About This Curricular Guide

To promote participation in the DEBT conference from all educational levels, and to encourage instructors to integrate the conference with their Spring 2010 course syllabi, the Center for 21st Century Studies and the conference organizers are pleased to offer this curricular guide. In this guide, you’ll find

- titles and abstracts of conference presentations
- professional information on speakers
- recommended readings and representative publications by conference speakers, with links to PDF versions of these readings, or Google Book previews, when available

Speakers are listed in alphabetical order.

The DEBT conference curricular guide will be updated regularly, but the most recent version of the guide can always be found at the conference page of the Center for 21st Century Studies web site:

http://www4.uwm.edu/21st/pages/events/conferences.html

For more information, please contact the Center at 414.229.4141 or ctr21cs@uwm.edu.

Version History:
First Issue: April 15, 2010
Revision 1: April 21, 2010
Revision 2: April 28, 2010
About the DEBT Conference

This conference will examine the idea of debt in its various senses. Debt has become a central element of US-dominated global capitalism, as the United States has borrowed massively from foreign lenders to finance consumer spending and meet the ballooning expenditures for its social programs, as well as to pay for two ongoing wars abroad. The notion of debt plays a crucial role in traditional as well as modern accounts of ethics that emphasize the indebtedness of subjects to each other and to society as a whole. The specter of catastrophic climate change has led theorists, environmental activists, and members of the clergy to underscore the debt of those living in the present to future generations in calling for restraints upon current patterns of industrial production and consumption.

The conference panels, in examining the meaning of debt in the areas of economics, the environment, and ethics, will address such questions as: How do notions of indebtedness affect moral and political life under postmodern global capitalism? How does the idea of indebtedness help us to understand interdependence, whether it pertains to the economy or to the environment? What are the challenges to developing an ethics based upon a sense of debt and obligation in a postmodern society?

Conference organizers: Peter Y. Paik (French, Italian, and Comparative Literature) and Merry Wiesner-Hanks (History, Center director)

Conference coordinator: Kate Kramer

Sponsored by UWM’s Center for 21st Century Studies (College of Letters & Science, with support from the Graduate School).

The April 29 performance by Theaster Gates is sponsored by The Chipstone Foundation and the Milwaukee Art Museum.
Conference Program

Thursday, April 19
Milwaukee Art Museum
5:00 pm   Welcome (and registration for speakers)
6:15 pm   Theaster Gates performance and lecture

Friday, April 30
Curtin 175
12:30 pm   Welcomes: Dean Richard Meadows and Peter Y. Paik
1:00 – 2:30 pm   The Economics of Debt
   Richard D. Woolf, “Consumer Debt and the Economic Crisis”
   Elaine Lewinnek, “I Consider It Un-American Not to Have a Mortgage: Historic Perspective on the Housing Crisis”
   Joel Magnuson, “Looking Beyond the Recession”
   John S. Heywood (Economics, UWM), moderator
2:45 – 4:15 pm   The Ecology of Debt
   Gerry Canavan, “Debt, Theft, Permaculture: Justice and Ecological Scale
   Juliann Lutz Warren, “Placing Debt”
   Erica Bornstein (Anthropology, UWM), moderator
4:30 – 6:00 pm   Keynote Presentation
   Michael A. Gillespie

Saturday, May 1
Hefter Conference Center
10:30 am   Coffee and continental breakfast
11:00 am – 12:30 pm   The Ethics of Debt
   Eleanor Courtemanche, “Unintended Consequences from Dickens to Hayek”
   Kennan Ferguson, “Debt’s Moral”
   William Bristow (Philosophy, UWM), moderator
12:30 – 1:30 pm   Lunch
1:30 – 3:00 pm   The Demons of Debt
   Morris Berman, “Is Debt the New Karma? Why America Finally Fell Apart”
   Mary Poovey, “Demonizing Debt, Naturalizing Finance”
   Jason Puskar (English, UWM), moderator
3:15 – 4:45 pm   The Futures of Debt
   Michael Tratner, “The Resurrection of an Economic God: Keynes Becomes Postmodern”
   Donald D. Hester, “China and the United States: The Bonds of Debt”
   Steven Shaviro, “The 'Bitter Necessity' of Debt: Neoliberal Finance and the Society of Control”
   Tracey Heatherington (Anthropology, UWM), moderator
5:00 – 6:00 pm   Closing remarks

All Center events are free and open to the public
Morris Berman
Independent Scholar
http://morrisberman.blogspot.com/

Conference Topic and Abstract
“Is Debt the New Karma? Why America Finally Fell Apart”

