Originalni naučni rad

UDK: 316.7-053.9:39
791.221.4

https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v19i3.11

Ljubica Milosavljevic
Department of Ethnology and Anthropology
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology
University of Belgrade, Serbia
ljmilosa@f.bg.ac.rs
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3430-8084

Mladen Stajic
Department of Ethnology and Anthropology
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology
University of Belgrade, Serbia
mladen899@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4222-2261

Anthropological Analysis of the Depiction of Deprivation in Old Age In the Case of the Movie *Night Boats*[*1]

Abstract: This anthropological analysis focuses on the Croatian feature film *Night Boats* (2012), directed by Igor Mirković. The subject of the movie is a partnership that develops between two residents of a nursing home in Zagreb, highlighting, among other things, numerous problems and difficulties that the elderly face while trying to pursue a new romantic relationship at the very end of their lives, in specific nursing home conditions. The couple's escape from the nursing home serves as an act of resistance, leaving room for the analysis of visual depictions of the various deprivations encountered by the elderly. Depictions of physical, emotional and economic dependency which result in an inability to make independent decisions, are in accordance with the results attained during several years of field research conducted in nursing homes in the Republic of Serbia. This research, which explores new partnerships as strategies of action among

[*] The realization of this research was financially supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia as part of funding for scientific research work at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy (contract number 451-03-66/2024-03/200163).

[1] The paper titled "Anthropological Analysis of the Depiction of Deprivation in Old Age in the Case of the Movie Night Boats" was presented at the 10th International InASEA Conference, *Visual Cultures in Southeast Europe: Globalization, Gender, Power, and Resistance: In Memoriam Karl Kaser*, held from September 15 to 18, 2022, at UNI Graz, Austria.

nursing home residents, will be compared with the film's visual interpretations. Interpreting the visual depiction of deprivation and infirmity, which society associates the elderly with, will also include a semiotic interpretation of the symbolic expression that is used in the movie.

Keywords: movie, old age, semiotics, partnerships, deprivation

Introduction

The focus of this analysis is the Croatian feature film *Night Boats* (2012)[2], directed and co-written by Igor Mirković, with the screenplay based on the play *The Beloved and the Dead* (*Voljeni i mrtvi*)[3] by Elvis Bošnjak, who also co-wrote the script. The film centers around an elderly couple who meet in a nursing home in Zagreb. After a brief acquaintance and romance, the elderly man and woman escape from the nursing home, each driven by their own reasons, providing the opportunity for an anthropological analysis focused on the semiotics of aging and the anthropology of old age.

Semiotics is a field that gerontology has largely ignored up until now. Studies that focus specifically on the semiotics of aging (see: Stafford 1977; Stafford 1988) or the semiotics of ageism (see: Nuessel 1992; Caldas-Coulthard 2023) are rare. However, there are more frequent instances of semiotic analysis being applied to certain segments of culture related to old age and aging (see, for example: David & Hei 2006; Ellison 2014; Emandi 2014; Loose, Kubinski & Romero 2017; Aliakbari & Kamalvand 2023). Despite this, certain fields of research, such as communication in old age, have provided fertile ground for the intersection of these disciplines. These studies have mostly focused on common forms of interaction among the elderly, as well as communication difficulties caused by pathological factors, such as hearing loss, cerebrovascular accidents, or degenerative changes, and reduced memory and speech abilities due to dementia or Alzheimer's disease (Stafford 1988, 286-287). Comprehensive semiotics of aging, however, strives for a holistic approach to meaning and communication among the elderly, relying on intertextuality and the connection of cultural elements that may initially seem incomparable (Stafford 1988, 287-288), as well as on the deconstruction of persistent metaphorical and metonymic meanings of aging through a deep understanding of the cultural codes within which those meanings originated (Nuessel 1992, 44).

[2] Filmed in co-production with the Croatian production company Studio DIM in collaboration with HRT, Bela Film from Slovenia, and Delirium from Belgrade.

[3] https://www.hnk-split.hr/o-kazalistu/ansambl/detalj/artmid/1151/articleid/10773/elvis-bo%C5%A1njak

Starting from the premise that aging, in addition to being a biological fact, also represents a social construct defined through semiosis (the process of meaning-making in a given culture), and relying on Peirce's categories and triadic structure of the sign, Barthes' concepts of anchorage and relay, as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's spatial map and Greimas' semiotic square as auxiliary methodological tools, we will primarily, through a semiological analysis of the film Night Boats promotional poster, but also through the interpretation of key metaphors and metonymies in the film, attempt to uncover the deep latent structures of thought underlying the social construct of aging and the accompanying stereotypical ageism that is perpetuated in contemporary local and global contexts through numerous texts and media.

Moreover, building on the understanding that old age often confronts individuals with various forms of deprivation—ranging from the loss of a partner, health, and respect, to self-esteem, social connections, security (including financial security), privacy, intimacy, and even the right to make decisions... (Milosavljević 2017, 1075)—and that aging is predominantly viewed in a negative context, equating it with illness, loneliness, uselessness, and helplessness (Rašević and Mijatović 2004, 491), this study also aims to connect the film's narrative with the broader social context. This will contribute not only to the understanding of the circumstances in which we find the specific film characters but also of the society they belong to, which significantly influences the personal decisions and strategies of action of the elderly (Swidler 1986, 273–286). In this specific case, considering the broader context will involve an analysis of the findings from a qualitative field study[4] focused on partnerships formed among residents of homes for the elderly and adults after their arrival at the institution (Milosavljević 2019). This research, which chronologically and thematically aligns with the phenomena and issues portrayed in the film concerning the institutionalized elderly, highlights a range of characteristics, such as social, economic, historical, cultural, value-based, and religious factors. At the same time, it provides an appropriate comparative framework, especially considering the inherited conditions in the area of social protection and institutional care in the newly formed states that emerged from the former Yugoslavia.

Connecting a work of art with its context is necessary for the reasons emphasized by Bojan Žikić, which can be summarized in the claim that the context is the social and cultural framework in which the artwork is created and, as a result, "it presumably looks the way it does, regardless of the value judgment the artist has incorporated into the work regarding that context" (Žikić 2010, 22). Consequently, the anthropological focus on the specific nursing home context is justified, in the simplest terms, by the fact that the first part of the film's

[4] Conducted in the territory of the Republic of Serbia from 2011 to 2014, which will be discussed in more detail later.

plot takes place in this setting, which is characterized by specific rules of living and working, while also being inevitably shaped by broader social movements and value orientations.[5] This further reinforces the idea that aging is a social construct, not merely a biological fact. In addition to the fact that life in the nursing home follows prescribed rules, it is important to highlight that these circumstances also offer certain opportunities, which provide the basis for viewing nursing homes as specific dating markets, a topic to which a separate part of the analysis will be devoted.

The semiotics of old age

The semiotics of old age suggests that old age, as the signified, is created through numerous interwoven semiotic processes that position this element of the real world somewhere along the axis between the opposing poles of nature and culture. While medical biology views aging as an indisputable biological fact, whose existence is independent of our cultural conceptualization, in colloquial communication there is often the perspective at the opposite end of this axis, which sees old age as a "state of mind," where people are "only as old as they feel." It appears that a compromise between these two diametrically opposed views can be found in the idea that aging and old age are undeniable parts of reality, which people occasionally, due to various social and cultural factors, are either unaware of or consciously attempt to overlook (Stafford 1988, 271).

As Stafford observes, this paradox and the discrepancy between fact and construct, which can also be seen in the approaches of different subdisciplines of gerontology, can be better understood through the application of Peirce's concept of categories (Stafford 1988, 271). The founder of semiotics developed a classificatory system of phenomenology that sorts all elements that can enter human consciousness—elements that are not necessarily limited to "real" physical objects of the external world but can also represent the product of the semiotic human mind's internal creation—into three distinct categories based on their characteristics, form, and potential. Peirce explains how these three levels function in the process of meaning-making, known as semiosis (Gupta 2018; see also: Peirce 1867). As Gupta notes, Danesi connects Peirce's first category with physical sensation, the mind with the second, and culture with the third (see: Danesi 2004, 18).

Firstness belongs to the realm of latent possibility and refers to monads that do not relate to anything other than themselves, such as feelings or emotions that are devoid of analysis, comparison, objective perception, will, or thought. An

[5] The second co-authored paper by: Milosavljević, Banić Grubišić, and Ilić (2024) is dedicated to this topic.

example of this category is the concept of "redness," which is independent of any red-colored object and can be perceived as a sensation in and of itself. Secondness is a form of existence in which reality gains significance, representing intellectual categorization rather than mere sensation, and it is formed through a dyadic relationship that connects latent properties with manifest objects. Using the example of the concept of "redness," secondness occurs when this latent property is linked to a specific object, such as a rose. Finally, thirdness is the mediator through which firstness and secondness are connected. This category is furthest from "pure perception" and represents the result of cultural socialization. It is an intellectual framework that, through language, representation, and semiosis, shapes predetermined or established ways of thinking (Gupta 2018). As Danesi observes, people are born into an already fixed semiosphere that determines how we perceive the world around us (Danesi 2004, 21).

Understood as an unstoppable consequence of natural processes, aging corresponds to Peirce's definition of secondness, where biological gerontology, under the influence of biomedicine, attempts to uncover hidden universal principles that generate the "markers" of aging, focusing on the indexical aspects of old age (Stafford 1988, 271). This specific phenomenology is not exclusive to humans; indexes such as alopecia, changes in hair and skin color, body mass, and amenorrhea have been observed in other primates and mammals more broadly. Although it has not been thoroughly researched to what extent aging-induced changes in appearance and behavior are recognized and identified among other species, in humans, the identification and initial interpretation of this process begins through personal experience with aging in oneself and others. However, this process is also shaped and built upon through the lens of cultural patterns to which we are exposed and that we consciously and unconsciously adopt, including systematic practices of prejudiced and discriminatory behavior (Nuessel 1992, 41).

