

# Film education and age(ing): A case study of a university course on *FilmBildung*

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## Abstract

This paper elaborates on a practical film education project conducted in universities, schools and retirement homes, which we have been working on for several years. We describe the approach to teaching and research that we have been following, as well as the basis of our vision for a project on collage, life writing and film education with elderly people. Based on several MA modules on film education that we have taught at various universities during the past few years, as well as on a number of seminars on ageing studies (BA and MA) and on our experience as trained writing coaches, we draw together different strands of our experiences in order to sketch a film education workshop that instructs students to, in turn, instruct elderly people in a retirement home to work on their film experience by means of collage and life writing. The background in teaching and research upon which we draw is based on participatory action research, a constructivist teaching philosophy, a heterarchic organization of university modules and an intersectional understanding of age(ing).

**Keywords:** film education; ageing studies; higher education; participatory action research; collage; life writing

## Main concerns

In this article, we describe a research and teaching project on age(ing), film education and biographical writing that we have been developing for several years. The project is, to an extent, still a work in progress in that key aspects of it are still in development. The following study therefore describes work that has already taken place, alongside our aspirations for the future of the project. It should be emphasized throughout that our film education work involves diverse interlocutors, that we ourselves are often not the key agents leading the proceedings, and that much of the work described involves facilitating university students in finding their own voices and particular ways of working as film educators.

We have been working on the project since 2013, and teaching aspects of it at several universities as part of a variety of disciplines such as media studies, film studies and communication studies. So far, we have conducted several film education workshops with students, children and elderly people. At present we are developing a new approach that combines film education with collage and life writing. This specific aspect of the project has not yet been put into practice but is a composite of a number of formats and methods derived from the workshops mentioned above, as well as a number of modules we taught at various universities. As certified writing coaches we also draw upon our considerable experience conducting workshops on life writing

and collage, which is part of the basis upon which we are developing a new university-based course on film education and age(ing).

In this case study, we will first elaborate on the theoretical underpinnings of our work as film educators, on our approach to teaching and research and on the procedures of previous modules and workshops we designed and executed. We will then sketch a possible outline for a module that will assist university students in developing their own workshops combining collage and life writing in working with elderly people. Central to the proposed project are film education workshops, designed together with students and put into practice in retirement homes. These new workshops are composed of three steps: film screening, collage and life writing. They are based upon a multimodal entanglement of various reflection and thinking techniques. The workshops are not just about creating biographical thinking and reflection spaces, which are opened up and facilitated by film, art and writing; they are also about the sense of empowerment that can be enabled through these creative techniques (Eckert and Martin, forthcoming). The aim of our film education workshops is to reflect on life – in old age as well as in other phases of life – as well as to become empowered by rewriting it.

The corpus of films we work with is composed of four contemporary European and Canadian documentaries and fictional films. They enable us to attend to four topics important in old age and for the elderly: remembering/forgetting, living/habitation, loving/desiring, and sickness/death. Together with the participants, these topics are approached through film, collage and text. However, we will not be discussing the result of these seminars, but rather the process and the theoretical prerequisites of our concept of film education, which we have termed *FilmBildung*. This term reflects the German term *Bildung* in film education, which evokes a holistic approach that is able to embrace critical reflection and grass-roots democratic claims in conferring a sense of empowerment, not just on the elderly but also on the students who are taught to work in film education.

Our approach is based on participatory action research (Reid and Frisby, 2008; Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Swantz, 2008), which aims not just to investigate a given field, but also to change it while researching it. Moreover, our approach is informed by the concept of research-based learning (Brew, 2010; Brew and Jewell, 2012) and teaching/operating in the sense of a decolonizing and diversity-sensitive didactics. In this context, the vital question becomes how to convey knowledge about film, art and writing on the one hand, and how to convey knowledge about age(ing) to students on the other. Also, how can students learn to conduct a film education workshop themselves? Our hypothesis is that new synergies emerge especially in the collaboration between students and elderly people, and in the connection of film studies and techniques of writing and collage. We will describe the underpinnings of such a hypothesis. We will also illustrate our notion of the potentially emerging synergies within such an approach through the more detailed description of a student-led pilot project that we had the opportunity to witness.

## **How we understand *FilmBildung*, a concept we developed for children**

The concept of *FilmBildung* (Eckert and Martin, 2014) that we have developed in our work is derived from the French film educator Alain Bergala (2006), as well as from German writers and theorists such as Bettina Henzler and Winfried Pauleit (2009), Henzler et al. (2010), Wenke Wegner (2010), Manuel Zahn (2010), and Volker Pantenburg and Stefanie Schlüter (2014). Following these approaches, we consider there to be

three central questions in film education: personality development through cinema, cinema-specific thinking, and the question of suitable methods and institutional frameworks for film education.

