

Code: FLMD-322E.78 // FLMD-232.5 // FLMD-322.109 // MEDD-601.MB2

Course title: Experimental Trauma Processing in Contemporary Documentary Films

Course convenors: Beja Margitházi / Gizem Cakun

Class time and place: Tuesday 14:15–15:45, Múzeum krt. 6-8., lower level, room -135

Course type: seminar / **Max. 15 ppl.**

Course content: Going far beyond its original medical and psychological meaning, trauma emerged as a key interpretative framework of contemporary culture, not just an 'explanatory tool during periods of overwhelming cultural change' (Kirby Farrell), but an extensive 'global condition' (Sabine Silke). Being a meaningful, revelatory notion both in the sense of individual lives and in a collective context, trauma potentially sets together the concepts and processes of event, rupture, hiddenness, past, present and future, discovery, investigation, disclosure, confrontation and coping, which partly explains why the humanities and social science discourse thematizing this polychrestic concept became almost unfathomably rich after the turn of the millennium.

By the 21st century, not only has social awareness increased with regard to individual and collective traumas, but various nuanced artistic practices are created for processing them. From the first half of the 20th century, documentary films took their part in investigating traumatic historical events, and experiences of victims and survivors. While personal, direct documentary methods (talking-head interviews with witnesses and perpetrators' testimonies and recollections) and reconstructions based on archival material (found footage, amateur footage) are still present in the 2000s, contemporary documentary film is increasingly dominated by indirect, reflexive and performative approaches that incorporate therapy sessions (1), reenactments (2) or the medium of another art (theatre, dance, photography) (3) as a reflective surface or catalyst in trauma processing. By focusing on these three experimental practices, this course will deal with movie examples following these strategies. We will place the films in historical, cultural and institutional contexts and aim to critically reflect on their emotional and empathetic effects. The course is based on in-class group discussions and extracurricular activities of the students.

Classes will imply three main, **weekly** activities:

- (1) reading and interpreting some **key theoretical texts** for an introduction to theories of trauma, therapy, reenactment and documentary film
- (2) weekly preparation of short **individual reflections** on the films watched
- (3) in-class analysis and **group discussion** of the selected documentary films

Requirements

1. **Class participation:** Continuous attendance and active participation in the group discussions is required (e.g. meaningful questions, notes, observations).
2. **Preparatory notes** (Canvas activity). Students should watch the selected film for the respective class and send their notes and/or questions previously. Attention: the condition of attendance is sending the notes by the deadline.
3. **Mini-essays:** During the semester each participant has to work in pair and prepare a mini-essay related to a selected film. The type and topic of the essay will be specified together with the instructor.

Grading: 30% (in-class activity) + 30% (previous notes) + 40% (mini-essay).

Four or more absences result in an incomplete for the course. Attention:

*A delay of 10 minutes results in an invalid presence.

*No student will receive a final grade if their class presentation is missing or they have not submitted all their preparatory notes.

*First class on the first week!

Indicative list of readings:

- *Caruth, Cathy. 1995. Trauma and Experience. In: *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996. 3-12.
- *Cohen, Joshua L., ed. 2022. *Film/Video-Based Therapy and Trauma: Research and Practice*. Taylor & Francis.
- *Bessel A. van der Kolk - Onno van der Hart. 1995. The intrusive past: The flexibility of

memory and the engraving of trauma. In: Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 158-182.

*Daniels-Yeomans, Finn. 2017. Trauma, affect and the documentary image: towards a non-representational approach. *Studies in Documentary Film* 11.2: 85-103.

*Leys, Ruth. 2000. Freud and Trauma. In: *Trauma: A genealogy*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 27-40.

*Elsaesser, Thomas. 2001. Postmodernism as a mourning work. *Screen* 42: 193-201.

*Hirsch, Marianne. 2001. Surviving images: Holocaust photographs and the work of postmemory. *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14: 5-37.

*Kaplan, Ann E. 2005. Vicarious Trauma and 'Empty' Empathy: Media Images of Rwanda and the Iraq War. In: *Trauma Culture: the politics of terror and loss in media and literature*. Rutgers University Press. 87-100.

*Máté, Gabor. 2011. *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress*. Vintage Canada.

*Meek, Allen. 2010. *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories and Images*. New York: Routledge.

*Melzer, Kym. 2019. Vicarious trauma and emotion work in documentary filmmaking. *Studies in Documentary Film* 13.1. 38-52

*Nichols, Bill. 2001. What Types of Documentary Are There? In: *Introduction to Documentary*, Indiana University Press, 99-138.

*Plantinga, Carl. 2005. What a documentary is, after all. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63.2. 105-117.

*Tedeschi, Richard G., et al. 2018. *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Routledge.

*Turim, Maureen. 2001. The trauma of history: flashbacks upon flashbacks. *Screen* 42.2. Summer, 205-210.

*Van der Kolk, Bessel. 2014. *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma*. Penguin UK.

*Walker, Janet. 1997. The Traumatic Paradox: Documentary Films, Historical Fictions, and Cataclysmic Past Events, Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22, no. 4. 803-825.

*Walker, Janet. 2001. Trauma cinema: false memories and true experience. *Screen* 42.2. Summer. 211-216.

**Indicative list
of films:**

Srbenka (Nebojsa Slijepcevic, 2018)

S-21 – The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine (Rithy Panh, 2003)

Stories We Tell (Sarah Polley, 2012)

No Home Movie (Chantal Ackerman, 2015)

Theatre of War (Lola Arias, 2018)

The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

The Euphoria of Being (Réka Szabó, 2019)

The Missing Picture (Rithy Panh, 2013)

The Work (Jairus McLeary – Gethin Aldous, 2017)

We Are Not Princesses (Bridgette Auger – Itab Azzam, 2018)
