Masculine Ageing in Movies, from the 1950s to Today

Instructor: Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti

Pronouns: She, her, hers

Room:

Day and Time:

Office Hours: TBD

Course Description:

Old men rarely have a protagonist role in movies. And when they do, their narrative seems to be the same over and over. Old men stand at the center of the picture, alone, without a female companion who is either deceased or was never there in the first place. From professionally active and even successful career men, they have turned into gruff, grumpy old men, with misanthropic attitudes and a strong dislike for their progeny. These movies tell stories of vulnerability, of distress, of fear of death. Sometimes, the only possible solution these men can envisage is a preemptive suicide, to avoid the inevitable, while at other times, these stories offer a renewed sense of hope in the future through intergenerational mentoring with unlikely younger pupils. In this class we will observe how the picture of "the white old man" has been constructed and entertained in cinematic reality since the 1950s. We will strive to deconstruct it to understand what kind of male and societal anxieties are feeding it. The syllabus is not set: if you think a movie would be particularly interesting to explore, we can make some changes to the corpus.

Calendar

Week 1: Introduction. Ageing, its forms and constructions

Section 1 Introduction to the class

Section 2 Pamela Gravagne, *The becoming of age: cinematic visions of mind, body and identity in later life*, (2013) (Selections)

Week 2: Neorealism and Representations of Old Age

Section 1 Roberto Rossellini (1908-1977), *Rome, Open City* [*Roma città aperta*] (1945)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Springtime in Italy: a reader on neo-realism (1979) (Selections)

Week 3: Continued

Section 1 Vittorio De Sica (1901-1974), *Umberto D* (1953)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Roy Armes, *Patterns of realism* (1971) (Selections)

Week 4: Old Age and Sickness

Section 1 Akira Jurosawa (1910-1998), *To Live* [*Ikiru*] (1952)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Cohen-Shalev Amir, *Visions of aging, representations of the elderly in film* (2009) (Selections)

Week 5: Old Age and Bereavement

Section 1 Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007), *Wild Strawberries* [*Smultronstället*] (1957)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

John Powell, *Social theory and aging*, Lanham, (2006) (Selections)

Week 6: Old Age in the Last Fifteen Years

Section 1 Clint Eastwood (1930-), *Gran Torino* (2006)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Cinematic sociology: social life in film (2013) (Selections)

Week 7: Continued

Section 1 Pete Docter (1968-), *Up* (2009)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Handbook of the humanities and aging, (1992) (Selections)

Week 8: Portraits of Aging Men

Section 1 Jake Schreier (1981), *Robot and Frank* (2012)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017), *Mortality, Immortality and other life strategies* (1992) (Selections)

Week 9: Old Age between Idyll and Satyre

Section 1 Hannes Holm (1962), *A Man Called Ove* [*En man som heter Ove*] (2015)

Section 2 Discussion of the Movie

Sally Chivers, *The silvering screen : old age and disability in cinema*, (2011) (Selections)

Week 10: Old Age and Satyre

Section 1 Clips Presentations

Section 2 Clips Presentations

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

Through successful completion of this course, students are expected to be able to:

Literary, Cinematic and Cultural analysis

- Demonstrate critical thinking and writing skills, mastery of conceptual tools learnt in class;

- Learn to research a social and historical phenomenon, using a variety of ressources from different fields;

- Use the vocabulary of literary, cinematic and sociological analysis and develop your interpretations both of fiction and social change, both orally and in writing;

- Identify, isolate and analyse the ways in which a society constructs old age at a given time;

- Show a sense of "cultural" (for lack of a better word) awareness towards ageism and its concealed expressions;

Materials for the Class

The movies will be projected in class during Section n. 1, the movies may exceed the class time: expect two hours much about for each movie. They are available on kanopy using your institutional ID. The chapters of the critical readings will be available on Canvas.

Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti
Masculine Ageing in Movies, from the 1950s to Today

Evaluations

n Units

- **Class Participation (15% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (30% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **One Page Paper (30% of the Grade)**, four in total.
- **Clip Presentation** (**25% of the Grade**), in groups of 2, 3 or 4

Details on the Evaluation format

1. Class Participation: reading the assigned materials, participating actively in the class discussions;

2. Short Oral presentation: 15min max presentation on an assigned topic, decided together with the instructor, to kick off class discussion. Presentations Suggestions:

1) Paraphrase the text (summarize it and describe its logical sequence/narrative structure). Or present an overview of the issue at hand, when the presentation is about background information.

2) Present the two or three passages you find most relevant and analyze them. If you are not presenting about readings on the syllabus, bring mini excerpts from relevant written material.

3) Suggest insightful questions for our class discussion.

Make your presentation a lively one, with or without props such as Powerpoint, handouts, transparencies, etc. You have anywhere from 8 to 12 minutes, even more if you engage the class (it is ideal to combine your role as presenter with that of discussion moderator). Throughout

3. One Page Paper: (4-500 word count), due for section 2 of the week. It will be the starting point for Section 2's class discussion. The content should be pertinent to the week's material: you can analyse a particular on a theme presented in a text, contest an author's/critic's perspective and/or representation, compare different texts, etc. You will have to submit six throughout the quarter, it is up to you when you'll do so.

4. Clip Presentation: Ideally, students would get together in groups of 2, 3 or 4 (but solo projects are allowed) and work on the creation of:

   -a clip about the themes explored in class, ageism, bereavement, sickness, loneliness, suicide (always in relation with old age), you are free on how you want to go about it: a collage of the movie scenes, a collection of scenes, you can record a group conversation in which you discuss the themes, or another idea I'm not considering;

   -an analysis of a movie centered on an old man with a different ethnical and/or sociological standing (i.e. not white or not coming from a white collar profession);

   -you may also consider a movie with an old woman at the center: analyse it using the conceptual tools learnt in class and identify similarities and differences. You can show clips from scenes and record yourselves commenting on it.

    -Record a systematic, structured, rich interview with one or several old men in your personal entourage; Solo projects are allowed.

If you have other ideas, formats, projects you would like to try, I'm interested!

Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti
Masculine Ageing in Movies, from the 1950s to Today

Diversity and Inclusion

These movies contain extremely saddening, disheartening and triggering scenes. Suicide is present and shown in many of them, I encourage to keep this in mind before enrolling in the class, and while we watch the movies in class. If a scene is too difficult to watch, you may leave the room, take a short walk, take a deep breath and think about comforting images. Your first concern is to take care of yourself. I will not warn students about particular topics, because sensitivity to different topics varies from person to person, and because topics may arise unexpectedly in movie scenes and class discussion. Given the sensitive and challenging nature of the material discussed in class, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of trust and safety in the classroom. We will work on fostering an environment in which everyone feels safe to speak and is open to listening to what the other has to say.

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups. If you wish to add movies telling stories of old men with different ethnical origins, we may explore how different social identities of aging are constructed and reproduced in possibly different ways.