What if the American Way of Life were, at root, a Faustian bargain? At the heart of the American Revolution was a rejection of the European model of an organic commonwealth in favor of the Jeffersonian model of unlimited competition. This led to a dramatic economic expansion of the United States, but at heavy cost, including the warping of our inner lives and the emergence of a predatory foreign policy. Events such as the attack of 9/11, and the economic collapse of October 2008, suggest that Mephistopheles has come back to collect the debt.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Morris Berman is well known as an innovative cultural historian and social critic. He has taught at a number of universities in Europe and North America, and has held visiting endowed chairs at Incarnate Word College (San Antonio), the University of New Mexico, and Weber State University. During 1982-88 he was the Lansdowne Professor in the History of Science at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. Berman won the Governor’s Writers Award for Washington State in 1990, and was the first recipient of the annual Rollo May Center Grant for Humanistic Studies in 1992.

Berman is the author of a trilogy on the evolution of human consciousness—The Reenchantment of the World (1981), Coming to Our Senses (1989), and Wandering God: A Study in Nomadic Spirituality (2000) — and in 2000 his Twilight of American Culture was named a “Notable Book” by the New York Times Book Review. During 2003-6 he was Visiting Professor in Sociology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Dr. Berman relocated to Mexico in 2006, and during 2008-9 was a Visiting Professor at the Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico City. His volume of poetry, Counting Blessings, will be released in 2010.

Representative Publications
- The Twilight of American Culture (2000).
  http://books.google.com/books?id=Fbpjdj8wwRYC&printsec=frontcover&dq=%22the+twilight+of+american+culture%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Conference Topic and Abstract
“Debt, Theft, Permaculture: Justice and Ecological Scale”

“A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.”
—Greek proverb

“We stub our toes every day on things discarded from times to come.”
—China Miéville

If capitalism is, as K. William Kapp has famously said, “an economy of unpaid costs,” the competing paradigms of climate debt (recently championed by activists like Naomi Klein), climate trials (called for by NASA’s Jim Hansen), and permaculture (developed by Australian agriculturists Bill Mollison and David Holmgren) offer three alternative frameworks for balancing the books. This presentation will consider how these three approaches differ, but also the essential ethical demand they each in their own way assert: the recognition of a planetary commons, extending in both space and time, from which industrial capitalism ceaselessly appropriates more than its fair share.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Gerry Canavan is a James B. Duke Fellow in the Program in Literature at Duke University, where he researches science fiction and modernity. His dissertation centers on the political uses of futurity in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature, film, and culture, including figurations of the Internet as a proto-Utopian space for free discourse and identity construction.

Recently, Canavan co-organized Cultures of Recession, an interdisciplinary graduate student conference hosted by the Program in Literature at Duke. He is currently co-editing a special issue of Polygraph, an annual interdisciplinary journal affiliated with the Duke Literature Program, on Ecology and Ideology, and a special issue of American Literature (Duke University Press) on Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Myth. He is a co-convener of the Ecology and the Humanities Interdisciplinary Working Group at Duke, a program that fosters cross-disciplinary conversations and collaborative intellectual projects among Duke faculty and students. He also holds an MFA in fiction writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Representative Publications
Eleanor Courtemanche
Assistant Professor, English
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
http://www.english.illinois.edu/people/ecourtem

Conference Topic and Abstract
“Unintended Consequences from Dickens to Hayek”

The phrase “unintended consequences” has become a habitual catchphrase of moderate conservatism—the kind that clings in late-Burkean fashion to the status quo and warns against Great-Society-style government meddling. But in fact, as the mostly-unanticipated recent financial collapse demonstrates, there are more kinds of unintended consequences in any complex society than the relative failure of well-meaning government initiatives. Even leaving aside the obvious lessons of “blowback” in foreign policy, recent controversies in American domestic politics, from global warming to the mortgage securities crisis, show that the “doctrine of unintended consequences” should be considered much more than a simple axiom of free-market fundamentalism.

Since the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek is most associated with the polemical use of this phrase during the Cold War, this paper will investigate his argument that price competition is a more accurate information-distribution system than any planned bureaucracy. This concept has many intellectual heirs, not only in cybernetic theory but in Nicholas Taleb’s defense of “epistemological humility” in stock trading. But I argue that in looking for the concept’s intellectual roots, we should consider not just obviously economic thinkers like Smith and Mandeville, but also the authors of realist novels, like Dickens. Dickens was one of many Victorian multiplot novelists whose attempt at depicting a complex society not only dramatized the unintended consequences of any single action, but considered a much wider range of possible outcomes than the Hayekians. In Little Dorrit, for example, one unintended consequence of Mr. Dorrit’s release from debtor’s prison is his irrational relapse into a fantasy of incarceration. In Bleak House, the urban environment is so dense with unforeseen connections that young Esther is infected by a disease passed along through a street urchin whom (unbeknownst to her) contracted the illness from her own father’s grave.

