**perfect!**

**?**

utopias, dystopias, & the sociological imaginary

the facts

class: fyse 1392

days: m/w

times: 2.50-4.05

place: laforce121

teacher: linus owens

email: lowens@middlebury.edu

office: munroe 207

office hours: m/w 9.52-10.57, t 3.01-4.02

writing tutors: julia trencher & rachel cohen

email: jtrencher@middlebury.edu & rdcohen@middlebury.edu

open hours: tba

the class

Don’t mess with perfection: that’s the promise, as well as the trap, of utopian visions. Utopian theory criticizes existing worlds, offering plans for a better society, and better people to stock it. Since one person’s utopia can be another’s dystopia, this “good society” often intensifies tensions it promises to resolve. We will study modern utopias and dystopias as theories of society, as expressions of sociological perspectives, and imaginations of alternative worlds. Along the way, we will watch as utopianism shifts from a collective to an individual vision. We use sociology to explore the possibilities and limits of utopian thinking, and turn the tables, using utopias to rethink the uses of sociology

The objectives of this class are simple: to learn a little bit about the pleasures of sociology, to learn a little bit about competing utopian visions of the world and how they can help us think about current society, and to learn a little bit about negotiating the sometimes utopian and sometimes dystopian world of this liberal arts college.

the work

1. Attendance. Come to class. Every day. Important stuff happens in class (e.g., learning), so you don’t want to miss out. You should come. You know, because of the learning…

2. Read. Classes operate on the assumption that you’ve done the readings, so please do all the readings. It really will improve the entire experience for all of us. They can be found online at go/utopia (i.e., http://blogs.middlebury.edu/utopias)

3. In-class writing. As we ~~indoctrinate~~ socialize you into the practices of the college, we emphasize writing. Thus, writing will be part of our classroom routine, since consistent, frequent writing is better than sporadic, stressed writing. Mostly this will not be collected, but it might happen on occasion, just to check in with what you’re thinking and ensure everything’s going as planned. Not that there’s much of a plan.

4. “Larger” assignments. There will be three (3) written assignments spread out over the span of the semester. More details will be emerging later, but here are the basic details. One, an analysis of a utopian text, final draft due 3/16. Two, research on a existing (or existed) utopian project, final draft due 4/13. Three, an original utopian vision based on independent research, final draft due 5/11. Please note, that these are final draft due dates, signaling you to the fact that rough drafts will be part of the process. Also, the due dates are all Fridays. Plan accordingly..

5. Presentation. Before submitting your final project, there will be a week of individual presentations of your work. The point of these is to both work on presenting skills and to garner feedback in the final stages of your writing.

6. Final. There will be a relatively short, but nonetheless comprehensive, final something or other. It will be take home. The due date will be established as a class, but will happen some time during exam week.

the other

Let’s meet! If you have questions, concerns, suggestions, etc, the best way to discuss them is in a face-to-face conversation during my office hours (or at an alternative time determined together). Email is great for lots of simple things (see below), but it is not the best medium for discussing most questions about work or difficulties you might be experiencing. Make an appointment, and we can talk.

Email: check it, because sometimes things change, and the best way for me to let you know is over email. The class has its own email address (fyse1392a-s13@middlebury.edu). I will use it to update you on various happenings, as well as pointing out the occasional interesting bit of news related to the class. You should also feel free to use the list for similar purposes, although being respectful of not overloading people’s email with too many messages (something I also try to respect, although I sometimes forget.)

the code

Be a good person. Respect others (your classmates, your teacher, and beyond). It may seem like those kinds of things aren’t valued too much right now, but let’s make our class some “utopian” space where we engage with each other with empathy and respect.

Also, you probably shouldn’t cheat or do bad things, since there’s that college honor code thing hanging over your head…

**w**

**the future is no**

the shape of things to come…

[week zero: introducing utopias & sociology & ourselves]

2.8: hg wells, “the so-called science of sociology”; cw mills, “the promise”

identity & difference

**week one: socialisms, utopian & scientific**

2.12: k. marx and f. engels, “the communist manifesto”;

c. fourier, selections from *the utopian vision of charles fourier*

2.14: c. guarneri, “brook farm and fourierist phalanxes”;

rm. kantor, “commitment: the problem and the theory”;

**week two: gender paradise & sexual differences**

2.19: cp gilman, selections from *herland*; the redstockings, “the redstockings manifesto”

2.21: k. burdekin, seclections from *swastika night*

**week three: nationalist dreams & racial exclusion**

2.26: b. anderson, selections from *imagined communities*;

k. ross, selections from *communal luxury*

2.28: zn. hurston, selections from *their eyes were watching god*

d. lane “88 precepts”

some yet-to-be-determined examples of race-based utopian experiments

freedom & control

**week four: totalizing worlds & absolute control**

3.5: g. orwell, selections from 1984;

d. harvey, “edilia, or ‘make of it what you will”

3.7: m. foucault, “the panopticon”;

film *we live in public*;

**week five: stateless societies & the freedom of promise**

3.12: r. nozick, selections from *anarchy, state, & utopia*;

some readings on various libertarian projects

3.14: e. goldman, “what is anarchism?”;

some readings on various anarchist-ish projects

**week six: rules, library & otherwise**

3.19: the library! a utopia of learning!

3.21: d. graeber, “utopia of rules”

**spring break!**

abundance & austerity

**Week seven: too much & never enough**

4.2: a. huxley, selections from *brave new world*

4.4: t. simplson, selections from *tourist utopias*;

a. ross, selections from *celebration florida*;

n. postman, selections from *amusing ourselves to death*

**week eight: doing more, & being better, with less**

4.9: u. le guin, selections from *the dispossessed*;

s. collins, selections from *the hunger games*

4.11: scattered readings from the world of lifestyle minimalism

real & unnatural

**week nine: back to the land & restoring humanity**

4.16: e. callenbach, selections from *ecotopia revisited*

4.18: scattered examples from various ecovillages, sustainability projects, etc.

**week ten: technofixes & the science of self improvement**

4.23: r. kurzweil, selections from *the singularity is near: when humans transcend biology*;

c. carlson, selections from *nowtopia*

dd. kilgore, selections from *astrofuturism: science, race, and visions of utopia in space*

4.25: e. morozov, selections from *the net delusion: the dark side of internet freedom*;

z. tufekci TED talk, “we’re building a dystopia just to get people to click on ads”

now & forever

**week eleven: share & share alike**

4:30: student presentations

5.2: student presentations

**week twelve: moving targets & shifting locations**

5.7: o. butler, “the book of martha"

5.9: h. bey, “t.a.z.: temporary autonomous zones”

disclaimer

this syllabus is not perfect. it may not even be perfectable, but that shouldn’t keep us from trying. thus, it is likely to change. if it does, you will be given fair warning, so nothing catches you by surprise. be ready.