

Looking at War
ENGF 390 R1, Hendrix College, Spring 2024

Dr. Alex Vernon
office hours: MWF 11:00-12:00; TTh 230-330
I do not hang out on MS Teams...

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Wars, like everything else, are replaced by the telling of them.

—Roman Skaskiw, “Narrative and Memory at War,” *NYT* (6 Mar 2010)



The Thin Red Line (1998)

Watching representations of, imagining, talking and writing about, and doing war. This course explores the interrelationship of these acts and emphasizes their real consequences; our concerns are moral as well as aesthetic.

The primary materials are films, both from the U.S. and around the globe, but we will also study prose texts about (visual) representations of war and some literary texts that ask us to “look” at war. We launch the course with Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* and proceed to study foundational films such as *The Battle of Algiers* as well as newer works such as *Waltz with Bashir* and *Zero Dark Thirty*.

Be aware that the nature of our subject involves exposure to and discussion of potentially uncomfortable subjects.

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War, Words, Watching

1	Tue, 16 Jan	Snow Day!!
2	Thu, 18 Jan	Course Introduction: Before class, watch to minute 28:30 of <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> , end of D-Day scene.
3	Tue, 23 Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Podcast: BibleWorm 145, Lamentations 1:8-22 and 2:10-22, Trauma & Protest (42 minutes) ➤ Totally optional: BibleWorm 146, Lamentations 3 & 5, Trauma has Many Voices (42 minutes) ➤ Review course description/syllabus/requirements
4	Thu, 25 Jan	Sontag, "Looking at War" (a long article/essay, a somewhat shorter version of <i>Regarding the Pain of Others</i>)
5	Tue, 30 Jan	Trumbo, <i>Johnny Got His Gun</i> , Book One
6	Thu, 1 Feb	<i>Johnny Got His Gun</i> , Book Two In class: Metallica, "One"
7	Tue, 6 Feb	Kate McLoughlin, "War and Words" Jan Mieszkowski, "Watching War"

Theaters of War

8	Thu, 8 Feb	<i>Apocalypse Now</i> theatrical release
9	Tue, 13 Feb	No class. Short Fascination Essay #1 due at 2:30 on Teams
10	Thu, 15 Feb	Weschler, "Valkyries over Iraq" Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor"
11	Tue, 20 Feb	<i>The Thin Red Line</i>
12	Thu, 22 Feb	Pippin, "Vernacular Metaphysics: On Malick's <i>TRL</i>," PWF 385-412 Silberman on Malick, Landscape, and War in the Heart of Nature

Visualizing the Iraq Wars

13	Tue, 27 Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Midterm Engagement Reflection & Grade due on Teams ➤ In class: watch <i>Lessons of Darkness</i> (Herzog)
14	Thu, 29 Feb	<i>The Hurt Locker</i> In class: "Home Fires: Retelling the War"
15	Tue, 5 Mar	Sharif, <i>Look</i> , poems TBD
16	Thu, 7 Mar	<i>Look</i> , poems TBD
17	Tue, 12 Mar	<i>Look</i> , poems TBD
18	Thu, 14 Mar	No class. Short Fascination Essay #2 due at 2:30 on Teams

All linked texts are also in Teams "Readings" folder.

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21-25 Mar	Spring break
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Hurting to See

19	Tue, 26 Mar	<i>Battle of Algiers</i>	
20	Thu, 28 Mar	Repass, "Toward a Revolutionary Space" Harrison, "Pontecorvo's 'Documentary' Aesthetics"	
21	Tue, 2 Apr	Schechner, "9-11 as Avant-Garde Art"	In class: watch 9/11 shorts
22	Thu, 4 Apr	<i>Zero Dark Thirty</i>	
23	Tue, 9 Apr	Burgoyne, "The Violated Body," PWF, 247-260 Evans, "The Work of Art in the Age of Embedded Journalism," PWF, 355-391	

Visualizing Memory

24	Thu, 11 Apr	<i>Hiroshima, Mon Amour</i>	
25	Tue, 16 Apr	<i>Waltz with Bashir</i>	
26	Thu, 18 Apr	Hochberg, "Soldiers as Filmmakers" Schlunke, "Animated Documentary and the Scene of Death"	
27	Tue, 23 Apr	2nd Half Engagement Reflection & Grade due on Teams In class: watch <i>Colette</i> ; discussion with filmmaker Aaron Matthews	
28	Thu, 25 Apr	writing/conference day	
	Mon, 29 Apr	Reading Day	
	Wed, 1 May 2:00-5:00	Final Fasciation Essay due by 2:00/Teams. "Optional" Style Revision: Receive at 2:00; submit by 5:00/Teams.	

Viewing Films: This course, by braiding film, theory, and other creative texts, transforms media from its original entertainment purpose and situates it—via critical commentary, detailed analysis, student reflection, and class discussion—within a noncommercial educational context. Students can access a film through an online private link, through personal access, and occasionally in class. All these methods are in keeping with fair use principles, given our educational contextualization of the material.

Course Goals (see also [Literary Studies learning domain goals](#)).

- 1) Study the aesthetic and moral considerations involved with war representation and spectatorship.
- 2) Substantively engage with the course material.
- 3) Improve your writing through experience writing three essays on the traditional-creative criticism spectrum.

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Course Requirements. The course has a possible 105 points graded on a traditional 100-pt scale:

Course Engagement (20 pts): Because I only have access to your attendance, verbalized class participation, and communication with me outside class, I can't appreciate the full extent of your engagement with the material. You will assign your own Course Engagement grade. You'll do this twice—at midterm and at the end of the semester.