Dickens’s hostile depictions of the Court of Chancery and the Office of Circumlocution fit well with Hayek’s assumptions about malignant bureaucracy, but unlike Hayek he extends his critique to every selfish profession, including speculative finance. Though Dickens’s defense of individualism may have lacked political sophistication, his sense of moral irony is more refined than Hayek’s bland celebration of aggregate organization. Dickens’s representations of the limits of human intention remind us that the concept of “unintended consequences” should not merely be accepted as a fetishized defense of business activity, but perhaps serve as a more general cautionary trope for human fragility and blindness.
Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Eleanor Courtemanche’s research interests include economic and political approaches to Victorian fiction, irony, and comedy. She teaches courses in Victorian literature and culture; histories of economics, technology, and design; narrative theory; popular culture; urbanism and steampunk. Her current work-in-progress is the tentatively titled book, Invisible Hand: Capitalist Plots in 19 Century Britain and Germany.

Representative Publications
  [http://books.google.com/books?id=Sm4aCx8bjzkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=%22Metaphors+of+Economy%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=courtemanche&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Sm4aCx8bjzkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=%22Metaphors+of+Economy%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=courtemanche&f=false)
Kennan R. Ferguson
Assistant Professor, Political Science
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee
http://www4.uwm.edu/letsci/polisci/faculty/ferguson.cfm

Conference Topic and Abstract
“Debt’s Moral”

Debt and its various iterations (interest, jubilee, moneychanging, usury) form an important component of Western religious traditions. In our contemporary economic and political climate, debt’s moral component is no less fraught: a conversation about the relative responsibility of banks, mortgage brokers, and homeowners, for example, quickly breaks down along lines of justice, responsibility, or guilt. So why does indebtedness have such a moralistic cast; why does the temporal repayment of capital bring out the ethical judge in us?

In this presentation, I argue that debt inextricably links the mythology of personal independence to the debate over responsibility of the impersonal system. In either case, the question becomes one of blame: if capitalism, for example, necessitates debt as a process of worker disempowerment, as Marxists argue, then the moral burden of debt is the financial system’s. Conversely, if individuals have failed in their personal obligation to understand and manage their debt, as free-market economists claim, then their failure to repay their loans is a personal failure.

It is what both approaches assume in common, that debt could be properly managed and correctly apportioned, that gives them their moral force. But the attempt to thereby locate responsibility is a political response, one that attempts to displace an unavoidable truth: that we are all, already and always, indebted. We are born indebted to those who raise us, we remain indebted to those who love us, and we will die indebted to those who remember us.

The fiction that each of us has a self that can be unencumbered, relieved of obligation to others, to the world, underlies the need to find a moral to debt. It reflects, in fact, the foundations of modern morality: that independence can be achieved, that actions can be wholly good, that people can be free. Thus are the ethics of religious traditions the same as the morality of the marketplace: a search for a fundament of responsibility upon which we can lay the dynamics of interdependence. But such a state would be an impoverished, abject, bereft state. The only way to conquer debt would be through pure and inhuman aloneness.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference
Biography

Representative Publications
  http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=UbzcSUv2HgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=%22william+james:+politics+in+the+pluriverse%22&ots=fhucc_avBO&sig=XIruf5_E5M-F5-CG_WG5PzYDluc#v=onepage&q=&f=false
  http://socialtext.dukejournals.org/cgi/reprint/25/2_91/39
  http://books.google.com/books?id=EwWZ6hvHkfcC&pg=PP1&dq=%22the+politics+of+judgment:+aesthetics,+identity%22&lr=&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Stephen Gardner
Associate Professor, Philosophy
University of Tulsa

Conference Topic and Abstract
“How Debt Replaces Guilt: Social Order vs Sacred Order”

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Professor Gardner’s work focuses on the relations of philosophy to history, politics, the social sciences, and modern culture. Areas of expertise include Kant, Hegel and nineteenth-century thought; twentieth-century phenomenology and existentialism; classical and modern aesthetics and the theory of popular culture.

His current book project is tentatively titled The Sublime Lie of History: The Quixotic Imperatives of Democratic Desire. The book aims to show how critics and defenders of “bourgeois” society (such as Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Freud, for example) are driven by a conceit of “life as literature” (in the phrase of Alexander Nehamas, who applied it to Nietzsche) or “existence as an aesthetic phenomenon” (Nietzsche). This conceit intimates the democratic phenomenon of the modern public, in terms of which such figures implicitly cast their own “self” creation as writers or thinkers. It is both a prophylactic against and a reflection of this distinctively modern “social power,” the media-based and market-driven public, to which the modern notion of a “self” is a defensive reaction. In the process and contrary to intent, they generated constitutive myths of democratic culture, including such myths of freedom as an idea of history in terms of the “sublime” (an aesthetic notion) and an idea of the “self” modeled on authorship.