Bergala's *The Cinema Hypothesis* (2016), which culminates in the figure of the film educator as *passeur/passeuse*, becomes vital for our project. According to Bergala, the *passeur/passeuse* is led by his/her passion for film and guided by his/her own preferences: this is how s/he incites passion in the students. A precondition is that the *passeur/passeuse* leaves behind the authority of the teacher and connects with the students on a different level, that is more from the perspective of a mentor who passes on his/her enthusiasm for cinema. Our use of his/her and s/he, as well as *passeur/passeuse*, is to reflect the fact that Bergala was unable to think of his concept of the *passeur* as female, or as gender neutral. The androcentrism present in Bergala's work is not just reflected in the excluding and discriminating choice to think of the *passeur* as male but also in his choice of texts and films for his corpus in film education. Bergala's ignorance about intersectional aspects of identity and film education is extensive. However, the *passeuse/passeur* is still a valid starting point for our concept.

Searching for comparative institutional frameworks of film education throughout Europe, we also found a sense of synergy when looking at the Spanish school cinema project by Núria Aidelman and Laia Colell (2010), as well as the KurzFilmSchule Hamburg by Nina Rippel and Manuel Zahn (2010). Both are programmes of film education that centre on conceptions of film as art. The Spanish project is also based upon the unearthing of artistic creativity through film education. Nathalie Bourgeois (2010) of the Cinémathèque française describes how a number of projects, workshops and materials enable children to develop a relationship with cultural film heritage and to receive a basic introduction to cinema culture. In all these European film education projects, film is not understood as a text but as an artefact whose power lies more in its specific aesthetics than in its narrative. Building on these European concepts of film education, we have developed the term *FilmBildung* (Eckert and Martin, 2014), which distances itself from an educational model based upon the teaching of facts and information that can be consumed (see, for example, Paolo Freire (2008) for a pedagogy of autonomy). Instead, *FilmBildung* is based upon a constructivist didactic, working with a perception of students as sovereign beings who can contribute to the learning situation with their own experience and expertise. Learning is thought of as an initiation into a self-controlled process. Moreover, in the framework of this concept, we see *Bildung* as leading to autonomy and being able to counter discrimination and oppression. A number of categories of difference, such as gender, race, age, ethnicity and sexuality, which can lead to discrimination and oppression, can therefore be of interest and relevance. With an intersectional analysis in mind, seeing the aforementioned categories as intersecting, we adapt de-hierarchizing pedagogies, such as that of bell hooks (1994, 2003, 2010), to our aesthetic educational approach of *FilmBildung*. Five aspects need special attention in this context, which we have elaborated on elsewhere (see Eckert and Martin, 2014, 2015a), and that we want to outline again here. First, with Bettina Henzler (2014), we argue that film in its specific materiality has to be included in the process of film education. The aim of film education needs to be to work with film on several levels. This means: screening films, making films and talking about films. For example, how a storyline works can become clear through a montage of different film stills: the various arrangements can reveal how images generate stories. Second, according to Pantenburg and Schlüter (2014), the perception of film has to be regarded synaesthetically. Spectators perceive of films not only visually and acoustically but also with the whole body. Bodily perception here asks for special attention, since it happens

beyond narration and the sort of sensory units usually discussed in film studies. This requires an education that does not solely function through words but through film itself. Third, the role of teachers in film education processes is vital. Teachers act as *passeur/passeuse* according to Bergala (2016), and tread back behind the affective network of film education according to Zahn (2014). The *passeur/passeuse* leaves the guiding function in the learning process to the film itself. Fourth, even the film itself can become a *passeur/passeuse* (see Wegner, 2010). Fifth, teachers cannot – even though they are experts in theory and history of film – know more about personal film experience than all other spectators, and should meet those at eye level in the process of filmic appropriation. The meeting point of all these perspectives lies where the desire of the teacher and the desire of the learners are given room, and where all the participants meet each other and meet with the film.

Moreover, the changing materialities and technologies of film have to be considered in our concept of *FilmBildung*. Not only as film educators but also as recipients of films, we face the challenge that children grow up with different technologies than we did. These so-called digital natives use technologies differently than older people do, and they integrate them into their life in other ways. Last but not least, digitization, the multitude of circulation media and end devices (such as smartphones, satellite and the internet), and changing aesthetics and production modes (special effects, digital 3-D9, and forms of reception (IMAX, 3D, Home Cinema and so on)) alter, multiply and shift the spaces of film. These changing conditions need to inform *FilmBildung* when addressing children. When addressing elderly people all these specifics need attention as well.

