***The Postmortal*: Common Reading 2014-15**

**Book Discussion with Stacey Bieber**

**April 21, 2014**

*The Postmortal* offers many themes and topics worth pursuing in classes at CSUN. The following list is arranged alphabetically by topic. Each topic includes questions and suggested readings. For additional information or questions, please feel free to contact me at [stacey.bieber@csun.edu](mailto:stacey.bieber@csun.edu).

**Blogs**

**Moodle Question:** What is a blog? Do you read any blogs? If you don't read blogs, take a few minutes and look at some blogs. What features are important for a quality blog?

**Moodle Question:** How often do you use Internet sites to find information? How do you assess the credibility of a source?

**Moodle Question:** Where do you get most of your news? How trustworthy is your news source? Do you think it is important to receive news from a variety of sources?

**Readings:**

[“The Amorality of Web 2.0”](http://www.roughtype.com/?p=110) by Nicholas Carr

www.roughtype.com/?p=110

[“War Takes Up Less Time on Fox News”](http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2007Jun11/0,4675,APonTVFoxapossWar,00.html) by David Bauder

http://www.foxnews.com/printer\_friendly\_wires/2007Jun11/0,4675,APonTVFoxapossWar,00.html

**Consumerism**

“We’re staying at the Fountain of Youth. We have to go all the way with this. I’ll even pay for yours. I can’t have a half-assed cure party” (82).

“Next to the casino floor at the Fountain of Youth is a stadium-sized mall that houses nothing but shops selling cure related merchandise” (89).

**Moodle Question:** Do you think there is a limit to what can or should be bought and sold? Are there some things that should never be assigned monetary value?

**Readings:**

[“What Isn’t for Sale?” by Michael J. Sandel](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/04/what-isnt-for-sale/308902)

http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/04/what-isnt-for-sale/308902/

[“Consumerism is ‘eating the future’”](http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17569-consumerism-is-eating-the-future.html#.U1MAQMdNr3w)by Andy Coghlan

http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17569-consumerism-is-eating-the-future.html#.U1XHi8dNr3x

**Education**

*Does education still matter?*

“You know they don’t want to finish high school? Jay walked right up to me the other day and told me he wanted to go to New Zealand next year. I asked for how long. And he said, oh, maybe a decade...I read about how all the college enrollments are down and kids are putting everything off” (157-158).

**Moodle Question:** Do you think a college education should be focused on specific careers or tasks, or do you think it should encompass multiple areas of study?

**Readings:**

[“3 reasons college still matters”](http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2012/03/04/reasons-college-still-matters/Dfav44acJ8HpkU6Xu2D5CN/story.html) by Andrew Delbanco

http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2012/03/04/reasons-college-still-matters/Dfav44acJ8HpkU6Xu2D5CN/story.html

[“Tuning In to Dropping Out”](http://chronicle.com/article/Tuning-In-to-Dropping-Out/130967/) by Alex Tabarrok

http://chronicle.com/article/Tuning-In-to-Dropping-Out/130967/

**Euthanasia**

*Should doctors be allowed to help terminally ill people die?*

*Do the terminally ill have a right to choose when to end their lives?*

*Does permitting assisted suicide lead to abuse?*

“I answered him carefully. ‘I’ve had people in my life who to die on their own terms. And I’ve had people in my life who didn’t have any say in the matter. I don’t want anyone to go out that way if they don’t want to. I want to help” (181).

**Readings**

[“Why Do Americans Balk at Euthanasia Laws?”](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/04/10/why-do-americans-balk-at-euthanasia-laws) *New York Times* (Multiple articles)

http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/04/10/why-do-americans-balk-at-euthanasia-laws

["Assisted Suicide"](http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2013051700) by Karaim Reed (CQ Researcher)

http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2013051700

[“Three Farewells: Medicine & the End of Life”](http://www.learner.org/series/ethics2/three_farewells/index.html) Ethics in America (Video 56:46)

https://www.learner.org/series/ethics2/three\_farewells/index.html

**Freedom of Speech**

*What does freedom of speech really mean?*

*Who decides what is offensive language and what is not?*

“At the time of legalization, XMN…was part of a large online subculture of people known as “trolls,” cyberanarchists who enjoy wreaking as much havoc online as they possible can—on message boards, blogs, feeds, everywhere” (91).

