blueprint for the re-orientation of American government that would come in 1933 with Roosevelt's New Deal. In its essence, this is liberalism as we understand that term in American politics today, and it was based on the radical idea that the pursuit of happiness is an unalienable right, and that it is the business of government to secure that right for all citizens. This is the milieu that would conceive the “American Dream” (a term coined by the historian, James Truslow Adams, in 1931). With a study of Frankfurter and Dewey, this paper will examine the role of utopian thought in liberalizing of the “mind of the nation” (to borrow another contemporary term from Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.). Though I describe this process as a “re-orientation,” which might imply a revolutionary shift, really it meant putting in place the kind of mechanisms necessary to the incremental change referenced in the conference's CFP.

Stacy Maddern, University of Connecticut, “Building Utopias on College Campuses”

At its core capitalist education is harsh and divisive. It distorts the practice and promise of democracy that envisions a project of human development that strives to build a better future. This conception of utopia includes educationally sensitive environments where equality creates the necessary space and time for developing real capacities. Jean-Jacques Rousseau identified the most important rule of education as “not to gain time but to lose it.” William Morris rooted education to the foundations of utopia because it encouraged democratic participation. John Dewey coined creative democracy as the “free gathering of neighbors.”

The remaking or reimagining of education as experimentation and growth is a consistent feature on college campuses around the world. It is not occurring in classrooms, nor is it a function of innovative curriculum. Professors and instructors are not leading the charge. Instead, students are turning away from the indoctrination offered by neoliberalism. New student organizations are committed to reshaping the boundaries established by capitalism's class structure and social hierarchies. Reminiscent of the counterculture of communal living during the 1960s and 1970s, the younger generations are finding their footing by building social values based on acceptance and preservation of lived experience. These students understand praxis as a formula for creating and living in horizontally organized spaces. They identify higher education, not as a benefit to them, but as an institution where the opportunity to speak truth to power is actually possible.

## **2.C. Slavery, Imperialism, Abolition, and Memory (Citadel North)**

Barry Stiefel, College of Charleston, "Playing Whiteface: A Dystopian Comparison Study of the Indigenous Diamond Hill and Black Melrose Plantations Through Rose-Colored Utopian Glasses"

The Antebellum plantation defined the American South as the paradigm of social progress and economic success. The iconic symbol of the plantation built environment structure and system was typified by a central house with associated outbuildings for the processing of the cash-crop of that particular area, whether sugarcane, cotton, tobacco, rice, indigo, or other resource. Expanding out unto the horizon from the central house was a vast expanse of fields tended by enslaved Black and Brown bodies, often African but also indigenous. The previous indigenous inhabitants had either been displaced, killed, or enslaved to make room for the cash-crop plantation economic system. At the structural and social pinnacle of this system were the Euromerican taskmasters, enslavers, financiers, among others. However, a striking contrast at Diamond Hill plantation near what is now Chatsworth, Georgia and Melrose plantation near Natchitoches, Louisiana were that they developed, owned, and operated (respectively) by free indigenous and African individuals. Cherokee Chief James Vann was the proprietor of Diamond Hill and Louis Metoyer owner of Melrose plantation, and in many ways were playing "whiteface" as the patriarchs of each of these estates with many enslaved people forced to work for their benefit. Using these extraordinary contrary examples of indigenous and Black people owning and operating a conventional plantation, where resources were extracted and other people of color were enslaved, this paper will examine the Post-bellum reflections of race and slavery at Diamond Hill and Melrose plantations, as these places evolved from utopian romanticism to dystopian site of conscience.

Abdul Isiaq, Temple University Department of Africology, "No Africans Involved: Contextualizing the Western Imperialist Project From An Afrocentric Abolitionist Perspective"

Recent works from educator and community organizer Mariame Kaba and Afro- Caribbean professor Dr. Rinaldo Walcott both make emphatic arguments in support of the pressing need for a contemporary abolitionist theoretical and practical framework in freeing the African

diaspora from Euro-centric physical and mental subjugation. This paper seeks to build upon both discussions to maintain that an Afrocentric abolitionist perspective is one that calls for the inclusive liberation of all African persons that have been marginalized and oppressed based on their cultural location, mental or physical (dis)abilities, or their perceived locations within Euro-centrally imposed stratified social identification structures/spectra based on Western concepts of gender and sexuality. Moreover, this paper puts forth the essential consideration that such an inclusive abolitionist framework cannot be fulfilled in its entirety as long as the personal and social restructuring that it requires uphold any manifestation of the global Western imperialist project.

Session III 5:15-6:15

### **3. Keynote conversation (Colonial East)**

Hoda Zaki, Pete Sands, Claire Curtis

As scholars of utopia our academic work is on the boundaries of some particular discipline for which utopia is potentially marginal or even a somewhat suspect concern.

As academics we all share to differing degrees the tensions around the boundaries of job status, administrative work, service commitments, pedagogical approaches.

As people in the world we negotiate the boundaries between job, community, family, politics.

We share a set of experiences with boundaries: the intellectual, disciplinary, professional, political and personal and we share the very idea that each of these realms has been bounded (or to use the lingo of the academy: siloed) in ways that often undermine each of these pursuits.

Join us for a conversation about negotiating and traversing these boundaries. Come and share your own travels and let's continue the conversation into the reception afterwards.