Malte Hagener (2008) speaks about the phenomenon of media immanence, and locates the omnipresence of films not just in cinema, end devices or the factual presence of audiovisual products but extends it to our experiences, memories, identities, affects and thoughts as being always already mediated. With this approach, it becomes possible to develop a theory of *FilmBildung* dissolving the separation between the act of perception (the reception of films) and the perception subject (the spectator). If we already live (and always have lived) in images, as Hagener stresses, and the image also in us (ibid.: 58), then age(ing) cannot be thought of without film and film cannot be thought of without age(ing). Therefore, one should think about an age-specific differentiation of *FilmBildung*. This on the one hand accounts for people in different phases of life (children, adults, elderly people), and on the other hand also for students in classes about *FilmBildung*. Asked differently: How can we instruct students to conduct workshops with people in different life phases? What understanding of teaching is necessary?

## Our teaching approach

In the scope of age(ing) and *FilmBildung* it seems plausible to use a constructivist, gender- and diversity-conscious, as well as a de-hierarchizing, teaching concept. Learning is understood as a social process that takes place between all protagonists and that can be employed to deconstruct the power imbalance between teachers and students. In the sense of a research-based teaching, processes such as knowledge production in academia will be made transparent and the social positioning of the participants in relation to gender, ethnicity, age, class and so on will be subjected to critical consideration. Teaching at eye level means to craft the learning process together with the students and to transfer responsibility for learning processes to everyone. We believe that this is how everyone can learn from everyone in the sense

of the each-one-teach-one philosophy, which is based upon the perception of all participants as being able to teach.

The theoretical foundation of this teaching approach is informed by the works of bell hooks in *Teaching Critical Thinking* (2010), *Teaching Community* (2003) and *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). We consider bell hooks's teaching trilogy as crucial in the formulation of a teaching practice that looks sensitively to navigate and challenge structures of power and difference. Seminars that perform what they want to teach can be conceptualized by including aspects of the works of critical pedagogies such as those of Paolo Freire (1993, 2008) and Peter McLaren (1995), as well as the post-structuralist account of the persona of the teacher in Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) and the constructivist didactics of Johannes Wildt (2004). In conveying one's authority as a teacher to the students, one can create an atmosphere of mutual responsibility and consideration. Expertise for the object is not established *qua* authority anymore – the teacher–learner relationship can therefore be perceived as de-hierarchized. This makes clear to all participants that their own experiences have value for the development and the execution, as well as the success, of a class.

Paolo Freire (2008) describes the common understanding of teaching as a *banking system*, and thus criticizes models of education that assume that teaching should be composed of the consumption and plain storage of facts. (We are grateful to one of our anonymous reviewers for the advice on reflecting on Freire's historical and pre-neo-liberalist use of the metaphor of a banking system, especially when it comes to the making, editing and distributing of film in the age of Web 2.0. This is a very interesting aspect to be considered in film education. However, this discussion would exceed the scope of this paper.) The critical pedagogy, or the pedagogy of the oppressed, which Freire (*ibid.*) advocates in contrast, is based upon the assumption that different forms of expertise will be present in diverse groups of learners. Learners in his concept participate self-responsibly and contribute with their diverse experiences and previous knowledge, thereby assisting learning (see also Berendt, 2000, 2002). Learning is here understood as an intrinsically social process. Even though Freire can and has been criticized for his androcentrism and sexism, his concepts do enable emancipating processes and have been adopted and adapted by feminists. For example, bell hooks builds her pedagogy upon some of his premises. Her claim is to become a witness of freedom in the process of learning (hooks, 1994: 11) and she requests that one should strive for knowledge of how one can live in the world (*ibid.*: 15). These approaches differ from traditional didactics such as behaviouristic approaches, and are in sync with constructivist and gender-sensitive didactics. According to feminist post-colonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (1993), it is necessary to develop pedagogical methodologies that rearrange structures of desire in the classroom, especially in order to involve students in the process of learning and in order to support them to *unlearn* known frames of reference. Moreover, in connection with the affective turn, one has to assume that we learn affectively and that enabling specific situations, atmospheres and spaces will help foster learning processes. According to Watkins (2010), affect accumulates in the body as processes of memorizing and of learning. This affective aspect becomes obvious when thinking of the bodily level of film experience. We will address this specificity of film as the object of teaching below. First, however, we will elaborate upon the connection between de-hierarchized teaching practices and research-based teaching.

The concept of research-based teaching has greater significance in this context. For Mieg and Lehmann (2017), it is important how students reflect upon their own role in the group and how they become aware of their own influence on the group

dynamics. It is also of importance for Mieg and Lehmann that students are permitted to regard teachers as equals. In our seminar series, students are asked to freely design single classes, meaning that students can contribute their own ideas regarding how to put film education into practice. At the beginning of every film education seminar series, we stress that we as teachers also navigate a fairly new field and that we will not know what the results will look like and that we are very curious. This means that we establish the necessity of creating an atmosphere of common responsibility, creativity and commitment concerning the success of the class. This concept of shared responsibility in our research-based teaching approach is based upon participatory action research.