**Moodle Question:** What happens when the right of one person to state his or her beliefs conflicts with rights of others to be free from verbal abuse?

**Moodle Question**: Should college campuses have speech codes?

**Moodle Question:** Have you ever been bullied on or offline? How did it make you feel?

**Readings:**

[“The Dark Side of Web Anonymity”](http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-04-30/the-dark-side-of-web-anonymity) by Catherine Holahan

http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-04-30/the-dark-side-of-web-anonymity

[“Cyber-Bullying: Creating a Culture of Respect in a Cyber World”](http://www.crisisprevention.com/Resources/Knowledge-Base/Education/School-Bullying-Resources-and-References/Cyber-Bullying-Creating-a-Culture-of-Respect-in-a) by Susan Keith and Michelle E. Martin

<http://www.crisisprevention.com/Resources/Knowledge-Base/Education/School-Bullying-Resources-and-References/Cyber-Bullying-Creating-a-Culture-of-Respect-in-a>

**Home**

“And cars. From the road to the horizon, on both sides, stretched an enormous, undulating metallic quilt—a mix of vapor greens, galaxy whites, Icelandic blues, and thousands of other colors found nowhere in the nature. The old limos were dubbed McMansions by the people living there. And the campers and Winnebagos were like forty-four-acre estates” (187).

**Moodle Question:** What do you believe a home reveals about cultural values?  Who should own a home?  Is home ownership important? Who should live in a home? What should a home contain? How does the space of the home reflect these values?

**Moodle Question:** Upload a picture of the place you think of as home.  Then write a description of it that conveys what it represents to you.

**Readings:**

[“Iwan Baan: Ingenious Homes in Unexpected Places”](http://www.ted.com/talks/iwan_baan_ingenious_homes_in_unexpected_places) TED Talk Video (16:58)

http://www.ted.com/talks/iwan\_baan\_ingenious\_homes\_in\_unexpected\_places

[“A tiny home tour: Jay Shafer’s 89-square –foot home on wheels”](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJLSoUkh1Vs)  Video (6:45)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJLSoUkh1Vs

[“CBS Sunday Morning: Small house living in Japan”](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEaa0LCY47k) Video (2:44)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEaa0LCY47k

[“Visiting a Favela in San Paulo”](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGXjNCGiEVw)  Video (3:10)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGXjNCGiEVw

**Human Genetic Modification**

*Is genetic modification of human beings acceptable?*

“So, what this involves is me taking a sample of your DNA, then finding and altering—or, more precisely, deactivating—a specific gene in your DNA, and then reintroducing it into your body…the virus will replicate the new gene code throughout your system” (7).

“I had it done. I found a new geneticist, Dr. Neil. He’s great. Like the blonde?” (123).

**Moodle Question:** Where would you draw the line with genetic technology between using it to avoid passing on a devastating genetic condition, and using it to give a child enhanced athletic, cosmetic, and cognitive traits? Should we be afraid to use genetic technology? Do you personally consider this possibility frightening?

**Readings:**

[“Genetically Modified Humans? No Thanks”](http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/15/AR2008041501620.html) by Richard Hayes

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/15/AR2008041501620.html>

[“A Better Brain: The Ethics of Neuro-Enhancement”](https://www.learner.org/series/ethics2/better_brain/index.html) Ethics in America (Video-56:46)

https://www.learner.org/series/ethics2/better\_brain/index.html

**Income Inequality**

*Does the gap between rich and poor threaten democracy?*

“Why should we pay 30 percent of our salaries to help keep some crack addict in Detroit on welfare for the next thousand years? Why should we care about people in California? Or Florida? Or New York? Why should we share anything with them? They’re not our people” (96).

