**Utopias, Futures and Temporalities:**

**Critical considerations for social change**

**An Interdisciplinary Symposium 19 & 20 May, 2015, Bristol Zoo, Bristol**

**Call for Papers: Deadline Feb 14, 2015**

2016 is the 500 year anniversary of the first publication of Thomas More’s Utopia. Such a moment encourages reflection on the uses and misuses of utopias and dystopias in social change as well as critical reflection on the contribution of ideas of the future and of temporality to the processes of social transformation.

The ideals of citizenship encourage us all to desire a stake in the future – whether trying to shape our own lives, those of our families, the places we live, or wider society – and to imagine a better or different world. But what is this entity that we name ‘future’? Senses of time vary across and within human societies, and disciplines from philosophy to natural science present equally differing conceptions of it. By invoking ‘utopias/dystopias’ we wish to explore the questions of positionality, power, hope and despair that are at play in the imagination of new times and the way that these effect change in the present. By pluralising ‘futures’, we want to explore the diversity of ways in which anticipatory practices can be performed by people and communities. And by invoking ‘temporalities’, we want to reflect on how the qualities of time – endurance, succession, speed, rhythm, for example – interact with imaginings and perceptions of what is to come. Perhaps, by better understanding the temporal qualities of society, culture and environments, we could create social change at a scale and pace that connects communities with their futures, rather than disenfranchises them. Perhaps again, by invoking utopias and dystopias, we may recognise that questions of future possibility are not simply technical, but involve politics, fear, despair, hope, imagination, dreams, desires and aspirations, all of which may act as stimulus or disincentives for social change.

**Key questions include:**

How have different societies thought about ‘the future’? What role have different conceptions of the future played in confronting the problems of the present or reflecting on those of the past? What role do ideas of the future play in creating and connecting communities? How do narratives across past, present and future cohere? How do the different temporalities of human, environmental and technological change inter-relate? How do societies and communities use and construct utopias, dystopias and other forms of anticipation to build agency and capacity for change? What impedes or enables these processes? What methodological and theoretical resources do we have for thinking about futurity and temporality?

**Aspirations for the event**

This two-day interdisciplinary symposium aims to bring together researchers and activists working across academia, civil society, heritage and arts organisations. We expect it to involve those who are concerned with questions of social and environmental change, humanitarian challenges, and community empowerment and participation, as well as with the role of philosophy, art, history, theory, social science and cultural studies in exploring questions of hope, agency, temporality and the future.

The event will be curated to foster new conversations and the development of productive new areas for research and social action. We expect the event to lead into opportunities for collaboration, writing and research leading up to the 2016 500 year anniversary of the publication of More’s *Utopia*.

**Themes**

The symposium will accept papers on a wide variety of themes related to the overarching focus of the event. To provoke conversations and stimulate collaborations, we propose a number of topics that might be generative. Submissions should explain how they relate to the theme of ‘Utopias, temporalities and futures: critical considerations for social change’.

* Anticipation, abundance and anxiety: when is anticipation healthy and expansive, and when does it become pathological?
* Conflict, trauma and recovery
* Critical temporalities: reimagining time as part of reimagining social life
* Heritage, stewardship & trusteeship: what is the role of history in shaping and caring for the future?
* Historical legacies: how do some aspects of the past endure into the present and future?
* Imagination and agency: how are imaginative conceptions of time and change related to the capacity to act?
* Intergenerational responsibility, justice and ethics
* Materialising futures through creative practice: how can artists, architects and designers work with communities to imagine and make futures?
* Human and more than human futures, where is the locus of future making?
* Novelty and contingency: what are the possibilities for radical uncertainty and the emergence of the new?
* The role of time in social inclusion and exclusion
* The relationship between Utopias and dystopias

**Symposium Session Formats**

We are keen to encourage a variety of different session formats. The exact timing of these sessions will depend on the mix of abstracts submitted. Our aim is to encourage a space for dialogue and sharing of ideas that moves beyond the simple presentation of existing research.

