

SEGNI DEL TEMPO

IL VOLTO ANZIANO NELL'ERA DIGITALE

a cura di

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MASSIMO LEONE



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I SAGGI DI LEXIA

64

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Aprire una collana di libri specializzata in una disciplina che si vuole scientifica, soprattutto se essa appartiene a quella zona intermedia della nostra enciclopedia dei saperi — non radicata in teoremi o esperimenti, ma neppure costruita per opinioni soggettive — che sono le scienze umane, è un gesto ambizioso. Vi potrebbe corrispondere il debito di una definizione della disciplina, del suo oggetto, dei suoi metodi. Ciò in particolar modo per una disciplina come la nostra: essa infatti, fin dal suo nome (semiotica o semiologia) è stata intesa in modi assai diversi se non contrapposti nel secolo della sua esistenza moderna: più vicina alla linguistica o alla filosofia, alla critica culturale o alle diverse scienze sociali (sociologia, antropologia, psicologia). C'è chi, come Greimas sulla traccia di Hjelmslev, ha preteso di definirne in maniera rigorosa e perfino assiomatica (interdefinita) principi e concetti, seguendo requisiti riservati normalmente solo alle discipline logico-matematiche; chi, come in fondo lo stesso Saussure, ne ha intuito la vocazione alla ricerca empirica sulle leggi di funzionamento dei diversi fenomeni di comunicazione e significazione nella vita sociale; chi, come l'ultimo Eco sulla traccia di Peirce, l'ha pensata piuttosto come una ricerca filosofica sul senso e le sue condizioni di possibilità; altri, da Barthes in poi, ne hanno valutato la possibilità di smascheramento dell'ideologia e delle strutture di potere. . . Noi rifiutiamo un passo così ambizioso. Ci riferiremo piuttosto a un concetto espresso da Umberto Eco all'inizio del suo lavoro di ricerca: il "campo semiotico", cioè quel vastissimo ambito culturale, insieme di testi e discorsi, di attività interpretative e di pratiche codificate, di linguaggi e di generi, di fenomeni comunicativi e di effetti di senso, di tecniche espressive e inventari di contenuti, di messaggi, riscritture e deformazioni che insieme costituiscono il mondo sensato (e dunque sempre sociale anche quando è naturale) in cui viviamo, o per dirla nei termini di Lotman, la nostra semiosfera. La semiotica costituisce il tentativo paradossale (perché autoriferito) e sempre parziale, di ritrovare l'ordine (o gli ordini) che rendono leggibile, sensato, facile, quasi "naturale" per chi ci vive dentro, questo coacervo di azioni e oggetti. Di fatto, quando conversiamo, leggiamo un libro, agiamo politicamente, ci divertiamo a uno spettacolo, noi siamo perfettamente in grado non solo di decodificare quel che accade, ma anche di connetterlo a valori, significati, gusti, altre forme espressive. Insomma siamo competenti e siamo anche capaci di confrontare la nostra competenza con quella altrui, interagendo in modo opportuno. È questa competenza condivisa o confrontabile l'oggetto della semiotica.

I suoi metodi sono di fatto diversi, certamente non riducibili oggi a una sterile assiomatica, ma in parte anche sviluppati grazie ai tentativi di formalizzazione dell'École de Paris. Essi funzionano un po' secondo la metafora wittgensteiniana della cassetta degli attrezzi: è bene che ci siano cacciavite, martello, forbici ecc.: sta alla competenza pragmatica del ricercatore selezionare caso per caso lo strumento opportuno per l'operazione da compiere.

Questa collana presenterà soprattutto ricerche empiriche, analisi di casi, lascerà volentieri spazio al nuovo, sia nelle persone degli autori che degli argomenti di studio. Questo è sempre una condizione dello sviluppo scientifico, che ha come prerequisito il cambiamento e il rinnovamento. Lo è a maggior ragione per una collana legata al mondo universitario, irrigidito da troppo tempo nel nostro Paese da un blocco sostanziale che non dà luogo ai giovani di emergere e di prendere il posto che meritano.