Unlike biological gerontology, the psychological and social branches of this discipline partially rely on the biomedical model in their attempts to define "normal aging" and identify causes of aging that are independent of environmental factors and lifestyle. They also seek to uncover nearly universal social and psychological characteristics of old age that remain after variables such as gender, class, illness, ethnicity, etc., are removed. However, these subdisciplines fundamentally view aging through the lens of the culturally mediated experience of the biological aging process, which corresponds to Peirce's category of thirdness (Stafford 1988, 272). In this way, interpretations of aging go beyond mere phenomenological experience and personal encounters with aging, focusing instead on the range of meanings attributed to the concept of old age in secondary written, oral, visual, and other texts across various temporal and cultural contexts. From a semiotic perspective, gerontology thus represents a

kind of commentary on both primary and secondary texts about aging (Stafford 1988, 285).

Although secondary representations of elderly people and interpretive derivatives are generally motivated by artistic impulses, they can serve as highly productive sources for exploring the meaning of aging through both declarative and normative models. The former reveal what the concept of aging entails in a given culture, while the latter assert what aging should represent (Stafford 1988, 274). Contrary to the observation by Simone de Beauvoir that the elderly are predominantly "absent" in history, due to their everyday status in society, further marginalized by industrialization and the advent of capitalism, and opposing the widespread belief that aging is an ignored topic in art, there are numerous examples in oral tradition, literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, marketing, photography, film, and their various genres that reference or focus on elderly individuals. These works explore themes such as the loss of strength and beauty, accompanied by changes in interpersonal relationships, the relationship between lifestyle in youth and quality of life in old age, asexuality or undiminished sexual desire, loss of social status and role in society, the significance of memory and attachment to specific places, or latent and manifest struggles with the angel of death, to name just a few (Stafford 1988, 285). Throughout history, old age has actually taken on almost mythical proportions in terms of meaning, becoming a symbol of many significant events and social realities of the life cycle, such as retirement, exclusion, ostracism, decline, etc. (Nuessel 1992, 40-41).

Nuessel identifies exclusion, subordination, distortion, and degradation as four prevalent manifestations of ritual ageism in contemporary society (Nuessel 1992, 37-38). Exclusion is the dominant form and refers to the omission or elimination of the elderly from numerous social activities, their disproportionate representation in the media relative to the growing number of individuals in this population group, and their physical segregation and "warehousing" in nursing homes. Their marginalization, often justified by the motive of preserving productivity, is accompanied by practices of subordination, where roles assigned to the elderly reflect their diminished status within society. Distortion involves the virtual and systematic assignment of negative physical, behavioral, and mental traits to the elderly in various cultural spheres, such as dramaturgy, music videos, film, telecommunications, or video games. In colloquial speech, this can be observed in attributes like toothless, peevish, or senile. Similarly, degradation represents the final form of ageism, where the elderly are stereotypically portrayed as inferior and both mentally and physically unbearable, a concept embodied in adjectives like rambling or decrepit. It is also important to note that due to the constant negative portrayals of aging, society becomes desensitized to them over time (Nuessel 1992, 43).

If we define ageism not only as a set of prejudices and stereotypes toward the elderly but also as a type of learned, culturally and socially conditioned behavior with subtle and unobtrusive principles of communicative interaction, then all these diverse "texts," understood as a body of repetitive and reflexive acts of communication, actually serve as signifiers that shape old age as the signified. They establish a shared corpus of cultural consciousness that can be viewed as a sort of grammar of ageism, capable of perpetuating a singular, monolithic sign through various forms (Nuessel 1992, 40). The cognition of these symbolic subaspects of aging thus amplifies and shapes them into a broader framework of meaning. These gestalts of meaning properties are holistic, and although composed of parts, they are not reducible to them; rather, they possess additional characteristics that arise from the whole, which can be analyzed and interpreted (Nuessel 1992, 40).

As Mead points out, semiotics is essentially patterned communication across all modalities (Mead 1964, 75, according to Nuessel 1992, 39). The concept of old age, in terms of meaning, is thus fulfilled through numerous modalities, which can be iconic, indexical, or symbolic (Stafford 1988, 274), creating a representation of what that concept entails, such as specific ways of behaving or dressing, for example. Certain clothing may be socially recognized as shabby and labeled as old-fashioned, and this old-fashionedness can become a signifier of aging in a broader sense (Nuessel 1992, 39). In this way, old age becomes a polyvalent meta-sign that, depending on the context, can be represented in various ways, including rhetorical tropes like conceptual metaphors, where we express abstract concepts through similarity, using other, more familiar, concrete, or better-defined concepts. It can also involve metonymy and synecdoche, where, based on proximity, a part substitutes for the whole, and a concrete concept replaces an abstract one (see: Danesi 2004, 115-140), such as when old-fashionedness represents old age as a whole. In this manner, a systemic combination of metonymic codes intersects and creates a derived whole, representing a set of metaphors and metonymies that can stand in for aging. As Lakoff and Johnson highlight, we understand experience metaphorically when we use a gestalt from one domain of experience to structure experience in another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 230). We use our knowledge of familiar systems, such as clothing, non-verbal communication, housing, social interactions, sexuality, etc., to comprehend the propagated behavior patterns of the elderly in a given culture through culturally conditioned texts (Nuessel 1992, 43).

One common metaphor for aging is that old age equals illness, suggesting that it is equivalent to a pathological condition. This metaphor establishes an indexical connection between "symptoms" such as pain, infections, physical injuries, frailty, immobility or reduced mobility, clouded and incoherent thinking and speech, on the one hand, and advanced age on the other (Staf-

ford 1988, 275). Attributes like decrepitude, frailty, weakness, shakiness, and exhaustion are just some of the numerous negative traits associated with the elderly in various media, ultimately creating a general archetype of old people (Nuessel 1992, 42).

Additionally, another common conceptual metaphor is that old age equals childhood, where the elderly exhibit many physical and behavioral similarities with the youngest members of society (Stafford 1988, 288). Old age is part of the continuum of the life cycle, which consists of different stages such as birth, childhood, adolescence, youth, middle age, old age, and so on (Nuessel 1992, 40). The popular iconic representation of the "staircase of life" has historically illustrated an odd number of life cycle stages as an ascent and descent on a symbolic hill of life, where the first step represents early childhood, maturity is the highest step, followed by the descent into old age on the final step. In this way, old age is symbolically equated with childhood, making them the two least influential periods of a person's life, both outside the adult world, which holds real power and authority (Stafford 1988, 288).[6]

In everyday communication, the elderly are often described as sweet, kind, or dear, and in some situations, caring for the elderly is viewed as a form of "parenting the parents." There is also a tendency, particularly in contexts such as nursing homes or hospitals, to approach the elderly in a patronizing manner and to address them differently than other adults, such as using "baby talk." This infantilizing language creates a significant distinction from perceiving them as equal adults, establishing a power dynamic of domination and dependence on the working-age population whose care the elderly require (Stafford 1988, 288). Nursing homes are another metonym for old age, symbolizing segregation and ostracism.

In certain contexts, old age is also equated with an economic and social problem, emphasizing the negative aspects of financial dependency and social unproductivity (Nuessel 1992, 43). However, in other cultural frameworks, this kind of dependency can be seen as an opportunity to express respect and gratitude toward the elderly. Thus, the representations of old age are not always necessarily negative. In some cultures, the physical and indexical proximity to death or ancestors is seen as a source of spiritual strength, inaccessible to younger people (Stafford 1988, 291). Old age can also be depicted as serene beauty and wisdom, but equally as ugliness and physical and mental decay. Therefore, a deep understanding of the cultural code in which a certain representation is created and enriched with meaning is essential for the proper comprehension and interpretation of conceptual metaphors.

[6] This will be discussed further in the following sections.

Film synopsis

According to the description on IMDb, the film is presented as follows: "Seventy-year-old teenagers run away from home. They are not running from their parents, they are running from the inevitable."[7] The playful manipulation of age, where the elderly are equated with children or, in this case, teenagers, is something that will also be present in the film itself—whether it comes from the characters who work at the nursing home or the protagonists themselves. This serves to emphasize the dependent position that differentiates them from their middle-aged selves, during which they presumably had the ability, and the right, to make independent decisions. As a result, their *departure* from the nursing home is portrayed as a multiple *escape*. However, what is "inevitable" for Helena (Ana Karić) and Jakov (Radko Polič) is quite different, but together, it represents some of the key attributes associated with aging: economic, social and health decline, which creates fertile ground for a vast field of deprivation. More specifically, Helena spends her days at the Zagreb nursing home feeling despondent, waiting for her son, who has moved to Australia with the money she gave him from the sale of her apartment, to contact her. The existential worry (as she no longer has a place to live and is waiting for a decision to move her to a cheaper nursing home), the realization of parental failure in investing her life in a son who has abandoned her, and the loneliness after 30 years of widowhood and outliving her best friends, all make Helena visually blend into the slow and "lifeless" atmosphere of the nursing home. Her attention, however, is captured by the newly admitted Jakov, a former jazz saxophonist who played on international cruising ships and then became a taxi driver after returning to his home country. Due to illness, he is now placed in a nursing home, confined to a wheelchair. Their connection is preceded by a transformation. Helena, after borrowing money to get her hair done, becomes a visual contrast to the other female residents. Jakov's transformation involved, first, a health improvement that lifted him out of his wheelchair and then a change from being gruff and irritable to someone who could be communicated with and who eventually accepted playing the role of *Grisha*, Helena's first love from her youth, which lasted three days—the same length of time as their escape. However, the fact that both of them are reluctantly in the same place leads them to form a kind of unspoken alliance through which they attempt to overcome the circumstances they find themselves in. While they do this cautiously and very slowly, they attract the attention of those around them, either through gossip or as an open threat to the intimate sphere. Their escape from the nursing home leads them into a series of situations in which they will need the help of strangers, culminating in the con-

[7] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1930421/

clusion where the male protagonist dies in a stranger's car on the ferry that was supposed to take them to Italy. Their paths diverge not only with his death but also with her prior decision to seek police help after discovering that her partner was in the terminal phase of his illness, which led her to abandon their travel adventure. In the final scenes, we see her back in the nursing home, in the same place from which she had set out, returning to the life she once knew.

