

Instr. Daniel Hoffman-Schwartz
Gallatin School of Individualized Study
715B, 601 Broadway
9:30-10:45, MW
Office hours: 11-12, MW, room 615

WSII: Why War? (K10.0669)

Why has war been a constant of human societies? Why is war such an object of philosophical and aesthetic fascination? And what to do with the almost endless metaphorical extensions of the concept of war (e.g., “the war on terror,” “the war on drugs,” even Hobbes’ famous description of “the war of all against all” or Marx’s description of capitalist society as “civil war”)? In this writing class, we’ll answer these questions and others, placing a particular emphasis on the dilemmas and difficulties, at once ethical and stylistic, of writing about war. In a series of writing assignments of various genres (including literary criticism, theoretical essay, and research paper), we’ll attempt to come to terms with the “spectacle” of war; that is, the conventional aesthetic forms by which war is depicted in literature and film, and other, less familiar or relatively overlooked scenes of war.

Assignments:

3 4-6 page essays, 1 8-10 page research paper. (Due dates marked in bold on syllabus)

We will also have several writing workshops for which you will be expected to prepare an outline or partial draft. (Also marked in bold on the syllabus)

Weekly reading journals due every Monday, unless otherwise noted; each entry should consist of a 1 page commentary on a single passage from that week’s reading. (Reading journals dates marked with an asterisk.)

Grading:

These assignments, along with your attendance and participation, constitute the components of your grade; robust participation, which necessarily entails coming to class prepared to discuss the texts, will be especially valued. 3 unexcused absences will jeopardize your grade for the semester.

Required books (available at NYU Bookstore):

Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*
Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*
Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*

If do not already have it, you are also *required to purchase* the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Additional readings will be made available as photocopies throughout the semester.

January 21th: Introduction, overview, handout (Hobbes).

**January 26th: Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story."

January 28th: "How to Tell a True War Story," continued.

**February 2nd: Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

February 4th: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* continued.

February 9th: Tim O'Brien, "Speaking of Courage," "Notes"; excerpt from Benjamin or Lukacs.

February 11th: O'Brien continued, outlines for paper # 1 due in class; workshop.

**February 16th: no class.

February 18th: paper # 1 due, selection from Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces*.

February 23rd: Melville continued, selection from Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*.

February 25th: Melville and Whitman continued.

March 2nd: Writing about poetry workshop; outlines due in class.

March 4th: Workshop continued.

Friday, March 5th: paper # 2 due in my box by 5pm.

**March 9th: Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others."

March 11th: Judith Butler, "War, Photography, Outrage."

(Spring Break)

**March 23rd: *Waltz with Bashir*; Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*.

March 25th: *Waltz with Bashir*, *Memory for Forgetfulness* continued.

March 30th: *Memory for Forgetfulness* continued.

April 1st: *Apocalypse Now* and/or *Tropic Thunder*; excerpt from Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry."

April 6th: workshop: writing about film and photography; draft/outline of paper #3 due.

April 8th: workshop continued.

Friday, April 9th: paper # 3 due in my box by 5pm.

April 13th: Research paper discussion and brain-storming; **1 paragraph abstract of research paper due in class.**

April 15th: Special session in library with reference librarians.

**April 20th: Virginia Woolf, excerpt from *Three Guineas*; Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death."

April 22nd: Presentation, discussion, workshop of final research projects.

(Note: we will have 4 sessions devoted to presenting and workshopping final research papers; a draft of your final paper will be due on the *specific day that we workshop your paper*; details to follow.)

April 27th: Presentations continued.

April 29th : Presentations continued.

May 4th: Wrap-up of final research paper presentations; general conclusions.

Friday, May 8th, 5pm; final essays due in my box.