

CSTU 3009 – ART, CRISIS AND ACTION – Winter 2014
“**DEBTS: REAL AND IMAGINED**”
Thursdays, 9am-12pm, room: D500

Instructor: **Dr. Max Haiven, mhaiven@nscad.ca**
Office hours: **Wednesdays, 11am-1pm**
Thursdays, 12:30pm-2:30pm
Office: **D313**
Prerequisite: **6 credits of CSTU or AHIS**

Website: **debtsrealandimagined.wordpress.com**
Password: **debtorsunite**

PREAMBLE

Debt is one of the most profound and powerful forces not only in our highly “financialized” society, but in almost all human civilizations. So deeply is it stitched into the social fabric that it spans and binds together multiple meanings: the economics of debt, the morality of obligations, the tenacity of social bonds, the inspirations and influences of arts and culture, the politics of guilt, the possibilities of justice and restitution, and the ideologies of value. Today, we live in a world cross-cut by debt in various forms. Our global order is in many ways defined by a politics of global debts, and the policies of whole nations (whole continents) hinge on their debts. Meanwhile, our own personal conditions are shaped by debts: student loans, credit-card debt, the debt of institutions (like the city of Halifax, or NSCAD). Yet so too are our lives suspended by other, less economic (yet no less powerful) debts: the debts we owe to parents, teachers, inspirations, artists, ancestors; the debts we owe the earth; and, more generally still, the networks of social bonds that sustain us.

As such, debt is this year’s theme for *Art, Crisis and Action*, a course that offers an opportunity to understand the crises we find ourselves in and plot individual and collective responses. This course is conceived as a participatory seminar and a collaborative learning/action project. Throughout the term, we will work together to understand and theorize debt in all its conceptual richness and manifold dimensions. The first half of the course is oriented towards research on different forms of debt in small groups or by individuals, culminating in presentations, annotated bibliographies and a short explanatory essay/article. In the second half of the class, we imagine and execute, together some intervention in the debt system which brings together our research and our talents.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Graeber, David. 2011. *Debt: the First 5000 Years*. New York: Melville House.
- Lazzarato, Maurizio. 2012. *The Making of the Indebted Man*. Translated by Joshua David Jordan. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

COURSE SCHEDULE

*All texts (except Graber and Lazzarato) can be found on the course website: cstu3009.wordpress.com.
Syllabus and readings are subject to change.*

WEEK 1 (Jan 9)

Screening *Payback* film

WEEK 2 (Jan 16)

Woolard, Caroline. 2013. "Solidarity Art Worlds." *Brooklyn Rail*. February 5.
<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/02/artseen/solidarity-art-worlds>.

"The Process is the Massage" (talk by Caroline Wollard – 58min).
http://youtu.be/3TrHeP4q_7g

"The Debt of Creativity" (Talk by Max Haiven – 15min)
<http://youtu.be/i0xpJNAPdjM>

WEEK 3 (Jan 23)

George, Susan. 1997. "How the Poor Develop the Rich." In *The Post-Development Reader*, edited by Majid Rahnema and Victoria bawtree, 207–213. London: Zed.

Schuller, Mark. 2006. "Break the Chains of Haiti's Debt." *Jubilee USA*. May 20.
http://www.jubileeusa.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Resources/Policy_Archive/haitireport06.pdf.

WEEK 4 (Jan 30)

Klein, Naomi. 2009. "Climate Rage." *Rolling Stone*, November 12.
<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/climate-rage-20091112>.

Ross, Andrew. 2013. "Climate Debt Denial." *Dissent*. July.
<http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/climate-debt-denial>.

Coulthard, Glen. 2010. "Place Against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti-Colonialism." *Affinities: a Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4 (2): 79–83.
<http://affinitiesjournal.org/index.php/affinities/article/view/69/211>

Annotated bibliography due

WEEK 5 (Feb 6)

Soederberg, Susanne. 2013. "The US Debtfare State and the Credit Card Industry: Forging Spaces of Dispossession." *Antipode* 45 (2): 493–512. <http://www.cips.uottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Debtfare-Soederberg-Antipode-Jan-2012.pdf>.

PresentationsWEEK 6 (Feb 13)

Martin, Randy. 2002. "When Finance Becomes You. In *Financialization of Daily Life*, 55-101. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

PresentationsWEEK 7 (Feb 27)

McClanahan, Annie. 2011. "The Living Indebted: Student Militancy and the Financialization of Debt." *Qui Parle* 20 (1): 57–77.

Federici, Silvia. 2013. "Commoning Against Debt." *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 4: 20. <http://tidalmag.org/issue4/commoning-against-debt/>.

