INSISTENCE AND POSSIBILITY: NEW AND ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY PROJECTS IN 21ST CENTURY NEW YORK

OVERVIEW

There are approximately 50 worker-owned cooperatives currently operating in New York City, as well as numerous collective housing projects, intentional communities, community gardens and urban farms, and a growing number participatory budgeting initiatives. What ethical principles or ideological positions do such projects hold in common, if any? What desires, needs and aspirations do they attempt to address? Do they form a challenge to capitalist hegemony, or do they see themselves as operating outside of it, or both? Is there an outside to capitalism? How do the participants understand themselves as political actors, if at all? What kinds of personal transformation might arise through the act of participation? Upon what kinds of possibility do such projects and initiatives ultimately insist?

In this class, students will examine the social, political and historical trajectories of which these projects and initiatives are a part, through various reading and writing assignments. In addition, students will be asked to engage directly and deeply with a specific ongoing “possibility project” in the city, selected from a long and growing list to which students will be invited to add. The culminating project of the course will be a research-based paper, presentation or art project. The ultimate form that this project will take is up to the students, in consultation with the professor, and collaboration will be encouraged.

We will also be exploring questions around the topic of collaboration and community engagement. Under what conditions can genuine collaboration take place, and what practices can help foster it? How can one engage and collaborate across lines of difference such as race and class, in a process that moves beyond charity towards genuine solidarity?

GOALS

1- Develop a critical language with which to talk about political, social, and economic projects that attempt to create alternative models for addressing human needs and desires such as affordable housing, a decent wage, dignity in work, and participation in civic life.
2- Knowledge of the history and context out of which these alternative models have arisen, up to and including the current moment and current efforts.

3- A deep, first-hand understanding of a specific project’s goals and aspirations, it’s challenges and successes, as well as the motivations and desires of its participants

4- Reflection on the nature of participation itself. How do we participate and/or not participate in the shaping of our own lives and the lives of those around us.

5- How to creatively approach the presentation of research-based academic work.

**EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING**

**Student Responsibilities**

- Treat class time as an opportunity.
- Arrive to class on time, with all materials, ready to work steadily throughout the session. Be prepared with all your required materials for every class. Complete all assignments on time.
- Participate in all class discussions and critiques. Confront difficulties in your work in the spirit of learning, creative exploration and personal growth. Ask for help from your instructor when needed.
- Respect your fellow students at all times. Disruptive behavior is not tolerated.
- No radios, players, walkmans, beepers or cellular phones are allowed in class.

In this class you will be asked to do a significant amount of work on-site, conducting research and participating/volunteering in a project, sometimes in collaboration with others. The amount of time and effort that you put into project work, along with the quality of your participation in the class will be the critical factors comprising your grade. The most important things you can do are to (a) show up to class prepared to participate in discussion; (b) turn in all written assignments on time: and (c) be a responsible and accountable collaborative partner. Here’s a guideline for how grading works in this class:

**Attendance and Participation: 50%**

Come to class, on time, prepared, and participate. Our classes will be very full, moving from one exercise to another as we try to cover a lot of ground in limited time. It’s important that you show up on time. Three late arrivals will count as one absence. So, show up on time and be prepared to participate. Absences will be excused only in the case of a note from a doctor or other verification that you could not attend class.

**Papers and Projects- 50%**

There will be significant written work for the class. Most of the written work will come in the form of weekly response papers, which will be 3-5 page papers in response to assigned readings. These are due at the beginning of Thursday’s class, printed, double spaced. Late papers are graded accordingly. In addition there will be three projects that have written components and class presentations. For projects #2 and #3, the sort of work you produce (in what medium) is
something you can decide for yourselves, in consultation with me. More detail on the course projects is in the next section.

Results matter, but so does process. In the end, the quality of the work that you do is what will make you proud of yourselves, and that’s what matters more than any grade. But how you get there, the preparations you make and the process by which you make it all come together is something that I will pay attention to.

Finally, collaboration, collegiality and respect for one another are required. If you choose to collaborate with others in the class, it must be a genuine collaboration based on mutual respect and shared responsibility. Students in one group may receive differing grades if it becomes clear that they are doing more or less work.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
You belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS AND TIMELINE
Project 1 - Defining Terms, Sharpening Analysis
Due date: October 3rd
Deliverables: 2-4 page paper, and brief (5 minute) class presentations (a “teach-in”). For your first presentation assignment, you will be asked to identify a concept, term, person, or philosophy that you have come across in class assignments or discussion about which you would like to know more. What are you curious about? What do you think you ought to try and understand better? What confuses you? Write a paper explaining it in some detail, including historical context and, why it’s important to the topics of the class, and why you chose it. Challenge yourself. Upon completing that paper, you will collectively teach one another what you have learned, in class, on October 3rd and/or October 5th
Examples of terms/concepts: Hegemony, Anarchism, Solidarity, Fouerierism, Utopian Socialism, Alienation of Labor, Patriarchy, Use-Value vs. Exchange Value, Wage theft, Wage Slavery, Barter Economy, etc...

Project 2 - Modern Cases of Possibility Projects
Due Date: October 26th-November 30th
Deliverables: You will work in twos and threes and closely examine one modern case study of a “possibility project” that we are NOT otherwise covering in the class otherwise. The modern case studies that we will be examining in class are Mondragon, The Zapatistas, Argentina 2001, the Black Panthers, and Cooperation Jackson. You may pick one from the Google Drive Folder, or
choose one of your own and create an additional folder. You will present to the class your findings as a power-point or some other visual presentational format, and facilitate a conversation following your presentation.