Ugo Volli

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**EU Face Advanced
Communication
for Elders Treasuring
in Society**

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THE DESTINIES OF THE BODY: CORPOREITY, OLD AGE, AND SIGNIFICATION IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

LUIGI LOBACCARO, FLAVIO VALERIO ALESSI

ITALIAN TITLE: I destini del corpo: La corporeità, la vecchiaia e la significazione nel cinema contemporaneo

ABSTRACT: Contemporary age supports a conception of elderly based on the inherited dichotomy relating a negative representation of old age as bodily and cognitive decay, and a positive one which emphasises the wisdom and experience derived from it. Thereby, this category implicitly omits and, contrarily, runs the risk of supporting an opposition between the biological and the sociocultural dimensions. Instead, through the analysis of 7 films, this contribution aims at emphasising the interdependency between three main domains regulating the semiotic experience of elderly, engaged in a dynamic relationship: the dimension of corporeality, the reflective discourse of a subject upon his or her condition and, eventually, a cultural and intersubjective dimension articulating the forms of representation and relationships between subjects.

KEYWORDS: Semiotics of Culture; Semiotics of Cinema; Old Age; Body; Intersubjectivity.

1. Elderly between nature and culture

The recent development of scientific knowledge has led to prolonged life expectancy and an aging population. While in low birth rates societies this phenomenon poses a problem of workforce renewal, some argue that this trend could also be an opportunity for economic growth.

Thus, the pessimistic analysis is rather conceived as the effect of an ideology that views old age as a limitation for the individual and the social, political, and cultural systems (Posner 1995).

In this direction, the conception of old age as an unhappy age is frequently seen as the product of the medicalising and neoliberal paradigm, identifying the body with its biological path measured in terms of costs and benefits (Vincent 2008). Numerous constructivist approaches have emphasised that old age is neither a predetermined nor a binding age. Instead, it is conceived as the result of systems and logics of power (Nussbaum and Levmore 2017). For this reason, there has often been an attempt to shift the debate on population aging from a primarily technical, medical, and economic domain to a social and cultural level where a solution to the problem of aging would consist in promoting a different image of old age seen as a resource, as a source of wisdom, and as a happy age to be guaranteed and protected.

However, it should not be surprising that the opposition between old age as a burden on society, due to cognitive and physical decay, and old age as a moment of wisdom, a benefit for the community, refers to an encyclopaedical category (Eco 1984), stemming from the classical world and inherited throughout the history of Western culture (Minois 1987; Mattioli 1995).

For this reason, a completely constructivist reading of this categorization — which suggests that it is solely cultural discourses and axiologies that determine whether and how a body ages (Gergen and Gergen 2000) — seems unable to grasp why this heritage still holds such significant weight in contemporary times. The body has, indeed, a destiny that binds the social determinations of meaning. It is marked by a frailty that displays to the gaze of others the effects of the passage of time, and is subject to various constraints (cognitive, perceptual, sensorimotor, etc.).

Thus, a semiotic view of old age not only can focus on the opposition between cultural categories or the opposition between social norms and natural course but can also reason about the inextricable plexus that aggregates them: the aging and elderly body.

2. The interwoven destinies of the elderly body

In contemporary society, both classical models of old age are deeply dehumanising, causing stigma and shame either for the frailty of the body or for the inability to conform to ideal models (de Beauvoir 1972), as it is clear in anti-aging currents (Sandberg 2008).