PresentationsWEEK 8 (March 6)

Chakravartty, Paula, and Denise Ferreira da Silva. 2012. "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: the Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—an Introduction." *American Quarterly* 64 (3): 361–385.

Caffentzis, George. 2013. "The Power of Money: Debt and Enclosure." In *In Letters of Blood and Fire: Work, Machines, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, 236–240. Brooklyn NY and Oakland CA: Common Notions (PM Press).

WEEK 9 (March 13)

Roy, Ananya. 2012. "Subjects of Risk: Technologies of Gender in the Making of Millennial Modernity." *Public Culture* 24 (1): 131–155.

Ross, Andrew. 2014. *Creditocracy*. New York: OR Books. (selections TBA)

Article due

WEEK 10 (March 20)

LeBerge, Leigh Claire and Dehlia Hannah. 2014. ““Debt Aesthetics: Medium Specificity and Social Practice in the Work of Cassie Thornton.” *Postmodern Culture*, forthcoming.

WEEK 11 (March 27)

Graeber, David. 2011. *Debt: the First 5000 Years*. New York: Melville House. Chapters one (1-20) and six (127-164).

WEEK 12 (April 3)

Graeber, David. 2011. *Debt: the First 5000 Years*. New York: Melville House. Chapters eleven (307-360) and twelve (361-391).

WEEK 13 (April 10)

Lazzarato, Maurizio. 2012. *The Making of the Indebted Man*. Translated by Joshua David Jordan. Boston, MA: MIT Press. Chapters one (13-36) and two (37-88).

WEEK 14 (April 17)

Lazzarato, Maurizio. 2012. *The Making of the Indebted Man*. Translated by Joshua David Jordan. Boston, MA: MIT Press. Chapter three (89-160).

ASSIGNMENTS

Annotated bibliography (due January 30) – 20%

This assignment aims to prepare you for the second “article” assignment and to build a collective “archive” of knowledge for our group project. You may work alone or in groups to create an annotated bibliography on one of the topics BELOW (or a topic of your choice). You are to create an annotated bibliography of (for each group member) at least eight (8) entries, four (4) of which should be accompanied by a short (150 word) review outlining the text, its strengths and its weaknesses. Entries should be in MLA or Chicago format.

Presentation (sign up sheet to be distributed) – 15%

In February, you are to present the research you’ve been conducting in the form of a 15-minute presentation. You may work in groups. A sign-up sheet will be distributed in class.

“User’s Guide” article (due March 13) – 25%

Based on the work you did in your annotated bibliography, you are to craft a 1,500 (per group member) word article on debt for a “user’s guide” to debt which we are collectively authoring. This article should serve as an introduction to the topic for the uninitiated, almost like an encyclopedia entry. It should include both a cogent but efficient description of the mechanisms and intricacies of the debt practice/topic in question, as well as illustrative examples. Make sure you cite thoroughly.

Group project (due April 3) – 20%

The nature of this project will be discussed and deliberated collectively by the class. The assignment is to craft some sort of collective intervention in the debt system based on our research. This may take the form of a collectively authored text (perhaps with illustration), a web-based manifestation, a performative occurrence, a gallery exhibition, all of the above or none of the above. It will afford each of us an opportunity to contribute our skills and talents to a collaborative project.

Reading worksheets (due weekly) – 20%

See the final page of this syllabus (and the website) for a template. You are required to hand in a reading worksheet for every week of the class, which will be marked out of two (2), however only the top ten (10) grades will be counted.

SAMPLE TOPICS

- Student loans
- Credit cards
- Auto loans
- National debts (Canada)
- Third world debt
- Microfinance/microcredit
- Philosophies of debt
- Mortgages/housing debt
- “Fringe finance” (eg. payday loans)
- Collections agencies
- Anti-debt resistance
- NSCAD’s debt

POLICIES

Attendance: Attendance at all classes is mandatory.

Email: Please be aware that, while I'm happy to communicate over email, I can provide only limited advice or direction through that medium. If you'd like to discuss any course materials or assignments, I would be more than happy to meet you during office hours or we can schedule an appointment.

Late Assignments: It is important to get your assignments in on time so that I have time to give them the attention they deserve. See the assignments section for details on penalties.

Writing and ESL (English as a Second Language) Tutors are available, free of charge. Please visit Ken Rice in Art History and Critical Studies office (3rd Floor, Duke Building) or call him at 494-8187 for an appointment.

Learning disabilities or special needs: If you think you need help for any reason, please contact the Disability Resource Facilitator in Student Services, 494-8313. And please let me know, as soon as possible, what I can do to help.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism

Students are reminded that plagiarism is a serious academic offence and carries severe penalties. Students may obtain a copy of the complete *Policy on Plagiarism* from the Office of Student and Academic Services (2nd floor Duke block) or on the NSCAD website.