Representative Publications

  http://books.google.com/books?id=WtLF5yplPjkC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_v2_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Theaster Gates
Artist/Performer
http://theastergates.com/home.html

Keynote Performance
Chicago artist Theaster Gates will provide us with a performance and lecture related to his ongoing installation at the Milwaukee Art Museum, *To Speculate Darkly: Theaster Gates and Dave the Potter*, which explores the history and legacy of Dave Drake. A freed slave in antebellum South Carolina, Drake produced stoneware pottery and famously adorned his pots with poetic couplets. Though historians and art historians have explored Drake’s career in detail, Gates is the first artist to reinterpret his work and to make it pertinent to a broader set of concerns about the place of labor and craft in present-day America.

A sound piece accompanying *To Speculate Darkly* features a two hundred-strong voice choir that engages the enigmatic, emotional works of poetry found on Drake’s pots. Gates created this captivating sound piece with musicians from both Milwaukee and Chicago. Gates further collaborated with local tradespeople to develop original ceramic works for the show. Thus, the project, as intended, has brought together two very different groups of people in partnership, and promises to create lasting relationships across the city.

Potter, musician, and performance artist, Theaster Gates, Jr. has earned national acclaim for his intelligent commentaries on race, the city, and the museum and recently participated in the 2010 Whitney Biennial.

*To Speculate Darkly: Theaster Gates and Dave the Potter* is supported by a generous grant from the Joyce Foundation, which fosters the development of new works in dance, music, theater, and visual arts by artists of color. The exhibition is curated by Ethan Lasser, curator at the Chipstone Foundation. Theaster Gates’ performance and lecture for the Debt conference is sponsored by the Chipstone Foundation and the Milwaukee Art Museum.

Suggested Viewings and Readings in Preparation for the Conference
- Chicago Artists to Watch: Theaster Gates Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAlwf4aH4gU
Biography
Theaster Gates, Jr. is the Director of Arts Programming in the Office of the Provost, a Resident Artist, and a Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. He has long had interest in both arts administration and art practice. After spending a few years as project manager for the Chicago Transit Authority overseeing arts related projects, he began working with many of Chicago’s arts-based community organizations as both artist-teacher and administrator. Gates’ recent work, *Cosmology of Yard*—in which he collaborates with researchers, performers, and the public—took over the sculpture court of the Whitney Museum of American Art as part of its 2010 Biennial. Theaster will also be participating in an artist-led project entitled Urban Expression as a part of the Transformation programming for the Pulitzer’s exhibition, *Urban Alchemy/Gordon Matta-Clark.*

http://mattaclark.pulitzerarts.org/transformation/panel-series/the-city-as-studio/panelists/

Representative Art Works
Theaster Gates web site:
http://theastergates.com/home.html

*Cosmology of Yard*
Whitney Biennial 2010
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
February 25 – May 30, 2010

*Temple Exercises*
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
January 6 – February 1, 2009
http://www.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/exh_detail.php?id=211
Michael A. Gillespie
Jerry G. and Patricia Crawford Hubbard Professor of Political Science
Duke University
http://fds.duke.edu/db/aas/Philosophy/faculty/mgillesp

Keynote Presentation

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference


Biography
Michael Gillespie (Ph.D. University of Chicago) is the author of Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History, and Nihilism before Nietzsche, and is also co-editor of Nietzsche’s New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics, and Ratifying the Constitution. He has published articles on Montaigne, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and various topics in American political thought, as well as on the relation of religion and politics. He is currently completing a book entitled Mutiplicitous Modernity. Professor Gillespie has received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Templeton Foundation, the Liberty Fund, and the Earhart Foundation. At Duke, he is the Director of the Gerst Program in Political, Economic, and Humanistic Studies.

Representative Publications

Donald D. Hester
Professor of Economics, Emeritus
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Conference Topic and Abstract
“China and the United States: The Bonds of Debt”

This paper explores the large and growing indebtedness of the United States to the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Beginning with the 1971 reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, international trade between them expanded but was very modest until the mid 1980s. At that point, China under Deng Xiaoping adopted a variation on the successful export strategy that had been pioneered by Japan and the smaller Asian “tigers.”

