

COMFORT VIEWING

Session Six

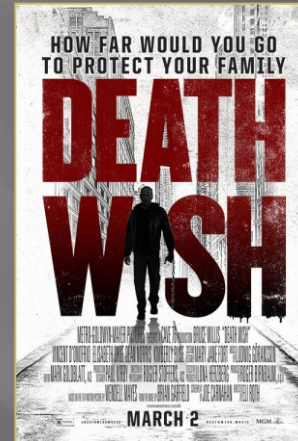
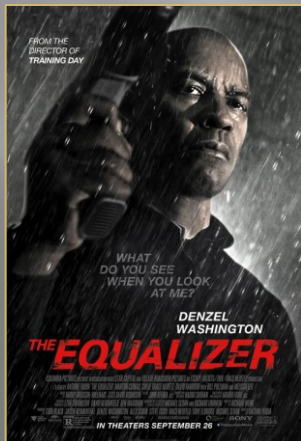
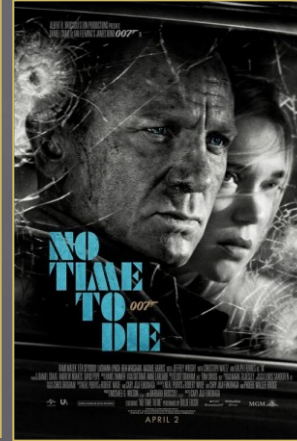
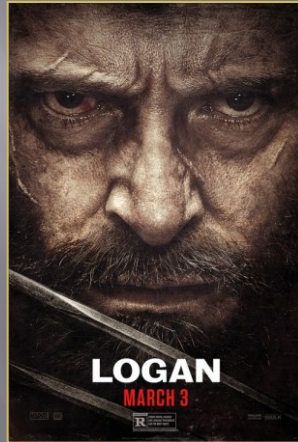
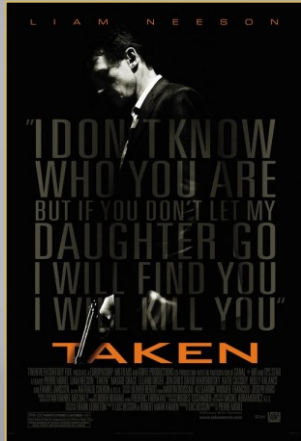
Geriation

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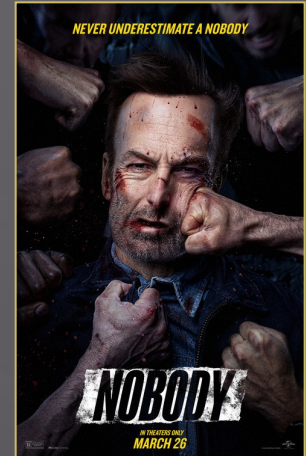
Geriation



Targeted Learning Outcomes

To develop a sound understanding of:

1. Geriaction as a supposedly reactionary format
2. Geriaction as Comfort Viewing
3. The economics of cultivating older viewers



Comfort Viewing & Media Politics

So far we have seen how the concept of Comfort Viewing provides us with a new lens through which to enrich our understandings of media

As well as industry and cultural history, character-types, and formats, the Comfort Viewing Mode enables us to rethink the politics of media

This returns us to the phenomenon driving the agenda of this course: to underscore the extent to which joy exists within a tense media culture

Much of the negativity traversing audiovisual culture derives from dissatisfaction at output and the assumed conduct of those behind it

However, such positions often derive from questionable readings of the politics or ideology of media texts by folks with little media education

Action as (Dis)Comfort Viewing

Following a recent cultural rehabilitation of some horror as progressive, action-centered media represent perhaps the most disreputable format

Given its general cartoonishness, criticism angled at action media has tended to derive from claims about its politics, less than its violence

For a media elite that either holds or affects left-liberal values, action media has historically been devalued as incendiary right-wing hate

Such positions read the action hero as a punitive figure symbolically policing a racist, sexist, homophobic status quo from outside “threats”

