

Cities Under Stress: Urban Discourses of Crisis, Resilience, Resistance, and Renewal

The Third International Conference of the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS)

We invite proposals for contributions at the third international conference of ALUS, scheduled to take place at the University of California, Santa Barbara on 17–19 February 2022. Following earlier successful meetings in Tampere, Finland (2017) and Limerick, Ireland (2019), and sessions at the Modern Language Association Convention (MLA) in both 2020 and 2021, ALUS now organizes its first event in North America.

This conference explores the theme of crisis and response as conveyed in cultural representations of urbanity. We welcome contributions that take up any aspect of or perspective on urban crisis and response, working on any period or genre of literature, from any linguistic tradition. Proposals are invited for individual 20-minute papers or multi-paper panels that in some way work with the theme of urban crisis and response.

The 2020-21 pandemic has led to widespread speculation about how cities will change over the decades to come in response to the vulnerabilities of urban populations exposed by the virus. Other recent events have foregrounded the various roles that cities play as sites of political contestation and social conflict. These include the recent unrest over structural inequalities and police violence (in the USA and around the world), debates over public symbols of cultural memory (as in Bristol, UK), protests against gentrification (as in Berlin), and anti-inequality or pro-democracy demonstrations (as in Santiago, Hong Kong and Cairo). Meanwhile, the nexus of existential threats associated with climate change has lent even greater urgency to the question of how cities must evolve, and whether they can do so in ways that promote more sustainable, equitable, and socially cohesive modes of existence.

Of course, these are hardly the first events to have made cities face the possibility of profound and irrevocable change, nor is this the first time that fears of contagion, violence, and other threats have been concentrated on cities. Only in dialogue with the many profound changes of earlier historical moments can the present moment become explicable, a process in which the humanities have a crucial role to play. Papers concerning literary representations of numerous other crisis moments in the cities of the past are therefore warmly welcomed for this conference.

The triumphalist tone that much urban theory took on at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is being heard less. Now, it seems, is a time for recognition of profound uncertainty, a time for learning from the numerous crises cities have overcome in the past. In particular, it is a time for awareness of the particular challenges facing peripheral cities, shrinking cities, and cities in the Global South. And yet, as the United Nations' *New Urban Agenda* of 2017 asserts, "If well-planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development for both developing and developed countries." Recognizing the central role that cities have played in human history in the past, for better and for worse, and stressing the apparent inevitability of increasing urban growth in the foreseeable future, the UN document expresses optimism about the future of cities, provided that they can be made "inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable."

Many of the watchwords of the UN document--resilience, efficiency, development, consumption, sustainability--are themselves subject to critique, raising larger questions about how the proper goals of urban development should be defined and what principles should guide city planners and city dwellers in an era of proliferating challenges. What clues does the past offer? Do the kinds of representations found in literary texts offer any special insights? How do specific literary forms, including those found in poetry, drama and both prose fiction and nonfictional prose genres mediate and contest the notion of resilience? These are the questions we hope to address in 2022.

Areas you might choose to focus on include:

- theoretical and fictional discourses of urban resilience;
- urban resilience and genre: speculative fiction; creative nonfiction including life writing, travel writing, essay and reportage;
- environmental change including the current climate emergency and its possible impacts in cultural representations;
- identities including queer, feminist, and intersectional literary urban studies;
- cities of the Global South, postcolonial literary urban studies and related decolonizing perspectives;
- networks of larger and smaller cities, including global measures of alpha, beta and gamma-level urban regions and representations of secondary and tertiary cities;
- literary representations of city subsections and divisions including but not confined to
 - o downtowns in crisis,
 - o exurbs,
 - o gentrifying zones,
 - o informal settlements,
 - o industrial zones, or
 - o ports and other frontier points;
- sites associated with mass transportation and other urban mobilities;
- representations of plague, epidemic and disease in any historical or national context;
- urban planning texts and other not explicitly literary texts read using literary studies methodologies;
- resilience as comprehended in urban poetry or drama;
- accounts of displacement and acts of resistance to it including squatting and rent protests.

Please send an abstract of your proposed talk (max. 250 words) and a 50-word bio indicating your affiliation and any other key points to alus-sb-2022@frit.ucsb.edu by 1 August 2021. You may also direct any questions about the conference to this address or individually to the conference organizers.

Conference Organizers

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