Semiotic analysis

Visual communication serves as a dynamic canvas on which icons, signals, and symbols create meanings and convey important denotative and connotative messages (Popat et al. 2023, according to Anggraheni, Anandha, and Yogatama 2024, 228). Film posters, as a significant element of marketing and distribution, represent a text filled with meaning and an ideal subject for semiological analysis (Utami, Setia, and Deliana 2021, 20). These posters usually embody the central concepts of the film itself and set the tone for prospective viewers even before they watch the film, while remaining open to various interpretations and the incorporation of personal, socially shaped attitudes and values into its understanding.

The poster for the film Night Boats on a denotative level depicts an elderly man and woman lying on their backs outdoors on the hood of a red car, gazing at each other. This is an illustration of one of the visually striking and narratively significant scenes from the film, in which the protagonists, Jakov and Helena, in a moment of closeness and trust, share intimate secrets under the night sky on the roof of his old Mercedes, which he once drove as a taxi. Jakov has gray hair and is wearing a blue shirt, while Helena has a styled hairdo reminiscent of her youth and is dressed in a pink knitted sweater, covered by her beige coat. Both of them have used their arms as pillows, and with gentle smiles and wide-open eyes, they look directly into each other's eyes, their heads turned toward one another. On the roof of the car, the windshield of the sunroof is visible, above which the title Night Boats is written in large letters, in two lines, in blue and pink colors that match the protagonists' clothing. As per usual convention, the names of the lead actors are listed above the title, while the director's name is below it. Directly above the main characters is the slogan: "Their last dance

is their first chance at true romance." In the bottom right corner, the awards won by the film and the actors are prominently displayed.

The first connotative sign that can be interpreted from the poster is the concept of romance. In his iconic analysis of the French ad for Panzani pasta, Roland Barthes demonstrates how the use of green, red, and white colors, along with the melodic nature of the brand's name, evokes a sense of "Italianicity" among potential consumers. The advertisers rely on already ingrained knowledge and perceptions of Italian culture and the quality of Italian cuisine to create a positive association with their product (Barthes 1977, 153-154). Similarly, based on our understanding of the concept of romance in other contexts, its elements can be recognized and culturally translated through the example of this poster. The physical closeness of the protagonists, the comfort they clearly feel in each other's presence, and the smiles and warm gazes they exchange indexically suggest that they are partners with emotional feelings for each other.

At first glance, the scene seems to depict long-time spouses sharing an emotional moment in bed in their bedroom, but the roof of the car shifts the context. They are on the road, outside the safety of their home, enjoying each other's company under the starry sky, even though it is evidently cold outside. This can be inferred from Helena's sweater and the use of the coat as a blanket, as well as from the scene itself, which captures the moment where the protagonists' breath forms condensation as they speak. Despite the cold, Jakov has chivalrously offered his velvet jacket to Helena to make her more comfortable as she lies down. This gesture expresses both his affection and gentlemanly manners typical of the "olden days". The red color of the car, which frames the elderly couple, also alludes to the romantic emotion that exists between them.

The title of the film, according to director and screenwriter Igor Mirković, is tied to two things: "First, the fact that the protagonists, who have fallen in love in a nursing home, are trying to reach a boat that will take them to Italy; and second, the symbolic story that connects their youth to boats. The film tries to be lyrical and emotional, and we felt this title was appropriate."[8] The imagined sight of boats sailing into the night evokes feelings of mystery and romance. Night is often perceived as a time of heightened emotions and the most romantic part of the day, during which couples share their intimacy. The sense of love and passion on this poster is further enhanced by the impression that, in a "Meadian" sense, "things are not in their place"—suggesting that this is an adventure born of spontaneity and the inspiration of the moment.

By considering the depicted signs and their opposites, we see that instead of the expected enclosed space of a nursing home and immobility, we see open

[8] Trkulja, Božidar. 2012. "Ne osjećam se debitantom, naučio sam plivati kad me bace u reku". Vjesnik.

expanses and travel. Instead of an early bedtime, we witness a sleepless night under the stars. Instead of apathy and asexuality, we see pleasure and emotion. Instead of dependence, we see initiative. Visually, the protagonists take on the role of outlaws, reminiscent of Bonnie and Clyde (more in: Milosavljević, Banić, and Ilić 2024), who, through authentic actions, consciously express rebellion and claim freedom of choice in very limited circumstances (see: Stajić 2017, 525).

This brings us to the second significant connotative and complex sign that can be identified on the poster—old age. The night also represents the final interval of the day, which, in a metaphorical sense, corresponds to old age on the chronological timeline of life. The Night Boat that the protagonists seek to catch is headed for Italy, an idealized, paradise-like world of freedom and excitement that lies across the sea. Boats symbolize freedom and boundlessness due to their indexical connection with sailing and the open sea, and in the film, they serve as a metaphor for the unfulfilled dream of youth that Jakov and Helena still wish to experience at the very end of their lives. In this sense, the Adriatic Sea and its crossing almost resemble the mythical crossing of the River Styx, symbolizing a journey to a metaphorical otherworld.

Socially recognized markers of old age that appear on the poster include the iconic representation of the actors themselves in advanced years, with facial features such as wrinkles, baldness, gray hair, and a particular hairstyle,[9] as well as the protagonists' names and the clothing they wear (like the knitted sweater), which can conventionally be perceived as old-fashioned in this context. Even the car itself is an old model Mercedes, discarded and put up for sale, which, as shown in the film, is unable to reverse due to a mechanical issue, thus symbolizing both old age and the irreversibility of the passage of time. Also, worth noting in this regard is the sense of tranquility and bliss exuded by the protagonists, which is, in certain contexts, associated with older individuals.

Applying a paradigmatic analysis and a commutation test—where we examine whether the meaning would change if a sign were replaced by another from the same paradigmatic set (Vasiljević 2007, 45; Stajić 2024, 237-238)—we can observe that the element of surprise, caused by breaking cinematic clichés with the appearance of elderly individuals in the role of rebellious lovers on a journey, would be completely eliminated if a young couple were cast as the protagonists. Given that viewers are well-acquainted with the normative form of the road movie genre and its attributes, they attribute many characteristics typically associated with youth to the elderly couple who has taken their place. The blue and pink clothing worn by the protagonists symbolizes the traditional gender

[9] Which points to old age by the fact that it contrasts with youth, i.e., that the hairstyle is an attempt to negate or reverse aging.

roles of a young man and woman, roles that, in this case, are being embodied by individuals from the old generation, who are typically perceived as asexual by younger generations. However, they are full of life, in love, free, and uninhibited, inclined toward adventure and experimentation. The poster noticeably lacks stereotypical negative attributes of old age, such as wheelchairs, canes, medications, caregivers, nursing homes, grumpiness, senility, or lethargy.

Kress and Van Leeuwen proposed a spatial map for analyzing visual content, suggesting that the lower parts of an image typically depict realistic content, while the upper parts convey idealized content, with the central area occupied by the main metaphor (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1998). Interpreted in this framework, the lower part of the poster shows two elderly people lying peacefully and exchanging caring glances, which represents a realistic depiction of old age with a positive inclination. The upper part of the poster is filled with the image of the car and the title Night Boats, suggesting an idealized portrayal of mobility and an adventurous spirit in old age. The central metaphor that unites these elements into a meaningful whole is the slogan, "Their last dance is their first chance at true romance."

Barthes observes that all images are polysemous, offering the interpreter a choice from a "floating chain" of possible meanings. Therefore, every society develops techniques aimed at fixing meaning in a way that eliminates the anxiety of sign ambiguity. The linguistic message is one of these techniques, which directly answers the question of what we see in an image. In his analysis of the functions of linguistic messages related to iconic images, Barthes concludes that they can serve as either anchorage or relay (Barthes 1977, 156). Anchorage provides a denotative description of the image, helping us to clearly and easily determine the level of perception, identify the elements of the scene, and solidify the intended meaning. At the symbolic level of the message, anchorage doesn't guide identification but rather interpretation, preventing wandering and loose understanding. In the case of relay, words and images are part of a broader syntagm, and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level within the overall narrative. In this case, text and image are in a complementary relationship, with the message containing meanings that extend beyond the image itself (Barthes 1977, 156-157). These two functions of the linguistic message can coexist within a single iconic whole, which seems to be the case in the poster for the film Night Boats. The meaning of the image—given its atypical break from genre conventions, which could easily be interpreted in a comedic or ironic light—is anchored as an illustration of a romantic love drama and the last adventurous endeavor in the lives of two people.

The film trope of the "last dance" emphasizes the gravity and significance of the moment when one confronts their own mortality. In the case of a person who has led a particularly adventurous life, this motif can imply rejecting all rules

and norms and embarking on a final mission—because when you have nothing to lose, you can give it your all.[10] This cliché is closely related to the trope of "your days are numbered",[11] as well as the "going out with a bang" trope, where a character, despite the inevitability of death due to an incurable illness, refuses to succumb to despair and lethargic acceptance of fate.[12] Instead, with the help of a partner, they accomplish a personally meaningful goal before death, making the most of their last days by living life to the fullest.[13]

In the case of Night Boats, the protagonists fully embody this trope. Jakov, a former bon vivant and free-spirited jazz musician, after being placed in a nursing home due to an injury and subsequently learning that he is terminally ill, refuses to passively wait for the outcome of this "sentence." With the help of his newly found partner, he decides to cast aside numerous social conventions—as he has done many times before—and live his last three days in a fulfilling and adventurous way, also realizing Helena's unfulfilled dream from her youth.

The film was marketed as the Croatian version of The Bridges of Madison County (1995),[14] which tells the story of a four-day spontaneous love affair that, despite its brief duration and the protagonists' later separate life paths, left such a profound impact on both that it remained a life-changing moment and their greatest unfulfilled dream until death. Similarly, in Night Boats, the main characters attempt to rekindle a three-day love affair that occurred in Helena's youth, a longing and regret that have persisted for many years. Jakov agrees to play the role of Grisha in this "reconstructed" affair, a character from Helena's memory inspired by the protagonist of Mikhail Lermontov's novel A Hero of Our Time, with whom Jakov shared many bohemian traits and the Don Juan lifestyle in his youth. Even in old age, he shares the same worldview, particularly his love for freedom. The character similarity between these figures is perhaps best captured in a quote from Lermontov's novel, where Grigory Pechorin declares: "...I would risk my life twenty times, even my honor... but I will not give up my freedom. Why is it so dear to me? What do I gain from it? What do I want from myself? What do I expect from the future?... Honestly, nothing at all..."

