Age and Ageing in Anglophone and European Cinema(s)

SERCIA Conference in collaboration with the AGE-C Research Project

3-5 September 2025, Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Keynote lectures:

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In her seminal 2006 essay "Performing Age, Performing Gender," Kathleen Woodward describes six types of age based on phenomena examined in detail in gerontological research:

> *Chronological age* refers to the number of years a person has lived. *Biological or functional age* refers to the state of a person's physical capacities. . . *Social age* refers to the meanings that a society accords to different categories of age. . . Like social age, *cultural age* refers to the meanings or values that a culture assigns to different people in terms of age, but here status and power are crucial. . . *Psychological age* refers to a person's state of mind in terms of age. . . Finally, by *statistical age* I mean predictions concerning age based on large data sets.[1]

All these forms of age have undergone and are currently undergoing profound change(s) in the first quarter of the 21st century. Human beings today have the prospect of attaining the highest values in what concerns the most objective age-forms, *chronological* and *statistical age*, since such measurements have started being taken. With the increase of these values projected into the near future (life expectancy sitting at an EU-average of 80.1 years for babies born in 2021 within the Union[2]), state institutions and NGOs have been engaged in trying to understand the consequences of these processes for the other types of age defined by Woodward: *biological, social, cultural* and *psychological age*.

Cinema is one such culturally prestigious institution in which these changes can be observed. We hope that by focusing on Age and Ageing in Anglophone and European

[1] Kathleen Woodward, 'Performing Age, Performing Gender,' p. 183, note 5, 2006 *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 1 (Spring), 162-189.

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mortality_and_life_expectancy_statistics, 16-17 December, 2023.

Cinema(s), the SERCIA 2025 Conference shall advance our understanding of how a greying medium, cinema, persists in an overall greying social context – or perhaps collaborates with youth cultures in order to survive. How cinema culturally represents and redefines what ageing means; how cinema is battling with gender gaps and ageing roles above 50; and how cinema is affected by its own 'greying' – these are some of the most ardent questions of this research (sub)field.

The 2025 SERCIA Conference will be organized in collaboration with the research project *AGE-C: Ageing and Gender in European Cinema* (2023-2027) funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, which "aims to establish cultural gerontology as a key approach in film studies. We focus on how cinematic representations of gender shape notions of old age and well-being across Europe." The 2023 volume *Ageing Masculinities in Contemporary European and Anglophone Cinema* offers a fundamental starting point, in reference to "the need to view old age as part of the life course rather than as an isolated life stage" (Tracy, Shrage-Früh 2023, 4). Ageing is a visually and dramatically striking feature of life and necessarily affects the audiovisual medium of film narration. Because they operate as continuums, films and series are capable of figuratively representing other such elements of our existence that may also be identified as spectrums and less as clear-cut categories: like the passing of life and ageing.

Examples that come to one's mind have no cut, to echo the slogan of the AGE-C project, "Life Has No Cut". *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) is the story of two former star sisters, their ageing feud meta-referenced in the 2017 first season of FX channel's *Feud* series – which dramatizes the rivalry of Joan Crawford and Bette Davis as real-life actresses of the 1962 classic, with Jessica Lange and Susan Sarandon's fascinating impersonation in focus. Female heroes (past/of) middle-age or wise old women populate blockbuster fantasy worlds from the Harry Potter universe to the franchises of *Mad Max* and *Dune*, and smaller budget European titles like *Spoor* or *Nightsiren* offer further variations. Obviously, age and ageing do not have gendered or social status limits either: Daniel Blake's or Dante Lăzărescu's ordeals in Ken Loach's and Cristi Puiu's films are counterbalanced by the humor of French comedies or the beauty of Italian melodramas. The determinacy of greying Anglo-Saxon detectives and of Scandinavian political decision makers is mirrored or deconstructed by ageing stars, fictive and actual, in recent titles such as *The Substance, The Last Showgirl* or *Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields*.

The *Age and Ageing in Anglophone and European Cinema(s)* 2025 SERCIA conference welcomes proposals focusing on the following points:

Industries of ageing in films and series:

• Film and series personnel and ageing: from casting decisions to longevity on (different) screens; career paths and career breaks affected by gender bias, ageism, and other types of exclusionary industry practices.

• Film and series and ageing: industry policies, trends and future changes.

• Film and series, and their ageing audience: loyalty, new allegiances and shrinking fanbase; different generations – the same content?

• Star studies and ageing: short- and long-span careers, loops among star personas and acting performances; de-ageing; prosthetic ageing.

Representations of ageing in films and series:

• Film and series and the topic of ageing: arthouse narratives, generic variations, remakes and transmedial expansions.

• Anglophone cinemas, European cinema, and ageing: regional, historical or politized differences.

• Film and series, ageing and society: inclusion, exclusion, class and habitus, informal and formal practices, work and migration; technological changes.

• Film and series, ageing and gender(ed), sexualized, racialized identities.

• Film and series, ageing and intersectionality: possibilities for synthesis?

• Film and series, ageing and creativity: outbursts, former glitter, comebacks.

• Film and series, ageing and temporality: the retrospective look on ageing (e.g. in filmic autobiographies); ageing as a topic that eludes representation through narrative.

• Film and series, ageing and stylistics: specific techniques of mise-en-scène and mise-en-image.

• Film and series ageing and the question of research methodologies.; the intersection of film and television studies, gerontology, and cultural gerontology.

The SERCIA 2025 Conference *Age and Ageing in Anglophone and European Cinema(s)* is hosted by Babeș-Bolyai University, in a collaboration between the Faculty of Theatre and Film (FTF) and the Faculty of European Studies (FES), in the medieval old town of Cluj-Napoca/Klausenburg/Kolozsvár.

Cluj-Napoca has a well connected regional airport – with daily flights to major European hubs, including French ones https://www.airportcluj.ro/en/informatii-zboruri/destinatii/ – and which is linked to the city center by taxis and regular public transport. Accommodation is provided

on the full spectrum of several star hotels, cosy apartments or cheaper student accommodations, with local street food and restaurants catering for all needs.

Driving through Cluj-Napoca: 1.30-3.10, the Kogălniceanu/Farkas Street between the two remaining medieval city walls, with our conference's location at 1.42-1.48.

Local vlogger's fairly recent video of the city: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZbhJdxaagw .

SERCIA 2025 local organizing committee

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Please, send your proposals (abstract 300 words, bio 100 words) by 30 April 2025 to andrea.virginas@ubbcluj.ro, boglarka.farkas@ubbcluj.ro. Preliminary programme shall be circulated from 15 May 2025 onwards. Registration for the conference requires active SERCIA membership (https://www.sercia.net/index.php/how-to-join-sercia/17-how-to-join-sercia), and the payment of the registration fee (65 EUR, which will cover the conference package, refreshments during breaks, buffet lunch and wi-fi). A conference dinner will be organized (to be paid separately upon registration), and a post-conference one-day trip to the Transylvanian countryside in the Western Carpathian/Apuseni Mountains (to be paid separately upon registration).

Looking forward to welcoming you in Cluj!