

WiSe 2023/24



# Never Too Old to Be Seen:

AGEING AND GENDER  
IN EUROPEAN CINEMA

## IMPRESSUM



© „Der Flohmarkt von Madame Claire“  
(La dernière folie de Claire Darling, 2018)

**Cornelia Goethe Centrum für Frauenstudien und die  
Erforschung der Geschlechterverhältnisse (CGC)**

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

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## ABOUT THE LECTURE SERIES

### NEVER TOO OLD TO BE SEEN: AGEING AND GENDER IN EUROPEAN CINEMA

When feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey famously described classical Hollywood cinema as an art form dominated by a male gaze which objectifies women, she forgot to specify “Women under 35”. 75% percent of the audience of mainstream Hollywood cinema are between 14 and 30 years old, and starring roles for women are reserved for actresses largely in that age bracket. By contrast, European cinema increasingly seems to offer important roles for women over sixty, and stories which validate and expand on the experience of ageing people of all genders. This partially reflects the fact that European cinema consists mostly of arthouse films, and that the audience for arthouse cinema has been ageing over the last decades. Furthermore, it also speaks to culturally and socially specific approaches to the visibility of older and ageing people.

In the CGC Colloquium “Never Too Old to Be Seen: Ageing and Gender in European Cinema” specialists from five European countries – Britain, France, Italy, Romania, Germany – engage with different aspects of the cinematic representation of old age and gender. Through six instalments and a variety of formats the colloquium addresses issues such as the tension between screen age and physical age, questions of masculinity across cultures, female roles and questions of motherly authority, and cultural differences in standards of visibility for ageing women. Combining cinema studies and the social sciences with gerontology, the colloquium advocates for a cultural gerontology approach to questions of cinematic representation, visibility and well-being, with a particular focus on questions of gender.

## DATES

### 01.11.23

Understanding Old Age and Visibility: A Dialogue between Gerontology and Cinema Studies  
VINZENZ HEDIGER, BETTINA KLEINER, MIRANDA LEONTOWITSCH and ASJA MAKAREVIĆ

### 15.11.23

Man in Search for Meaning: Masculinity and Ageing in a Transnational European Context  
LUIS FREIJO

### 29.11.23

Acting Old: Ageing as Screen Performance  
ALEXANDRE MOUSSA

### 20.12.23

Mothers (as) Grandmothers in Recent European (Small National) Cinemas: Figures of Authority, Goddesses of Wisdom, or Mad Rebels, and/or Societal Waste?  
ANDREA-ADRIANA VIRGINÁS and BOGLÁRKA ANGÉLA FARKAS

### 17.01.24

(Not) Looking One’s Age: The Double Standard of Ageing On-screen  
FRANCESCO PITASSIO and GLORIA DAGNINO

### 31.01.24

Have You Seen These Women? – Cultural Specificity and the (In)visibility of Old Age across Film Cultures  
VINZENZ HEDIGER and ASJA MAKAREVIĆ

#### Current information about the colloquia and COVID-19

Due to the unforeseeable developments of COVID-19, the Cornelia Goethe Center reserves the right to postpone events at short notice. Please check the time, place and format of the colloquia before the event at:

<https://cgc.uni-frankfurt.de/>

If not indicated otherwise, Wednesdays, 6pm – 8pm c.t. room: PEG 1.G191

## FILM SCREENINGS

The Film Screenings complement the Cornelia Goethe Colloquium and will take place prior the corresponding lectures. Attendance is permitted only for university students.