Discussion Prompts (10 pts): At the beginning of each class for which we have assigned reading/viewing, submit a brief note (1-2 sentences) for each of two aspects of the material you want to discuss. A scene, an idea, a passage. Ask a question or make a supposition. Be curious.

Final Fascination Essay (30 pts): Seize on an aspect of the texts we've studied that fascinates you, and explore that fascination toward understanding. All critical work is creative, informed by one's own voice and perspective, experiences, imagination, and expressivity. Consider a familiar essay that draws on experience to illuminate the text and vice versa. While the assignment requires that you foreground why the essay matters to you, it does not require you to write in the first person. Plenty of excellent "traditional" scholarship engages creatively and personally without overtly making the self one of its subjects. The structure can range along the creative-traditional spectrum. And because all writing belongs in a larger conversation, the final essay must include at least three sources (of any sort, as long as you can argue for their relevancy; at least one source must be a conventional academic essay or chapter. Details to follow.

Two Short Fascination Essays (15 pts each): Shorter versions of the final essay. Seize on something from the first and then the second segments of course that fascinate you and write about that fascination. Minimize the first person! Write about the ideas and objects of study, not yourself (unless your own self-reflection is the object of study). Use at least two sources—most likely a primary text and then a secondary one that helps illuminate the first. 4-5 pages double-spaced (1200-1500 words).

"Optional" Fascination Essay (10 pts): About a text not studied by the class. Consult with me. Submit any time after the first short fascination essay is returned.

"Optional" Final Essay Style Revision (3 pts): Conducted remotely during the final exam period.

"Optional" Course Evaluation (2 pts): This is an important reflection opportunity.

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Other Policies

- ✘ All members of this community are expected to contribute to a respectful and welcoming environment. If you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, contact the Dean of Students Office (Mike Leblanc, leblanc@hendrix.edu 501-450-1222 or the Title IX Coordinator (Dr. Jennifer Fulbright, SLTC #150, Fulbright@hendrix.edu, 501-505-2901). If you have ideas for improving the classroom experience, talk with me. See the [Hendrix non-discrimination policies](#).
- ✘ **Electronic devices:** E-readers for course material are permitted, except for cell phones. A few cautions: (1) Do not use e-readers for convenience at the expense of active reading. You are still expected to take notes, highlight passages, add comments, etc. (2) Laptops/tablets can be used in class as e-readers. Do not abuse this privilege. Keep in mind: You owe yourselves time away from a screen, and nothing is better for active reading than underlining and annotating paper copies, and taking notes by hand.
- ✘ The **syllabus** is subject to revision as the course progresses.
- ✘ **Disabilities:** Hendrix College accommodates students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Students should contact Julie Brown in the Office of Academic Success (505.2954; brownj@hendrix.edu) to begin the accommodation process. Any student seeking accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor as soon as possible.
- ✘ **Your Well-Being:** Many students face mental and/or physical health challenges. If your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. If you would like to implement academic accommodations, contact Julie Brown in the office of Academic Success (brownj@hendrix.edu). To maintain optimal health, utilize campus resources like Hendrix Medical Clinic or Counseling Services (501.450.1448). Your health and wellbeing are important. **Eat well, get sleep, and exercise!**
- ✘ **Email:** Email will be used to contact the entire class for communicating changes to the syllabus and other matters. Check your Hendrix account daily.
- ✘ **Academic Integrity:** High standards of honesty and fairness in academic pursuits are central to intellectual inquiry, character development, and community integrity. Familiarize yourself with the [statement of Academic Integrity](#). Frequently, errors in documentation and attribution are not deliberate attempts to pass off another's ideas and words as one's own, but rather misunderstandings of how to give that other person sufficient credit. Consult with me on potential confusion so we can avoid problems.
- ✘ **Late essays:** For the two short Fascination Essays, you will lose two points for every day one is late. The Final Essay cannot be late. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must consult me at least one week prior to the paper's due date (except in the case of actual emergencies, of course).

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AI-Assisted Writing

On the one hand, I discourage its use. I don't believe it can produce the kind of original work I'm asking you to achieve; I don't believe it can think the way your unique mind thinks or capture your voice. Our goal is to foster your creative critical abilities and your craft talents. We are creating knowledge based on personal encounters with texts; we are not repackaging information. On the other hand, AI is upon us, and it might prove a useful learning tool. I'm eager to talk with you about its value.

If you choose to use AI, you must adhere to academic standards for attribution, validation, and transparency. This means that you must (1) fully document all material that you did not generate [using MLA guidelines](#); (2) check information generated by AI and take full responsibility for its accuracy; (3) identify where and how you used any AI tools; and (4) **reflect in writing** on (a) how it contributed to your work, and (b) how it has made you more attentive writer. You will thus need to append a page or two of additional work. The key word here is "reflect."

Assessment of your work might include how you improve on and surpass the initial contributions of the AI.

We've been living with lower-level AI-assisted writing for many years now in the form of grammar checkers and style support. These tools are not perfect, but they are very good and getting better. This course requires AI-assisted writing in one concrete way:

Anything submitted with word processor under-squiggles for actual errors will not be accepted until you revise those squiggles away. That's just careless. Not including style choices.

Attending to the software's suggestions ideally makes us more aware of our writing and of the rules, and so should make us better writers in the long run.