



# MUSEUM UTOPIAS

## Navigating the Imaginary, Ideal and Possible Museum

A Two Day Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Symposium  
at the School of Museum Studies,  
University of Leicester

**Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th March 2012**

In everyday life, the chance to dream, to imagine, to explore the idea of the museum is limited, leaving many museums reacting to change, rather than being able to think about how the museum *could* be. This Symposium will give museum researchers, students and practitioners the opportunity to consider the changes that are taking place in the world and how museums might respond to them, using the idea of Utopia as a place for dreaming as well as thinking practically about how these challenges might be addressed.

Despite the impossibility of building Utopia, we arguably retain our need for what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) has called 'the utopian imagination'. Utopia can inspire us to challenge the status quo, and to transform our world for the better. From temples of the Muses dedicated to the arts to today's democratic forums of debate and consumption, the concept and the realization of the museum have changed dramatically during its long and varied history. Stepping into the Utopian otherworld enables us to engage the past and present incarnations of the museum, both real and imagined, and begin to navigate its future.

Papers are invited to address the following key themes, but we welcome and encourage any creative or imaginative ideas that correspond with the aims of the Symposium.

Please read on for details...

# Symposium Aims

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## The Idea of Utopia

- If the idea of Utopia is inherently flawed, can the 'perfect' museum be imagined?
- Why, if the concept is so problematic, do some continue to strive for the ideal?
- How might we explore the many variations and negations of Utopia, including Heterotopia and Dystopia?
- How have different societies and cultures, historical and geographical, constructed the idea, and the ideal of the museum?

## Building Utopia

- How have Utopian ambitions been realized, or failed to be realized?
- How might the concept of Utopia – or Dystopia – be used to understand the social and personal impact of museums?
- In what ways can the practice of collecting be understood through a Utopic frame?
- Does looking at conservation through a Utopic lens enable a greater understanding of the philosophical and ethical implications of its theory and practice?
- What Utopian models have existed, or do exist, in museum architecture and design?

## Utopia as Interpretation

- How has the idea of Utopia been used as a means of cultural communication to connect and unite people of different social and cultural backgrounds?
- How are Utopian or Dystopian ideals implicated in the museal presentation of self and society, past, present and future?
- How has museum architecture, display and exhibition design created, interpreted or refuted Utopia and its variants?

## Exploring Utopia

- Whose vision of Utopia is presented by the museum?
- How does the visitor interact with the museum and the Utopian or other worlds it constructs? Is this engagement sensory; emotional; imaginative; mnemonic; performative?
- Is the experience of visiting a museum an inherently Utopian one? Is this what motivates us to visit museums?
- Are certain types of museum more Utopian than others?

## The Imaginary Museum

- What is the relationship between the museum and myth, fiction and fantasy – ideal or otherwise?
- How can and should the imagination be engaged in the twenty-first century museum?
- Is the Virtual Museum the new Utopia? Or Dystopia?
- How might the Museum of the Future be imagined? Is this the Ideal? In the future, do we want Utopia? What will people in the future think about our museums today?

## Presentation Requirements

'Museum Utopias' is keen to support a broad variety of presentation styles, including workshops and panel debates. Some other suggestions include:

- Films
- Practical demonstrations
- Posters
- Art installations
- Creative writing
- Music

We welcome submissions from researchers working in the fields of museum studies, cultural studies and allied subjects, and from museum practitioners, but we especially encourage responses from PhD students and early career researchers. Submissions will be accepted for presentations (20 minutes plus 10 minutes Q&A) and practical workshops (between 30 and 60 minutes). There may be opportunities for publication, in a form yet to be determined, for papers accepted for and presented at the Symposium.

## Deadlines

300 word abstracts must be submitted via email or post by the 14th November 2011 to the addresses provided below. The abstract should contain the following information: 1) author(s), 2) affiliation, 3) email address, 4) title of abstract, 5) body of abstract, (including the intended nature of your presentational form) 6) 3-4 keywords and 7) technical requirements (i.e., video, data projector, sound, web access).

Successful applicants will be notified in early December 2011, and will be asked to confirm paper and presentation details, including their proposed delivery format.

## Cost

- Early Bird Fee £60 (£40 students)
- Full Fee £70 (£50 students)

The early bird fees expire at midnight on the 14 December 2011. For registrations submitted on the 15 December 2011 or later, the full fees will apply. All fees include lunch and refreshments on both days. Booking forms will be available in October from the conference website, [www.le.ac.uk/mutopia2012](http://www.le.ac.uk/mutopia2012).

## Please Contact:

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