Wednesday,  
4pm - 6pm  
PEG 1. G 168  
PEG Gebäude

### 01.11.23

LATE BLOOMERS | Die Herbstzeitlosen  
2006 | COMEDY DRAMA | Dir. Bettina Oberli

LATE BLOOMERS centers around four older ladies from the Emmental region. When four older women decide to turn the local corner shop into a chic lingerie store, the whole community is thrown into disarray.  
(<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0841109/>)

### 15.11.23

PAIN AND GLORY | Dolor y gloria  
2019 | DRAMA | Dir. Pedro Almodóvar

PAIN AND GLORY tells of a series of re-encounters experienced by Salvador Mallo (Antonio Banderas), a film director in his physical decline. Some of them in the flesh, others remembered: his childhood in the 60s, when he emigrated with his parents to a village in Valencia in search of prosperity, the first desire, his first adult love in the Madrid of the 80s, the pain of the breakup of that love while it was still alive and intense, writing as the only therapy to forget the unforgettable, the early discovery of cinema, and the void, the infinite void that creates the incapacity to keep on making films.  
(<https://www.sonypictures.com/movies/painandglory>)

### 29.11.23

GUY  
2018 | COMEDY DRAMA MUSIC | Dir. Alex Lutz

Gauthier, a young journalist, learns through his mother that he's the illegitimate son of Guy Jamet, an aging French pop singer who was famous from the '60s to the '90s. As the old-time crooner embarks on a tour to promote his newly released cover album, Gauthier decides to follow him behind the scenes, on stage, and on the road, under the pretext of filming a documentary about his career.  
(<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7253216/>)

### 20.12.23

WOMAN AT WAR | Kona fer í stríð  
2018 | ADVENTURE COMEDY DRAMA | Dir. Benedikt Erlingsson

Halla is a fifty-year-old independent woman. But behind the scenes of a quiet routine, she leads a double life as a passionate environmental activist. Known to others only by her alias "The Woman of the Mountain," Halla secretly wages a one-woman-war on the local aluminum industry. As Halla's actions grow bolder, from petty vandalism to outright industrial sabotage, she succeeds in pausing the negotiations between the Icelandic government and the corporation building a new aluminum smelter. But right as she begins planning her biggest and boldest operation yet, she receives an unexpected letter that changes everything. Her application to adopt a child has finally been accepted and there is a little girl waiting for her in Ukraine. As Halla prepares to abandon her role as saboteur and savior of the Highlands to fulfill her dream of becoming a mother, she decides to plot one final attack to deal the aluminum industry a crippling blow.  
(<https://www.womanatwarfilm.com/>)

### 17.01.24

No Screening

### 31.01.24

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS WOMAN? | Da li ste videli ovu ženu?  
2022 | COMEDY DRAMA | Dir. Dušan Zorić and Matija Gluščević

The film is divided into three chapters, three acts that follow three different lives of a middle-aged woman of the same name – Draginja. Not choosing the means and often neglecting their own reasons, each Draginja tries to "jump out of her skin" in her own way.  
(<https://mubi.com/en/de/films/metamorphoses-2022>)

# VINZENZ HEDIGER, BETTINA KLEINER, MIRANDA LEONTOWITSCH and ASJA MAKAREVIĆ

01.11.23

Wednesday,  
6pm - 8pm

Language:  
English

Understanding Old Age and Visibility: A Dialogue  
between Gerontology and Cinema Studies

One of the most important characteristics of contemporary societies has been the emergence of the visual and the virtual. Age itself has become a visual phenomenon - whereby the older people, women in particular, have become more strongly defined by their appearance. As Kathleen Woodward has famously stated in her book *Figuring Age* (1999), older women are both invisible - in that they are not seen - and hyper visible - in that they are all that is seen. In response to demographic shifts, the experience of old age and its visual constitution becomes more often than not the focus of inquiry shared by gerontology and cinema studies.

Cultural gerontology as a burgeoning scientific field attempts to recuperate the individuality of older lives explored through literature, film and other forms of art. With its emphasis on mediatisation, individuation and the politics of everyday (older) life, cultural gerontology may bridge the gap between gerontology and cinema studies despite the initial differences in the research interests, theorising and methodologies of the two fields. Prof. Dr. Bettina Kleiner, Prof. Dr. Vinzenz Hediger, Dr. Miranda Leontowitsch and Dr. Asja Makarević will engage with this and other ensuing questions in this opening panel discussion.