**Readings**

["Wealth and Inequality"](http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2014041800) by Susan Glazer (CQ Researcher)

http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2014041800

[“The Middle Class Is Steadily Eroding”](http://tinyurl.com/l7fwj86) by Nelson D. Schwartz

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/03/business/the-middle-class-is-steadily-eroding-just-ask-the-business-world.html?\_r=0

[“Class in America: Mobility, measured”](http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21595437-america-no-less-socially-mobile-it-was-generation-ago-mobility-measured) *The Economist*

<http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21595437-america-no-less-socially-mobile-it-was-generation-ago-mobility-measured>

[“Crossing a St. Louis street that divides communities”](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17361995) BBC Videos (4:06)

http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17361995

**Marriage**

**“**Three weeks ago I helped our firm devise a lucrative new type of prenuptial agreement between a banker and his fiancée. It’s a forty-year marriage. Set in stone. No divorcing allowed without significant penalties. The couple agrees to be together for forty years, with the marriage automatically dissolving at the end of that period and the assets divided at a previously agreed-upon percentage. The couple could then pick up an additional forty-year option if they wished. My boss has even coined a new term for it: “cycle marriage”.” He says it could help raise marriage rates back up to where they were a few years ago” (80).

**Moodle Question**: Do you think more people today are less inclined to get married than in previous generations? Why or why not?

**Moodle Question:** Why do you think the divorce rate is so high in America? What are some solutions you can think of to lower the rate of divorce?

**Readings:**

[“The Marriage Crisis”](http://uvamagazine.org/articles/the_marriage_crisis) by Aja Gabel

http://uvamagazine.org/articles/the\_marriage\_crisis

[“Temporary marriage licenses not a solution to increasing divorce rates](http://sundial.csun.edu/2012/05/temporary-marriage-licenses-not-a-solution-to-increasing-divorce-rates/)” by Natalie Rivera

http://sundial.csun.edu/2012/05/temporary-marriage-licenses-not-a-solution-to-increasing-divorce-rates/

**Prison**

*Should mandatory sentences be abolished?*

*Do alternatives to incarceration reduce recidivism?*

*Are lengthy sentences necessary to protect public safety?*

“Already many states have adjusted their sentencing guidelines to prevent the indefinite housing of prisoners. Some states, like California, have instituted a one-hundred-year maximum collective sentence, despite fiery opposition from victim’s rights’ groups. Maine is now tinkering with idea of a permanent island prison, which is not expected to get financing approval. And officials in Oklahoma have considered implementing a delayed death sentence, which would mandate the execution of any state prisoner over the true age of eighty-five, regardless of cure age” (154).

**Moodle Question:** Do you believe prison deters crime?

**Readings:**

[“Misplaced Priorities: Over Incarcerate Under Educate”](http://www.naacp.org/pages/misplaced-priorities)  NAACP Report

http://www.naacp.org/pages/misplaced-priorities

[“Beyond the Prison Bubble”](http://nij.gov/journals/268/Pages/prison-bubble.aspx) by Joan Petersilia

http://nij.gov/journals/268/Pages/prison-bubble.aspx

["Sentencing Reform"](http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2014011000) by Sarah Glazer (CQ Researcher)

<http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2014011000>

[“To Defend a Killer”](http://www.learner.org/vod/vod_window.html?pid=192)  Ethics in America (Video 58:13)

http://www.learner.org/vod/vod\_window.html?pid=192

**Sex Trafficking**

*Are governments doing enough to eradicate the illicit trade?*

*Are anti-trafficking laws tough enough?*

“I saw a report about what was going on in Thailand, how there were young girls over there who had been given the cure and sold as prostitutes” (120).

**Readings:**

[“Striking the Brothels’ Bottom Line”](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/opinion/11kristof.html?_r=0) by Nicholas D. Kristof

[“Sex-Trafficking in Cambodia”](http://video.pbs.org/video/2283614000/)  PBS Video (10:11)

http://video.pbs.org/video/2283614000/

[“Breaking the Chains of Modern Day Slavery: Sex-Trafficking and Intergenerational Prostitution: Lesson Plan”](http://cdn.itvs.org/half_the_sky-slavery.pdf) by PBS (PDF—Lesson Plan)

http://cdn.itvs.org/half\_the\_sky-slavery.pdf

["Human Trafficking and Slavery”](http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqrglobal2012101600) by Robert Keiner (CQ Researcher)

http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqrglobal2012101600

**Social Media**

*How has social media changed the way we relate to others?*

*Is the Internet changing our lives?*

*Are we giving our privacy away?*

**“**I had seen him on screen virtually all his life. The ads always tell you that using WEPS is like never leaving home or whatever” (214).