## Our approach to research

Action research is a method that focuses on the creation of spaces for collaborative learning and, by combining action *and* reflection, enables liberating actions. Furthermore, it can be considered a grass-roots democratic practice to generate knowledge, and at the same time generate social change. The main goals of action research are participatory engagement, collaborative partnership, empowerment, co-learning, capacity building and action towards social transformation, alternative ways of doing and knowing, critical thinking and discourse, and, of course, exploration of the social world.

Arts-based action research can add even more aspects to the process, as it incorporates the aesthetic in terms of perception and in terms of creation. Film education per se could be considered an action research method based on the arts. However, since we use the film education process for generating knowledge and empowerment, we combine it with the collaborative and participatory practice of the collage.

Participatory action research is based on what Agnes Heller termed 'symmetric reciprocity' and on 'subject–subject horizontal or symmetric relationship' (quoted in Fals Borda, 1999: 13). Therefore, the aspiration for de-hierarchization and de-colonization we see as necessary in our teaching practice is also present in our research practice. Our participants and students are co-researchers whose experiences are authentic and valid. Action research is not immune, however, from the colonizing impetus found in many research practices. Therefore, we need to constantly re-evaluate our methods – in the research process as well as during the compiling, recording and writing processes of our findings.

In this respect, it is helpful to see empowerment as both a theoretical concept *and* a practice. Empowerment arises from the growth of self-confidence, self-trust and self-consciousness, but also in the understanding of one's own agency. Furthermore, empowerment is essentially a form of *dignidad* (dignity and self-respect) that is the feeling of 'being worthy of having a right to respect from others' (Rowlands, 1997: 129). However, we do not understand empowerment as a solely individual process but as 'an intentional on-going process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources' (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989: 2). Put differently, this community-located conception of empowerment is when people collectively gain a critical understanding of their social context and their positions in it, alongside greater control over their lives. Empowerment is thus a process and an outcome, and collective action and participation with others are vital aspects of structures of empowerment.

The term 'collage' originates from the French word *collé* and means 'glued'. Famous artists, such as the Cubists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques, introduced the technique at the beginning of the twentieth century. Collage can also be considered as a corollary to Postmodernism in challenging linearity, providing multiple perspectives, being fragmented and fragmenting, and challenging objectivity and reality. Collage is (next to photography) one of the most commonly applied action-research methods, as it allows participants to work intuitively. The collage is a technique in which one can spontaneously select, relocate, sort, connect and arrange material – text and images – and use it to represent opinions, experiences, ideas, anxieties, challenges and concerns. Moreover, collage can bring together sensory and visual textures, enabling the researcher to see and feel differently, and therefore provides various ways of asking questions regarding data. According to Donna Davis (2008: 245), collage has emerged as an 'exciting strategy for the exploration of memory, imagination and experiential reflection in an increasingly "mediated" world'. The connection to film education becomes clear here, since this approach enables participants to connect to each other through images, and to connect to their memories and, of course, also to the film they have been watching. The collage technique also offers an interesting parallel to montage in film.

Approaches to film education drawing from collage can thus provide the precondition for a teaching approach that aims to assist participants in integrating new and existing knowledge, as well as empowering them to make appropriate alterations to their current intellectual framework to accommodate that new information. Based on their cognitive structure, learners construct the knowledge they acquire through its inclusion into their symbolic mental representations and images. New information is selected, organized and transformed on the basis of past learning experiences. Collage in some way even represents the perception of this teaching-and-learning-relation in the way that it is a composition of old and new, of prevailing and creating, of cutting, editing and arranging bits and pieces into one framework.

As trained writing coaches, we have gained significant experience in how to guide people through creative processes. Collage is a recognized and well-received method in creative writing training. It can trigger new and exciting associative processes, can lead the creative process in new directions, and can even produce completely new connections. Collage also allows for giving materiality to aesthetic expression, and can therefore trigger new modes of both expression and perception.

The connection between film and collage can also be found in Julia Bee's (2018) work on 'Arrangements of spectatorship: desire, power and difference in the perception of film and television' (our translation of its title *Gefüge des Zuschauens: Begehren, Macht und Differenz in Film- und Fernseh-wahrnehmung*). The collages are composed by young people after seeing a film that will subsequently be reflected upon in group discussions and private interviews. In *Collage Dream Writing*, psychologist and writing coach Johanna Vedral (2017) explores the connection between collage and writing. The method she develops is based upon a combination of techniques such as collage, collage therapy, multimedia art therapy, trauma therapy and creative writing. The author describes this as a playful approach to personally significant stories from 'deeper soul levels' (Vedral, 2017: 70). Birgit Schreiber (2017) has also described similar methods of therapeutic and creative writing, such as drawing and painting. Further research on creative and therapeutic writing is also to be found in Heimes *et al.* (2013).

