

HISC 87: *What is Utopia?*
Tuesday/Thursday 1-4:30pm
GSI: Justine Parkin
Summer 2023
Online Synchronous: [Zoom link](#)

Course Description

Coined by Renaissance thinker Thomas More, the word *utopia* literally translates to “no place” though it sounds identical to another Greek word *eutopia*, or “good place.” In one way, this double meaning speaks to the simultaneous desire for the ideal society coupled with the very impossibility of its creation. Yet, this hasn’t stopped philosophers, writers, architects and others from engaging the concept of utopia and theorizing the ideal society or place. While the term *utopia* originated with More in the tradition of political philosophy, in this course, we will also open up our discussion to a range of utopian thinking in the domain of literature, philosophy, and theory.

Some of the questions we will tackle in this course are: What are some common elements of utopian imaginaries? Are utopias always already dystopias? How is the concept of utopia connected to the way we shape and experience space? Do we *need* the concept of utopia even as we realize it is unachievable? Close reading and discussion of written and visual texts will be complemented by analytical and creative writing exercises that engage the themes of the course. This course will meet synchronously online. Twice weekly class meetings will generally consist of 1 hour of discussion/lecture, 1 hour of small group meetings, and 1.5 hours of individual writing exercises.

Instructor Information/Communication

GSI: Justine Parkin

Office hours: Wednesdays 10-12pm, on [zoom](#); also available by appointment

Email: jeparkin@ucsc.edu

You are welcome to drop into my zoom at any time during these regularly scheduled hours. If you would like to meet outside these times or have questions that arise throughout the week, do not hesitate to email me. I will get back to you promptly, usually by the same day.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

In this course, we will explore and interpret texts of a variety of forms, including political treatises, short stories, theory, and visual media. Students will be asked to think critically and creatively about the themes and questions that arise from the course materials and share these ideas in our meetings. Students will be working across traditional disciplinary formations to analyze the development and diverse representations of utopias and utopian thinking. In class discussions and written work, we will emphasize the practice of close reading, that is, paying attention to the subtleties of diction, syntax, figurative language, and style. By the end of the course, students should be able to: 1) interpret textual evidence to develop effective, scholarly arguments; 2) identify how to seek out further knowledge of a work and its possible interpretations in order to buttress these arguments; 3) compare understandings of the nature and purpose of utopian imaginaries; 4) create utopian texts of their own, reflecting on the forms and traditions of utopian thinking that we cover in the course.

Required Materials

Most readings will be available on Canvas. However, students should acquire the following books. Please note the appropriate translation of More's *Utopia* in particular.

Thomas More. *Utopia* [1516]. Translated by Paul Turner. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.

Italo Calvino. *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt, 1978.

Donna Haraway. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

Assignments/Assessments

As an intensive, 5-week summer course, regular attendance and participation in discussions will be key to success. Excused absences will be granted in exceptional circumstances. **Come having completed the assigned readings for that day. Bring at least one question or an extended reflection on one or more of the texts assigned.** Each class meeting will generally begin with a 1-hour lecture/discussion of the texts, followed by 2.5 hours of small group discussions and writing exercises. In-class activities will often include group reading exercises to break down readings into smaller parts, Canvas discussion forum postings, and independent writing exercises that lead up to the three longer assessments for the course.

In addition to in-class work and discussions, there are three assessments required in this course: 2 creative, 1 analytical. During the last week of the course, you will choose one of your creative pieces to present to the class. You may choose to do a visual project for one of the creative assignments, though you will be asked to produce a short written reflection to complement it.

Each paper should be 3-4 pages. If you choose to do a visual project in lieu of paper #2 or #3, you must first get approval from me. Reach out as soon as possible so we can discuss.

Analytical Paper #1 (due Thursday, July 6)

Political Utopias – Choose and analyze a passage from Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Applying Louis Marin’s argument, discuss how the “frontier” or “horizon” of political power is being represented and articulated in your chosen passage.

Creative Paper #2 (due Tuesday, July 18)

Utopias & Dystopias – Add to Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* by writing your own version of an invisible city, informed and inspired by your reading and our discussions of Calvino’s text. Your addition should speak to key themes and motifs of Calvino’s text though you are welcome to riff on and creatively expand on the text as you see fit.

Creative Paper #3 (due Tuesday, July 25)

Companion Species Manifesto – As Donna Haraway writes in her *Companion Species Manifesto*, “Dogs and people figure a universe.” Her reflection on dog-human companion relationships is, for her, “a political act of hope” in a damaged world. Applying (or challenging) Haraway’s claims, write your own companion species manifesto that explores a companion species relationship with an animal, plant, insect, or even fungi, viruses or bacteria! How might your own manifesto serve as a “political act of hope”?

Grades/Grading Policy

In-class Participation, Writing Exercises & Group Work: 50%

Assignments: 45% total (15% each)

Final Oral Presentation (3-5 min): 5%

Late essays will receive a half-grade penalty for every day the essay is late. I understand extenuating circumstances may arise, so I encourage you to be in contact with me in advance of these due dates to discuss alternate arrangements, as needed.

Week 1: Utopias, Then & Now

Tuesday, June 27

Orientation to course guidelines, expectations, and online modules

Read/discuss together in class

Thomas More, “Lines on the Island of Utopia” and “More’s Letter to Peter Giles” (p. 7-10)
Introduction to the characters in *Utopia* (Thomas, Peter, Raphael) [pp. 15-19]

Individual writing exercise (at least 1 page) - due by end of day

What does utopia mean to you? What is a place that you might call utopian? Go there, if you can, and write this reflection from there.

