

EN 4353: Critical Theory Since 1900

Fall 2019: TR 9:30-10:45

Professor: Peter DeGabriele

Theory and War



“Time for some remote-control diplomacy, eh Carl?”

“No, NO! That’s not what I meant.”

Most college freshman have not known a world not at war. Indeed, in the face of what seems to be an infinite and endless war, the old ways we used to name wars by giving them dates (1939-1945) or geographical limits (Korea, Vietnam) seems almost quaint. This class will look at how philosophers and critical theorists have attempted to account for our new way of living under war, and at how our current state(s) of war do or do not differ from earlier wars. In order to understand modern phenomena of war, such as remote killing by drone, we will first look at classical accounts of war from Clausewitz, Schmitt, Freud, and Einstein, before looking at how contemporary thinkers like Balibar, Agamben, Weizman, and others redefine the meaning of war. We will also look at literary works that take up the theme of war. Please note: this is NOT a class on military history or strategy. It aims to look at the meaning of war, and ultimately what it means to live in a world defined by a seemingly endless and infinite military conflict.