



## Call for Papers

### 7<sup>th</sup> Cultural Geography, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies International Conference in Languedoc-Roussillon (France)

#### A joint production

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### Contemporary Cultural Utopias

June 16-18, 2016, Nîmes University (France)

The 7<sup>th</sup> Cultural Geography, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies International Conference in Languedoc-Roussillon will focus on contemporary cultural utopias. It wishes more specifically to explore how they are currently being formalized, their meaning, and their social and spatial localizations. At a time when the world is often described as saturated with technological innovations and communication flows, when humanity's craziest dreams seem to have become reality, how can we give a fresh meaning to the notion of utopia and understand its unabated success? The notion of "contemporary cultural utopia" suggests that to the political and scientific utopias of the past, a new, more cultural and global dimension can be added, one that would encompass all the interpretations and controversies related to the roles of culture today. The conference wishes to explore and define the boundaries of this new dimension and investigate its implications by means of a multidisciplinary approach. Several axes are suggested to try and come to terms with the complexity of the notion of cultural utopia.

A first axis explores how the concept of utopia, traditionally conceived as out of time and space, is today repositioned around the notions of "living together" and "pacific co-existence" that imply specific places and communities. Has the possibility of living together become a utopia? Is this a mere consequence of the disintegration of social links or does it reveal something significant about the myths at work in contemporary societies? Is it merely a nostalgic reaction to the impression that it has become impossible to live together or does it play a role in the construction of contemporary collective identities? Inscribed in a double process of delocalization and relocalization, utopias have seemingly considerably evolved in terms of contents, which required new approaches to their study.

Another axis deals with the domains of application of the concept of utopia. Urbanism and contemporary architecture have resorted to utopian visions that have sustained innovation on the long term by enabling a reflection that went beyond mere functional issues. In turn, how have these processes led to a reconfiguration of the concept of utopia? Have they tamed it, have they moved its boundaries? To what extent has the multiplication of utopian conceptions of the territory (participative democracy, sustainable development, etc.), more or less adapted to the requirements of collective processes, contributed to cultural development? Is the current obsession with the identification of all forms of cultural heritage, at the risk of depriving them of their stamina and diversity, a form of contemporary utopia? Similarly, the tourist industry and territorial marketing resort to tools traditionally associated with utopia, such as post-humanism or augmented reality, which redefine its domains of application. What is left for utopia when technology makes any site and artwork virtually accessible by all? Eventually, in the political field, to what extent can we keep effective the concept of utopia without turning it into the nostalgic dream of a bygone golden age, or a mere electoral argument? What do political utopias become when they are relegated to a rhetoric of happiness?

Including culture into the reflection on utopia implies a necessary critical assessment. One must seriously contemplate the possibility that utopias have been confiscated by various instances: when commercial products are sold as utopias to consumers, what happens to true utopias, and their critical, subversive, disturbing, and unsettling charges? Have utopias been degraded, to the same extent as other cultural values? In our mercantile, consumer society, the question must be raised of whether utopias can legitimately be sold, bought, and negotiated.

It is thus obvious that the status of utopias has changed considerably. By becoming “cultural”, they have been both diluted and devalued. Consequently, they are being used more like stable beacons than radical openings to Otherness; a series of references to be shared than dividing lines. Their connection to politics is less pregnant as they participate to the spectacle of the environment or of endangered minority cultures. It has become urgent to question and probe the new language of utopia, in the fictional, virtual, or real worlds, both for artistic, literary, or digital creations, and for political and economic actions. An extra, more reflexive layer of questioning has to be initiated regarding the various scientific disciplines, and the way they participate in the redefinition of utopia.

Rather than a mere catalogue of contemporary utopias, or worse, of current “futuristic” projects, this international conference has the ambition to explore the survival, today, of utopian thought: in which forms, for what aims. Beyond case studies, we encourage proposals that investigate the present and the future of the very notion of utopia.

*Papers may focus on one of the following axes:*

- Utopia, living together, and co-existence today.
- Utopia, post-humanism, and augmented reality.
- Utopia, urbanism, architecture, and the current territories of utopia.
- Utopia, politics, the manipulation and subversion of utopias by the body politics.
- Utopia, commerce, and commercial communication.
- Utopia and the spectacle of collective identities, labels, and heritage.
- The new language of utopia.

**The papers can be delivered either in French or in English.**

**Please, note carefully:** Speakers are requested to take part in the three days of the conference since several round-tables will be organized throughout the conference requiring the participation of all the speakers.

### **Deadline for proposals: June 15, 2015**

Proposals (between 2000 and 4000 signs, 1 to 2 pages, in English or in French) must be sent in Times New Roman 12, 1.5 line spacing, in Word. They shall feature the first and last name, field, status, affiliation, and electronic address of the author, as well as 5 key words.

The document will be saved under the following name: LASTNAMEfirstname.doc, and sent exclusively to [christiane.lagarde@univ-montp3.fr](mailto:christiane.lagarde@univ-montp3.fr)

Summer 2015: evaluation of the proposals by the Scientific Committee.

October 15, 2015: notification of the decision to the authors.

### **Organizing committee**

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