

Lawrence Weschler
THE FICTION OF NONFICTION
[NYU 2011]

{January 28: Introduction}

FEBRUARY 4

1. A selection of exemplary short pieces

by Joseph Mitchell, Guess who?, George W.S. Trow, Mark Singer,
Diane Ackerman, Lawrence Weschler, Susan Orlean and Bill
McKibben

FEBRUARY 11

2. A critique of the notion of “objective truth”

George Orwell: Homage to Catalonia, Chapters 10 & 11
also: “Politics and the English Language”
Christopher Hitchens, “Wanton Acts of Usage”
Alexander Cockburn, “The Tedium Twins”

FEBRUARY 18

3. Further critique: Selected “phony” controversies

Files on the Alastair Reid; Janet Malcolm/Jeffrey Masson;
and CBS/Westmoreland affairs, to wit:

Wall Street Journal piece on Alastair Reid

Alastair Reid, selections from “Notes from a Spanish
Village” and “Letter from Barcelona”

“Fictions” and “In Memoriam, Amada” from
Reid’s Oases

“Where Truth Lies” (poem)

Janet Malcolm, start of The Journalist and the Murderer

John Taylor on Malcolm/Masson/McGuinness

Subsequent NY Times coverage of Malcolm affair

K.C. Cole, “The Truth about Objectivity”

Jorge Luis Borges, “The Land of the Cartographers”

Dave Eggers, “Impressions” from McSweeney’s 2 (in Appendix)

Weschler, “True to Life”

(Hockney’s critique of monocular photography)

FEBRUARY 25

4. Interviewing and Profiling

Weschler, first chapter of Seeing is Forgetting (Irwin)
Mel Brooks interview
General Medina interview
from A Miracle, A Universe
Michael Lewis, Harold Ickes profile

WEEK OF MARCH 4(though we will need to pick an alt date){A}

5. Reporting and Ordering material

Susan Sheehan, second part of A Missing Plane
(the clipping from which it emerged)
William Finnegan, passages from his Surfing pieces
Todd Newberry. "Fieldtrips"

MARCH 11 {B & C}

6. Form and Structure ("Form is feeling")

John McPhee, "Los Angeles versus the Mountains" (Part I)
Ian Frazier, "Canal Street"

{MARCH 18 BREAK: NO CLASS}

MARCH 25

7. Structure and Tone

Weschler, "My Grandfather's Last Tale" (Toch)
Ernst Toch, Letter to a would-be composer
Joan Didion, passages from Salvador

APRIL 1

8. Tone and Voice

David Foster Wallace, passages from "A Supposedly Fun Thing
I'll Never Do Again" (luxury cruise)
Jane Kramer, "Kurt Waldheim"
Jamaica Kincaid, A Small Place (Antigua)
Joseph Mitchell, "Mazie" from Up in the Old Hotel

APRIL 8

9. Freedom and Grace

Grace Paley, "A Conversation with My Father"

Ellen Pall on artist Vincent Desiderio

Ian Frazier, "Nobody Better, Better Than Nobody"
(profile of Heloise)

Passage from Chapter 10 of Family

Weschler, Breytenbach profile

(NOTE: Read the version in Calamities of Exile!)

Wisława Szymborska, "Could Have"

Stanisław Lem, "De Impossibilitate Vitae..."
from A Perfect Vacuum

APRIL 15

10. "Higher Truth": Rhapsodic Nonfiction

Ryszard Kapuscinski, The Emperor

Reb Nachman of Bratslav, "The Portrait of the King"

Franz Kafka, "An Imperial Message"

Oliver Sacks, "Rosie R." from Awakenings

"Witty Ticky Ray," from The Man Who Mistook...

"Cold Storage" (Uncle Toby) from Granta

Weschler, Uncle Toby comment & "Allegories of Eastern Europe"

APRIL 22

11. Bringing it all together (1) {Writer's block} {C}

Joseph Mitchell, Joe Gould's Secret

"About the Author" (hardcover of Up in the Old Hotel)

A Medley of elegies and obituaries for Joseph Mitchell

APRIL 29

12a.. Bringing it all together (2) {B}

William Finnegan, Crossing the Line

Parts 1 through 3

MAY 6

12b. Bringing it all together (3) and conclusion {A}

William Finnegan, Crossing the Line

Part 4 ("Travels with Mazie")

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Spring 2011

Required books:

- George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia
 - Jamaica Kincaid, A Small Place
 - Ryszard Kapuscinski, The Emperor
 - Joseph Mitchell, Up in the Old Hotel
 - William Finnegan, Crossing the Line
 - Lawrence Weschler, Calamities of Exile
and the Class Packet
- (available from Village Copier, 20 E 13th Street)

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