(<http://nscad.ca/site-nscad/media/nscad/plagiarismpolicy.pdf>)

Other policies can be found on the NSCAD web site – please take the time to review them. (<http://nscad.ca/en/home/abouttheuniversity/policiesdocumentation.aspx>)

Assignment formatting

All assignments must meet the following formatting criteria:

- Be printed and handed in. I accept neither emailed assignments nor hand-written ones.
- Be on standard, white 8.5"x11" paper, single or double-sided.
- A cover page is not necessary, but your paper should include your **name**, the **date**, the name of the **class** (CSTU 3009)
- Page margins **MUST** be 1" on all sides
- Use either Times New Roman or Ariel font, double-spaced. There should be no extra lines between paragraphs and the first line of each paragraph should be indented by 0.5".
- You must include a word-count at the end of each document.
- Your assignment **MUST** be proofread. Excessive errors due to failure to proofread may result in penalties or I may return your paper to you for revision.

WEEKLY READING WORKSHEET (silly sample)

NAME: Joe Student

DATE: August 29, 2013

READING CITATION (use Chicago or MLA format):

Zomboni, Ethan. 2013. "How to survive the zombie apocalypse: a theoretical approach." *The Journal of Useless and Impractical Knowledge* 23(2): 341-363.

In one or two sentences and in your own words, what was the article about and what was the author's main argument in this piece?

Zomboni, who is a professor of Zombie and Undead Studies at the University of Transylvania, draws on evidence from his Zombie Research Lab to argue that Zombies are an unstoppable force. He suggests that humanity concede defeat now and allow their brains to be devoured without a struggle to prevent future anxiety.

In your own words, in one or two sentences each, outline three of the author's supporting arguments.

1. Zomboni argues that zombies cannot be stopped by any conventional means, and that the quantity of flamethrowers presently available is not sufficient to arm humanity against them.
2. He presents statics about how many lab assistants were eaten by zombies (100%) and how many survived (0%) in his field trials.
3. He provides a literature review of some critical recent works in the field of zombie studies, noting that only those researchers with no first-hand, experimental experience of zombies actually believe that a zombie apocalypse could be survived.

Identify three other writers that the author of the article engaged with or drew on. Briefly (in one sentence) explain how the author of the article engaged with these works.

1. Dr. A.C.Ula: Zomboni agrees with Dr.Ula that humanity is a pitiful and weak race, destined to be devoured by the undead, but disagrees with his assertion that vampires will inherit the earth.
2. Al Larmist: Zomboni notes that most academics don't take the accounts of journalists like Larmist seriously, but that, in this case, Larmist's first-hand accounts of the mobilization of the zombie horde needs to be taken seriously.
3. Prof. Arrghhhh Brains: Zomboni praises Brains research because of his close work with zombies, but suspects that, especially in light of Prof. Brains's recent name change, he may now be a zombie himself.

List three words, terms, concepts or ideas that you found difficult or confusing, or which you would simply like to learn more about.

1. Antidiszombification (p. 342)
2. Undead epistemologies (p. 355)
3. I would like to know more about the secret tome of forbidden knowledge referred to on page 361 that Zomboni claims holds the key to abolishing the zombie menace.

Do you think the author successfully made his or her point? Explain why in one paragraph.

Zomboni marshals a lot of high quality evidence to make his case, and it's hard to disagree with him. While his review of the literature seems very comprehensive, and all the texts seem to agree with his perspective, I wonder if he has left out the writing of those who might disagree with him. He also provides a very compelling review of the statistics based on his field experiments, but I think that his experimental method was flawed. He simply dropped research assistants with a variety of weapons from a helicopter into the zombie pen. But in a real zombie apocalypse, I think humans would have a greater chance of survival because they can make use of the natural environment, and Zomboni himself notes that zombies are not very adaptable.

Do you agree with the author? Explain in one paragraph. Alternately or in addition, reflect on what the author has written and its implications for your own life and/or visual arts practice.

Zomboni makes a pretty pessimistic case for our chances in the event of a zombie apocalypse. I'm convinced that he's right: if zombies were to break free of research facilities like the one Zomboni runs, we'd be doomed. But I think that Zomboni's argument that, therefore, we should simply offer our brains up to the zombies now is problematic. After all, the zombie apocalypse is not inevitable, so long as strict security measures are followed. It is disturbing to read that a high-profile zombie researcher is so fatalistic. In my future work, I plan to experiment with the colour red, which Zomboni (on p. 353) notes can sometimes distract and confuse zombies. I hope that someday I can join a zombie research facility and conduct experiments to see if this is true.