**PROF. DR. VINZENZ HEDIGER**

is a professor of cinema studies at Goethe Universität Frankfurt. He is the co-director of the research center "ConTrust - Conflict and Trust in Political Life" and of the DFG-funded Research Training Program „Konfigurationen des Films“. His latest publication entails *Accidental Archivism. Shaping Cinema's Future with Remnants of the Past* (edited with Stefanie Schulte Strathaus; Lüneburg: meson press 2023).



**DR. MIRANDA LEONTOWITSCH**

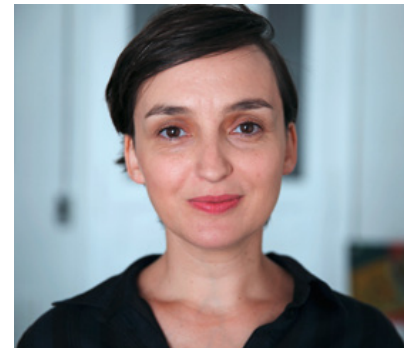
is a senior researcher at Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany. She has a background in social work and sociology and her research focusses on intersections of ageing and gender, care relationships, queer ageing, and ageing in the digital age. She uses a range of qualitative research methods and has a particular interest in participatory approaches.



Foto © Klaus Ditté

**PROF. DR. BETTINA KLEINER**

is a professor of the science of Education at the Goethe University Frankfurt. She is an expert in the areas of school, gender and sexuality as well as of postcolonial feminist perspectives on education and pedagogy. She is author of *subjekt bildung heteronormativität* and co-editor of the volume *Trans\* und Inter\*Geschlechtlichkeit in Erziehung und Bildung*.



**DR. ASJA MAKAREVIĆ**

currently works as a post-doctoral fellow in the research programme "AGE-C Aging and Gender in European Cinema" at Goethe University, Frankfurt, where she obtained her PhD degree. Prior to embarking on an academic career, between 2009 and 2017, Asja programmed Talents Sarajevo, the Sarajevo Film Festival's networking and training platform for emerging film professionals from Southeast Europe and Southern Caucasus.

Foto © Nina Kusturica

## LUIS FREIJO

Man in Search for Meaning: Masculinity and Ageing  
in a Transnational European Context

15.11.23

Wednesday,  
6pm - 8pm

Language:  
English

The decade of the 2010s and the early 2020s have witnessed the release of several high-profile films in different European countries which featured male protagonists over 60 years of age who were faced with reformulations of their notions of maleness and masculinity and subsequent losses of meaning. Films such as *La Grande Bellezza* in Italy, *Western* in Germany, *Dolor y Gloria* in Spain or *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* in the UK presented a variety of male protagonists in search for meaning while existing in different national and socioeconomic contexts within a wider European milieu.

This lecture proposes to connect ageing, masculinity and representation through the psychoanalytic works of Viktor Frankl and his system of "logotherapy" (1959). Frankl, psychiatrist and survivor of the Holocaust, proposed that the "primary motivational force in man" is the search for meaning. Applying logotherapy to *La Grande Bellezza*, *Western*, *Dolor y Gloria* and *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, this lecture proposes to compare similarities and differences in how these searches for meaning by ageing male characters are articulated. The analysis will enable to chart how ageing is conceived and how it intersects with other notions of class, gender values, national constructions and European politics and economic dynamics. Ultimately, the purpose of this lecture is to explore a methodology for a flexible understanding of European identity as it relates to ageing and masculinity.



### DR. LUIS FREIJO

is a Research Associate at the Department of Film Studies at King's College London, where he works for the project "AGE-C: Ageing and Gender in European Cinema". His research has previously focused on the dynamics of World Cinema and film genre studies, specifically the global film Western. He also has a previous background in journalism in Spain, where he worked on radio, written press and, especially, the private network Telecinco.