The connections between ageing processes and biographical writing are of central interest for our project. Rüdiger Kunow (2005) describes his work with elderly people, and argues for a writing practice encompassing fictional, autobiographical

texts and life writing. This practice of representation, which May Sarton describes as 'applying verbal skin cream' (quoted in Kunow, 2005: 39), interrogates the existing hegemonial systems of representation, including images, patterns and thinking figures. This criticizes stereotypes of ageism and the accompanying representation of Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, as well as enabling positive images of ageing that may allow the possibility for empowerment (ibid.). It is this empowering effect of life writing that is of particular interest for us. Here, ageing is not represented as a narrative of sickness or decay, but rather is portrayed as supporting the formation of a self-empowered identity. In the context of film education work based around collages, writing can open up a space of reflection and thinking that makes identity the object of negotiation and simultaneously discloses discriminating structures. Claire Horst (2017) develops a similar approach when she introduces diversity-sensitive techniques of creative writing. This approach is also a relevant anti-discriminatory practice for our project, since it also serves to bring attention to the structural discrimination towards the elderly, while simultaneously assisting self-empowerment.

Collage has been used as a mode of enquiry, analysis and representation (Butler-Kisber, 2007, 2008, 2010). Lynn Butler-Kisber and Tiiu Poldma (2010: 3) characterize collage in qualitative research as 'a reflective process, as a form of elicitation, and as a way of conceptualizing ideas'. Therefore, as a method used in action research it can also assist people in reflecting on their lives. The process as such can also be deeply empowering. And this is where we see the immense potential of an arts-based action research approach to film education with the elderly. We once had the experience of working with a group of women experiencing dementia, where we put postcards of animals on the tables to foster discussion. One of the women studied the images intensely and started telling a story from her childhood in which she had to bring home the cows. One of those cows would regularly bite strangers. The memory enabled her to connect to the students, who then started asking questions about her childhood. Working with people who have been diagnosed with some form of dementia, however, is something that needs special attention also from a psychological point of view. In the project described here, we do not work with people with dementia but with elderly people for whom interaction is especially challenging due to difficulties with standard communication.

We have identified some challenges that need to be addressed when working with collage with the elderly. The gluing together and the handicrafts and tinkering aspect of the collage might seem infantilizing to participants. This needs to be handled with care and is best communicated to participants beforehand. Moreover, people who have not been working creatively or as professional artists may be inhibited in expressing themselves, or want to create something beautiful, which might not work out as they expect, thus resulting in disappointment with the process. In these cases, we tend to stress that it is not the product but the process in which we are interested, and that it is this process that is the main aim of our workshops and research. In this respect, it also helps that collages are collaborative projects, meaning that there is never just one person responsible for the end product.

## **FilmBildung for the elderly**

When it comes to the description of phases of life, as Maierhofer (1996) notes, the instruments to narrate ageing and its gradations are missing, since Western culture only knows the dichotomy of youth and old age, which is hierarchized. To be young is connoted positively and to be old is connoted negatively. Youth is therefore not a fixed

mark, but is indefinitely extensible and fluid. A first step towards a new understanding of age(ing) is therefore the creation of new and suitable tools to describe it (ibid.: 5). For example, a chronological view on age(ing) can distinguish between children and teenagers, young adults, middle-aged people (40–60), elderly people (60–80) and high-aged people (beyond 80). Phases of life can also be segregated by educational, institutional and working phases, such as kindergarten, school, college/university, working phase, and retirement. For example, concepts for differentiating life phases, and pedagogy workshops for different ‘media generations’, are to be found in Schorb *et al.* (2009) and Hartung *et al.* (2012), which mainly discuss different approaches to the life phases to media by using categories such as digital natives.

Yet age(ing) should not be regarded as a solely quantitative and linear dimension of time but rather as a continuous process of becoming, configuring identity anew again and again. The continuous definition of the ‘I’ is perpetually creative and makes age(ing) a meaningful procedure (Maierhofer, 1996: 7). This performative act reinventing us constantly is especially meaningful when it comes to film education. We need to consider which topics are relevant in which life phases (relationships, family, friendship and so on), which topics change throughout life and which abound more than others (sickness, desire, living situation). It is one of the main aims of film education for the elderly to mediate these connections for aesthetic experience. Analytical instruments such as *mise en scène*, montage or sound help in this endeavour.

Up until now we have delivered six courses on film education and two on age(ing) and film. Two of those were intersecting in that they were focusing on film education and the elderly. The rest were aimed at children (primary and secondary school). While the workshop in the primary school was designed by ten university postgraduate students and visited by ten primary school children (6–8 years old), another of these courses brought children of a secondary school and their grandparents together for a workshop on intergenerational film education. This intergenerational film education course was composed of 10 postgraduate students, 28 children (12–14 years old) and 6 grandparents. In both instances, students designed and led the workshops themselves. At one point in the semester, we realized that we would have five generations present in the workshop: the children (12–14), the students (23–27), us the teachers (40–45), one generation of grandparents (50–70) and a second generation of grandparents (90).