They connect supposedly reactionary content to supposedly reactionary filmmakers and ultimately supposedly reactionary fantasies of viewers

Frame on Geriaction

The most high-profile recent incarnation to draw the condemnation of media elites has been tales of aging men embarking on violent missions

An exemplary piece of scholarship on this topic comes in the form of Gregory Frame's essay on what he calls "Geriaction Vigilante Films"

- 1. How does Frame read the politics of Geriaction?**
- 2. How does this reading characterize the films prime target audience?**
- 3. How does the concept of Comfort Viewing challenge Frame's ideas about Geriaction?**

Recuperating MAGA Dad on the Screen and in-front of it

Frame argues that these films respond to feelings of cultural erasure among aging, white, blue-collar conservative men



He suggests they transpose onto the action cinema format
Alt-right discourses Trump used to court these folks as voters



He argues such feelings derive from a dystopian vision of a
U.S. devastated by liberalism, immigration, and Post-Fordism



Hence he argues these films depict a social order wrecked by
criminal immigrants and a weak criminal justice system



Personal and political merge here, as aging patriarchs rise to
protect their families (the US) through violent individualism



Punching Up by Punching Down

Frame's paper itself reads as hateful, and dismissive, about how aging blue-collar men may feel when thinking the world has left them behind

This reads as elitist and ageist, given it comes from a younger man of intellect and privilege, born into a time of relative safety and prosperity

It also risks caricaturing American political perspectives, by reducing anything right of hard-left to a rabid masculinist Alt-right/Neo-Nazism

This pathologizes viewers as a dangerous rabble roused, when such media is perhaps just offering supportive fantasies to unhappy people

Maybe geriatric uses the Comfort Viewing Mode in order to offer support to men who feel left behind culturally in a fast changing world

Nobody (2021)

1. What challenges does the aging male protagonist of this film face?
2. How does the film suggest this demographic might adapt to social changes?
3. Is this film as hateful as Frame's work suggests?



“I’m just a soul whose intentions are good. Oh Lord, please don’t let me be misunderstood”

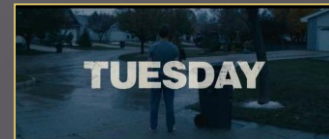
Nobody reframes Geriaction from a rightwing call-to-arms to a chance for men to reflect on aging, gender, and fantasy

It suggests aging causes emotional and existential issues for men, whose sense of waning usefulness deserves sympathy

It counters charges that geriaction racializes crime, by showing desperation driving crime; and a mixed-race family

Its intertextuality de-topicalizes recent geriaction, locating it in a long history of media that speaks to older-male concerns

It posits men’s violent/protective impulses are best indulged as fantasies, as daydreams or by watching films like itself



Somebody's Comfort Viewing

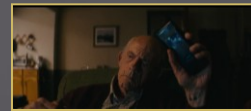
Nobody is less a celebration of alt-right values than a reminder to aging men that action is an example of comforting viewing

The film suggests that aging men's sincere fondness and indeed nostalgia for the media of the past can enrich their present lives

Hence the film's takes place in a hyperreal present built on the conventions of earlier action cinema, e.g. Russian villains

The film allegorizes its psychosocial ambitions, showing aging isolated men building communities around cinematic violence

Uplift is therefore encouraged by inviting aging men to recall the importance of earlier action media, and reconnect therewith



Screening II: Top Gun: Maverick (2022)

1. What challenges does the aging male protagonist of this film face?
2. How does the film suggest this demographic might adapt to social changes?
3. Is this film as hateful as Frame suggests?



“The Future is Coming, and You’re Not in It”.