The first section of the paper analyzes the distinctive features of this variation and provides tabular information about trade and foreign exchange balances and the exchange rate between the dollar and yuan. The second section proposes a crude game-theoretic discussion of what each country might gain and lose from their large growing financial entanglement in the short and long run. The third section is a discussion of the limits of the imbalance and how U.S. debts to and Chinese claims on other countries impact the relation between the P.R.C. and the U.S. The concluding section focuses on the paradox of a poor and rapidly growing authoritarian country financing an undisciplined and relatively declining democratic superpower.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference
“China and the United States: The Bonds of Debt”:

Biography

Representative Publications
- The Evolution of Monetary Policy and Banking in the US (2008)
  http://books.google.com/books?id=Sk289ndGre4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=%22evolution+of+monetary+policy+and+banking+in+the+us%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Elaine Lewinnek
Assistant Professor, American Studies
California State University, Fullerton
http://hss.fullerton.edu/amst/faculty/elewinnek.asp

Conference Topic and Abstract
“I Consider It Un-American Not to Have a Mortgage: Historical Perspective on the Housing Crisis”

Home mortgages are the largest portion of American debt. Yet the recent economic crisis reveals how little is known about home mortgages, how much any household should borrow, and what any piece of real estate is fundamentally worth. This paper looks at the foundations of American house-lending policies at the turn of the twentieth century, considering immigrant-led micro-lending societies and developer-led loaning practices as well as banking policies, in order to place the present foreclosure crisis in historical perspective. In the early 21st century, almost all American banks assessed home-loan risk by considering the history of housing prices since 1950. Looking before 1950 creates a different picture of the nightmare side of the American dream.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Elaine Lewinnek wrote her dissertation on Chicago’s working-class suburbs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and currently studies the cultural, social, and political history of the United States 1820 to the present, urbanity, market culture, the political history of families, and narrative history. The courses she teaches include American Character, Theory & Methods of American Studies, California Cultures, and Consumer Culture.

Representative Publications
Joel Magnuson
Professor, Economics
Portland Community College, Oregon
http://www.mindfuleconomics.com/mindful_economics.html

Conference Topic and Abstract
“Looking Beyond the Recession”

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference
- Interview with Joel Magnuson on *Mindful Economics*. November 9, 2008 on Mind Over Matters, KEXP 90.3 FM Seattle. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F0kUWZ5W0k

Biography
Joel Magnuson is an internationally recognized economist specializing in non-orthodox approaches to political economy. He is currently a professor of economics in Portland, Oregon; a visiting fellow at the Ashcroft International Business School at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, England; and is an international advisor to the editorial board of Anglia’s journal *Interconnections*. He is an active member of an international research group based in Europe that is working toward new philosophical foundations for economic theory and practice. He writes extensively on historical events and issues related to capitalist development.

Representative Publications
Mary Poovey
Samuel Rudin University Professor in the Humanities; Professor of English
Director of the Institute for the History of the Production of Knowledge
New York University
http://english.fas.nyu.edu/object/MaryPoovey.html

Conference Topic and Abstract
“Demonizing Debt, Naturalizing Finance”

The critical role played by debt in the recent financial crisis (whether in the form of sub-prime mortgages or securitized debt) is simply the most recent phase of a complex history of attitudes toward borrowed money. In late-seventeenth-century England and for much of the eighteenth century, debt was treated as an ordinary part of every individual’s routine monetary transactions. In the nineteenth century, by contrast, debt was criminalized and reviled as a “hereditary remnant of the original savage” (Samuel Smiles). In this paper, I argue that, paradoxically, the Victorian demonization of debt constitutes an early episode in the naturalization of modern attitudes toward finance—including the belief that one can use debt to finance large purchases (through a mortgage, for example) or to augment investment (through leverage). To avoid debt, Victorians had to learn to value saving over immediate gratification; to make saving pay, the money they set aside had to be invested in profitable enterprises; to trust that saving would yield returns, they had to believe that the future of their financial system would replicate its past. Naturalizing these beliefs has taken most of the last two centuries; in the process, the original meaning of “finance” (the settlement of a debt) has morphed into something approaching its opposite (the science of funds management—that is, the science of making money from debt).

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Mary Poovey is Samuel Rudin University Professor of the Humanities and Professor of English. Her primary scholarly work focuses on nineteenth-century British literature, history, and culture, although she has also published on eighteenth-century British literature and culture, the history of literary criticism, feminist theory, and economic history. Two recent books, A History of the Modern Fact and Genres of the Credit Economy, examine the emergence of the modern disciplines. In them, she argues that literary study acquired the rudiments of its modern form through a process of generic differentiation that distinguished between modes of writing about value. Her current work focuses on financial crises, both past and present.
Representative Publications

- *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating value in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2008)  
  [link](http://books.google.com/books?id=9_ueXNuu7KcC&printsec=frontcover&dq=genres+of+the+credit+economy&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false)