[10] https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheLastDance

[11] https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/YourDaysAreNumbered

[12] Just as he does not resort to suicide as a form of escape—a common issue in old age—"People, for various reasons, turn to what they see as the only remaining option, fleeing from life (due to disappointment, loneliness, physical and mental illness, failure, heroism, cowardice, restlessness, misfortune, anxiety...)" (Knežić 2006, 285), this is not a solution for a character inclined toward adventure. However, one might question whether his refusal of treatment implicitly constituted an act of suicide.

[13] https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DoNotGoGentle

[14] 2012. "Noćni brodovi". Zadarski list.

Although it seeks to redefine certain socially ingrained norms, the film embodies numerous metaphors and metonymies that, together through indexical connections, create a unique concept of aging. Based on various examples at different moments throughout the film—more of which will be discussed later—a correlation is formed between aging and several aspects. These include physical and mental illnesses (such as weakness, dementia, senility, communication difficulties, diabetes, fainting, and proximity to death), powerlessness (financial and physical dependence, medication, neck braces, hearing aids, magnifying glasses, eyeglasses, assistance from staff and kind individuals), immobility (being bedridden, wheelchairs, canes, walkers), and childhood (with phrases like "everyone's playing around, just like in kindergarten," the elderly being labeled as children, the patronizing approach of staff, "childish" communication, the introduction of prohibitions and permissions, sneaking around, and interactions perceived as playful flirtation).

Additionally, aging is associated with isolation (loneliness, widowhood, lack of contact with loved ones), the loss of freedom and individuality (living in a nursing home, collective activities, lack of privacy, loss of previous status and social influence), personality traits (grumpiness, talkativeness, gossiping, shouting, attachment to the past, rich life experience, courtesy), clothing styles (drab colors, untidiness, old-fashioned attire, shirts and knitted sweaters, skirts and wide pants, coats and velvet jackets, suspenders and hats), hairstyles (outdated cuts and styling, baldness, graying, disheveled hair, neglect), and emotions and sexuality (love, infatuation, asexuality, inhibited or rekindled sexual desire).

The most significant concepts in the film, as we've had the opportunity to observe, are aging and romance, and we can use them in a semiotic analysis to uncover some of the deeper structural meanings that this film contains latently. The use of dichotomies and contrasting concepts such as youth and old age, memory and amnesia, speech and silence, ambition and apathy, divine beauty and grotesque ugliness, etc., has already been explored in critical analyses of films dealing with the elderly and nursing homes, such as Sorrentino's Youth (2015) (see: David 2019, 27). In this case, we will rely on Greimas and Rastier's semiotic square, which serves as a methodological tool for graphically representing the deep structures of a semiotic system. By focusing on contrasting and contradictory terms, it frames the narrative segment within a particular discourse (Corso 2014, 69) and enables the analysis of the underlying structures of thought (Hébert 2006, 18).

Greimas emphasizes that the semiotic square represents the basic structure of signification and the functioning of oppositional logic that underlies the narrative and its semantic and symbolic content (Feluga 2002). It consists of four elements and three types of axes that exist among them—axes of contrariety, axes of contradiction, and axes of implication. Following Dragana Antonije-

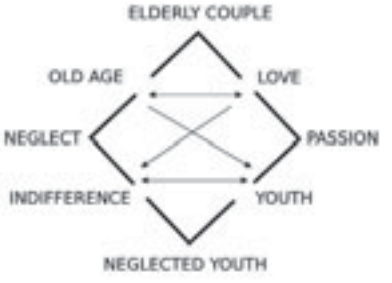
vić's presentation of Greimas' squares (Antonijević 2009) and its application to the study of non-alignment (Krstić 2012), we will apply the semiotic square, intersecting it with the modality of truth, using the two central motifs of Night Boats—the motif of aging and the motif of love.

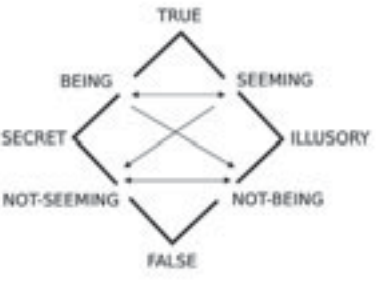
If we accept the widely held colloquial belief that old age is generally seen as the period when it is no longer socially acceptable to fall in love or engage in sexual activity,[15] then the terms "old age" and "love" can be viewed as contraries—opposite poles of an axis that are opposed but not mutually exclusive. The contradictory term to "old age" would be "non-old age," a concept that, in a logical sense, implies the negation and complete absence of old age. For the purposes of this analysis, this will be labeled with the simpler and more meaningful contrary term "youth." On the other hand, the contradictory term to the concept of "love" is not "hatred" (which is actually a contrary term) but the complete absence of love, represented by the concept of "indifference." In accordance with this, we can construct a semiotic square with the basic concepts of old age, love, youth, and indifference. By combining these elements, it is possible to create meta-terms that can identify structurally important latent ideas and concepts.

Thus, on the upper axis of contrariety, by combining the concepts of old age and love, we can position the concept of the "elderly couple." On the lower axis, by combining the concepts of youth and indifference, we can position the concept of "neglected youth." The first meta-term is embodied by the film's protagonists, while the second is illustrated through the depiction of a young adolescent without parental care, whom the protagonists take along with them during their journey out of altruistic motives. However, communication breaks down between them due to a generational gap, leading to a confrontation that almost has fatal consequences.

The elements on the axes of implication can also form meta-terms. On the axis that connects the concepts of youth and love, we can position the concept of "passion," while on the axis between indifference and old age, we can identify the concept of "neglect." The first is embodied by the young nurse working in the nursing home where the protagonists are staying. Through her communication with Jakov, viewers learn about her tumultuous love affair with a married man whose wife discovered the infidelity. Although it is conventionally believed that youth brings a fulfilling love life and emotional passion, this illustration suggests that this is not always the case. The second meta-concept, neglect, can be identified in the relationship between Helena and her son, who shows complete indifference toward his mother, despite her having sacrificed her own well-being by selling her apartment to provide him with a more comfortable life.

[15] More on this will be discussed further on.





Finally, this schema can be supplemented with the veridictory square developed by Greimas and Courtés. The veridictory square is a semiotic square built upon the oppositions of being/seeming, which is used to examine truth and falsehood within a given narrative (Hébert 2006, 29). Depending on how meaning is interpreted in the two-way communication between sender and receiver, discourse, according to Greimas, can be true, false, illusory, or secret (Maddox 1989, 661-663). In the case of our newly formed semiotic square, at the level of deep structures of thought, the existence of elderly couples and emotional connections among the elderly is seen as true, while neglect of the young and abandonment of youth is revealed as false. Passion and idyllic happy love among the young are exposed as illusions, while neglect of the elderly is semiotically recognized as a factual societal secret.

The Elderly couple

In the continuation of this paper, the film will be approached from the perspective of the anthropology of aging, with the aim of connecting the film's narrative with the results of qualitative field research due to the significant overlap that unequivocally highlights the position of the elderly in society. Night Boats, which can be classified as both a (melo)drama and a road movie (more in: Milosavljević, Banić, and Ilić, 2024; on aging and road movies, see: Gravagne 2021, 244-246), represents the cinematic portrayal of a late-life love that begins in old age, within the confines of a nursing home. In other words, it takes place at an "inappropriate" time and in an "inappropriate" place, when both are viewed through the lens of dominant social conventions that transcend the geographical and historical boundaries to which the film belongs. This deviation from socially acceptable norms—specifically from the typical narrative in which romantic relationships lead to marriage and family formation (see: Lightman 2015, 110)—results in at least two outcomes. The first suggests that such relationships fail to be accepted as so-called *romantic love*; instead, they

are met with skepticism, with additional motives[16] being sought to justify their realization. The second outcome suggests that if the relationship between elderly individuals is *romantic*, meaning it serves as a framework for expressing sexuality (more on romantic relationships in: Baćević 2008), it becomes largely unacceptable to the broader community, as it often cannot meet the expectations imposed upon it. These expectations can, in short, be reduced to the imperatives of marriage, motherhood, and the idea that love, once found, is meant to last a lifetime (for more on romantic love as a culturally specific phenomenon, see: Giddens 1992). The loss of the ability for the experiences of elderly constituents of a new couple to meet these demands represents an additional burden. When combined with other issues related to aging, this burden causes such behaviors to either be avoided or relegated to a secret or isolated zone, which corresponds to the environment of a nursing home, a topic that will be discussed in more detail later.

The suppression related to the elderly, including by the elderly themselves, is, however, a general indicator of the power relations in society and does not pertain solely to specific life patterns. The insufficient visibility of a social group that, in Western societies, constitutes one of the largest demographics is consequently typical for film and media as well. Some authors emphasize the paradox of this outcome, noting the clear "trend of increasing numbers of elderly people worldwide and their share of the overall population, but also the trend of their social marginalization and discrimination based solely on their age" (Baraković and Mahmutović 2018, 22). Research shows that discrimination against the elderly in media discourse is mostly reflected in their "exclusion from media focus, or reports on the elderly being based on negative stereotypes," which, according to conclusions, has influenced "the public's perception of the elderly as well as their own view of their position" (Baraković and Mahmutović 2018, 28). Because of this, the analyzed work—belonging to the category of cinematic exceptions in this region[17]—plays an additional role in addressing related societal issues. Staying within the realm of media—which significantly shapes the image of the elderly (Gudac Dodić 2019, 179)—it is generally observed that the presence of older people is lower compared to other age groups, and there are tendencies that align with ageism (more in: Zovko and Vukobratović 2017; Baraković and Mahmutović 2018). Commercial interests, which prioritize viewership as the main imperative influencing the presentation of certain categories of people, including the elderly, can be identified as one of the reasons for this (more in: Perišin and Kufrin 2009). Translated into the domain of Yugoslav cin-

[16] As a rule, manipulative.

