

Virtual Workshop: (Narrating) Environmental Displacements, October 6-8, 2021

“We live in an era of unprecedented mobility: movement of ideas, goods, money and, increasingly, of people,” opens a 2017 UN report on emerging issues of environmental concern. While mobility and migration can be significant drivers of development and progress, offering opportunities to individuals and families, as well as spreading ideas and connecting the world, they are often also involuntary: The UN Refugee Agency estimates that global forced displacement surpassed 80 million in mid-2020. Climate change and environmental destruction, such as “the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events” (UNHCR, “Climate Change and Disaster Placement”) or the newly exacerbated precarity of living conditions as a result of neocolonial extractions of geologic resources, are major causes of such forced displacements.

Concurrently to an era of unprecedented mobility, we thus live in an era of unprecedented environmental change. Human activity has harmed and reconstructed our planet so profoundly that scientists argue we have entered a new geological epoch called the “Anthropocene”, “emphasiz[ing] the central role of mankind in geology and ecology” and the “still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere” (Crutzen and Stoermer, “The Anthropocene”, *Global Change Newsletter*, 17). The recent coinage of “environmental displacement” captures the ways in which environmental change and degradation such as desertification, deforestation, land degradation, water scarcity and changes in climate more generally not only fundamentally redraw the map of our world, but equally fundamentally affect where and how people are able to live.

Although this issue has gained prominence in recent years, particularly in relation to small islands and coastal areas in the Pacific, it is by no means a challenge connected solely to a certain region or singular events - and North America is anything but immune to its impacts. In fact, as Julia Sze has put it, “The United States is burning, flooding, exploding” (*Amerikastudien/American Studies* 66.1, 259). In 2016, the residents of Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana were the first US “climate migrants” to receive a US\$48 million federal grant for their relocation as part of a program by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to help communities across 13 states adapt to climate change. At the same time, “The United States has much to do with the present state of the world characterized by environmental racism, injustice, and climate disasters—a world that relies on the exploitation and cheapening of nature and peoples” (*Ibid.*, 260). This devaluation as well as a commodification of nature is arguably a driving force of climate change and questions of responsibility clearly arise, especially when considering the impact of the US on the global climate.

We thus understand environmental displacement as a wide network of interconnected events and processes that, on the one hand, affect individuals and communities and non-human environments, and on the other, have historically often been intricately and bidirectionally linked with the devaluation of peoples within the frameworks of settler-colonialism, frontier-expansionism, and nation-building mythologies of extraction (for example gold-rushes).

Against this background, for this workshop on “(Narrating) Environmental Displacements”, we are interested in how literary and cultural productions have grappled with the unique role and responsibility of North America as a space and simultaneously purveyor of environmental displacements. We seek contributions that address how such displacements are

represented in an era of climate change, specifically in Anglophone literature and culture and in reference to the United States.

Possible topics for contributions include, but are not limited to literary / medial negotiations of:

- (Forced) human and non-human displacement due to extraction / natural disasters / climate change
- Racialized / Racializing dynamics of displacement
- Displacement of Indigenous populations
- Ecoprecarity
- Metaphorizations of displacement / nomadic subjects (cf. Braidotti)
- Slow violence (cf. Nixon)
- Toxic places (oil spills, nuclear testing, pollution)
- Terraforming / “Earth-shaping” / geoengineering (re-routing of rivers, fracking, mining, and other practices that radically reshape landscapes)
- Extinctions and changes in migration patterns
- US involvement in wars (for oil)
- Material displacements (e.g. plastic, textiles, waste)
- Discussion of different generic forms and their ability to portray environmental displacements

We intend the workshop to be an intense discussion forum for the topics sketched above; thus, the group of participants will be limited to a maximum of twenty scholars. We also specifically encourage international and early-career scholars, as we aim to represent all stages of the academic career. Since the desired outcome of this format is the comprehensive discussion of individual proposals, applicants should be willing to prepare a 2000-word essay for distribution to all participants prior to the workshop.

We invite the submission of individual abstracts of 300 words, together with a short bio, until June 30, 2021. For further questions about the workshop theme and to submit your proposal, please contact the conference organizers (Ina Batzke, Linda M. Hess, Milena Krischer) via displacements@philhist.uni-augsburg.de.

21st Conference of the Utopian Studies Society / Europe

UTOPIAN POSSIBILITIES: KNOWLEDGE, HAPPINESS & WELLBEING

10-12 December 2021 – an Online Conference

‘Utopias will come back as we need to imagine how to save the world’, Margaret Atwood has recently declared.

This Conference starts from the conviction that this is a **turning point for Utopian Studies**: Its online format is a sign of the times as well as an opportunity for raising global awareness and stimulate collective thinking about problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated millions of lives, caused the economic and social disruption of societies already in crisis, and has had a global impact on people’s livelihoods and wellbeing. This is the moment to show that **the only future we will get is the one we are capable of imagining**.