## ALEXANDRE MOUSSA

Acting Old: Ageing as Screen Performance

29.11.23

Wednesday,  
6pm - 8pm

Language:  
English

In recent years, several European films released in movie theaters have cast middle-aged stars in order to portray characters of an older age: relevant examples that come to mind are Alex Lutz playing a washed-up pop singer in *Guy* (Alex Lutz, 2018), Tilda Swinton embodying her character's mother in *The Eternal Daughter* (Joanna Hogg, 2022), Elsa Zylberstein as an ageing Simone Veil in *Simone: Woman of the Century* (Olivier Dahan, 2022) and of course Marion Cotillard as Édith Piaf in *La Vie en rose* (Olivier Dahan, 2007).

This lecture will examine a corpus of such films in order to answer several questions, the first of which is: how does one 'act old'? How much do actors rely on external support such as make-up, costume and accessories (McLean, 2022) or, more recently, CGI? What 'eloquent' gestures (Pearson, 1992), postures or voice alterations do they use to express the transition to old age? What kind of narrative and visual frameworks allow these performances to be believable and how well are they received? Beyond the shape that those transformations take in films, this lecture will also address their underlying ideology: because of their excessive nature, they indeed tend to rely on, reinforce or make a caricature out of gender norms of ageing. We will therefore also wonder: what perception of old age do they tend to build?



### DR. ALEXANDRE MOUSSA

holds a PhD in Film Studies from the Sorbonne Nouvelle University (Paris, France). He's the author of a thesis dedicated to French actress, director and activist Delphine Seyrig. His work focuses on the study of screen performance and star images, as well as gender representation in film. Moussa teaches at the University of Poitiers and also works as a film critic, a film programmer and a screenwriter/director.

## ANDREA-ADRIANA VIRGINÁS and BOGLÁRKA ANGÉLA FARKAS

Mothers (as) Grandmothers in Recent European  
(Small National) Cinemas: Figures of Authority,  
Goddesses of Wisdom, or Mad Rebels, and/or  
Societal Waste?

20.12.23

Wednesday,  
6pm - 8pm

Language:  
English

In spite of their peripheral situatedness and scarce(er) resources, 21st century European small national cinemas are overrepresented as far as the moving image-based, narrative fictional articulation of the ageing, childless, or infertile woman, fighting an ecological(ly) inspired 'war', is concerned. Our presentation shall examine the phenomenon along three subhypotheses.

1. Older women might appear more frequently in decision-making positions in small national film and television production cultures – such as the presently considered Danish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Greek, Lithuanian, Slovakian, Swedish, or the Romanian one(s) – and their involvement is essential with regards to 'proposals' to reimagine female existence past youth and fertility.

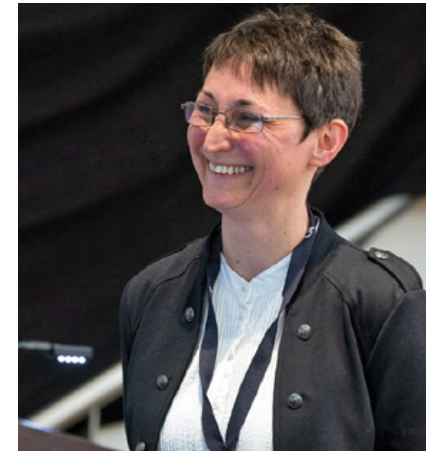
2. These lonely women characters, performing small charities or sabotage actions on behalf of nature and the environment, are a 21st century actualization of the stereotype, also archetype, of the caring woman, possibly wise, old, a witch or a priest, even a deity – a way to engage with climate trauma through a powerful yet 'cost-effective' method, so important for scarce(er)-resource small national film and television cultures.

3. The explicit childlessness and/or infertility, as well as the pronounced ageing process of the heroines might be linked to the grandmother theory advanced in behavioural ecological thinking. "A woman could not invest fully in her grandchildren if she went on having children of her own" suggested Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* in 1976, offering thus an explanation "of the evolution of the menopause in females" (Dawkins 115-116). With the overall ageing of the population in a European Anthropocene context, the tendency is more pronounced in the case of

women – who simply live longer than men – and it is even more evident in scarcer-resource small national contexts of grand/mothers. Thus, these proposals to reimagine female existence in the Anthropocene through the stereotype of the lonely ecological terrorist, the archetype of the wise old woman, and in the character of 'mothers as grandmothers' must be considered in detail.