Thursday, June 29

Read before class:

Finish Book I of *Utopia* (pp. 15-47)

Louis Marin, “The Frontiers of Utopia,” in *Utopias and the Millenium* (1993) [pp. 9-16]

Read/discuss together in class:

Read p. 113 of More’s *Utopia* together as a group; divide up Book II amongst groups

Individual writing exercise (at least 1 page) - due by end of day

Free write: Reflect on the last paragraph from Louis Marin’s essay: “In the term invented by More to name the best possible republic, in his fiction of the perfect state, we can read today, in 1992, the limits or frontiers of any state, of any institution...” (16). This can serve as a brainstorm for your first paper.

Week 2-3: Utopias & Dystopias

Tuesday, July 4

NO CLASS - Fourth of July holiday

Thursday, July 6

Paper #1 due

Read before class:

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972) [pp. 5-69]

Individual writing exercise (at least 1 page) - due by end of day

Choose a place where you will return throughout the week. It may be in your house, but ideally choose somewhere outside your home but nearby. Some ideas: a park, a lookout point, a cafe. Spend some time observing and experiencing the space before you begin to write. Describe how it feels, what it looks like, what it smells like. Focus on what you would identify as its utopian elements.

Tuesday, July 11

Read before class:

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972) [pp. 73-131]

Read together in class:

Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character" (1931) [2 pages]

Individual writing exercise (at least one page) - due by end of day

Return to the same place as you did on Tuesday. Observe. Again describe what you notice but see if you can bring to the forefront other elements. Perhaps in this exercise the place is unrecognizable as the same one as you wrote about before. Can you look at it a different way? Focus on what might be its dystopian elements. You may also want to bring in Benjamin on the "destructive character."

Thursday, July 13

Finish before class:

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972) [pp. 135-165]

Saidiya Hartman, “Note on Method” & “The Terrible Beauty of the Slum” in *Wayward Lives* (2019) [9 pages]

Individual writing exercise (at least one page) - due by end of day

Return to your chosen place. Describe it yet again, identifying other features that stand out. You may want to use one of Calvino’s chapter titles as a guide (e.g. “Cities and Names,” “Cities and Desires,” “Hidden Cities.” The writing assignments from past two weeks can and should be used to craft paper #2.

Week 4: More-than-Human Worlds

Tuesday, July 18

Paper #2 due

Read before class:

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*.
(2003) [pp. 1-32]

Individual viewing/writing

Watch Donna Haraway's lecture, "Making Oddkin: Story Telling for Earthly Survival" ([2017 lecture](#)) [90min]. Write a reflection of at least 1-page. In your reflection, identify Haraway's key arguments, describe her style and mode of argumentation, and write down questions. For this exercise, please post your reflection to the Canvas discussion forum.

Thursday, July 20

Read before class:

Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*
(2003) [p. 33-65]

Read together in class:

Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Skywoman Falling," in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) [pp. 3-10]

Individual writing exercise (at least 1 page) - due by end of day

As Haraway writes, "Dogs and people figure a universe." Complete the statement your own way: "_____ and people figure a universe." What or whom do you count as your companion? Spend some with them. Observe, then reflect.

Week 5: Utopia & its Consequences

Tuesday, July 25

In-class presentations: Choose an image to accompany a reading of one of your creative essays.

Read/watch before class:

Octavia Butler, “The Book of Martha,” *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (2005) [17 pages]

Space is the Place, Sun Ra (1974) [85 minutes]

Thursday, July 27

In-class presentations: Choose an image to accompany a reading of one of your creative essays.

Read before class:

Ursula LeGuin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” from *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters* (1973) [5 pages]

N.K. Jemisin, “The Ones Who Stay and Fight” in *How Long ‘Til Black Future Month?* (2018) [6 pages]

Academic Policies

All members of the UCSC community benefit from an environment of trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility. You are expected to present your own work and acknowledge the work of others in order to preserve the integrity of scholarship. All work submitted in this course must be your own and must be written exclusively for this course. The use of *any* source (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Instances of suspected plagiarism will be pursued vigorously. Violations of the Academic Integrity policy can result in dismissal from the university and a permanent notation on a student's transcript. For the full policy and disciplinary procedures on academic dishonesty, students should refer to the [Academic Misconduct page](#) at the [Division of Undergraduate Education](#).

Accessibility

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the course. At this time, I would also like us to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. I encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

Title IX

UC Santa Cruz is committed to providing a safe learning environment that is free of all forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which are explicitly prohibited under Title IX. If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, know that you are not alone. The Title IX Office, the Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE) office, and Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) are all resources that you can rely on for support.

Please be aware that if you tell me about a situation involving Title IX misconduct, I am required to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator. This reporting responsibility also applies to course TAs and tutors (as well to all UCSC employees who are not designated as "confidential" employees, which is a special designation granted to counselors and CARE advocates). Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that you are aware of the range of options available to you and that you have access to the resources you need.

Confidential resources are available through [CARE](#). Confidentiality means CARE advocates will not share any information with Title IX, the police, parents, or anyone else without explicit permission. CARE advocates are trained to support you in understanding your rights and options, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. You can contact CARE at (831) 502-2273 or care@ucsc.edu.

In addition to CARE, these resources are available to you:

- If you need help figuring out what resources you or someone else might need, visit the [Sexual Violence Prevention & Response \(SAFE\) website](#), which provides information and resources for different situations.
- [Counseling & Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) can provide confidential counseling support. Call them at (831) 459-2628.
- You can report gender discrimination and sexual harassment and violence directly to the University's [Title IX Office](#) by calling (831) 459-2462 or by using their [online reporting tool](#).
- Reports to law enforcement can be made to the UC Police Department, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1.