The conference will have the threefold objective of **raising awareness, analysing old and new utopian spaces and discourses, and creating a forum for delegates to co-design the future**. Hopefully, a document will result from this co-designing activity – ***The Porto Declaration on Utopian Possibilities*** – to be signed by individuals and institutions, acknowledging the productivity of a utopian thinking methodology and asserting the universities as privileged places for training utopian minds.

We invite utopian scholars to contribute to ONE of the three sections of the conference:

1. Raising awareness – online pre-programme / early December 2021

We already have the following online events planned: *LI(ea)VING UTOPIA* Film Festival (org. 2021 / ASCIPDA); *Visual Spaces of Change* Exhibition (SCOPIO / Fac. Architecture Univ. Porto); Collective Imagination Festival / Lab of the Future (lower and upper secondary students / org. UTOPIA500 / Univ. Porto).

We welcome **proposals for other online events** taking place in early December (before the conference) to be included in this section, preferably **artistic performances and exhibitions**. Please submit a 250-word description.

2. Utopian Spaces and Discourses

The 2021 USS Conference is dedicated to exploring the power of utopian imagination and how positive visions of the future have/will inspire/d real change. It is specifically meant to focus on how knowledge has been/may be used to construct an inclusive society, aimed at the happiness and wellbeing of all its citizens. However, the Conference also welcomes proposals on other aspects of the utopian tradition, including its dystopian and anti-utopian counterparts, as well as on productive intersections with other fields of study.

The Organising Committee hopes to be able to set up a number of thematic panels to facilitate the delegates' navigation of the conference. Potential topics include (but are not limited to):

- Utopian inclusiveness and its discontents;
- Happiness, wellbeing, citizenship;
- Utopian transgressions and the Arts;
- Knowledge & ethics;
- Dystopian fears, past, present, and future;
- Anti-utopian resistances and the role of dissent;
- Transdisciplinary intersections in utopianism.

Proposals for presenting high-quality research are welcome in one of the following formats:

- . 20-minute paper / please submit a 250-word abstract
- . 10-minute position paper / please submit a 250-word abstract
- . Research poster / please submit a 250-word abstract
- . Closed panel of 3 or 4 papers by named contributors and chair / please submit a proposal with 1) the outline of the panel theme; 2) the authors and the abstracts of their papers; 3) the name of the chair.

3. Utopian Possibilities: Co-Designing Workshops

For this innovative section, to take place on the last day of the Conference, we invite delegates to contribute with ideas to the collective construction of positive visions of the future nurtured by relationships of care, and to discuss how universities can contribute to this most needed paradigm shift.

There will be six groups (with seven participants each) working simultaneously. Each participant is invited to make a 5-minute presentation of his/her vision concerning one of the topics below. Debate will follow so that a draft with the group's resolutions may be prepared. The 2-hour workshop slots will be followed by a plenary session where the moderators of each workshop are to present the results of their groups' exercise of collective imagination, as well as practical measures that may be put in place. These conclusions and recommendations will be reflected on the six chapters of the *Porto Declaration on Utopian Possibilities* to be published (and open to be signed) in January 2022.

We invite utopian thinkers to send us a 250-word abstract of utopian possibilities / positive visions providing answers to the questions formulated in ONE of the following sections:

- I. THE ROLE OF UTOPIA – Why is it important that we engage collective imagination in creating positive visions of the future? What is the role of Utopia?

- II. DEFINITIONS – What are the basic conditions for human well-being? How would we describe a happy community?
 - III. VISION – How do we imagine life in sustainable cities and communities?
 - IV. HOLISTIC THINKING – How are we to reconcile health, wellbeing and equity locally and globally? And how can we articulate individual freedom with collective action?
 - V. UTOPIAN SOLUTIONS – What kind of whole-of-society response is needed to address the most pressing problems of our times: migration, the climate emergency and the consequences of the pandemic?
 - VI. THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES – How can universities become centres for training utopian minds and promoting an ethics of care and responsibility towards the Other? What practical recommendations can we offer university administrators?
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Closing dates for proposals:

1 September 2021

Please send all proposals and correspondence to
[**utopian.possibilities.conference@gmail.com**](mailto:utopian.possibilities.conference@gmail.com)

Please note that we may not be able to accommodate all the proposals. The Organizing Committee will send a notification of acceptance by September 15.

Delegates will then have until the end of October to send us an extended summary of their papers (2000-2500 words). These will be included in the (online) volume *Utopian Possibilities* to be launched on the first day of the Conference.

The USS Conference 2021 will be hosted exclusively online by the University of Porto and CETAPS / Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies.

Plenary sessions will be recorded and live streamed through CETAPS' YouTube channel. For the other sessions, we will be using Zoom Seminar, as well as a virtual platform especially created for the event; these will be open to registered delegates only.

By presenting a proposal to the conference you are agreeing with these arrangements.

Registration is free. Attendance certificates will be sent only after the conference takes place.