  [link](http://books.google.com/books?id=Qq34RejpoT4C&dq=The+Financial+System+in+Nineteenth-Century+Britain&hl=en&ei=VpK7S8P-O5OkngfHpoSpCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDYQ6AEwAA)

  [link](http://books.google.com/books?id=Gs2y8xCn3EMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=a+history+of+the+modern+fact&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false)
Steven Shaviro
DeRoy Professor of English
Wayne State University
http://www.dhalgren.com/

Conference Topic and Abstract

In an essay originally published in 1990, Gilles Deleuze argues that we are in process of moving away from Michel Foucault’s disciplinary society, and towards a new sort of social formation, which Deleuze calls the control society. Under these new circumstances, Deleuze says, “a man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt.” The traditional disciplinary regimes of schools, factories, and so on lose their power; they are replaced by the so-called “discipline of the market,” with its accounting for all areas of human life in financial terms. Foucault himself had made a similar point more than a decade before, when his 1978-1979 lecture series at the College de France, titled The Birth of Biopolitics, turned out not to be concerned with the biopolitical disciplining of bodies and populations at all, but rather with an emergent neoliberalism, and its new articulation of the figure of Homo economicus. Human beings are induced to fashion themselves as subjects, insofar as they become entrepreneurs of themselves, investing their own “human capital” in the hope of gaining a return.

In these texts, Deleuze and Foucault in effect “cracked the code” of the process that has come to dominate life in the early twenty-first century. Both thinkers rediscover political economy at the heart of processes that had previously seemed to be of an entirely different order. Under what Marx calls “the real subsumption of labor under capital,” all areas of human life and society are now quantified in financial terms, and subject to market competition—or to what F. A. Hayek, in his celebration of capitalism, described as “the bitter necessity of [man’s] submitting himself to rules he does not like in order to maintain himself against competing groups.” Today, these “rules” take the form of “exotic” financial instruments such as derivatives. The financialization of human life means that a calculus of credit and debt is built into all institutions, and is a necessary precondition for all potential actions. Debt has become a universal situation, and the “servicing” of debt—that is to say, the extraction of payments for debt—has become the major source of capital accumulation in the world today.

If the economic collapse of 2008 has demonstrated that such a debt economy is not viable in the long term, it has nonetheless also become an alibi, and a mechanism, for extending the reach of this economy even further. Ultimately, financial debt is a way of colonizing and pre-empting (or premediating, in Richard Grusin’s term) the future, of pricing its unknowability according to a measure that is graspable and controllable in the present—despite the fact that the future is actually unknowable and unpredictable. In this sense, capitalist debt as we know it today is a kind of double
process. It ravages the present in the name of a future that will never actually arrive; and it depletes our hopes for, and imaginings of, the future by turning it into nothing but a projection of the present. Such a process can best be grasped in the form of science fiction, which will therefore be a major component of my presentation.

**Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference**

**Biography**

Steven Shaviro is an American cultural critic. His most widely read book is *Doom Patrols*, a “theoretical fiction” that outlines the state of postmodernism during the early 1990s, using poetic language, personal anecdotes, and creative prose.

Additionally, Shaviro has written a book about film theory, *The Cinematic Body*, which examines the dominance of Lacanian tropes in contemporary academic film theory. According to Shaviro, the use of psychoanalysis has mirrored the actions of a cult, with its own religious texts.

Shaviro earned a PhD from Yale in 1981. After several years teaching at the University of Washington, he now resides in Detroit with his wife and daughters. He teaches literature and film at Wayne State University. He is currently at work on his latest book, tentatively titled *The Age of Aesthetics*, a series of essays on contemporary consumer culture, and the relationship between aesthetic values (style, specifically) and Marxist theory.


**Representative Publications**

Genese Sodikoff
Assistant Professor, Anthropology
Rutgers
http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~socant/genese.htm

Conference Topic and Abstract

The phrase “a land out of time” once alluded to Madagascar’s anachronistic biogeography. Today it evokes Madagascar’s crushing “extinction debt,” or the time lag between a species’ biological longevity and its species’ death sentence. Zombie metaphors haunt conservation biology. “Living dead” species denote those slated for extinction because their habitats have degraded to the point where they cannot reproduce for much longer. “Lazarus species” refer to those that vanish from the fossil record or landscape only to reemerge from oblivion later. Both populate the rain forest habitats of Madagascar. Conservation scientists have identified slash-and-burn agriculture as a leading cause of deforestation, while they also concede the damaging effects of corporate mining, logging, and agribusiness. An indication of disjointed or misaligned time, “extinction debt” alludes to a mortgaged ecological future. This paper analyzes how nongovernmental environmental organizations and transnational firms capitalize the island’s extinction debt as they implement strategies to extinguish it.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Genese Sodikoff has focused her research on rain forest conservation and international development in Africa, specifically the Comoros (1989-1991) and Madagascar (1994-2002). Over several periods of fieldwork in Madagascar since 1994, she has examined the significance and role of low-wage labor in rain forest conservation projects, as well as the politics of biodiversity loss. Teaching and research interests include political ecology, conservation and development, agrarian economies, biotic and cultural extinction, human-animal relations, labor regimes, green capitalism, historical anthropology, medical anthropology, and Africa and the Indian Ocean islands.

