Instructor comment

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Writing War: What Is It Good For? (Fall 2011)

In a course on "writing war," one might expect student essays to analyze poetry, novels, short stories, milblogs, or even Departent of Defense memos and press releases. In her final project for our course, however, Kate embraced a more capacious idea of writing as narrative and representation, and in the process, she produced an excellent counterintuitive argument about cinematic representations of the War in Iraq. Taking issue with the oft-leveled criticisms of Iraq war films and complicating easy distinctions between reality and fiction, Kate's essay was a delight to read and it made me view these films in a different light. While it is customary to think of personal narratives and, in the case of our present moment, video journals or personal video recordings as residing closer to truth and reality, Kate's paper asserts that feature films can actually bring the viewer closer to war's truth and can deepen our understanding of the "shades of gray" that permeate the war zone.

One of the goals of my courses is for students to produce nuanced close readings of primary texts (in Kate's case, *Battle for Haditha* and *The Hurt Locker*) while situating those readings within a larger argument that engages existing conversations about their topic. Kate's paper does this superbly, and I was particularly pleased with how she not only treats her scholarly interlocutors respectfully and fairly, but also uses them to position her own argument. Indeed, Kate's paper helped me to see how better to help my future students achieve such a goal!

Finally, one of the pleasures of teaching is seeing how students grow over time. Kate's interest in truth manifested itself in our first writing project, where she examined the different levels of truth in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. To see her continue to interrogate the meaning of truth and produce a far more nuanced and complicated take on truth at the end of the semester was a great pleasure for me as her teacher. I'm very happy to see that the *Deliberations* readers also thought so highly of her work!