This film also offers a mediation on the roles that action cinema can play to help support aging men in a changed world

It uses the Cruise/Maverick/*Top Gun* relationship to imagine a world in which the heroes of the past still have a role to play

Cruise/Maverick is presented as an anachronism, struggling to understand his role in a new world that sees him as a dinosaur

Maverick ultimately finds purpose through sincere connections in a supportive role; as teacher, as partner, as father, as friend

This casts the film in a supporting role for aging male viewers; assuring them they remain relevant if only to the film’s makers



The Economic Fallacy of Toxic Branding

Positioning Geriaction as reactionary trash for aging white-supremacists deeply misunderstands the US media market



The Alt-right represents a tiny market segment that is unable to support the profitability of expensive media products



Cultivating this segment also risks public backlashes and boycotts that jeopardize corporate reputations and profits



Thus, Disney dropped Fox when it bought 20th Century Fox to avoid unwanted associated with right-wing Fox News



Associating media with politically extreme positions risks losing the greatest untapped media audience alive today...



A Perfect Comfort Viewing Market

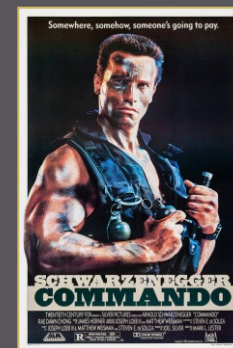
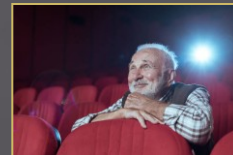
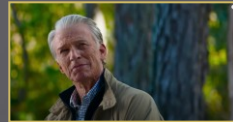
Aging American men represent a large underserved, lucrative audience for whom Comfort Viewing is timely and even urgent

Baby Boomers and older gen-Xers comprise a sizable target market boasting significant free time and disposable income

This is also a group for whom loneliness and mental health concerns have been a long-standing and increasing problem

Older men are also a challenging media market alienated from modern culture, whose interest in heritage media can be nurtured

As younger people these individuals were the lifeblood of the American media industries who made action into blockbusters



Geriation as Established Comfort Viewing

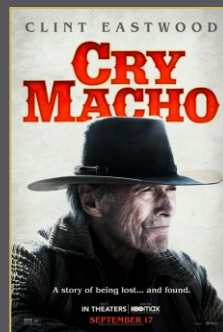
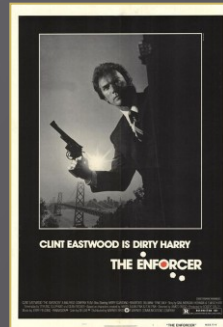
The notion that at least some Geriation media uses the Comfort Viewing Mode is supported by a genuinely insightful essay

Deborah Allison (2007) shows how the content and themes of the *Dirty Harry* sequels were recalibrated in the 1970s and 80s

Where these and similar fare was generally deemed right-wing trash, Allison shows they were tailored to dilute such positions

She argues that to minimize critique and maximize attendance, the films showed a once bigoted Harry defending inclusivity

Reflecting the general trajectory of Eastwood's self-produced output, the series invited its aging male viewers to follow suit



In Sum

As well as industry and cultural history, character-types, and formats, the Comfort Viewing Mode also allows us to reconsider media politics

One such case is represented by Geriaction, a format focusing on aging men seeking to reaffirm their waning authority through violent action

Scholarly and popular criticism has largely cast geriaction as a right-wing format that seeks to foster resentment in older conservative men

However, if we approach these films as comfort viewing for viewers seeking emotional support, a more optimistic politics typically emerges

Under these circumstances, it becomes apparent that geriaction often aims to help such viewers come to terms with progressive social changes

Course Summary

1. Beyond characterizing acts of consumer choice, Comfort Viewing is also a mode of media assembly, one that invokes connection, nostalgia, uplift, sincerity, and familiarity
2. The CVM enables us to enrich industry history, with the 1980s Feelgood of Amblin and others infusing emotionality into a period typically associated with cold rationality
3. The CVM enables us to enrich cultural history, suggesting Metamodernism represents a way of foreclosing cynicism at media output that is heavily reliant on textual recycling
4. The CVM enables us to enrich understandings of character-types, with the recent habilitation of the nerd used to recuperate lucrative high-investor media fandom
5. The CVM enables us to enrich understandings of media formats, with the tourist movie often reflexively promoting the benefits of comfort viewing over actual travel
6. The CVM enables to enrich understandings of media politics, with geriatric reading less as alt-right hate media than an effort to help older men adjust to progressive change