The courses on age(ing) studies and film in the cities of Weimar and Jena (2014 and 2017/18) were composed of workshops in retirement homes and film screenings, as well as presentations by professional film-makers and film scholars. As part of this, we were even able to collaborate with the communal and independent city cinema for a film screening series on ‘Screening age’.

Both courses had a similar outline: first, a theoretical introduction to ageing studies and the aesthetics of film, then the practical part of transferring this knowledge to a workshop in the retirement home. While there were 40 students and 20 elderly people in the retirement home in Leipzig, in Erfurt there were 15 students and 4 elderly women (diagnosed with dementia). In both workshops, we started with the screening of *Oma & Bella* (2012), a documentary directed by Alexa Karolinski about a common living arrangement of two elderly Jewish women who lost their families in the Holocaust. Following the screening, we had discussions about the film in groups. Both workshops were designed and conducted independently by students. We only oversaw the process, and assisted in designing the workshop beforehand – the proceedings during the workshops were completely led by students.

In both courses, a variety of coursework was handed in by students. We received classical scientific essays and reflections, as well as portfolios including practical work

such as drawings and photographs. We also received one body of work on film, collage and writing, on the film education work with the grandparents of a student (description below). Next to the written assignments, we also received two 'making-ofs' in the form of video essays, which document the processes in the courses and the workshops.

## A university course on intergenerational film education

### Workflow

One course is composed of 14 weekly two-hour sessions, or of two seminar blocks on two weekends plus a one-day workshop.

1. **The first, introductory, session:** Here we set the common tone for the course, meaning that we discuss the culture of the course with the students, we talk about expectations concerning the art of contact and conduct between participants, and we present our syllabus. This syllabus contains all the literature and films with which we work. Furthermore, we discuss the formal requirements of the coursework (essay and reflection) and organize single sessions for student facilitators.
2. **The second session:** We, the teachers, facilitate the first thematic session using a diverse set of methods. We use a template consisting of introduction, main session and conclusion, and this functions as a blueprint for further sessions facilitated by students. It is important that all participants (us included) work in alternating, differently composed groups on particular texts and films. Our own conception of our role as teachers is that we do not function as explainers but as companions in the process of learning, who can enable learning in a variety of ways. This position is handed over to students in the coming sessions.
3. **Third to eleventh sessions:** From hereon, sessions are designed and facilitated by students. Group formation depends on the methods applied. The only requirement is that working groups are composed of two or three participants. The responsible students (in groups of two) direct the teamwork in working on films and texts. Here we, the teachers, are always equal parts of the teams. We provide the students with a handout on suitable facilitation methods. Before every session, we offer advice on what we feel works and what might have to be adjusted. Normally, we ask for the concept 48 hours before the session (by email) in order to have enough time for feedback and adjustments. Most of the time, students are too ambitious and need to be reminded that there is only a certain amount of time. The sessions always begin with a short reflection and recall of the last session (moderated by the teachers), then the students follow with their own, directed session work. After the session is concluded, we moderate a feedback round on the session. We approach the student moderations as being part of the learning project, which is enhanced from session to session through the feedback given by the group and by those who are yet to design a session. In our experience, the variety and plurality of methods (as well as the quality of content) improve during the progress of the semester. All students profit from each other's experience, and develop an attitude of wanting to entertain and surprise their fellow students. Usually we host at least one academic guest speaker and a series of film screenings. Students introduce the speakers and the films. Alongside theoretical works on the texts and films, we reserve one or two sessions for the design and preparation of the workshops, also facilitated by students. In these sessions, it is pivotal that the group finds a democratic way to accommodate all wishes and desires concerning the design of the workshops. At this point in the progress of the course, individual

students have very clear and strong ideas of what they wish to work on with the children or the elderly people. These sometimes differing ideas need to be woven together into one workshop concept.

4. **Twelfth and thirteenth sessions:** Here the students are now performing their own workshops *in situ*, for example at a secondary school with the grandparents of some of the school pupils and the school pupils themselves. Students will have prepared the workshop in advance (democratically), and will have composed a schedule, decided on the method of film education, and organized their materials (such as cameras, filmstrips and popcorn). Students then meet in the morning of the workshop day at the school, and prepare the rooms used for the film screenings and for the workshops. Then, pupils and their grandparents are welcomed and introduced to the schedule. First, all participants watch, for example, the short film *Pasadena Freeway Stills* (Beydler, 1974), and this is followed by a discussion. Then groups are composed of six or seven secondary school pupils and one or two grandparents, as well as four students (secondary school pupils are put together with their grandparents). As a warm-up, students facilitate the first material experience: filmstrips are cut and glued together by all participants. Everyone starts talking: for example, grandparents start talking about their first cinema experience. Then, students introduce the topic of the day: 'becoming/being/having been an adult'. Then the participants use 15 to 20 postcards as film stills in order to narrate a story. This story is – in the fashion of *Pasadena Freeway Stills* – filmed behind a glass wall. In all groups, the dynamics between grandparents, students and pupils vary greatly. Different people take on different tasks within the groups, and four short films are produced ([http://silkemartin.com/?page\\_id=39&preview\\_id=39&preview\\_nonce=995ee60913&thumbnail\\_id=-1&preview=true](http://silkemartin.com/?page_id=39&preview_id=39&preview_nonce=995ee60913&thumbnail_id=-1&preview=true)). Film screenings with popcorn follow in the assembly hall. After each film, the crew is asked to go on stage and answer questions. All participants are given a certificate of attendance. There is applause after every film and at the end of the workshop.
5. **Final session:** The course concludes with a collective recall of the course, the evaluation of the course syllabus, and detailed discussion of the required coursework. The writing and composition of coursework follows after the end of the course (usually, four weeks are given). Students are required to present their ideas and proposals in office hours.

