

GST309 Millennial Imagination

Elon University, Spring 2009

TTh 2:20-4:00, The Lodge

Professor Anthony Weston

Department of Philosophy, 109 Spence Pavilion

Phone: x5699 (278-5699) E-mail: <weston@elon.edu>

Office hours: M-Th 11-12 and by appointment (please ask)

This course is an exploration of *creative futures* – of what might actually be possible for our society and world, right now, and without anything outrageous technologically but with a lot more imagination. First we spend some time awakening and training our own social creativity. We then survey some “out of the box” possibilities, inventing still better ones as we go, across a wide range of areas, including: how to take the future more seriously; different kinds of work (and a lot less of it); alternative schools (and alternatives *to* school); sustainability and beyond; alternative architectures and arts; space exploration; and others. When you leave this course, you should be conversant with some radical new thinking across this range of issues, and you should have some experience of thinking more creatively about those issues yourself: that is, reframing those issues based on the readings, and then going still farther on your own, issue after issue. In the end you should know how to think more creatively about everything!

Books for the course, in the order required, are:

- Anthony Weston, *Creativity for Critical Thinkers* (Oxford University Press)
- Anthony Weston, *How to Re-Imagine the World* (New Society Publishers)
- Rob Simpson, *What We Could Have Done with the Money* (Hyperion)
- Bruce Mau, *Massive Change* (Phaidon Press)
- Stewart Brand, *The Clock of the Long Now* (Basic Books)
- Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American* (Basic Books)
- Daniel Quinn, *Beyond Civilization* (Three Rivers Press)
- John Holt, *Instead of Education* (Sentient Publications)
- Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (Bantam)
- Robert Zubrin, *The Case for Mars* (Simon and Schuster)

That’s a lot – some of them are short and cheap, though. Taken together they should certainly freshen up your bookshelf and your thinking too, I hope! There will be a few additional readings on handout and on line. I would also like you to subscribe to Worldchanging’s weekly e-newsletter at <http://www.worldchanging.com/>.

Tentative schedule

Week 1, 2/3-2/5: Opening

For Tuesday: explore Global Ideas Bank, www.globalideasbank.org: write-up due.

For Thursday: Weston, *Creativity for Critical Thinkers* (all). Essay assignment: pick one topic from Chapter 1 Exercise 2.

Week 2, 2/10-2/12: Social creativity

Read: Weston, *How to Re-Imagine the World* (all). This is a dense enough book that you should plan to read it in sections – not at all one sitting – and even better, read it twice!

Week 3, 2/17-2/19: Our moment

Read Simpson, *What We Could Have Done with the Money* (all: but don't go for the details) and begin Mau, *Massive Change* – pages TBA.

Week 4, 2/24-2/26: The question of design

Read: Mau, 30-105.

Tuesday, 24 February: we will meet on campus, location TBA, for media access.

Week 5, 3/3-3/5: Thinking (very) long-term

Read: Brand, *The Clock of the Long Now*, Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6-9, 11-15, 20, 21, 25

Week 6, 3/10-3/12: Rethinking work

Read: Schor, *The Overworked American*, read Chapter 1, skim 2 and 3, read 5 and 6

Week 7, 3/17-3/19: Bohemia squared

Read: Quinn, *Beyond Civilization* (all)

The week of 3/24 and 3/26 is BREAK!!

Week 8, 3/31-4/2: Rethinking schools

Read: Holt, *Instead of Education*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16.

Week 9, 4/7-4/9: Sustainability and beyond

Read: Callenbach, *Ecotopia*, first half (p. 83 in old edition: we'll check in the re-issue)

Week 10, 4/14-4/16: Sustainability and beyond #2

Finish *Ecotopia*.

Tuesday, 4/11, 2:30-6: Trip to Arcadia Co-Housing and The Change, Carrboro

Week 11, 4/21-4/23: Beyond Earth

Read: Zubrin, *The Case for Mars*, Preface and Chapters 1, 2, 8, 9.

April 28 we do not meet – SURF day!

Weeks 12-14, 4/30-5/12: Project(s)
Assignments and plans to be decided!

Final session, Friday, 5/15, 8-11 am: Presentations/conclusions.