This focus on the dimension of social discourse leads to a conceptualization of old age that moves away from the experience of the subjects living it. An experience stemming from the relationship between a living and lived body, which is subject to one's and others' gaze, and imbued with a culture of other bodies, languages, discourses. Along these lines, in recent decades, semiotics has brought back to the forefront the role of the body as a determining element of meaning, conceived as an instance of translation in continuous negotiation with the corporeity of the world (Marsciani 2012). In this vein, the body is seen as a fold that produces a meaningful viewpoint on the world only insofar as it is already and always taken in a structural coupling with it (Basso Fossali 2009; Paolucci 2021). This results in a conception of a body in continuous intercorporeal and intersubjective negotiation, certainly seen as a creator of meaning but also as a product of historical and cultural semiotic processes that orient its possibilities of signification (Violi 2012).

A semiotic focus on corporeity in old age will then aim to outline how the destiny of the biological body is always played out in an opening, in an intersection with other destinies that allow for possibilities of action, choices, creative deviations (Basso Fossali 2008).

3. Bodies in cinema

Our encyclopedia provides numerous texts exhibiting the dynamics that allow articulating and interpreting the sense of old age and its intimate belonging to corporeity. Among these, undoubtedly, filmic texts provide an important investigative tool on which semiotics have also extensively exercised an analysis of corporeity (see Fontanille 2004; Marrone 2005). In this contribution, we will focus on the semiotic forms through which various recently produced films shape the experience and image of old

age. In line with de Beauvoir's proposal (1972), we will show how these texts invoke and are able to illuminate the intricate dynamic of interactions that characterises the carnal, identity-related, and intersubjective dimensions of old age while simultaneously relying on a series of stereotypical representations of elderly. For these reasons, we propose a corpus of 7 films produced in the last 15 years with a mainstream vocation.

We will investigate a) how cinema stages the experience of the elderly between a body traced by its interwoven destinies and a subject who, as a tragic hero, either surrenders to or fights against them; b) how, in this polemical narrativization, the body becomes a witness capable of establishing an empathic and intercorporeal resonance with the spectators (Gallese and Guerra 2015) capable of transmitting models, values, and behaviors.

4. Games of time and body–substance between *Leib* and *Körper*

Let's start with a banal observation: aging is a temporal phenomenon. Aging means responding to the transformations produced by time and interpreting them in their occurrence. De Beauvoir (1972) perfectly highlighted this intertwining of different temporalities in old age: a biological time that wears down the body, an embodied experience of time divided between an uncertain future and a past now gone, a historical time that is articulated in memory, and a community time marked by the clock that signals identity in terms of age. Obviously, the elderly body is both theater and actor of these temporal relations, operating as a surface of inscription (Fontanille 2004) and an enunciative instance (Coquet 2007).

Cinema is a particularly effective language for representing this relationship as it is a disposition of sensomotricity and temporality (Deleuze 1983; 1985). For this reason, we propose analysing *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* by David Fincher (2009), and *Old* by M. Night Shyamalan (2020). Through the modulation of the represented time, in these movies it is possible to photograph the destiny of the body, taking it out of the network of relationships in which it is usually entangled.

The protagonist of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* suffers from a syndrome that reverses the temporality of the biological cycle: born in the body of an old man, he gets younger throughout the movie, eventually

dying in the body of a child. Indeed, the overall architecture of the story finds a reference point in temporal management, with three nested narrative sections. A first diegetic level is set in a hospital with Caroline at the bedside of her dying mother, Daisy. A second, embedded level narrates the story contained in Benjamin's diary, which at the end of the film will be revealed to be Caroline's father. Premised on this second level is Daisy's story about a blind clockmaker and the construction of a huge clock that marks time backward. This story accounts for how the protagonist's reversed biological time is synchronised with a chronological time valid only for him.

The narrative constraints, enlightening the relationship between time and old age, are thus immediately exposed in the conjunction of three terminations: 1. Daisy's recount on her deathbed; 2. Benjamin's memoir diary, now concluded; and 3. the clock that synchronises Benjamin's chronological life's beginning with the clockmaker's attempt to end and reverse the linear course of time. From this end, it is possible to see how the destinies of the actors are articulated (Surace 2019).