[17] For an example of the Zagreb Film Festival's initiative to encourage reflection on aging, see: Zovko and Vukobratović 2017.

ema, we can equally observe a continuous marginalization of elderly characters, who are mostly deprived of the opportunity to be the main drivers of the plot, a trend that is particularly pronounced with female characters. Even when they do appear, they often play less significant roles (more in: Gudac Dodić 2019). More broadly, "women of 'a certain age' are generally represented as secondary figures 'in relation to' the main characters," reduced to asexual human beings (Zecchi 2021, 1998-1999).[18] Thus, it remains true that different representations of aging are shaped by various sociocultural influences, socially acceptable and dominant values, and that these representations change over time depending on historical, social, and cultural contexts (Gudac Dodić 2019, 178). In other words, films, as products of industries belonging to a particular culture, simultaneously replicate and generate the values and norms of that culture (Swinnen 2015, 69), leading to significant shifts over time. "Popular films have always included elderly characters, but until recently, old age only played a supporting role onscreen. Now, as the baby boomer population hits retirement, there has been an explosion of films" (Chivers 2011). Over time, this has led to more frequent portrayals of aging not only through depictions of dementia and other forms of disability[19] but also through love stories. Recently, there has emerged a distinct category of films set in nursing homes or addressing the challenges and emotions associated with entering such institutions or placing elderly family members in them. These films reveal the culturally constructed nature of the binary opposition between youth and old age[20] (Chivers and Kriebernegg 2021, 765-769).

The changes taking place, which include a growing number of films featuring older characters in more significant roles as drivers of the plot,[21] should therefore be considered within the broader processes of constructing old age as a social issue on a global scale,[22] which inevitably extends to the contexts addressed in this study. In this way, the construct of aging becomes one of the lenses through which the film's narrative can be viewed—where two seventy-year-olds embark on a romance after a brief acquaintance in a nursing home in Zagreb, from which they escape via a balcony toward the sea. For the film-

[18] For different examples, see: Kaplan 2010, 27-55.

[19] These narratives are shaped by the understanding of aging as a loss of capacity, ability, and agency (Falcus and El Madawi 2021, 1323).

[20] However, it is also noticeable that contemporary cinema follows the agenda of so-called "successful aging," which creates a distinction between the third and fourth age, where individuals in the latter are often pathologized (Dolan 2017, 5).

[21] Although it remains true that Western audiovisual culture is predominantly focused on men and youth (Zecchi 2021, 1998). See also: King 2010, 57-81.

[22] For more on the process of constructing old age as a social problem, see: Milosavljević 2014a, 2014b.

makers, this serves as both a form of critique and a mechanism for shedding light on a substantial number of stereotypes[23] associated with the final stage of life. Some stereotypes emphasize the negative traits of the elderly, creating perceptions of them as unproductive, ill, depressed, and prone to poor decision-making (Perišin and Kufrin 2009, 31). The anthropology of aging further identifies these highlighted stereotypes as a cause of a whole nexus of deprivations to which older people are typically exposed. Whether these deprivations are imposed by society as a whole, their immediate environment, or whether the elderly "voluntarily" place themselves in such positions to avoid judgment and pressure from those upon whom they are dependent, the result is often a disadvantaged and diminished status. This is particularly evident in stereotypes related to the sexuality of the elderly—a topic that will be discussed in greater detail later. For these reasons, it becomes important to draw attention to other connections between what is presented in this specific screenplay and what has been established through field research.

The research in question was conducted in six nursing homes for adults and the elderly, encompassing eight units located in Vojvodina, eastern, and southeastern Serbia, during the period from 2011 to 2014 (Milosavljević 2019). The primary focus of the research was on partnerships, in their various manifestations, as a strategy of action for residents within the institutional environment, as well as on a range of implications for both the individuals involved in the relationship and their surroundings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents who had personal experience forming relationships in these conditions (most often with both members of the seventeen partnerships)[24], as well as with staff members, including social workers, psychologists, special educators, medical staff, andragogues, and sociologists. Of the seventeen employees interviewed, four held managerial positions. What they all had in common, however, was their connection to the nursing home, either as a place of residence or as a place of work. This *place*, like other sites of anthropological interest, is defined by the people and the emotions they share. It is also shaped by cultural, social, political, and economic contexts; it is multifaceted and constantly changing. It bears traces of the past, has its present, and holds indications of the future as envisioned by its actors (Potkonjak 2014, 26). "Place, as such, is a social product; it arises and is reflected in the interaction of various actors, reflecting a particular social reality while simultaneously producing that reality" (Potkonjak 2014, 26), which can be stated in an absolute sense for nursing homes of this type (see Milosavljević 2014b for more).

[23] https://6yka.com/novosti/zdravo-je-ponekad-iskljuciti-mozak

[24] There were instances where a respondent shared their experience of being in two relationships during their time in the home.

This *place*, as the setting for the first half of the film—both in terms of its functions and visual representation—aligns with the research sites, particularly considering that the construction of nursing homes with a clearly defined purpose began in the 1970s in what was then a same country. However, the overlap between the film's timeline and the field research is coincidental. Another circumstance, though, reflects the targeted (but unrealized) intention of the researchers to conduct additional research focusing on the reception of nursing home residents. The aim was to screen the film in 2018 for interested residents at one of the largest homes for adults and the elderly in Serbia and to gain insights through interviews into their interpretation of the film's story, as well as to continue the previous research on partnerships within the nursing home. Negotiations with the administration, however, did not result in a positive response, precisely because the story revolves around elderly residents who begin a romance in the home and subsequently escape from it. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that such relationships do not occur in these institutions or that there are explicit prohibitions against them. On the contrary, the following section will highlight a range of benefits that such relationships provide, not only for the individuals involved but also for those around them, including staff, other residents, and often even family members. Thus, the analysis will delve further into the results of the field research, which bears many connections to the film. This once again confirms that, while the film is a work of fiction, as a "cultural artifact," its narrative addresses concrete societal issues (Jarvik, 1988: 85-86), most notably poverty, aging, and institutional care—issues that are often intertwined.

User relationships

The first connection between what we observe in the story of Helena and Jakov and the findings from field research is the recognition of the place where the couple meets—not just as a "last stop for dying," as partially suggested by the film's depiction of the protagonist wandering into a ward where his bed is waiting[25]—but also as a place with the potential to transform into a kind of dating market for those interested in continuing the established pattern of living as a couple. This *market* becomes particularly important when considering that, over time, social relations for individuals become more limited. Living as a couple represents a familiar formula in which individuals navigate the new circumstances of the nursing home with the help of previous experiences and acquired competencies (Milosavljević 2019, 127). According to research findings, approximately thirty percent of the nursing home population forms some type of

[25] However, it is interesting to note that some of the stories shared during the qualitative research were recorded specifically in the ward.

partnership with another resident.[26] The emotional depth and romantic content of these relationships, from an anthropological perspective, were not the focus of the research but were not denied in certain cases either (Milosavljević 2019). A significant conclusion, which equally applies to the film's narrative, is the idea that nursing homes are places where these relationships are more acceptable compared to the outside world. This affirms the constructivist insight that emotions are inherently "social" rather than entirely "private" (Leavitt 1996, 522). Those who are more accepting of these relationships include, first and foremost, the staff, but also other residents who engage in similar relationships, forming a kind of tacit alliance in which elderly couples constitute a distinct category of nursing home residents.

Furthermore, situating the narrative in an artificially created environment, composed of both residents and staff, where Helena and Jakov begin their relationship, highlights the specificities of the position of other elderly couples whose relationships begin in the final stage of life. These specificities may, to some extent, be the result of a need for compensation[27] aimed at achieving or maintaining a desired quality of life in old age, which can vary significantly among individuals or certain groups. However, feelings of independence, control, and autonomy remain key (cf. Walker and Mollenkopf 2007, 9). The decline in quality of life appears to be an almost inevitable companion of both the biological process of aging and old age as a social construct,[28] particularly when these processes unfold within institutional frameworks, leading to various deprivations. Thus, one of the key questions is what can be compensated through a partnership in the described circumstances, especially after considering what Helena and Jakov have lost and which strategies of action[29] they employ to compensate for these losses.

At the most general level, both Helena and Jakov lose the right to decide where they will live,[30] with whom they will share intimacy, and even their free-

[26] The connection to a romantic interpretation was intentionally omitted for the explained reasons.

[27] Successful aging could be linked to the process of selective optimization with compensation, which suggests that older people manage their lives by aligning their aspirations and adapting to changing circumstances and declining capacities (Baltes and Baltes 1990, as cited in Kandig et al. 2016, 4).

[28] One of the subprocesses in this construction was the establishment of organized institutional care, specifically through the creation of a network of nursing homes (Milosavljević 2014b). The other, and more dominant process, was the establishment of the pension system (Milosavljević 2014a).

[29] When people solve problems, they construct strategies of action – persistent (but not fixed or immutable) ways of ordering action through time (Laz 1998, 102).

[30] Like numerous real-life nursing home residents.

dom of movement, although it's clear that they had gained these freedoms to varying degrees in earlier stages of life. Freedom, inherent to Jakov, is primarily positioned in his professions. Jakov, a former jazz musician, spent his life playing saxophone on ships and in seaside hotels, and his life story is shaped by the trope that jazz, in all its forms, represents freedom (see: Tepelt, Kehl, and Wiedemann 2007). He is free from the constraints of family, parenthood, obligations to loved ones, and the need to live in one place or work for a particular employer. Even his second profession as a taxi driver can be equated with the choice to live freely without "answering to anyone." Playing jazz exuded the allure of the West, which was so admired in their youth in the former Yugoslavia, and taxi driving also carried values removed from socialism, where the professional status of freelancers was, if not rare, certainly not the norm.[31] These few indicators are enough to portray Jakov as a man who makes his own decisions. He does not lose the right to choose how to live, even with the fact that his illness has progressed to a life-threatening degree. It is Jakov who will include Helena in his plan to escape the nursing home. Helena, on the other hand, faces common companions of old age: loneliness, where it is necessary to differentiate between "objective and subjective states," with "feelings of abandonment, emptiness, and hopelessness being most present in older individuals who have become widows or widowers" (Knežić 2011, 58); along with rejection, neglect, and poverty.[32] Yet, she remains willing to "recognize" in Jakov her first love, the "imaginary" Grisha, and to embark on the adventure of a journey where she will also experience the adventure of love (for more on these aspects, see: Milosavljević, Banić, and Ilić, 2024). Her days in the nursing home pass quietly, spent watching television and reading newspapers, but also in restlessness as she receives no news from her son, nor any update on whether she will be moved to a cheaper home. Her only pleasure seems to be the conversations with her roommate, Tonka (who is already seriously detached from reality), which are accompanied by fortune-telling through coffee grounds. Her unconditional attachment to home, family, and her son persists even after all her obligations to them have ceased. Thus, Helena is not someone who has lost her freedom due to old age; rather, she rejects the liberation[33] that is considered one of the (few) advantages of the so-called third age. Her journey toward even partial liberation will begin at the urging of her new partner, in circumstances where everything around them and in their lives is old—except for their relationship.

