

## **Seminar in Literature: Cultural Representations of Violence (CRE)**

**LLT 4513, CRN 4106**

**Spring 2019**

**Dr. Paul Jaussen**

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**Office Hours: S228, MW 12:30-1:30, and by appointment.**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The twentieth century was arguably the most violent in human history. That legacy has carried into our own time: from 9/11 to the Sandy Hook school shooting to the recent conflict in Syria, violence surrounds us. But what exactly *is* violence? How is it that we all recognize it when we see it? How do we represent it to ourselves? Most importantly, how do we make sense of it? *Can* we make sense of it?

This class will explore these questions by studying the uneasy role violence plays in literature, film, performance art, and other cultural productions. As we do so, we will consider two central and potentially conflicting ideas. On the one hand, violence tends to resist our abilities to represent it; any depiction seems somehow inadequate to the real thing. At the same time, representations of violence surround us constantly, and for any number of political, cultural, and social reasons. Thus, violence in modern and contemporary culture is paradoxical, both permeating and resisting our imaginations.

Through class discussions, written responses, presentations, and a collaborative research project, we will explore these and other ideas, considering how art attempts to comprehend violence and how artistic representations of violence relate to (implicate?) their audience. Although our focus will be largely on art, and primarily literature, our approach will be necessarily interdisciplinary. Be prepared to weigh in on topics as diverse as politics, aesthetics, philosophy, gender and sexuality, war, trauma, and colonialism. Undoubtedly, violence can be a painful subject, but the goal of our seminar is to pursue a rigorous intellectual and imaginative inquiry into one of the most pressing topics of our time.

### **Course Outcomes**

By taking this course, students will develop...

- ✓ A critical consciousness and vocabulary related to the broad topics of violence, art, and representation
- ✓ A familiarity with several individual works by major artists and philosophers, as well as works in popular culture
- ✓ Enhanced skills in close reading and artistic interpretation
- ✓ Improved written and oral communication skills, including advanced research experiences

### **REQUIRED STUDENT WORK**

1. Close and attentive reading of the assigned texts; active, engaged, and daily contribution to the class discussion.
2. 2 essays (one 3-4 pages long, one 5-6 pages)
3. Collaborative research project, including class presentation and Research Day poster

## GRADE CALCULATION

Attendance/Participation: 20%

Essay 1: 20%

Essay 2: 30%

Research presentation: 15%

Research day poster: 15%

The following grading scale will be used for computation:

A, 100% - 95%,	B, 85% - 83%	C-, 72% - 70%
A-, 94% - 90%	B-, 82% - 80%	D+, 69% - 66%
B+, 89% - 86%	C+, 79% - 76%	D, 65% - 63%
	C 75% - 73%	D-, 62% - 60%

## REQUIRED TEXTS

**In the bookstore (you MUST purchase these edition)**

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (Norton, 1996) [ISBN: 978-0393327342]

*On Violence: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence and Karim (Duke UP, 2007) [ISBN: 978-0822337690]

## On Blackboard

Various PDFs. **Print and bring hard copies on the day these texts are assigned.**

## Course-based Research Experiences (CRE)

Course-based Research Experiences provide students with the opportunity to engage in meaningful academic discovery as a part of a required course. Such experiences allow you to develop your skills as a researcher and critical thinker, while contributing to a scholarly community through your research findings.

To accomplish these goals, our course will be divided into two elements, running concurrently. We will use the first 2-3 weeks to gain our bearings, by way of a close analysis of Simone Weil and Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. For the remainder of our time, the week will typically follow the following pattern: on our Monday class, we will be reading and discussing a series of theoretical texts on violence in its various guises. In the Wednesday session, teams of students will facilitate a discussion on a contemporary book-length cultural representation of violence that they will have studied, excerpted, and shared with the class. ***These presentations will then be turned into posters to be shared at LTU's Research Day on April 5***, which in turn will lead to the final 5-6 page paper. Through this process, each student will become an expert on a single text, while the class as a whole will learn from their expertise.

Many of these readings have been selected as an element of Professor Jausen's current book project, *The Virtual Politics of Literature*, and student work will be acknowledged in the final publication.

## EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES, ADVICE

### On Reading

Henry David Thoreau said that the best books require the best of us, and that “reading in the high sense” is “not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep [...], but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to.” The more actively and intelligently you engage with these texts, the more you will get out of this course. Prepare to spend the bulk of your studying time for this class carefully reading (and rereading) the texts. We will spend some time discussing what this means but, at minimum, it requires you to read **with a pen in hand** (underlining, making comments in the margins, taking notes). I will be looking for evidence of engaged reading as the course proceeds. **ADDITIONALLY: you must bring all REQUIRED material to class in HARD COPY. If you do not have a paper copy of the reading with you, you will be marked absent.**

### Participation

Per LTU guidelines, I will be keeping attendance every day and students who miss more than 6 class sessions risk failing the course. At the same time, I believe that you are ultimately responsible for your own learning. Whether or not you attend class is entirely up to you; apart from the regulations imposed by the university, I will not reward you simply for being here or penalize you for not being here.

