

Code: FLMD-314E.35 // FLMD-322.01. // FLMD-214E.17

---

**Course title: Contemporary Trauma Documentaries**

---

**Course convenors:** Beja Margitházi

---

**Class time and place:** Wednesday 12:30–14:00, 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). Approached as a 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 also 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 may incorporate therapy sessions, reenactments or the medium of other arts (theatre, dance, photography) as a tool or catalyst in trauma processing.

By covering different practices, this course focuses on the complex and deep analysis of some outstanding examples of contemporary international and Hungarian trauma documentaries. Our aim is to understand the historical, cultural and institutional embeddedness of the films, and 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 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. **Watching & reading:** As a preparation students should watch the respective film and read the mandatory text before the class.
3. **Preparatory notes** (Canvas activity). Based on the film & mandatory text students should send their notes and/or questions previously. Attention: the condition of attendance is watching the film + sending the notes before the weekly deadline.
4. **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 more than 10 minutes results in an invalid presence.

\*No student will receive a final grade if their mini-essay is missing or they have not submitted all their preparatory notes in time.

\*First class on the first week!

---

**Indicative list** \*Caruth, Cathy. 1995. Trauma and Experience. In: *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

---

- of readings:** 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.
- \*Kansteiner, Wulf – Harald Weinhöck. Against the concept of cultural trauma. *Cultural memory studies* (2008): 229-240.
- \*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.
- \*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:** *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1956)  
*Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985)  
*Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1998)  
*Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, 2003)  
*S21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine* (Rithy Panh, 2003)  
*A Film Unfinished* (Yael Hersonski, 2010)  
*Crulic* (Anca Damian, 2011)  
*The Missing Picture* (Rithy Panh, 2013)  
*The Dead Nation* (Radu Jude, 2017)  
*A German Life* (Olaf S. Müller – Roland Schrotthofer – Florian Weigensamer, 2017)  
*The Exit of Trains* (Radu Jude, 2020)  
*Welcome to Chechnya* (David France, 2020)  
*Three Minutes: A Lengthening* (Bianca Stigter, 2023)  
*Stories We Tell* (Sarah Polley, 2012)  
*The Work* (Jairus McLeary – Gethin Aldous, 2017)  
*Ghost Hunting* (Raed Andoni, 2017)  
*We Are Not Princesses* (Bridgette Auger – Itab Azzam, 2018)  
*Imad's Childhood* (Zahavi Sanjavi, 2021)  
*The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer – Anonymous – Christine Cynn, 2012)  
*The Euphoria of Being* (Réka Szabó, 2019)  
*Nelly and Nadine* (Magnus Gertten, 2022)  
*A Woman Captured* (Bernadett Tuza-Ritter, 2017)  
*The Hamlet Syndrome* (Elwira Niewiera – Piotr Rosołowski, 2022)  
*Theatre of War* (Lola Arias, 2018)  
*I Am Not Your Negro* (Raoul Peck, 2016)  
*Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008)