The overall narrative structure is highly stereotypical: the story recounts the adventures of an orphan and his love for Daisy. Indeed, the meaning of the text is first and foremost structured by the relationship between a predictable and clichéd succession of actions and passions of the narrated time, and Benjamin's inverted life cycle, primarily expressed through the figurative level. Rejected by his father due to his repulsion towards his body, Benjamin is abandoned in a retirement home, sharing his early years with the residents, constrained by the limitations imposed by his elderly physique. Thus, he immediately experiences the inevitability of death and the sense of abandonment: the more he gets younger, the more he sees his friends die. It is precisely the awareness of this inevitability that drives Benjamin to take charge of his destiny, continually embarking on new adventures. The entire film narrates the polemical clash between the biological body, a true anti-subject, and the protagonist, who in turn manipulates his destiny by challenging the limits of his own corporeity (getting up from the wheelchair, walking without a cane, going to a brothel, etc.).

The image of elderly offered by this film is, in this sense, highly dysphoric. Benjamin confronts the incontrovertibility of his biological

body, represented as a cage that limits his freedom. This kind of representation perfectly mirrors the conception of the body shared by the medicalising approach and refused by the constructivist one, where the body is an object, a substance–body (Marsciani 2012) functioning as a *mechanon* inhabited by a mind that does not accept its constraints. On this Cartesian body, the polemical scheme of freedom vs. constraint is perfectly exemplified by the letter Benjamin leaves to his daughter, urging her to set no limits and pursue her dreams and desires. This discourse, imbued with neoliberal ideology, shows how the movie is based on the stereotypical theme of the duplication of a body whose objective materiality, the *Körper*, is not only an invisible substrate of experience, objectifiable only through an act of reflection, but becomes visible as another subject on the scene opposing the protagonist's aims.

The same characteristic is clearly visible in *Old*. In this film, a group of tourists is unknowingly stranded by a pharmaceutical company on a beach surrounded by a high, steep cliff and the ocean. As it turns out, the company's goal is to save the world's population from diseases and aging by testing the effectiveness of its drugs on groups of tourists, selected for pre-existing sanitary conditions or risk factors. These drugs can be effectively tested because on the beach, due to an unknown physical phenomenon, time passes rapidly, affecting the biological aging rate. The characters thus find themselves caught in a rapid and progressive aging process.

However, in Shyamalan's film, we witness a significant shift in the narrative role of the elderly body. From anti–subject, the body here becomes a true enunciative instance (Coquet 2007), a non–subject capable of initiative, physically affecting one's body and the overall sense–making experience. This focus finds full expression in certain enunciative strategies that favor the viewer's identification. In a dialogue scene between Guy and Prisca, for instance, we see a first–person shot simulating Guy's disembedding and alteration of the perceptual experience derived from his rapid aging process. Shyamalan's enunciative strategies let us perceive the blur of his vision, reflecting a progressive weakening of figurativity. The same applies to the woman, whose deafness is expressed through an audio modulation useful for showing how the *Leib*, as a non–subject, operates as a filter between the subject and the world (Fontanille 2004). The generated effect is that of an

aesthetic–passional modulation of the audience caught in this transformation of the characters’ visual–auditory faculties.

5. The crisis of the body and the vulnerability of the *self-ipse*

If subjectivity emerges from a *Leib* that generates lived experience, this subjectivity is nonetheless always engaged in a dialogue with a body from which it stands out and to which it belongs. Experience always occurs in the lived experience of the *Leib*, but the forms of understanding of the subject stem from the dialogue s/he establishes with his or her body, starting from his or her desires, expectations, and goals.