* Roundtables: Cross disciplinary and cross-sectoral conversations of up to 4 people, for 90 minutes
* Papers: 30 minutes + 30 minute discussion
* Workshops : 90 minutes to explore how ‘using futures’ or thinking differently about temporality might be mobilised to effect positive change in the present
* Posters/ Pecha Kucha: Quick fire poster presentations to summaries emerging research and tentative ideas
* Open Space sessions: 2 hour sessions to generate and explore new directions in research and practice
* Practice as Research Submission: this might take the form of a short performance, small exhibition/installation or other format as appropriate. Note that time and space is limited so if you have ambitious ideas, please contact the organisers directly to discuss.

**Format for Submission**

All proposals should be sent by February 14th to Katherine Dunleavy at K.Dunleavy @bristol.ac.uk Any questions concerning the event or proposal formats should be directed to Keri Facer at [Keri.Facer@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Keri.Facer@bristol.ac.uk) For all submissions, please specify which Connected Communities or Care for the Future project you have been associated with. In exceptional circumstances we may include participants who have not been associated with the programmes – please contact Keri for further information.

Roundtable proposals

1500 word abstract (including references) identifying the 4 speakers, the topics they will present on and how the roundtable will address the themes of the symposium. We are particularly interested in roundtables that put different orientations toward the future/ utopia or temporality into dialogue and/or that bring together academic and practitioner perspectives in relation to the core theme.

Paper

500 word abstract (including references) of the paper, clearly explaining how the paper addresses the theme of the symposium and how it will offer resources to think and work with for symposium participants.

Workshop session

500 word abstract (including references if appropriate) identifying the topic of the session, the format that the workshop will take, the previous experience or research that feeds into the design of the session and the ways in which the session will contribute to the topic of the symposium.

Poster/Pecha Kucha Session

The poster/pecha kucha session will enable new ideas and provocations to be presented quickly as a basis for promoting further conversations. 500 word abstract (including references) identifying the topic, the fit to the theme of the symposium, and the new ideas that the poster/pecha kucha will aim to explore.

Open Space Session

We expect to host one or two Open Space sessions and invite proposals for such a session from experienced facilitators of these processes, on a topic that will be sufficiently generative to invite productive discussions and new directions from participants in the symposium. 1000 word proposals should outline the experience of the facilitator in running such sessions, the broad topic that will be proposed

Practice as Research

500 word abstract (including references) of the proposed piece, clearly explaining how it addresses the theme of the symposium and how it will offer resources to think and work with for symposium participants. Please specify the space and time requirements for the piece.

**Who can participate?**

We are very happy to receive applications to attend the Symposium from all researchers, however, initial priority will be given to researchers who are drawing on research and insights from the CC and CftF programmes as the event is part of those two theme activities. We do anticipate places being available at the symposium from researchers not associated with these programmes, particularly for those working in areas very closely related to the symposium themes.

**Financial Assistance to participate**

The two day event will be free to participants. Bursaries covering travel and accommodation are available for up to 50 people to attend the symposium. Those requesting a bursary should provide a short summary of reasons for needing this upon submission of abstract. Bursaries will be offered up to the total available in order of those with clearest financial need and in order to create a sufficiently diverse range of participants in the symposium.

**Peer review process**

There will be a light touch peer review process by the steering committee that aims to ensure that proposals all address the core theme of the symposium. The purpose of peer review will also be to identify productive connections and new thinking to encourage conversation and dialogue at the symposium. Applications from early career researchers and from those seeking to create interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral connections are particularly welcome. We may also offer places for participants to attend the event who are not successful in their proposal for a particular session.

**Conference Committee**

Keri Facer (Chair, Leadership Fellow, Connected Communities Programme) Andrew Thompson (Chair, Leadership Fellow, Care for the Future) Steering Group: Michelle Bastian, Jo Vergunst, Steve Pool, Joe Smith, Sian Sullivan, Richard Haynes, David Zeitlyn, Angela Piccini, George McKay (Leadership Fellow, CC programme), Michael Northcutt, Johan Siebers, Penny Evans