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Foreword to Age and Ageing in European and World Cinema(s)

A phenomenon indeed experienced by *all*—both human and non-human, organic and non-organic—ageing appears to be taking a definitive role in the playout of the 21st century: reshaping families, policies, economies, social service systems, and cultural products. According to the United Nations, "[b]y 2080, people aged 65 and over will outnumber children under 18" ("Ageing") in the global context, with (population) ageing being arguably the most pertinent issue in Europe, which is often regarded as the 'greying continent'. A 2025 policy brief on Europe's ageing challenges further emphasises that "[b]etween 2023 and 2050, Eastern and Southern EU countries will face the sharpest declines because of both natural population decrease and limited net inward migration," while "Northern and Western countries could see population growth driven by higher migration" (Pinkus and Ruer 1). This geographical divide—at least partially connected to historical divides, including that of the Iron Curtain—across European countries poses radically different challenges to the Western and Northern parts of the continent, possibly overwhelmed by outward population growth, and to the Eastern and Southern parts, threatened by mass depopulation, the shrinkage of working-age adults, and the overload of social service systems.

Besides the 'greying continent(s)', one can equally observe 'greying mediums' becoming vulnerable next to younger competitors. Considered

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to be "the first aesthetician of the cinema" (J. M. W. 252), Ricciotto Canudo welcomed the medium of film as the 'seventh art', and while the label accepts film as an art form, the chronological order behind the denomination underlines the youth of the moving image compared to other art forms such as painting, music or architecture. Since the early days of cinema and Canudo's manifesto in the 1920s, more than a century has passed, and with it, the medium of film matured and, quite naturally—following the logic of biological ageing—grew older. In the moments these lines are written, the film industry witnesses with suspicion and caution Netflix's (or that of further global post-digital conglomerates') acquisition of an 'old' Hollywood studio, Warner Bros. (Weprin), with commentators already speculating whether this development will lead to the slow death of cinema itself (Singer; Pulver). Besides these industry-level and structural tensions between the 'old' movie theatres and the 'young' streaming platforms, film embraces its greying in other respects too. Josephine Dolan's impactful 2017 monograph explored the 'triple silvering' articulated through the ageing of the stars, the ageing of audiences, and the (topic of) ageing palpable in the filmic narratives. Indeed, in the last decade(s), "scholarly attention to the perceived 'greying' of mainstream cinema has gathered momentum" (Jermyn 108), yet these silvering phenomena are far from being completely new.

From the perspective of film history, one can define several huge 'shock waves' that quintessentially represented frustrations around various forms of human and non-human, organic and non-organic ageing: be that the ageing of technology during the shift from silent to sound film in the late 1920s and early 1930s or from the analogue to the digital platform in the 21st century; or the ageing of classical movie stars during the dusk of Hollywood's Golden Era in the 1950s and 1960s, and the more recent de-fashioning of 1980s leading ladies for example. Evidently, these frustrations of the industry have also affected the level of representation, as evidenced by the numerous creations that revealed the vulnerability of the creators and that of the medium with much poignancy and self-reflexivity. Earlier well-known titles may include *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) or *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Robert Aldrich, 1962) and these same anxieties resurface in recent titles such as *The Substance* (Coralie Fargeat, 2024) or *Jay Kelly* (Noah Baumbach, 2025).

From the perspective of genre theory, the topic of ageing once again holds a prominent position, influencing the change of plots, stereotypes and iconographies to the degree that it can lead to the resurfacing, or even formation of new subgenres. Hagsploitation horror (or psycho-biddy) films cannot be imagined without the older adult female—see, for instance, *The Nanny* (Seth Holt, 1965) or *Weapons* (Zach Cregger, 2025) as two temporal extremes. Similarly, the recently coagulated geriaction films cannot be imagined without the older adult male as the universes building since *Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008) or *The Expendables* (Sylvester Stallone, 2010) attest. Not necessarily older adults, but the ageing human plays a central role in demographic dystopias, particularly in narratives of

age-based segregation or, in horrific developments, even genocide—see the science fiction classic *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) or the much more recent *The Blue Trail* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2025).

Additionally, film may address the ageing subject to articulate a social critique—be that the retired patient of *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (Cristi Puiu, 2005), who highlights the failures of the Romanian (state-operated) healthcare system and the inhumanity of a capitalist society (Parvulescu and Turcuș 117–147), or the petro-menopausal 'eco-warrior' female in *Woman at War* (Benedikt Erlingsson, 2018), who connects the topic of ageing with ecocriticism (Virginás 85–102). From the standpoint of national cinemas, the ageing subject may indeed be the shareholder of collective history and cultural trauma, repositioning older adults—either in the form of fiction, see *Aurora Borealis* (Márta Mészáros, 2017), or that of documentary, see *The Silence of Others* (Almudena Carracedo and Robert Bahar, 2018)—as the living and breathing testimonies of history and national identity.