The Wrestler, by Darren Aronofsky (2008), highlights the ways this dialogue is articulated. Specifically, this text shows how the experience of old age emerges from the dialogue between the bodily constraints and possibilities, and the socialised thematic roles and identity positions. It allows us to observe another characteristic of old age, which, on the one hand, can be outlined by the polemical scheme that sees the body opposing the subject’s narrative plans, and on the other, conceives it as always taking place within socio–cultural domains and networks of practices. Consider the case of the protagonist’s professional identity: if the prototype of old age is identified with the standard context of “retirement”, in a domain like sports, old age is attributed much earlier. That is, old age is as much a social as a biological phenomenon, standing and articulating at the crossroads of culturally situated practices and values.

The plot thus makes sense precisely because it stages the contrast of a *Me–flesh* that is no longer performant or considered as such — according to wrestling standards — with a personal and social identity tied to the profession (*Self–idem*) that generates the impossibility of thinking and projecting oneself beyond it, reconfiguring one’s existence through the rewriting of one’s destiny (*Self–ipse*) (Fontanille 2013).

In *The Wrestler*, this contrast is stark. The protagonist is a fallen icon of 80s wrestling, constantly seeking the adrenaline–fueled experience of ring battles. Randy “The Ram” Robinson cannot exist and does not recognise himself outside of that *Self–idem*. He continues to fight in squalid and desolate places, constantly reliving his past glory and manipulating

his substance–body with steroid injections. This relationship is further emphasised by Barthes' (1957) close connection between corporeity, exteriority, and public identity in wrestling: the wrestler's body destiny not only alters an internal relationship with his self, tied to an opposing *Körper* and a weakened *Leib*, but also alters the public recognizability of the protagonist's professional identity, deeply linked to the exteriority and visibility of his body. The film thus highlights how old age affects not only the body's cenesthetic properties but also its figurative properties, making it the center of others' gaze (Stanghellini 2019). Hence Randy's obsession with his physical form, configured in continuous manipulations of his body to maintain a virulent appearance.

Randy's ability to find himself in his thematic identity as a wrestler diminishes when the *Me-flesh* ceases to obey him. A heart attack caused by excesses (drugs, alcohol, etc.) pushes him to change his life. The substance–body that brought him honors in the past, and whose aging marked his professional decline, now reveals itself as a real obstacle to any form of *Self-idem* continuity, motivating the protagonist to rewrite his subjectivity (*Self-ipse*) (see Ricœur 1990).

6. The vulnerability of the *self-idem*, oblivion, and others

The notion that identity is closely tied to memory is a well-attested thesis in semiotic tradition (see Violi 2014). Among the vulnerabilities and critical issues exposed by old age, we find precisely that of memory loss. It is no coincidence that much contemporary cinema, including the two films we are about to analyse — *The Father* by Florian Zeller (2020) and *Ella & John* by Paolo Virzì (2017) — has addressed the theme of old age, correlating it with the experience of memory and identity loss caused by conditions such as senile dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The Father shows the tragic process of detachment from reality of Anthony, an elderly protagonist with Alzheimer's. Through narrative and enunciative strategies, Zeller encapsulates the experience of alienation lived by Anthony to the point that, at the end of the film, we realise that the entire story set within the domestic walls of what the elderly man believed to be his home, which throughout the film appears

incoherent and fragmented, is nothing but a sum of the protagonist's hallucinations while hospitalised in a care facility.

We are no longer dealing with the perceptual semiotic difficulties imposed by a sensory apparatus now affected by the passage of time, as in *Old*, nor with the attempt present in *The Wrestler* to control one's body to preserve and recognise oneself in one's identity. Instead, *The Father* thematises the relationship between old age and the experience of the progressive loss of a narrative self: it is the story of an obsolete substance–body reflecting an obsolescent self. It is precisely the awareness of this condition that causes Anthony's collapse at the end of the movie.