### DR. ANDREA VIRGINÁS

is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. Author of *Film Genres in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: History, Theory, Reception* (2021), Bolyai János Research Fellow of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (2021-2024), project leader of "Cultural Traumas in Contemporary European Small National Cinemas" (Romania, 2022-2024), and Romanian unit responsible in "AGE-C: Ageing and Gender in European Cinema" (2023-2027).



### BOGLÁRKA ANGÉLA FARKAS

is a PhD student in Film Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University (Cluj-Napoca, Romania). Along with her mentor, Dr. Andrea Virginás, she worked on several research projects, most predominantly regarding Transylvanian film. Currently, she is involved in two research projects, "AGE-C Ageing and Gender in European Cinema" and "Cultural Traumas in Contemporary European Small National Cinemas".

Foto © Tibor Danilics

## FRANCESCO PITASSIO and GLORIA DAGNINO

(Not) Looking One's Age: The Double  
Standard of Ageing On-Screen

17.01.24

Wednesday,  
6pm - 8pm

Language:  
English

Age has always been a factor of great sensitivity in the careers of screen actors. In 1957, Edgar Morin wrote that beauty and youth are the inseparable requirements of film stars. To preserve these valuable assets, individual talents and production companies go to great lengths, implementing an array of techniques that include make-up, cosmetic surgery, and CGI touch-ups. But how do *young* and *old* age look on screen? When does an actor become too old to play the part? Who gets to decide that, and based on which criteria? At a time when de-ageing AI allows 75+ stars like Robert De Niro, Samuel L. Jackson and Harrison Ford to play thirty, forty-years younger versions of themselves, what relation, if any, exists between an actor's biological and screen age?

The lecture will explore these, and related questions, by focusing on the notion of screen age, which will be analyzed as a theoretical and an operational concept. Far from being a "natural" transposition to the screen of an actor's inherent features, screen age is a culturally and socially constructed concept, which carries biases and bears problematic implications for the way we portray, experience and perceive age and aging in our societies. The intersection of age and gender will be especially addressed to illustrate how – consistently with Susan Sontag's "double standard of ageing" – it is mainly female actors who are adversely affected by the representational biases inherent in the concept of screen age.



**PROF. DR. FRANCESCO PITASSIO** is a professor of Film Studies at the Università degli Studi di Udine (Italy). He has authored and co-edited numerous publications in Italian and English on film theory, film acting and stardom, Italian and Central-Eastern European film history, documentary cinema. In 2015 he was Fulbright Distinguished Lecturer at the University of Notre Dame and, in 2021, Chaire Roger Odin at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3.

**DR. GLORIA DAGNINO** (PhD Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland) is a research associate at the Università degli Studi di Udine (Italy). She is also an adjunct professor at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. Her research interests include gender equity issues in the Italian film industry, the political economy of the audiovisual media, and regulatory, economic, and cultural practices around the media/advertising convergence.





## VINZENZ HEDIGER and ASJA MAKAREVIĆ

Have You Seen These Women? Cultural Specificity and the (In)visibility of Old Age across Film Cultures

31.01.24

Wednesday,  
6pm - 8pm

Language:  
English

It is often said that women become invisible in society after a certain age. However, ageing women have certainly become more visible in European cinema over the last two decades. But how do filmmakers from different parts of Europe negotiate the visibility of ageing women on screen? Does cultural specificity matter in the (in)visibility of old age across film cultures?

