

# Critical Legal Conference 2018

## The Open University

### *Regeneration*

*I always thought eternity would look like Milton Keynes.*

JG Ballard



Figure 1 - Image taken from Wikimedia and authors own work. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike license.

The Critical Legal Conference 2018 will be hosted by The Open University at our campus in Milton Keynes, a small city one hour north of London built at the end of the 1960s.

Drawing inspiration from the visions, strategies and conflicts that engendered the creation of Milton Keynes, as well as The Open University which was created at the same time and indelibly marks the history of the city, CLC 2018 will encompass the theme of *regeneration*. In all instances of regeneration are tensions between new and existing sociocultural visions and strategies, and the laws, regulations and forms of standardisation that seek to govern the pace and nature of regeneration in a given space and time. Equally there can often be a lack of legal attention and intervention where sometimes it is demanded, as well as forms of de-regulation that seek to attenuate the role and authority of law in favour of, for example, innovation. The call for streams and panels will open in January 2018, and submissions will be welcome on the general theme of Regeneration, which may include the following:

- Technology and the regeneration of law
- Teaching legal education critically in the neoliberal age
- Hope, belonging, futurity and other ideologies of regeneration
- Cultures of gentrification and community marginalization

- Life on Mars: (re)imagining law, justice and the political in the event of extra-terrestrial colonisation
- Loss, memory, and post-traumatic growth
- Radical urbanism and brutal culture
- A psychoanalytic politics of preservation

As Milton Keynes celebrates 50 years in existence new programmes of regeneration are being devised by a consortium of public and private actors aimed at creating ‘opportunities’ for the people that live there, ‘as well as building and maintaining their homes’. As a proposal it hints not only at the spatial impetus of regeneration but also the impact on particular forms of being shaped by the politics of the event of the place, or what the late Doreen Massey succinctly termed ‘throwntogetherness’.

Milton Keynes provides a modest example of the city as a negotiation between heterogeneous trajectories of culture, being and the material limitations of space and structure. A city which, once upon time (and the same applies to the Open University), represented a political commitment to social justice and mobility in the aftermath of World War II but has since shifted from these ideals and practices in the face of post-Thatcherite anti-socialist individualism and an upsurge in the neoliberal dominance of social life and the places it inhabits. As such Milton Keynes reflects many of the tensions existing within the present cultural, political and economic moment in the global north. As a species of ceaseless politico-economic urban regeneration like so many others around the globe however, to what extent can or does any future vision of Milton Keynes account for where people *are* and thus acknowledge what Stuart Hall, former professor of sociology at the Open University, called ‘the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism – the growing points of social discontent, the projections of deeply-felt needs’?

As a means of reimagining, reseeding and transforming space in and over time regeneration is a global phenomenon which always replicates, reveals or encapsulates an economic and political moment as it might reflect particular trends in architectural design and aesthetic taste. It is as such that regeneration asserts significant force on social life. As a contemporary process regeneration often occurs at points where private commercial interest and public need meet, blurring the two and bringing into question the nature of the duties and obligations owed to the communities subject to it. Prior to the types of rebuilding and reshaping that define projects of urban regeneration for example, do we always already find regeneration as ideology? As a force at play between infrastructure and superstructure regeneration can open space to new cultures, technologies and ways of being, but equally it is capable of delimiting, excluding and overruling the social in favour of privileged communities and groups. Thus regeneration may not always be positive but can instead describe harmful socioeconomic and ecological impacts that drive inequality, dampen democratic influence, countermand basic human rights and ignore or fail to take seriously climate change.

Following on from the animated and successful reflections at CLC 2017, can regeneration ward-off catastrophe or be a force for good in overcoming catastrophic events? Indeed, how does regeneration fit into and shape post-catastrophic narratives and discourse? As a temporal force regeneration signifies an active process with connotations of the past, present and future and the dynamic relationship between them. Regeneration might be thought of as revolutionary or apocalyptic on that account, whereby the past is ploughed into future ideals with the aim of creating meaning and stability for a present moment. In that sense, is regeneration arguably always already utopian?

Beyond this, regeneration is more than spatial or geopolitical. It is a term indicative of the computational and scientific where it speaks to processes of feedback, regrowth, renewal, and the

contingency of the human experience on techno-scientific developments. Moreover, it speaks to notions of learning, memory, information and the (re)construction of systems and processes. As with the spatial and geopolitical these instances of regeneration have the potential to reorder the social and drive a progressive and imaginative social agency. A notable example would be the development and deployment of cyber-social spaces enacting the negotiation with tensions and contradictions produced by capital.

In the third 'opening proposition' to her 2005 book, *For Space*, Doreen Massey claimed space to be 'always under construction' and thus constitutive of 'relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out', which are 'always in a process of being made [...] never finished; never closed'. Regeneration as a concept or material implementation indelibly marks the notion of what it means to be 'always under construction' and therefore the relations that process both creates and destroys. Regeneration, like Massey's space, is 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far ...'