Note the Field Trip on Tuesday, 4/11: we will visit Arcadia Co-Housing Community and The Change in Carrboro, leaving at class time, 2:30ish, and returning maybe around 6 – we’ll take a couple of school vans. Please put it into your schedule *now*. A few other days we may do some in-class very local trips – I am hoping that we can go past the 4:00 time on some of these days too, but we’ll have to check your schedules.

Expectations

This class is mostly a series of social-creativity workshops, with widely varying and ever-changing topics, based on some difficult but provocative books. I do not lecture on the “content”, but always aim to approach the material *with* you through a variety of exercises, discussions, simulation games, and other kinds of challenges. This in turn presupposes that you come into the class already having done the reading and thought about it. Put it another way: I am not going to tell you what the books say – you can find that out by reading them – but *we* are going to try to build upon what they say to make them clearer and to go farther. In short, then, I expect you to be actively committed to this class, to do the work consistently and the assigned reading before class, and to take an active part in class discussions and other class-related work. You may expect me to do the same, and not to let up!

Again, there are a *lot* of books – not that we’ll read all of all of them, but for much of the term we will be working through a book a week. Be ready, and plan in advance. Please note that *all assigned reading should be done before each week’s classes* – the weekend is a good time. In class we clarify, build on, apply, and ultimately imagine our way beyond the ideas in the readings in turn. Usually on Tuesdays we will be concerned with the ideas in the week’s text – I will lead these sessions. On Thursdays we will brainstorm our own ways beyond the week’s text – in the main part of the course, student groups will plan and lead these sessions.

Grades

Five elements determine your grade in this class. Each counts equally (one-fifth).

1) Attendance and participation. We meet only twice a week for 14 weeks, and many of the course’s various topics and activities build on each other. Any pattern of missed classes will make the class much less useful to you and less helpful to others too. You can only make your creative contribution to our joint work if you are present and speaking up – in the small-group work as well as the general class discussions.

2) Tuesday check-ins. Normally we will start each Tuesday with a short-answer check-in: a quick writing based on the week’s reading. I want both to get a sense of how you are keeping

up and to give you some feedback on how you are doing. Often class will begin with the quick-write question, which among other things is a good reason to be sure you show up on time (no late check-ins).

3) Thursday essays. On Thursdays each week there will be a short essay due on an assigned topic, also coming out of the reading but heading in a more open-ended direction. These essays should be 400-500 words – no room for filler!! – and *typed*. (The occasional handwritten paper is OK – I know, your printer may run out of paper or whatever – if you show me that it is complete right at the start of class.) Please note that I am happy to take late essays to read and comment as usual, but not for credit.

4) Group discussion planning and leading. From weeks 5-9 and 11, student groups will plan and lead the Thursday workshops – 6 sessions total, so you’ll be working with 3-4 other students. This is not a “presentation” in the usual way but rather your chance to take some leadership in pushing the group’s imagination on the week’s topic even farther and in more new directions. After a few weeks of class you’ll have a better idea of what I mean: we’ll start group planning in week 3.

5) Final project. By April we will have surveyed a wide range of topics and a vast range of new ideas and resources. Our final project will be to take some problem area and initial great idea, work it out much farther, and then *launch it* – begin to actually make it happen. We might choose to do several such projects, even some individual ones, but my guess is that probably we will end up doing one project all together as a class. Anyway, the structure and direction of the project are wide open, along with the topic area (OK, I have some ideas, but really we need to see what comes up over the term – everyone should keep a little list somewhere). We’ll begin brainstorming and giving shape to the eventual project right after Break: we’ll have about three weeks at the end to devote to it fulltime. Your contribution to the eventual final project(s) will determine the last part of your grade. Note that this may or may not be a piece of writing. My guess is that it will involve some writing aspects, but also many other aspects too – something for everyone. But we’ll have to wait and see...!

So finally... be sure this class is for you

This class asks you to “stretch the envelope” in various ways, starting with meeting off campus and outside as much as possible, and ending with a completely open-ended and wildly ambitious final project. It is meant to offer a serious challenge to your creativity and imagination, all the time. It is a class, all right, but it is also an adventure, an invitation, with uncertain outcomes. **There are certainly easier ways to get your upper-level GST credit!!** Please talk me if you have questions or concerns (and do it right away).