“Solara used my WEPS to erase all of Ingrid Malmsteen’s social accounts, as well as the ones the real Solara Beck still kept active. I asked her not use the new WEPS to search for anything related to her old self, lest the search engines solve her new identity in a matter of frames” (328).

**Moodle Question**: Does the Internet isolate us? Does the use of social media make you feel closer to people or farther away? Based on your own experience, what do you think? Explain.

**Moodle Question:** How dependent are you on the Internet? Can you imagine going a month, week, or even a day without logging on?

**Readings:**

[Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/) by Stephen Marche

http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/

[“How Social Media Is Having a Positive Impact on Our Culture”](http://mashable.com/2011/02/23/social-media-culture/)  by Josh Rose

http://mashable.com/2011/02/23/social-media-culture/

[“Invading Our Own Privacy”](http://www.utne.com/science-and-technology/invading-our-own-privacy.aspx#axzz2zNIDqN7) by David Schimke

http://www.utne.com/science-and-technology/invading-our-own-privacy.aspx#axzz2zNIDqN7

[“Who is really stealing your privacy?”](http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/12/01/etzioni.privacy/) by Amitai Etzioni

http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/12/01/etzioni.privacy/

[“The Invasion of the Cookie Monsters”](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2010/11/the_invasion_of_the_cookie_monsters.html)  by Jack Shafer

http://www.slate.com/articles/news\_and\_politics/press\_box/2010/11/the\_invasion\_of\_the\_cookie\_monsters.html

[“How Facebook is Redefining Privacy”](http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1990798,00.html) by Dan Fletcher

["Big Data and Privacy"](http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2013102500) by Tom Price (CQ Researcher)

http://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2013102500

**Violence**

“It was the world’s largest used car lot, petrified in amber and transformed into one of the more unpleasant cities you will ever visit. The Nebraska car yard is supposedly where the D36 gang began. It formed well after I left, but apparently some of the vagrants decided the best way to survive was to join together and start pillaging the hell out of everything. Then the drug dealers joined in, and the whole area became a giant black tumor on the landscape” (187).

**Moodle Question:** Is the world more peaceful or more violent than the world of the past? On what evidence do you base your position?

**Moodle Question:** What is the best way to help communities cope with escalating violence?

**Readings:**

[“Violence Vanquished”](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424053111904106704576583203589408180) by Steven Pinker

http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2012/03/04/reasons-college-still-matters/Dfav44acJ8HpkU6Xu2D5CN/story.html

[“Defusing Violence”](http://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr/Articles/Rotarian.pdf) by Alex Kotlowitz (PDF)

http://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr/Articles/Rotarian.pdf

**Work**

*Why do we work?*

“You can’t retire now. How are you gonna quit your job at sixty-five if you live for another five hundred years...This just gives me more time to figure out what it is I really want to do…I’m not preparing for some sixty-five end goal anymore. That rush to save money, or whatever, is all gone now” (30-31).

**Moodle Question**: What are your expectations when you graduate from college? What do you want to derive from your career? How do you define success?

**Moodle Question:** How do you define the American Dream?

**Readings:**

[“Why We Work”](http://www.andrewcurry.com/portfolio/WhyWeWork.html) by Andrew Curry

http://www.andrewcurry.com/portfolio/WhyWeWork.html

“[America’s bizarre secret to happiness: More work”](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1378297/Americas-bizarre-secret-happiness-More-work-Europe-pursuit-pleasure-key.html)  reported in *Daily Mail*

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1378297/Americas-bizarre-secret-happiness-More-work-Europe-pursuit-pleasure-key.html

**And: One More Assignment Suggestion**

[**A Modest Proposal (Jonathan Swift)**](http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/swift/swift-modestproposal6x9.pdf) (PDF)

http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/swift/swift-modestproposal6x9.pdf

Essay/Moodle question: The contemporary name of the problem that Swift’s proposal addresses is “population policy.” How would you describe our nation’s current population policy? Do we have a population policy? Should we have a population policy? Why or why not? How have other countries dealt with over-population (China, in particular)?

In *The Postmortal*, the President of the United States initially bans the cure for aging. But other people have differing views on the cure. Write a letter for publication in a newspaper either supporting or opposing the President’s ban on administration of the cure. In your letter, consider your audience. Those who already agree with your position do not need to be convinced. How would you convince a reasonable person to at least consider your position? What rhetorical strategies would work best?