Indeed, the disorientation and anguish caused by the (momentary) awareness of the imaginary status of the narratives lived by Anthony leads him to an infantile regression: the gap between the (ir)reality of a projected autistic experience and the intangibility of a shared space of affections and presences transforms the elderly man into a child sobbing for his mother. Thus, the film exhibits a double pathology of old age: on the one hand, through narrative–enunciative strategies, it testifies to personal oblivion (Basso Fossali 2003), the way the body's destiny contaminates the self's destiny without reversibility; on the other, through the plot and the final scene, it tells how this oblivion also involves others. The individual forgets himself while already forgotten by others, marooned in a care facility without visitors, forced to create circumstantial fragments of his identity every time he sees unfamiliar faces to set control over a self always on the verge of losing its sense of existence (Fontanille 2004).

In *Ella & John*, however, the theme of the memory is taken in a different direction. The two protagonists, Ella and John, decide to take a last trip together despite their health problems. Ella, affected by cancer, chooses to refuse treatments and organises a final journey aimed at magnifying and doing justice to the uniqueness of their relationship. After offering her husband the opportunity to find himself by visiting Hemingway's house — as a retired literature professor who, despite being affected by Alzheimer's disease, could remember Hemingway's literary details and, therefore, find an identity grip in the author's house–museum — she decides that the proper way to end her life is to die together before their respective illnesses take them away or prevent them from living moments like these.

The film, therefore, shows how the semiotic field of intersubjectivity (Violi 2012) can guarantee the recovery of a meaningful experience otherwise constrained by the structural limits imposed by the disease on the body. Through this narrative operation, useful for showing how the experience of old age is not reducible to the sole performative incapacity of the body or mind, finding instead full dignity in the recognition of the other and of the shared relationship, we understand the true aim of *Ella*. It is precisely through this perspective that the movie relates the elderly theme to a human and moving dignity in the touching and resolute gesture of the final scene.

7. The richness of old age between recognition and forgiveness

The last two films we take into consideration manage to capitalise on this gradual process of opening towards the other that has characterised the previous analyses. *Youth* (2015) and *Gran Torino* (2008), respectively by Paolo Sorrentino and Clint Eastwood, provide an image of old age irreducible to the decline of the substance–body, where wisdom is a kind of knowledge of a built and shared intersubjectivity that can express and offer a worthy and new existential perspective in the communal opening.

Sorrentino's film tells the equal and opposite stories of Fred and Mick, a pair of elderly, longtime friends spending the summer in a residence in Switzerland. The first is a retired orchestra conductor who has lost all enthusiasm and existential perspective (*Self-ipse*) and lives his existence almost waiting for the end to come. This prospect, on the other hand, is denied throughout the story by the material instance of a substance–body that, contrary to what might be expected given the advanced age, seems to function like a perfect machine. From a modal perspective Fred *cannot be*, for he does not have any existential aim, yet he *cannot not be*, constrained by the perfect functioning of a body stereotypically associated with withering. "I've grown old without knowing why", Fred says almost despondently to his doctor, observing the clinical test results that testify to an impeccable health condition.

Fred poses as a privileged observer of life, living with absolute detachment from any intersubjective relationship and rejecting any call to his

career as a conductor. The allurements of an emissary of Queen Elizabeth, who presents himself at the residence proposing a performance at Buckingham Palace of his well-known “Simple Songs”, are accompanied by the elderly man’s blunt refusal. Those pieces were composed with and for his wife, and after her loss, Fred sees no reason to perform them publicly. The refusal to give voice to those notes represents and is in turn motivated by the impossibility of giving space to a personal and professional (thus existential) identity constructed intersubjectively (*Self-idem*).