### Our experiences as teachers

Students address both topics – film education and age(ing) – with great interest. The introduction to ageing studies inspires interest despite (or maybe because) the students are still comparatively young (20–27 years old). The initial reference for students in terms of ageing is their own families. Here students normally acquire access to the topic through their grandparents. In the process of the course, this very personal access shifts to an increasingly general interest in ageing processes and the big subjects in life: memory, life, love and dying. Students develop a deep interest in the intersections between age and other categories of identity, such as gender and race, throughout the course. At the end of the course, we tend to witness students starting to engage with the content of the course in a very personal and existential way.

With the subject of film education, something quite similar happens. Regarding this subject, we place an emphasis on the aspects of personality development and the cinema-specific mode of thinking discussed above. Students normally connect to these concepts through their own cinema biography (such as their own first cinema

experience). In this sense, we focus on the experience of personal mediatized ways of life, such as thinking in images and cinematographic perception of the world (the panoramic view of the Alps, or the close-up on an insect). This enables fundamental collective insights into the mediatization of life and world concepts through intense discussions in the sessions. These insights, which are often accompanied by fascination but also by irritation and anxiety, are also coupled with a strong interest in concepts of film philosophy such as Gilles Deleuze's concept of film immanence (Deleuze, 2005a, 2005b). In most of our courses, the questions that arise are aimed not just at how to practise film education but also at how to reflect on one's own position in the (mediated) world. The pedagogical approaches based on French educational theories (such as those of Bergala (2016), and Rancière (1991)), and that to view film as art and alterity are of particular interest to us here.

The concept of the *passeur/passeuse*, in particular, has proven to be a source of great interest for us. The mode of education from a personal and different point of view is described as fascinating by students, and as paradigmatic for the roles of teacher and mentor to which they aspire. The fact that the knowledge of the participants (no matter if they are children or elderly people) is equally important to that of the educator is also an approach that seems to hold great attraction for students. Students aspire to act in a similar fashion in the workshops, and facilitate a heterarchic way of teaching in order to meet school pupils and elderly people on eye level. This mirrors our own perspective as teachers and educators, for we too aspire to diversity-sensitive and decolonizing didactics whereby we share responsibility with everyone in the room. All knowledge is shared according to the each-one-teach-one principle.

Our students therefore serve as multipliers and propagators of our anti-discriminatory and heterarchic educational philosophy. In feedback sessions, students have told us that being responsible for complete sessions is empowering, describing the experience of sessions and workshops as organic and resulting in a strong sense of passion. Our observations here are confirmed by written and oral feedback from students. Feedback is normally obtained through flashlight rounds at the end of every session and at the end of every course. Sometimes we also collect anonymous feedback through one-minute papers. The standardized and anonymous evaluations by the universities confirm our findings as well.

### **Coursework on film collage writing: Memory work with grandparents**

Here we offer a specific example of some of the coursework produced by one of our students, Lena Schröter (2018). Lena took the idea of working with her own grandparents on the film *Oma & Bella* (2012) by Alexa Karolinsky, using pictures on postcards to trigger discussion, alongside collage techniques and reflective writing on the film. She describes the process as follows:

Directly after watching the film together, my grandparents wrote down their impressions, associations, and thoughts on postcards. Those ideas scribbled on postcards right after the film helped them to filter central aspects and to compare the notes with their own biography. They used them as the basis which they referred back to during much of the following activities. (Schröter, 2018)

In her essay, Schröter describes how the collage by her grandmother depicts the relationship between the two women in *Oma & Bella*, their focus on their families and the happiness they gain from their families. Her grandfather's material shows the gradual approach to his own biography through the film. While his notes on the

postcards still seem quite distanced, in the collage one can start to see relationships emerging with his own biography, albeit in an abstract way. In his written texts, however, he describes the biographical relations very clearly and puts emphasis on the film as a trigger for memory (ibid.).

