

Humanities & Cultural Studies Department
HUM 6939: Trauma, Disability, and Representation
Fall 2017 Dr. Maria Cizmic



This graduate seminar will be a reading intensive course that will provide students with a foundation in trauma theory and disability studies. In terms of trauma theory we will begin with psychology, particularly Freud, Judith Herman, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman. We will then study the mainstream literary adaptation of psychological theories in the works of Cathy Caruth & Shoshana Felman, in addition to their more recent critics. This class will also take a look at the adaptations of this literary model of trauma to film and music. This psychological-literary model of trauma will then be balanced by looking at sociological theories about cultural trauma, particularly those stemming from Jeffrey Alexander and Ron Eyerman. We will then turn our attention to disability studies and its major proponents: Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Tobin Siebers, Leonard Davis, Helen Deutsch, among others. Similar to trauma theory, disability studies has a strong grounding in literary studies, and as a class we will again trace out these theories and methodologies and consider their application to film and music. Although trauma theory and disability studies are two independent discursive worlds, there are times when trauma and disability intersect, even if we simply consider the ways in which post-traumatic stress disorder can be treated as a disability. In focusing on representation (be it literary, visual, or auditory), there again turns out to be an overlapping question: How are audiences meant to relate to representations of others' bodies? For this reason, the issue of empathy will work as a frame for the work we do in this class.