Instead, Mick’s efforts to preserve his creativity through the creation of his cinematic testament, spending time with a group of young screenwriters, symbolise his desire to exert control over the passage of time by immersing himself in youth. This aim, however, is unsuccessful. Indeed, Mick’s film cannot conclude because it is not conceived, as in the case of Fred’s “Simple Songs”, as a gift, an emergent product of a relationship built over time in a disinterested manner. On the contrary, it is the product of an autotelic *ethos*, the site of a self-realization that cannot think of itself outside that act and inevitably will remain unfinished since identity — as Sorrentino shows in Fred’s story — can only be given in otherness. Having learned the impossibility of completing the film, Mick commits suicide in front of Fred’s impassive eyes, inciting him, just before his leap into the void, to live, not just survive. The final opening of the film stems from here. Fred, in fact, goes to visit his wife, hospitalised in a Venice clinic because of dementia, and then accepts the performance at Buckingham Palace. Fred thus becomes the interpretant, the “word-bearer” (Paolucci 2020) of the life partner who had no memory of him but whose sight and presence suffice to restore voice and body to the elderly man’s identity and existential perspective.

In *Gran Torino*, the space of intersubjectivity assumes a political and social value, becoming an instance of identity generation and transformation capable of giving new dignity to the figure of the elderly. Eastwood’s film tells the story of Walt, a Korean War veteran and widower who lives his life in isolation, accompanied only by his dog in a Detroit suburb populated by many Asian families, towards whom he harbors the most vile and racist feelings of distrust and indignation. Marked by the war experience that keeps him chained to the past, altering his present perceptions and aspirations — through aggressive, cynical, and

disenchanted attitudes — Walt seems to passively accept his destiny when diagnosed with lung cancer. This destined constraint of the substance–body, accompanied by a lack of existential aspirations (*Self-ipse*), is set in a context of great social loneliness.

In the relationship that unites Walt with his son and grandchildren, we can indeed note the depersonalising and disqualifying tendency generated by a conception that identifies the elderly figure solely with their physical–organic malfunctions (*substance–body*) framing it within a terminative temporality in the form of a countdown. Walt is treated by his family as if he were already dead, destined and near death, as if he could no longer say or give anything in this life.

In this stripping away of social and political value positions from which Walt started, a semiotic field opens up in which universal human oppositions prevail. Not the confrontation between ethnicities and political values, but an articulation linked to the relationship with violence, justice, and the protection of others. Thao, initially bearing an otherness, caught in Walt's identity circuit, becomes part of the family, symbolised by the significant gesture of the beloved car, named *Gran Torino*, left by the elder as an inheritance to the young man.

Thus, old age as a space of learning, redemption, and gift, as an irreducible threshold to the corporeal–biological or the sterile biographical account with a nostalgic flavor, as a stance that finds meaning and place only in a semiotic field of relationships that allow giving dignity and control to the irreducible life of every elderly person. *Gran Torino*, in this sense, systematises in a broader framework the dimensions of the elderly experience evoked in the previously analysed films, situating them in a communal dimension that condenses the domains of inter-subjective relationships, cultural stereotypes, and embodied narrative identity and experience.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can therefore observe how cinema allows us to reflect on the experience of old age by showing the inextricable plexus that anchors it between nature and culture: the body of the elderly is a biological body

that progressively loses internal strength, while at the same time, it draws energy and is influenced by its external environment, with which it continuously exchanges influences. On the one hand, old age is: i) an *enemy* when conceived as *Körper*; ii) an *obstacle* when conceived as a decay of the *Leib*; iii) a *decline* when related to the exposed body; iv) a *threat* when related to the personal and public identity; v) a *loss* when related to future possibilities. On the other, it is an opportunity to recalibrate one's experience of the world, to rethink oneself, to occupy new positions in a community, to manifest new shades of love, to exalt the power of will, to test the validity of an individual story and even to reverse it.

Cinema shows us how our biological constraints configure and exalt our existential possibilities, while at the same time offering us the opportunity to deepen our understanding of humanity through identification with the body we will become. "Let us recognize ourselves in this old man, or in that old woman. It must be done if we are to take upon ourselves the entirety of our human state", wrote de Beauvoir (1972: 5). To this hope, we would like to add an additional element: such recognition is not configured solely as the assumption of a destiny but also provides the possibility of its re-destination.

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