[31] Even the fact that Jakov drove a Mercedes D220, a popular taxi vehicle of that era, which he uses to escape from the nursing home, supports the idea that, in both qualitative and ideological terms, it was different from what the Yugoslav automotive industry produced at the time, for example.

[32] Another overarching societal issue within which aging has been constructed as a social problem.

[33] Initially completely, and later in the course of the narrative, partially.

The circumstances in which we meet the main characters, which align with the narratives recorded during field research, can be further distilled into several common themes, such as: the continuation of an established pattern of living as a couple[34] (particularly for Helena); the acquisition of a helper in adjusting to life in a nursing home[35] (as with Jakov); the need for separate living space and the expression of sexuality in old age[36]; and even financial empowerment through partnership[37] (as exemplified by their escape in Jakov's car) as well as the continued need for financial support from various helpers along the way. Thus, their strategies for negotiating with their surroundings regarding these important elements—though they may stem from different motivations—result in a set of outcomes related to meeting needs that lead to an improved quality of life in old age. These needs, which also appear in the testimonies of research participants, justify the claim that elderly couples, through forming partnerships under specific circumstances, fulfill far more needs than just emotional ones. While emotional needs play a significant role in the quality of life for the elderly, they are not the central focus of anthropological analysis.

Nevertheless, the affection and closeness between Helena and Jakov develop slowly and under the scrutiny of those around them. Examples of disapproval, both in the film and the conducted research, are primarily found among other nursing home residents, which leads both the characters and real-life couples to adopt a strategy of retreating into secrecy (as long as possible). In contrast, a more favorable attitude is largely reserved for the staff.[38] Both the film and the research "contradict stereotypes of older people as affectively blunted and particularly as depressed by illness and losses" (Powell Lawton 2001, 123). On the contrary, we encounter people who are willing to continue life as a couple, but also to endure societal pressure that strongly inhibits the expression of sexuality

[34] An almost inevitable motive for entering into a partnership in a nursing home.

[35] This is also a frequently recorded situation during research, which can be explained by the fact that the nursing home population faces a double challenge. First, "problems arise because adapting to old age involves not only adjusting to biologically and psychologically conditioned changes but also to changes caused by the weakening of social status, power, and roles, and the increasingly inferior role in society" (Knežić 2011, 57). The second part of the problem involves adjusting to the conditions of life in the nursing home, which require integration into a large collective and the loss of autonomy (see: Milosavljević 2019).

[36] While we watch the characters find ways to spend time together, nursing home couples are often provided with separate accommodation to ensure that, where applicable, their right to sexual relations is respected.

[37] By combining the so-called pocket money provided by the government, for example.

[38] This will be discussed in more detail later.

in old age. This pressure can manifest through jokes[39] and gossip as a form of violence (more in: Stanić 2009) or through direct insults, a dynamic that is also highlighted in the film.

One example, when judgment in the film is induced by a peer—a roommate (who is otherwise prone to bullying)—clearly reflects the previously mentioned conclusions. The retired general (played by Pero Kvrgić), in a wheelchair, who has been in the nursing home for fourteen years and is revealed to be diabetic, unleashes a fit of rage driven by his own frustration with a condition that has stripped him of his former privileges. He uses this moment to invade what belongs to the private and intimate sphere. The conflict begins when Jakov has an medical attack in the bathroom, and the general locks him in, accusing him of being a thief. After the general opens the door, Jakov throws him into the hallway, and the general continues shouting loud enough for Helena to hear: "Her son will kill you when he finds out! And he will find out. Don't worry. He'll hear it from me. Fucking grandmas in nursing homes! For two nights! Her son will kill you. The whole nursing home is laughing at you. Both at you and your woman."

Ageism and sexism, as has been shown, are not only expressed by younger individuals but also by other older adults, leading to frequent self-restrictive behaviors among the elderly. Ageism, defined as the systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people based on their age (Butler 1969, 243-246), is often connected with the taboo surrounding sexuality in old age, or with the neglect, trivialization, or even prohibition of sexual behavior among the elderly in institutional settings (more in: Lancaster 2023, 184). Nevertheless, it is a fact that sexual needs and interests continue to exist well into the later years of life (Griggs 1978, 1352). However, the cessation of sexual activity can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as lower income, feelings of guilt, a diminished importance of sexual relationships in the past, a later onset of sexual activity, mental illness, and other health issues (more in: Kellett 1989), as well as the loss of youthful attractiveness, the death of a partner, and lack of privacy (Griggs 1978, 1353), with the latter especially affecting those living in institutional settings. On the other hand, it is also true that intercourse is only one aspect of sexuality (Griggs 1978, 1353), and it can be "experienced and expressed in the form of thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships" (Mejdouli, Baali, Ouzennou and Amor 2023, 77). However, these forms of expression often remain hidden due to strong societal pressure,

[39] Thus, Helena and Jakov will enter the party just as Stjepan Džimi Stanić, to the approval of those present, is telling a joke on stage: "And after their romantic encounter, they're lying there, and the woman looks at him for about five minutes. She looks, looks, and says to him: 'You know, even your pension is small...'"

which assumes that the elderly are asexual beings—an assumption shared by many older individuals themselves (Griggs 1978, 1353).

All these reasons—although it remains true that nursing homes are places where relationships among the elderly are frequent enough not to be unusual—make such publicly expressed relationships draw considerable attention, especially since they often occur outside of marriage. While Helena and Jakov don't have time for a marital arrangement[40], the respondents in the study willingly choose non-marital relationships as a model, out of respect for their former spouses[41] and children, but also due to the realization that they are no longer seeking "the one" for "a lifetime." Instead, they want to spend their current time with someone who suits them, without the obligation of permanence.

Those who prioritize comfort in a non-marital relationship, as mentioned earlier, are likely to experience discomfort due to the community's reactions. On the other hand, the heightened attention also stems from the fact that everyday life in a nursing home lacks many of the excitements found elsewhere, which leads many residents to feel bored. Therefore, the attention drawn by newly formed couples, both in the film and in real life, does not necessarily have only negative consequences. Specifically, a new couple can bring liveliness to the collective, becoming the subject of discussion and gossip (for more on some positive aspects of such behavior, see: Stanić 2009), which can lead to the formation of groups that are either supportive or critical of the couple. These groups reveal their own value systems, religious beliefs, educational backgrounds, and personal experiences, potentially leading to new groupings.[42]Thus, it is important to recognize the bidirectional influence—not only the impact of the immediate environment on the formation of the couple and the choice to sometimes conduct the relationship in secrecy—but also how the couple influences their surroundings.

Another example of this two-way influence unfolds on the day of the monthly party organized in the nursing home. Jakov first accidentally ends up in the home's infirmary, where he sees patients in the terminal stages of illness. He knows that a hospital bed there awaits him as well. Lost in thought, with a

[40] Near the end of the film and Jakov's life, she will receive a "wedding ring" made from the cap of a wine bottle. It will be her third ring, worn on the middle finger of her left hand. On her ring finger, she wears her own wedding band, and on her right hand, her late husband's ring.

[41] Primarily when it comes to widows and widowers. Translated into the context of the research, it was possible to observe photographs of deceased spouses placed by the bedside where a new couple slept. A scene later in the film offers a similar image when Helena introduces Jakov to her deceased husband at a cemetery in Rijeka, presenting both of them as good men.

[42] This can motivate like-minded individuals to adopt the same behavioral pattern and more easily form partnerships, for example.

somber expression, Helena finds him in the TV room, where a few residents are watching the news about the 2011 nuclear disaster in Japan. Nevertheless, a few minutes later, he agrees to dance with her in the crowded hall, with a growing determination to escape:

> Jakov: Are they watching us?
> Helena: Of course.
> Jakov: All of them?
> Helena: All of them. And they're gossiping.

The fact that Helena shares a room with Tonka, her disoriented roommate who dies on the night Helena and Jakov's relationship begins—and is found on the floor of their shared room after they spent the night behind the same door—underscores the need to adapt to life in the nursing home, which involves a constant violation of the right to privacy (for both Helena and Tonka). It also highlights the necessity of finding ways to preserve what belongs to each individual's private and intimate sphere. The erasure of previously established boundaries, which once operated on many levels, is emphasized by Helena's parting words about Tonka: "She was such a lady. Her husband was an ambassador. She spoke languages. We were all someone once, and now we're all the same..."

The Relationship between the couple and the staff

Another important dynamic concerns the relationship between the new couple and the staff. Their supportive attitude—often shifting from negative to positive after gaining experience working with newly formed nursing home couples[43], whom they describe as more cooperative in their new relationship—receives emphasis in the film through the character of nurse Anja (played by Lana Barić), who is dedicated and kind, though she herself struggles in a love triangle while searching for "the one" for life. This contrasts with the real couples, who have outlived or become disillusioned with their past "true loves." Interestingly, staff members often learn about new couples through gossip and stories from other residents, and it is not uncommon for them to encourage older men and women to enter into partnerships. The restrictions faced by couples typically come more from family members than from formal policies, which would otherwise prohibit such relationships or be driven by the negative attitudes of some residents. This circumstance further supports the notion that nursing homes can become a kind of "dating market," with the staff's benevolent influence expressed through

[43] The staff respondents noted that it is easier for them to work with individuals who are in a couple, as they generally complain less about the living conditions in the home. Additionally, they found that they can often more effectively address issues with a resident by working through their partner, among other things.

their understanding that such institutions are perhaps the best equipped to accommodate these relationships (Milosavljević 2019, 147-177), especially when it is clear that the relationships are voluntary and do not involve any exploitation or harm. In this way, a bidirectional process is created, in which working in an institution "inevitably influences the thoughts, feelings, and behavior" of the staff, but also in which individuals, through their actions, influence the institution itself (Mladenović and Marković 2011, 9), making it primarily an easier place to work or a better place to live for those they care for.