**Project 3 - Participatory Research Project**

**Due Date: December 12th**

**Deliverables:** You will work alone, or pairs, or in groups of up to three people. You will volunteer with a NYC-based “possibility project” of your choosing, for 6-8 weeks, during which time you will conduct research about the project and its participants. You will keep a journal of your experiences. Ultimately, this research will be distilled into a creative presentation of some sort- a video document, photo essay, written paper, short story, one act play, podcast, power-point presentation, etc.- and presented to the class as your final project. Your presentation should last approximately 10 minutes.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**
Take Back the Economy

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS - Provisional**

**WEEK ONE - Greetings!**

*September 7th - Class #1*

Welcome!

**WEEK TWO - Defining some terms**

*September 12th*

Assignments Due:
Read *Other Economies Are Possible*, by Ethan Miller
Watch *Can We Do It Ourselves?* (Filmography Folder)
Examine: Bluestockings Bookstore website

**In Class:** Field Trip to Bluestockings Bookstore

*September 14th*

Assignment Due:
Read: Prologue and Chapter 1 in *Take Back the Economy*, by JK Gibson-Graham
Read: *Critics of Capitalism Must Include Its Definition*, by Richard Wolff
Watch *Shapes of the Solidarity Economy* (Filmography Folder)
Write: Response Paper #1

**In Class:**
Discuss Readings
Discuss Projects- (Stake your claim. Find your partner. Find your home)

**WEEK THREE - Cooperativism and Associationism**

*September 19th*
Assignment Due:
Read: pages 1-37, and 49-55 in *The Meaning of Rochdale*, by Brett Fairbairn
Pages 1-19 in *Self-Help by the People*
For context, take a look at this webpage, and this Wikipedia Entry

September 21st
Assignment Due
Read: *Take Back The Economy* Chapter 2
Radical Equality 1842-1846
Write: Response Paper #2
In Class:
Discuss Readings

WEEK FOUR- Utopianism and The Path to Freedom
September 26th
Assignment Due:
Read Introduction and pages 13-17; 34-48 in *Brooklyn’s Promised Land*, by Judith Wellman (in Weeksville Folder)
Explore: This website about abolitionist Brooklyn, particularly the lesson plans....
In Class:
Discuss Readings

September 28th
Assignment Due:
Read: Introduction on *Open Utopias* website- Stephen Duncombe
[skim] Book II of Thomas More’s Utopia
Write: Response Paper #3
In Class:
Discuss Readings

WEEK FIVE- Taking Stock
October 3rd
Assignment Due:
Project #1- Terms/Concept Paper
In Class:
Teach-in!

October 5th- GUEST LECTURE
Assignment Due:
Dig into the Solidarity NYC Website and other resources to choose 2-3 options for your final project. Also look at Meerkat Media’s website.
In Class:
Guest Lecturer Zara Serabian-Arthur
WEEK SIX- Taking Stock  
October 10th- FALL RECESS. NO CLASS

October 12th-  
Assignment Due:  
Read: Chapter 3 in Take Back the Economy  
Teach-ins Continue  
Preliminary decisions on research site for Project #3  
In Class:  
Teach-ins  
Report backs on contacts made

WEEK SEVEN-Mondragon Spain  
October 17th  
Assignment Due:  
Read article: The Mondragon Cooperatives and 21st Century Socialism: A Review of Five Books with Radical Critiques and New Ideas  
Watch: The Mondragon Experiment  
In Class:  
Discuss Readings  
Report-Backs on Projects #2 and #3

October 19th  
Assignment Due:  
Read: Read Chapter 6 and final chapter in Take Back the Economy  
Write: Response Paper #4  
In Class:  
Discuss Readings

WEEK EIGHT- South America  
October 17th  
Assignment Due:  
Watch Sixth Sun: Mayan Uprising in Chiapas  
Read: Introduction to Compañeras, by Hilary Klein; The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, and pages 199-217 in Little English School.  
In Class:  
Discuss Readings

October 19th  
Assignment Due:  
Read the Introduction and Chapter 2 from Everyday Revolutions, by Marina Sitrin  
Watch: The Take
Response Paper #5

In Class:
Discuss Readings

**WEEK SEVEN**
*October 24th* - Black Panthers and Cooperation Jackson

**Assignment Due:**
Read: [Communalism and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California](#)  
[The Jackson-Kush Plan](#)  
[Obituary of Chokwe Lumumba](#)

Turn in Research Schedules

*October 26th* - Student Presentation 1

**Assignment Due:**

**WEEK EIGHT**
*October 31*
SITE WORK

*November 2nd* - Student Presentation 2

**Assignment Due:**

**WEEK NINE**
*November 7th*
SITE WORK

*November 9th* - Student Presentation 3

Assignment:

**WEEK TEN**
*November 14th*
SITE WORK

*November 16th* - Student Presentation 4

Assignment:

**WEEK ELEVEN**
*November 21st* - Student presentation 5
SITE WORK

*November 23rd* - THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS

Assignment:
WEEK TWELVE-
November 28th
SITE WORK

November 30th- Student Presentation 6
Assignment:

WEEK THIRTEEN-
December 5th-
SITE WORK or FIELD TRIP

December 7th- Final Presentations

WEEK FOURTEEN- Final Presentations
December 12th- Final Presentations

December 13th-?????

December 14th- Final Presentations