However, a seminar is not a lecture, but an exercise in shared learning. We teach one another in this course, and thus, if you ARE in class, I expect your fully engaged presence. As your instructor, I am responsible for guaranteeing the best classroom environment, which informs my participation guidelines. Additionally, if your classroom behaviors indicate that you are not here to learn, I will call you out as an **agent saboteur: that is, someone who has infiltrated our seminar for the purposes of disrupting its progress. Agent Saboteur behaviors include but are not limited to the following:**

- ...no hard copies of the assigned readings.
- ...use of cell phone, including texting or web browsing (if you need to take a call or text, simply step outside).
- ...use of laptop without prior permission.
- ...engaging in other behaviors (sleeping, etc.) that distract from or diminish the quality of our conversation.

Obviously, if you are not here, you will not be able to earn participation points. Your participation score will fall into one of four categories. Here are the characteristics of each category.

**Excellent participation (A):** Demonstrates leadership in our class discussion by initiating conversation on a daily basis. Listens to fellow classmates and responds to them directly. Attends each class prepared to offer relevant, insightful, and thoughtful comments and discussion questions. Demonstrates a thoughtful reading of the material, and is prepared to respond to questions about the text. Takes regular notes and actively annotates the readings.

**Good participation (B)** Speaks up in class on a daily basis. Demonstrates that he/she has read and engaged the material to some degree, but offers little insight or poor discussion

questions. Contributes to small group discussion, but fails to show leadership. Takes minimal notes.

**Passing participation (C):** Speaks up in class occasionally, but does not make a significant contribution to the class discussion. Participates in small group discussions, but minimally. Does not demonstrate basic knowledge of the material. Takes few or no notes.

**Failing participation (D/F):** Attends class, but does not speak. Does not demonstrate that he/she has read the material. Does not contribute actively to small group activities, and sits passively during large group discussion.

I will be giving you feedback throughout the term so you know where you stand on your participation grade.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any plagiarized piece of writing will receive an F with no possibility of revision, *even if the plagiarism is unintentional*. Additionally, students who commit flagrant or persistent plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Honor Board for review and risk failing the course. Note that plagiarism is an insult to me as your instructor and to your peers. There is no reason for you to stoop to this in this course. If at any point you have further questions about this, or aren't sure whether or not something is plagiarism, come and see me.

**You will be required to type the undergraduate Honor Code Pledge on all papers and other work completed outside of class. Failure to do so will result in a lowered grade for that particular assignment. The Honor Code Pledge is as follows:** "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in completing this work, nor have I presented someone else's work as my own."

Finally, the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Communications requires students to submit all final copies of expository essays to Safe Assignment, LTU's anti-plagiarism software. Instructions on submitting work to Safe Assignment will be provided at a later date.

### **Important Dates**

1/21: Last day to add/register on Banner Web

1/25 Last day to drop traditional semester courses with refund

### **Accommodations**

Please let me know if you need accommodation of any sort. I will work with Disability Services to provide what you require. I am very willing to take suggestions specific to this class to meet your needs. This syllabus is available in large print, as are other class materials.

## **READING SCHEDULE (Subject to change)**

1/14 Chris Burden; "The Seminar"; syllabus; **CRE project assigned**

### **"From Person to Thing": Violence and Ontology**

1/16 "Introduction" to *On Violence*; Weil, "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force" (*On Violence*); **CRE groups established**

1/21 **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: NO CLASS**

1/23 Weil (cont); **Essay 1 Assigned**

1/28 *Fight Club*; **Research Day Poster assigned; Essay 2 assigned**

1/30 *Fight Club*

2/4 *Fight Club*

2/6 *Fight Club*

### **Violence and the State**

2/11 Arendt, from *On Violence* (**note: Canvas, NOT the *On Violence* anthology**)

2/13 **Project 1: Eyal Weizman, et al., *Forensic Architecture* (architecture/design)**

2/18 Foucault, from *Discipline and Punish* (*On Violence*)

**2/19: Attend Laura Forlano Humanity+Technology Lecture, 6 pm, Lear Auditorium**

2/20 **Project 2: C. D. Wright, *One Big Self: An Investigation* (poetry); ESSAY 1 DUE via Canvas AND Google Drive at 11:59 pm**

### **Violence and Race**

2/25 Fanon, "Concerning Violence" (*On Violence*)

2/27 **Project 3: Robin Coste Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems* (poetry)**

3/4 Claudia Rankine, "The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning" (Canvas)

3/6 **Project 4: Terrence Hayes, *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin* (poetry)**

3/11 NO CLASS—mid-semester break

3/13 NO CLASS—mid-semester break

### **Violence and the Environment**

3/18 Rob Nixon, "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor" (Canvas)

3/20 **Project 5: Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (novel)**

3/25 **Research Day Poster Review/Prep**

3/27 **Class cancelled for Humanity+Technology Lecture**

4/1 Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene" (Canvas)

4/3 **Project 6: Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came* (poetry)**

4/5 **Research Day Presentations**

### **Sensational Violence**

4/8 Joan Didion, "Sentimental Journeys" (Canvas)

4/10 Joan Didion, "Sentimental Journeys" (cont)

4/15 **Project 7: Nick Drnaso, *Sabrina* (graphic novel)**

4/17 **Project 8: *Serial* podcast (Season 1)**

4/22 Maggie Nelson, excerpts from *The Art of Cruelty* (Canvas)

4/24 **Project 9: Maggie Nelson, *Jane: A Murder* (poetry)**

4/29 Reading TBD; **Essay 2 DUE via Canvas AND Google Drive at 11:59 pm**

5/1 **Project 10: Maggie Nelson, *The Red Parts* (memoir)**

**The Ends of Violence?**

5/6 Stephen Pinker, "Decline of Violence" (Canvas)