Professor Sodikoff is currently finalizing a book manuscript entitled, Workers of the Vanishing World: Labor and Rain Forest Conservation in Madagascar. She is also beginning new research on the social anthropology of extinction. The first phase of the research concerns the science, politics, and technology of ex situ conservation in the U.S., specifically the captive breeding and repatriation of endangered lemurs. These practices are considered in light of the politics of diversity and nativism in the U.S., constructs of nature and the nation-state, and the public’s sense of compounding
existential risk. In addition, she is compiling an edited volume, Extinction Encounters: Dying Forms and the Ethics of Retrieval, comprising studies which examine the collateral effects of biotic and cultural extinctions.

**Representative Publications**

Michael Tratner
Professor, English; Director of Film Studies
Bryn Mawr
http://www.brynmawr.edu/english/Faculty_and_Staff/smTratner.html

Conference Topic and Abstract
“The Resurrection of an Economic God: Keynes Becomes Postmodern”

The Bush and Obama Stimulus Packages have inspired numerous claims that John Maynard Keynes is back from the dead. But the resurrected figure is strangely different, rather literally a ghost of his former self, because what is most decidedly left out is the relationship of Keynes’s economics to the human body. In the 1930’s Keynes proposed deficits to release “pent-up demand,” a concept quite close to the Freudian language of “pent-up desire”; the similarity derives from a common underlying notion of physiology, that human action starts with drives—or in Keynes’s term, “animal spirits”—found in the body, which can be inhibited by excessive social controls. One reason Keynesian economics died is that neoclassical theory proclaimed the rationality of economic acts, denying the power of bodily drives. The return of Keynes has seemed to revive the importance of “animal spirits,” as seen in the 2009 book of that title by economists Akerlof and Shiller. However, in their book, animal spirits are no longer biological structures, but rather discursive ones: people act like animals, according to Akerlof and Shiller, not because of instinctive drives, but because of the influence of “stories” and “illusions.” This transformation of the nature of the “animal” part of humans is not merely a shift in economics: it is one of the main features of the postmodern turn, even in biology itself: fundamental structures are no longer masses of flesh, but rather patterns of symbols (most famously DNA). The new goal of deficit spending is decidedly postmodern: to modify representations of wealth (e.g., “derivatives” and “subprime mortgages”). Hence the government’s money does not flow as it did in the 1930s to those whose bodily consumption is most restricted, the working class, but to those who manipulate the symbols of wealth, banks and financial institutions.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference
  Google books (preview): http://tinyurl.com/yfuaotl

Biography
Michael Tratner grew up in Hollywood, where the arts, business and government are hard to tell apart, and he still feels most at home among critics who treat literature, economics and politics as inseparable. He is the author of two books of criticism. The first, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce,*
Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, argues that modernists developed new literary forms in order to participate in the new, collectivist forms of mass politics emerging in the early twentieth century. The second, Deficits and Desires: Economics, Sexuality and Literature in the Twentieth Century, examines how morality and psychology changed when “being in debt” became a normal part of everyday life and governmental policy during the 20’s and 30’s. His latest project, Movies and Mass Politics, returns him to his childhood city, for a study of how Hollywood movies borrowed the innovations of Fascist and Communist filmmakers while struggling against the politics of those innovations. In his teaching, he has tried to demonstrate that bringing politics and literature together increases the instruction and entertainment to be derived from both.

Representative Publications

- **Crowd Scenes: Movies and Mass Politics** (2008)
  http://books.google.com/books?id=85XtypYHx0YC&printsec=frontcover&q=%22crowd+scenes%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

- **Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Literature** (2001)
  http://books.google.com/books?id=AvbMbOoofm-YC&pg=PP1&dq=%22%EF%82%A7%09Deficits+and+Desires:+Economics+and+Sexuality+%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false

  http://books.google.com/books?id=mDisAAAAIAAJ&pg=PP1&dq=%22%EF%82%A7%09Modernism+and+Mass+Politics:+Joyce,+Woolf,+Eliot,+Yeats+%22&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Julianne Lutz Warren
Professor, Environmental Studies in the Liberal Studies Program
New York University
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Conference Topic and Abstract
“Placing Debt”