Of course, the above-mentioned intersections between ageing and film are merely actualizing a few of the infinite possibilities, many of which were already signalled in seminal 1970s–1980s feminist writings by Susan Sontag, Simone de Beauvoir or Molly Haskell. The exploration of these interactions is definitely systematized and enriched by the theoretical frameworks and methodologies offered by what has been grown to be known as cultural gerontology: an inherently interdisciplinary field, which approaches ageing from various focuses (including but not limited to the initial gender aspects, temporal and spatial aspects, embodiment or consumption), and, consequently, a plethora of mediums (literature, theatre, music, and film, among others). In this respect, Twigg and Martin's 2015 handbook represents not only a major scientific contribution but also an *invitation* to the field, just as de Medeiros's more general guide to gerontology from 2017. By accepting this invitation from cultural gerontology, film and media studies can contribute to the understanding of how one is "aged by culture" (Gullette), connecting gerontology to film aesthetics, stardom studies, reception studies or production studies—to name a few potential areas. Through this fusion between the two fields, theoretical configurations such as *successful ageing* (Rowe and Kahn), *affirmative ageing* (Sandberg), or *decline and progress narratives* (Gullette); and *gendered* (Sontag; Tracy and Schrage-Früh; Woodward; Dolan and Tincknell), *racialised* (Jetson; Torres) or *classed* aspects of ageing (Formosa and Higgs) can be caught materialising on the silver(ing) screen, but also in front of it and behind the camera.

The special issue 'Age and Ageing in European and World Cinema(s)' is both the product of a sentiment—that of a societal responsibility to understand the 'greying' emergencies and silver linings—and that of a scientific vocation to meaningfully contribute to a maturing field. A crucial starting point of this special issue was the conference 'Age and Ageing in Anglophone and European Cinema(s)' (3–5 September 2025, Cluj-Napoca, Romania), a collaborative effort made between the SERCIA association (Société pour l'Enseignement et

la Recherche du Cinéma Anglophone), the international research project 'AGE-C: Ageing and Gender in European Cinema', and Babeș-Bolyai University—inviting scholars to engage with the topic of ageing in the context of film studies.

As a result, the current special issue offers a varied dive into ageing and film, which can be approached through multiple lenses. It might be read through the lenses of *film history* and *auteurship ageing*—opening with Alborz Mahboobkhah's study on the late style of Agnès Varda and arriving at Ion Indolean's exploration of recent titles such as *The Brutalist* (Brady Corbet, 2024). Likewise, it can be read through the lens of *gendered ageing*, see the studies that focus on ageing femininities in the first half of the issue—such as Serhat Erdem's study on the 'hagsploitation' genre or Julieta A. Rodriguez's study on the articulations of female ageing in a post-pandemic context—and the focus on ageing masculinities in the second half of the issue—such as Adrien Valgalier's study on artificial nostalgia connected to ageing male characters, Raúl Jambrina Rojo's study on temporal loitering and the animated ageing, (predominantly) male subject, or Pablo Gómez-Muñoz's study on the (mostly) ageing male agents of power in Denis Villeneuve's *Dune* universe. Additionally, the special issue offers various *methodologies*—including textual analyses, reception analysis (see Julieta A. Rodriguez's text), and data analysis, demonstrating the possibilities of digital humanities also in cultural gerontology—see Olena Gepper's study on the representation of migrant elderly care in European cinema.

One of the most cited monographs in the field of cultural gerontology, Margaret Morganroth Gullette's 2004 *Aged by Culture* is interestingly revealing its quintessentially cinematic kernel in the scientific anecdote that opens the work. "At the Boston Museum of Science, one exhibit in particular attracted long lines of children: 'Face Aging,'" writes Gullette. "Access to the open booth was forbidden to people over fifteen, so I watched from just outside," she continues, describing how "the youngsters sat down inside under bright illumination, faced forward trustingly (...) and had their portrait taken by an automatic camera." She then continues as follows: "After another wait, their digitized bust appeared on a TV monitor. Then, tapping a button like a VCR remote, each child could rapidly call up simulations of what she or he would look like at one-year intervals up to age sixty-nine" (Gullette 3). For our *Ekphrasis* special issue, 'Age and Ageing in European and World Cinema(s)', Gullette's final metaphorical remark emerges as if a serendipitous epigraph: "[f]lipped as fast as a Victorian zoetrope, the stills became a 'movie'" (Gullette 3). (Still) images joined by movement—be that of the zoetrope or that of the projector-camera—converge into one such technology of our human culture which can make perceivable time, of which ageing is but a specific variant. If we succeeded in editing a series of case studies centred on the once young seventh art's ageing technology, and the human agents involved, we can consider ourselves content; and similar to Gullette's youngsters while experiencing being aged by one cultural technology: film and cinema.

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