However, the film also underscores how the environment often *reduces* the elderly to the level of children, highlighting the unequal distribution of power in society when considering age as a criterion. In the research, this is evident through the constant assessment of how previously acquired rights can be transferred to life in the nursing home, especially regarding partnerships, a process that represents an intervention with no guarantee of being entirely well-measured. Similarly, in the film, this *reduction* occurs in multiple instances and serves as an additional example of the deprivation the elderly face, which they sometimes, perhaps predictably, reproduce themselves. An early example of this occurs when Helena and Jakov sit on a bench in the park, observing the elderly in the garden. Jakov, with a sarcastic smile, remarks: "They're all playing here. Like in kindergarten." A later scene, which introduces the audience to Helena's first love, Grisha, and Jakov's adventurous past, shows yet another *gaze* directed at them, this time from behind. The reversal of roles—where now the younger people, in this case, the staff, are controlling the older individuals (as parents would watch over children)—occurs when the lights are turned on during their conversation in the nursing home, and one of the staff members says: "What are you doing, kids? It's already past half-past one." Although this line is delivered without a negative tone, it still reflects the perception that it is necessary to care for the elderly, as has been previously explained. However, their helplessness can come from various sources—physical weakness, mental decline, or economic challenges. These weaknesses inevitably lead to a controlled environment, but the protagonists turn the tide and set off on their journey, each with their own reasons and motivations.

The Relationship between the couple and the family

The final important relationship worth highlighting is the one that the couple maintains with family members, if such connections are still intact. In the research, family members often emerge as the greatest opponents to these relationships,[44] until they realize the advantage of their parent having someone to rely on, which

[44] It is common for relationships to be kept secret only from family members, while being openly expressed in front of other residents and staff.

not only relieves them of certain obligations but also alleviates feelings of guilt about placing their parent in a nursing home. These conclusions were reached indirectly during the research—through the statements of staff and couples. In the film, the absence of Helena's son after he took her money and disappeared is emphasized. As a result, it becomes clear that residents who are not in contact with their families—whether those ties have been severed, as in Helena's case, or the family simply doesn't exist, as is the case with Jakov—tend to decide more quickly and easily to enter into a relationship. "Thus, people who have experienced being rejected, neglected, or even abused, or those who have no family members, face one less obstacle on the path to forming a relationship with someone of the opposite sex[45] in their later years, in what we might call a 'late place'" (Milosavljević 2019, 200). Several reasons for the difficulty adult children have in accepting their parents' relationships dominate, such as feelings of shame regarding the wider community, fear of their parent being exploited or losing their inheritance—although this concern is less prevalent since such issues are often settled before entering the nursing home—or the desecration of the memory of the other parent. Finally, there is the refusal to accept that older parents are sexual beings, as there is a prevalent notion that "sexual behavior does cease, should cease, and if not, is perverse"[46] (Kass 1978, 372-373). Because of this, the desire to experience a new partnership often involves the need to break free from certain roles, as previously mentioned. In Helena's case, this means releasing herself from the roles of wife, widow, and mother. The latter is symbolically ended before the audience's eyes when Helena throws her mobile phone into the river after waiting two months for her son to contact her, declaring: "Ten kilos lighter."

As a general conclusion that can be applied to both the research and the film, it should be noted that the relationship with children or other family members can be an obstacle to forming a new partnership, but it is often not decisive, frequently due to the family's lack of interest in the lives of their oldest members (Milosavljević 2019, 2005). Furthermore, the supportive attitude of the staff, along with the understanding and encouragement of some residents, ensures that partnerships in nursing homes are not unusual. What makes the film's story stand out is the perspective from outside the nursing home community—those who project their own meanings and evaluations of old age onto the narrative.

[45] The research focused on this type of relationship because only heterosexual couples agreed to participate in the interviews.

[46] This perspective is also shaped by the fact that a significant percentage of older individuals do not have partners (Pratt and Ashmall 1989, 141), for various reasons, including the loss of a partner due to death, divorce, or societal pressure not to form a new relationship for the reasons previously described.

Conclusion

Based on the semiotic analysis of the film Night Boats promotional poster, along with the key motifs, metaphors, and metonymies that appear in the film, this paper reconstructs how the socially constructed concept of old age and its consequent ageism is created and perpetuated in modern society through popular culture. In doing so, it identifies not only its manifest forms but also the deep, latent structures of thought that are demystified through the use of semiotic methodological tools.

Visual markers of aging are recognized, among other things, through depictions of physical and mental illness, frailty, immobility, the similarities between old age and childhood, isolation, loss of freedom and individuality, typical character traits, clothing styles, hairstyles, emotions, and sexuality. The central themes identified in the film are concepts of aging, love, and freedom, which were used to attempt to identify and deconstruct the connotative messages of the film and its promotional poster.

One of the conclusions of this paper is the notable overlap between the film's narrative and the findings of the qualitative field research focused on studying partnerships in homes for the elderly and adults. Although the task of an artistic work is not to reflect reality, nor is it prohibited from doing so, these parallels are significant because they shed light on the position of elderly people in the society to which they belong, as well as on the place of elderly characters in the cinema of this region.

More specifically, the scenario raises questions about the possibility of forming a romantic relationship in a place that, for the majority of its residents, marks the final stage of life. It does so by directly addressing certain problems or pointing to the "missing links" in the lives of the main characters. Through the analysis of the motifs upon which the story is built, as well as the absent elements, it has been possible to highlight the main conclusions of the research by emphasizing three relational elements. The first concerns the relationship between the constituents of the new couple and the advantages that the newly formed relationship brings—only part of which relates to the emotional improvement in quality of life in a setting like a nursing home. The second relational element highlights the influence of the environment in which the couple forms. In this context, it is important to note that older people who choose to enter a romantic relationship in such circumstances inevitably face pressure from their surroundings, particularly from other residents—whether the attitudes are well-meaning or not, as the film also illustrates. Equally important, however, is the fact that the couples themselves influence their environment, creating fertile ground for what might be termed a "dating market." The second important relationship is between the couple and the staff, who, both in the film and in real nursing home

settings, are generally supportive of these couples due to their experience working with them. On one hand, the staff is accustomed to these relationships as specific strategies for adapting to the environment, but they also recognize that working with couples is easier because of the mutual support and reliance the partners provide for each other. The third relationship, emphasized in the film through its absence, is the one concerning family. As in the research findings, the film shows that strained relationships and neglect of elderly family members can motivate individuals to form new relationships. Interestingly, families, when present, often change their initially negative stance toward the partnership of an older family member over time, as they realize it alleviates their own obligations and feelings of guilt, and that there is someone else to take care of the absent parent. In light of all this, it is important to emphasize that newly formed partnerships in old age can be treated as guarantors of preserving or even improving the quality of life in later years. Through these relationships, a wide range of needs are met for individuals continuing their lives in altered circumstances, often in a state of dependency—whether economic, health-related, or social. Just as the scenario does not only tell the story of the love between two elderly people, it also speaks to the alliance they need to overcome the various challenges that old age and society present to them.

References

Aliakbari, Mohammad and Kamalvand, Ayad. 2023. "Social Semiotic Analysis of Photographic Portrayals of Iranian Elders on Websites." *Visual Studies*: 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2023.2188251

Anggraheni, Dini; Anandha, Anandha and Yogatama, Adiprana. 2024. "Semiotic Analysis of Barbie Movie Poster". P. A. W. Wibowo et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Cultural Studies* (ICCuS 2023), *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 82: 228-235. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-212-5_22

Antonijević, Dragana. 2009. "Povodom Levi-Strosovog koncepta *motiva zaborava*".U *Strukturalna antropologija danas. Tematski zbornik u čast Kloda Levi-Strosa*, uredila Dragana Antonijević, 246-295. Beograd: Odeljenje za etnologiju i antropologiju Filozofskog fakulteta i SGC.

Baćević, Jana. 2008. "Romantična veza kao kulturni konstrukt". Doktorska dis. Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu.

Baltes, P. B. and M. M. Baltes. 1990. *Successful Ageing: Perspectives from the Behavioral Science.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Baraković, Vedada i Mirza Mahmutović. 2018. Medijska marginalizacija starosti: Od diskriminacije ka ejdžizmu. *Medijski dijalozi* 11(32): 19-37.

Barthes, Roland. 1977. "Rhetoric of the Image", from Barthes, *Roland, Image Music Text* pp.32-51. London: Fontana. https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1964.1027

Butler, Robert. 1969. Age-Ism: Another Form of Bigotry. *Gerontologist* 9 (4):243-6

Caldas-Coulthard, Carmen Rosa. 2023. "Ageism, Sexism and Semiotic Representation". In: Caldas-Coulthard C.R. and Coulthard M. ed. *Texts and Practices Reviseted*. New York: Routledge.

Chivers, Sally and Ulla Kriebernegg. 2021. "Care Home Stories". In *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, edited by Danan Gu and Matthew E. Dupre Editors, 765-769. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Chivers, Sally. 2011. *The Silvering Screen. Old Age and Disability in Cinema.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, edited by Danan Gu and Matthew E. Dupre Editors, 765-769. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Corso, John J. 2014. "What Does Greimas's Semiotic Square Really Do?". *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 47(1): 69–89. https://doi.org/10.1353/mos.2014.0006

Danesi, Marcel. 2004. *Messages, Signs and Meanings: A Basic Textbook in Semiotics and Communication*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

David, Ephraim. 2019. "Old Age in Cinema: A Reevaluation of Sorrentino's Youth". In: *Proceedings of The International Conference on New Trends in Social Sciences*. Barcelona: Diamond Scientific Publishing: 26-34. https://www.doi.org/10.33422/ntss.2019.08.489

David, Maya Khemlani and Hei Huang Ching. 2006. "Revisioning Ageing: A Semiotic Analysis of a New Magazine." In: David, M.K. and Abdullah A.N. ed. *The Power of Language and the Media*. Frankfurt a.M: pe-ter Lang: 6l-69.