Debt, like Hell, can be carried around as a “mental or spiritual non-place,” a “placeless place,” writes novelist Margaret Atwood. The ways that we imagine what we deserve and what we owe and our understanding of what consequences will flow out of not meeting such expectations shape lived reality. Real nature, 20th-21st century ecology has taught, has real capacities for self-renewal, but limited ones—real economies, in other words, that can be disordered and overdrawn leaving in their wake real places that can no longer support humans or other forms of life. Utopian narratives, “non-places” that often reflect existing conditions even as they seek ways to transform them, create territories for exploring not only the ways we imagine debt, but also the ways we imagine nature and our relationships to it. American and English Utopias of the late 19th century, as the Earth was being unprecedentedly re-formed by the intensive land-use practices of Western civilization, are good places to begin a critical inquiry into the attitudes about debt and nature that have brought us to this age of global ecological crises and how some writers sought to develop through literature ways to live in better balance. They are also good places from which to glean inspiration for better-grounded imaginings of a mutually prosperous future for humans and all Earth’s life.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
With formal training as an ecologist, Julianne Lutz Warren uses a narrative approach to teach environmental studies. She works with students to unfold a multi-faceted story of human relationships with the rest of nature. This story reaches back to antiquity, but has had unprecedented consequences much more recently. It incorporates scientific ways of knowing about the physical world and also cultural and personal ones. It is an open inquiry into what human thoughts, values, and actions may or may not be mutually beneficial to Earth and all its life.

Published writings include *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, a book about one of America’s best-respected 20th century conservation thinkers (1887-1948). Situated within the context of the American conservation movement, the book shows the development of Leopold’s idea of land health—what he hoped would become an ecologically grounded standard for right ways to think about and use nature.
Her current scholarly work builds from that on Leopold. It is situated at the crux of ecological science, cultural and environmental history, and literary criticism. She is studying “utopia’s nature”—developing a sort of intellectual biography of the human-nature relationship in utopian narratives written mostly between the late 19th century and the 21st century. She argues that to have enduring civilizations that advance meaningfully flourishing individual lives along with just social conditions, people must learn how to prosper without depleting Earth’s capacities for self-renewal. She seeks, then, what insights we can glean from evaluating utopias’ past ideals in relation to this standard. She also considers what virtuous impulses we would do well to spare and what dreams need to be better grounded in ecological realities for today’s utopias to promote humans and the rest of nature living to mutual benefit, while leaving for future generations the fullest complement of possibilities for thriving lives.

Representative Publications

Richard D. Wolff
Professor of Economics, Emeritus
University of Massachusetts–Amherst
http://www.rdwolff.com/

Conference Topic and Abstract
“Consumer Debt and the Economic Crisis”

A watershed change in US economic history occurred in the 1970s. A century of steady real-wage increases came to an end as social conditions permitted US employers thereafter to keep real wages flat while labor productivity kept rising. A stunned working class undertook unprecedented levels of debt to afford rising consumption costs. The post-1970s combination of borrowing and the corresponding financial industry expansion were key contributors to today’s economic crisis and to the continuing secular trend toward ever greater economic and social inequality.

Suggested Readings in Preparation for the Conference

Biography
Richard D. Wolff is Professor of Economics Emeritus, University of Massachusetts, Amherst where he taught economics from 1973 to 2008. He is currently a Visiting Professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School University, New York City. He also teaches classes regularly at the Brecht Forum in Manhattan. Earlier he taught economics at Yale University (1967-1969) and at the City College of the City University of New York (1969-1973). In 1994, he was a Visiting Professor of Economics at the University of Paris (France), I (Sorbonne).

Over the last twenty five years, in collaboration with his colleague, Stephen Resnick, he has developed a new approach to political economy. While it retains and systematically elaborates the Marxist notion of class as surplus labor, it rejects the economic determinism typical of most schools of economics and usually associated with Marxism as well. This new approach appears in several books co-authored by Resnick and Wolff and numerous articles by them separately and together. Common to all of Professor Wolff’s work are two central components. The first is the introduction of class, in its elaborated surplus labor definition, as a new “entry point” of social analysis. The second is the concept of overdetermination as the logic of an analytic project that is consistently non-determinist. Professor Wolff was also among the founders in 1988 of the new academic association, Association of Economic and Social Analysis (AESA), and its quarterly journal Rethinking Marxism.

Since 2005, Professor Wolff has written many shorter analytical pieces focused chiefly although not only on the emerging and then exploding global capitalist crisis. He regularly published such shorter
analytical pieces on the website of the *Monthly Review* magazine and occasionally in many other publications, both print and electronic. The wide circulation of the shorter pieces coupled with the deepening crisis brought many invitations to present work in public forums.

**Representative Publications**