

Fiction is an opportunity for exploration and discovery, especially in the more “fantastic” genres. Alternative or allegorical models of society, history, politics and science can be explored more freely, whereas more “traditional” kinds of narratives are probably bound to remain within the context of a more realist mode of storytelling – or so it appears.

Yet even the seemingly most aloft fantasy has a connection to reality, be it in the depiction of political, social, religious, philosophical or psychological motifs and issues. *Star Trek*, for instance, deliberately recurs to the motif of the frontier, thus claiming a specific American context. Other Science Fiction like *Stargate: SG-1* and *Atlantis* stays closer to contemporary surroundings, establishing the fantastic within the realms of the known. The political allegories on *Babylon 5* and the new rendition of *Battlestar: Galactica* as well as *Star Trek* have always allowed for comments in concrete circumstances, while still retaining multiple meanings by remaining within the framework of the allegory. Unlike directly political shows, taking up concrete day-to-day issues, like *JAG* and *The West Wing*, does the additional level of fantasy provide the work in question with staying power beyond the discussions of contemporary agendas?

The construction of fictional societies, hovering between the realization of the otherness of a non- place (ou-topos) and a possible hope for a good place (eu-topos), has moved from the depiction of fantastic islands to distant planets or “dimensions”. This fictional extension of science, politics, religion and ecology has been posing ethical questions since the days of Plato’s Atlantis story. Today’s political utopias follow those of earlier authors like Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Tommaso Campanella, as well as Aldous Huxley and George Orwell. The ecological perspective can be found in forms as diverse as the depiction of erosion in Plato’s *Critias*, the *Godzilla* series and Michael Crichton’s *Jurassic Park* and the subsequent films.

The Utopian can also be found in less ostentatious places, however, just as shown by the strange timelessness of *The Simpsons’* Springfield, or even within the depictions of community in otherwise rather realist works like *The Wire*, establishing alternative universes commenting on contemporary reality.

Thus, the Seventh Annual Students Conference is dedicated to analyzing the various ways visions of community, society and science have been developed in literature and the visual arts.

The Annual Students Conferences Series

The Annual Students Conferences series sets out to support and foster the students' interest in academic exchange and discussions. It provides students of all levels (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral) with a space for the discussion of academic topics in the absence of the usual hierarchy often found in university seminars.

The topics are related to the curricula of the American Studies Program while also incorporating different ideas and approaches, topics which are less often featured, topics which combine contemporary culture with academic interests. The conferences are thus supposed to both enrich the normal curriculum and offer a truly academic forum for exchanging ideas.

(<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/asc>)

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The American Studies Program at Humboldt-Universität
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For possible changes to the program, as well as for further information and background material, please consult the web site of the conference at

www2.hu-berlin.de/amerika/asc/utopia

Utopian Thoughts

Trans-Atlantic Fictions of Science and Politics. 7th Annual Students Conference, April 26-28, 2007



American Studies

Previous Conferences

Native Cultures in the 21st Century. USA, Canada, Mexico
6th Annual Students Conference, May 3-6, 2006

Picturing America.

Domestic & Global Aspects of American Media Culture
5th Annual Students Conference, May 19-21, 2005

Poietic Spaces. Communicating Landscapes of Imagination
4th Annual Students Conference, May 6-8, 2004

Multiple Cultures - Multiple Perspectives.

Questions of Identity and Urbanity in a Transnational Context
3rd Annual Students Conference, May 15-17, 2003

Haunted Dreams. Nightmares in American Culture
2nd Annual Students Conference, May 23-25, 2002

Licence to Thrill.

Reading James Bond as a Cultural Phenomenon
1st Annual Students Conference, May 10-12, 2001

Publication of Papers from Past Conferences:

Antje Dallmann, Reinhard Isensee, Philipp Kneis (Eds.)
*Picturing America. Trauma, Realism, Politics and Identity
in American Visual Culture*. Peter Lang: Frankfurt & al., 2007.

Related Events:

The Transatlantic Students Symposia Series
<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/transatlantic>

Thursday, April 26, 2007

UL 6, R 2103

18:00 - 21:00: Opening

Welcome

Philipp Kneis, HU Berlin (organizer):
*Introduction: Political Utopias
Between Fictional Politics and the Fictionalization of Politics*

Discussion of
Stargate Atlantis Ep. 1.07 "Poisoning the Well"
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Ep. 6.13 "Far Beyond the Stars"

Friday, April 27, 2007

UL 6, R 2103

11:00 - 12:30: Session I: Ecotopia

Rasmus Damkjær Christensen, Rikke Bjerg Jensen,
Martin Christensen Grøn, University of Southern Denmark:
Ecotopian Perspectives

12:30 - 14:00: Joint Lunch

14:00 - 15:30: Session II: Star Trek

Bert Bobock, HU Berlin:
From Kantian Space-Time to Star Trek?

Sandra Beyer, HU Berlin:
*A Utopia for Conservatives and Old Men:
Gendered Relations and Sexual Politics in Star Trek –
a Feminist Polemic*

16:00 - 17:30: Session III: Religion and Metaphysics

Dave Lojek, HU Berlin:
*Posthumans in Fact and Fiction. Notes on the Abolition of
Death and the Transmigration into the Digital*

Philipp Kneis, HU Berlin:
Feeding False Gods. Religion and Creationism at the Stargate

Wrap-Up

Saturday, April 28, 2007

UL 6, R 2103

11:00 - 12:30: Session IV: 24

Michael Lattek, FU Berlin:
"Do it now!" The Politics of Immediacy in 24

Katarzyna Sobieraj, HU Berlin:
What is Utopian About 24?

12:30 - 14:00: Lunch

14:00 - 15:30: Session V: Literature & Heroism

Berenike Jung, FU Berlin:
Utopian Heroes

Jia Wei Chan's paper on "Dystopias in American Literature" had to be cancelled on short term notice.

We will be discussing episodes from a *.hack* series instead to prepare for the following session.

16:00 - 17:30: Session VI: Reality

Daniela Simon, HU Berlin:
.hack//In Too Deep

Manuela Mangold, HU Berlin:
The Construction of Community on The Wire

Concluding Discussion

Joint Dinner

(all times s.t.)