To answer these questions we develop an experimental set-up which we present and discuss in a joint lecture. We look for cultural specificities in performance and reading of age and gender in Swiss and post-Yugoslav cinema by analyzing two examples from a situated perspective and across purported lines of cultural division and difference. The two films are the festival arthouse discovery *Have You Seen This Woman?* (Dir. Matija Gluščević and Dušan Zorić, 2022) and the comedy *Late Bloomers* (Dir. Bettina Oberli, 2006), one of the biggest box office successes of Swiss cinema of the last two decades.

We assume that there are codifications of age and gender which are immanent to the socio-political contexts from which these films originate and in which they find their primary audience. To make these codifications salient and legible we put them to the test in a cross-cultural analysis and the ensuing discussion. We are particularly interested in performative transgressions of socially imposed norms.

Spinoza's understanding of active and affirmative body offers a conceptual framework to engage with these question. Spinoza defines body not in terms of what it is but in terms of what it can do and become. This implies that its meaning and capacities vary according to the context, in which body finds itself. A Spinozian concept of the active and affirmative body, as further

theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri under the term "becoming-woman", has been gaining more prominence in contemporary feminist theory. Co-joining our cross-cultural readings of *Late Bloomers* and *Have You Seen This Woman?* we ask how ageing women can reverse their socially sanctioned invisibility through a process of "becoming-woman", i.e. by challenging the dichotomic order of gender divisions and the dividing line between young and old age.



**PROF. DR. VINZENZ HEDIGER** is a professor of cinema studies at Goethe Universität Frankfurt. He is the co-director of the research center "ConTrust – Conflict and Trust in Political Life" and of the DFG-funded Research Training Program „Konfigurationen des Films“. His latest publication entails *Accidental Archivism. Shaping Cinema's Future with Remnants of the Past* (edited with Stefanie Schulte Strathaus; Lüneburg: meson press 2023).

**DR. ASJA MAKAREVIĆ** currently works as a post-doctoral fellow in the research programme "AGE-C Aging and Gender in European Cinema" at Goethe University, Frankfurt, where she obtained her PhD degree. Prior to embarking on an academic career, between 2009 and 2017, Asja programmed Talents Sarajevo, the Sarajevo Film Festival's networking and training platform for emerging film professionals from Southeast Europe and Southern Caucasus.

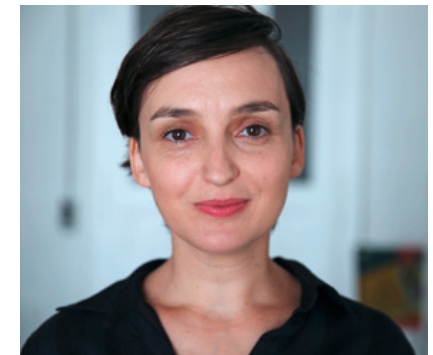


Foto © Nina Kusturica

## ORGANIZERS

The **Cornelia Goethe Center for Women's and Gender Studies (CGC)** is an interdisciplinary institute for research, teaching and the promotion of junior researchers at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. It stimulates cooperation among researchers from a variety of disciplines who engage empirically and theoretically with gender relations in history and in the present. The research profile of the CGC is characterized by the bundling of the current research questions of the center members and moves, among other things, within the framework of transnational migration and intersectionality research, social movement research and queer studies. In addition to biographical research, the study of the relationship between humans and nature as well as the body and identity are also part of the research focus of the Center.



## VENUE

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main Campus Westend, PEG, room 1.G191

### by public transport:

From central station take any S-Bahn in the direction city (tracks 101/102) to the station *Hauptwache*, change to metro lines (U-Bahn) 1, 2, 3 or 8. Exit at the station *Holzhausenstraße*, short walk to the campus. The closest bus stops near campus are with line 75 *Max-Horkheimer-Strasse*, *Bremer Platz* or *Uni Campus Westend*. The closest bus stop with line 36 is *Uni Campus Westend*.





Cornelia  
Goethe  
Colloquien



Project AGE-C  
Ageing and Gender  
in European Cinema



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Campus Westend, PEG-Gebäude,  
Raum 1.G 191 | mittwochs, 18-20 Uhr c.t.  
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