## What can a course on film education and age(ing), with collage and life writing, look like?

In this final section, we reflect upon our previous teaching experiences to think ahead to what a university-based course centred on film education and age(ing) might look like.

A university course for students that engages with film education and age(ing) should be based on how age(ing) is defined, on how it can be described scientifically and on how it can be categorized historically. However, a short introduction to age(ing) studies might be sufficient here. Nevertheless, it should attempt to define the terminology and reconstruct the history of ageing studies, as well as the various disciplines that engage with the topic of age(ing), such as medicine, sociology, the law, economics, literature and media studies. Using basic texts, for example Susan Sontag (1972) and Judith Butler (1990), questions are asked such as: How can age(ing) processes be described? How does age(ing) determine our lives? What is the relationship between age(ing) and society? How does age(ing) determine our being-in-the-world? What changes due to ascriptions that happen with changing life phases? Which identities are produced through these processes? What is 'doing age' and what is ageing trouble? What does age have to do with gender, class and race?

Following on from this, we intensify these questions by focusing on medial and filmic drafts of age(ing). In this way, questions of subjectivation, self-determination and heteronomy, alterity and being-in-the-world, as well as the interdependency between subject and world, aesthetic experience and medial constitution are addressed. These questions are to be posed in the light of concrete filmic analyses. The films to be screened in class are: *Amour* (2012, Michael Haneke), *Oma & Bella* (2012, Alexa Karolinski), *Vergiss mein nicht* (2012, David Sieveking) and *Gerontophilia* (2013, Bruce La Bruce).

With this selected corpus of films composed of two documentary and two fictional films of European and North American origin, the following themes (as mentioned at the outset of this essay) can be discussed with students: remembering/forgetting, living/habitation, loving/desiring, and sickness/death. Each of the films we have chosen portrays aspects of these four topics with varying intensities. In organizing the material, either each film is attributed to one of the topics, or each film is related to each of the topics. The films are accompanied by a reading of literature that critically explores gender and age(ing), such as the writing of Roberta Maierhofer (1996), Georg Seeßlen (2012), Lena Eckert (2017), Robin Curtis (2016), Thomas Küpper (2010) and Lena Eckert and Silke Martin (2015b, 2016, 2018).

In a third, hands-on part, the film education workshop in the retirement home is conceptualized and implemented. This proceeds from an introduction to film education according to Bergala (2016), Aidelman and Colell (2010), Rippel and Zahn (2010) and Bourgeois (2010). In addition, one needs to give insight into the artistic techniques of collage (Vedral, 2017), as well as the concept of creative and diversity-sensitive writing (Horst, 2017; Schreiber, 2017; Heimes *et al.*, 2013). After these very compact and condensed introductions, a discussion between the students takes place about which approaches they consider useful and suitable for the practical work with the elderly people. The only instruction from us (the teachers) is that the workshop with

the elderly people has to be composed of the three steps of a film screening, a collage and a writing session, all within four hours. During the film screening, one of the films is screened, or alternatively four different clips are screened, followed by work based upon one of the four themes. After the workshop, there is a session evaluating the results of the workshop and then the course as a whole.

In conclusion, in the context of ageism, the systemic discrimination against people on the basis of their age, and various forms of discrimination, need to be addressed. Negative representations of old age in film, especially regarding sickness and decay, have always to be put in relation to gender. Already in 1972, Susan Sontag emphasized the double standards about ageing when it comes to men and women. Sontag describes age(ing) not as a biological fact but as a societal condemnation of women (Sontag, 1972: 31). In the sense of intersectionality, it is not just age and gender but also other aspects of identity, such as class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and nationality, which have to be analysed as intersecting. Films such as *Et si on vivait tous ensemble?* (2011, Stéphane Robelin) or *Irina Palm* (2007, Sam Garbarski) feature a very homogeneous group of elderly people (heterosexual, white Europeans). Processes such as 'doing whiteness', 'doing bourgeoisie' and 'doing heterosexuality' happen. In *Gerontophilia* different identity categories intersect, and the characters are dichotomously arranged when an old black man is desired by a young, white nurse. Film education focusing on age(ing) must therefore be differentiated and intersectional.

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## Filmography

*Amour* (*Love*, AT/FR/DE 2012, Michael Haneke)  
*Et si on vivait tous ensemble?* (*All Together*, FR/DE 2011, Stéphane Robelin)  
*Gerontophilia* (CA 2013, Bruce La Bruce)  
*Irina Palm* (BE/DE/LU/GB/FR 2007, Sam Garbarski)  
*Oma & Bella* (DE/US 2012, Alexa Karolinski)  
*Pasadena Freeway Stills* (US 1974, Gary Beydler)  
*Vergiss mein nicht* (*Forget Me Not*, DE 2012, David Sieveking)  
*Wolke 9* (*Cloud 9*, DE 2008, Andreas Dresen)

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