Dolan, Josephine. 2017. *Contemporary Cinema and 'Old Age'.* London: Palgrave Macmillan**.**

Ellison, Kirsten L. 2014. "Age transcended: A semiotic and rhetorical analysis of the discourse of agelessness in North American anti-aging skin care advertisements." *Journal of Aging Studies* 29(1): 20–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2013.12.003

Emandi, Maria Elena. 2014. "Seniors in Commercials – A Semio-Stylistic Approach." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 142: 346 – 351. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.659

Falcus, Sarah and Stefanie El Madawi. 2021. "Decline and Progress Narrative". In *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, edited by Danan Gu and Matthew E. Dupre Editors, 1322– 1324. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Gravagne, Pamela. 2021. "Aging and the Road Movie". In *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, edited by Danan Gu and Matthew E. Dupre Editors, 244-247. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

Griggs, Winona. 1978. Sex and the Elderly. *The American Journal of Nursing* 78 (8): 1352-1354.

Gudac Dodić, Vera. 2019. Aging in Serbia in the Twentieth Century: A Gender Perspective. *Tokovi istorije* 3: 171-189. https://doi.org/10.31212/tokovi.2019.3.gud.171-189

Gupta, Tanvi. 2018. Understanding Semiotics: Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/understanding-semiotics-firstness-secondness-thirdness-tanvi-gupta

Hébert Louis 2006. *Tools for Text and Image Analysis: An Introduction to Applied Semiotics*. Rotledge.

Jarvik, Laurence. 1988. "It's only a Movie": The Television Docu-Drama and Social Issue Movie as The American Marketplace of Ideas. *Studies in Popular Culture* 11 (1): 80-96.

Kaplan, Ann. 2010. "The unconscious of age: Performances in Psychoanalysis, Film, and Popular Culture". *In Staging Age: The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film*, edited by Valerie Barnes Lipscomb and Leni Marshall, 27-55. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kass, Merrie Jean. 1978. Sexual Expression of the Elderly in Nursing Homes. *The Gerontologist* 18 (4): 372–378. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/18.4.372

Kehl, Rajnhard, Tipeld, Peter i Videman Rihar. 2007. *Duško Gojković. Džez je sloboda.* Beograd: Žagor.

King, Neal. 2010. "Old Cups: Occupational Aging in the Film Ganre. *In Staging Age: The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film*, edited by Valerie Barnes Lipscomb and Leni Marshall, 57-81. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Knežić, Branislava. 2006. Samoubistvo starih – (Ne)voljno napuštanje života. *Sociološki pregled* XXXX (2): 283-295. https://doi.org/10.5937/socpreg0602283K

Knežić, Branislava. 2011. *Ne samo koliko živeti – O starenju i starosti.* Beograd: Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja

Kress, Gunther and Theo Van Leeuwen. 1998. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold.

Krstić, Marija. 2012. "Evro-integracije Republike Srbije: semiotička analiza". *Etnoantropološki problemi* 7 (1): 143-165. https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v7i1.7

Lajtman, Katarina. 2015. Veza i brak: javni diskurs i pojedinačno iskustvo. *Etnološka istraživanja* 20: 107–117.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lancaster, Karen. 2023. "Granny and the Sexbots an Ethical Appraisal of the Use of Sexbots in Residential Care Institutions for Elderly People". In Social Robotics and the Good Life, edited by Janina Loh and Wulf Loh, 181-207. Transcript Verlag.

Laz, Cheryl. 1998. Act Your Age. *Sociological Forum.* 13 (1): 85–113.

Leavitt, John. 1996. Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions. *American Ethnologist.* 23 (3): 514–539. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1996.23.3.02a00040

Loos, Eugene, Kubinski Piotr and Romero Margarida. 2017. "The representation of older people playing a digital game in the short film 'Pony Place': A semiotic and narratological analysis". *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology* 8(2): 43-62.

Maddox, Donald. 1989. "Veridiction, verification, verifactions: Reflections on Methodology". *New Literary History* 20 (3): 661– 677.

Mead, Margaret. 1964. Vicissitudes of the Study of the total communication process. In: Thomas A. Sebeok, Alfred A. Hayes, and Mary Catherine Bateson (eds.), *Approaches to Semiotics: Cultural Anthropology, Education, Linguistics, Psychiatry, Psychology.* The Hague: Mouton: 271-287.

Mejdouli, Hicham, Baali, Abdellatif, Ouzennou, Nadia and Hakima Amor. 2023. The effect of sexuality on the quality of life of elderly people in Morocco. *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 27 (8): 76-82. https://doi.org/10.29063/ajrh2023/v27i8.8

Milosavljević, Ljubica. 2014a. *Antropologija starosti – penzije: konstruisanje društvenog problema kroz penzije – od prvih penzionera do penzionih fondova.* Beograd: Srpski genealoški centar: Odeljenje za etnologiju i antropologiju Filozofskog fakulteta, Etnološka biblioteka.

Milosavljević, Ljubica. 2014b. *Antropologija starosti: domovi: konstruisanje starosti kao društvenog problema kroz organizovano domsko zbrinjavanje – od sirotinjskih do staračkih domova.* Beograd: Srpski genealoški centar: Odeljenje za etnologiju i antropologiju Filozofskog fakulteta, Etnološka biblioteka.

Milosavljević, Ljubica. 2017. „Dead End: Antropološka Analiza Filma ‚Bez stepenika'". *Etnoantropološki problemi* 12 (4):1063–1090. https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v12i4.4.

Milosavljević, Ljubica. 2019. *Pozni parovi. Antropološka analiza partnerskih veza u domovima za stara i odrasla lica.* Beograd: Dosije studio; Filozofski fakultet u Beogradu.

Milosavljević, Ljubica, Banić Grubišić, Ana i Vladimra Ilić. 2024. Unutar i izvan filmskog žanra:

Starost na putu. *Etnoantropološki problemi* 19(2):335-357. https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v19i2.1

Mladenović, Vesna i Zorica Marković. 2011. Emocionalni profil i zadovoljstvo poslom zdravstvenih radnika. *Engrami* 33 (2): 5–17.

Nuessel, Frank. 1992. *The Semiotics of Ageism*. Toronto: Victoria College in the University of Toronto.

Perišin, Tena i Valentina Kufrin. 2009. Ageizam u televizijskom mediju na primjeru središnjih informativnih emisija HRT-a, RTL-a i NOVE TV. *Ljetopis socijalnog rada* 16 (1): 29-51.

Pierce, Charles Sanders. 1867. On a New List of Categories. *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 7: 287–298.

Popat, Anannya; Gupta, Lakshya; Meedinti, Gowri N., & Perumal, Boominathan. 2023. "Movie Poster Classification Using Federated Learning." *Procedia Computer Science*, 218, 2007–2017. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2023.01.177

Potkonjak, Sanja. 2014. *Teren za etnologe početnike.* Zagreb: Hrvatsko etnološko društvo.

Powell Lawton, M. 2001. Emotion in Later Life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science.* 10 (4): 120–123. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00130

Rašević, Mirjana i Boško Mijatović. 2004. Ka zadovoljenju potreba populacije starih lica. *Sociološki pregled.* XXXVIII/4: 481–506. https://doi.org/10.5937/socpreg0404481R

Stafford, Philip B. 1977. "The Semiotics of Old Age in a Small Midwestern Town: An Interactionist Approach". PhD Thesis, Indiana University.

Stafford, Philip B. 1988. "Toward a Semiotics of Old Age". In: Sebeok, T. and Umiker-Sebeok, J. ed. *The Semiotic Web 1988*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton: 271-300. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110864458-014

Stajić, Mladen. 2017. „Da li postoji gen za ljudski duh? Analiza osnovnih motiva i simbolike u filmu Gataka". *Etnoantropološki problem* 12(2): 505-534. https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v12i2.8

Stajić, Mladen. 2024. "Fiction Too Close to Home: Baby Theft On-Sreen." In: Banić Grubišić, A. and Kotnik V. ed. *Popular Culture in Post-Socialism*. Belgrade: Universtity of Belgrade.
Stanić, Ivica. 2009. Trač i ogovaranje. Od zabave do klevete. *Pedagoška stvarnost* LV, 1–2.
Swidler, Ann. 1986. Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review.* 51 (2): 273–286. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095521
Swinnen Aagje. 2015. "Ageing in film". In *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*, edited by Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin, 69-76. New York: Routledge.
Utami, Ratih; Setia Eddy and Deliana. 2021. "A Semiotic Analysis Found on Movie Poster "Shutter Island"". *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research* 2(3): 20-26. https://doi.org/10.32734/lingpoet.v2i3.6642
Vasiljević, Jelena. 2007. „Semiološka analiza reklame: Metodološka razmatranja." *Etnoantropološki problem* 2(1): 41-53 https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v2i1.3
Walker, Alan and Heidrun Mollenkopf. 2007. „International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Quality of Life in Old Age". In *Quality of Lafe in Odl Age,* edited by Alan Walker and Heidrun Mollenkopf, 3–13. Dordrecht: Springer.
Zecchi, Barbara. 2021. "Gendered Aging and Sexuality in Audiovisual Culture". In *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, edited by Danan Gu and Matthew E. Dupre Editors, 1998-2003. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
Zovko, Anita i Jelena Vukobratović. 2017. Percepcija starenja i društveno-medijska slika o starima.
Andragoške studije 1: 111-124. https://doi.org/10.5937/andstud1701111Z
Žikić, Bojan. 2010. Antropološko proučavanje popularne kulture. Etnoantropološki problemi 5 (2): 17–39. https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v5i2.1

Ljubica Milosavljević
Odeljenje za etnologiju i antropologiju
Institut za etnologiju i antropologiju
Univerzitet u Beogradu, Srbija

Mladen Stajić
Odeljenje za etnologiju i antropologiju
Institut za etnologiju i antropologiju
Univerzitet u Beogradu, Srbija

Antropološka analiza prikaza deprivacije u starosti na primeru filma Noćni brodovi

U fokusu antropološke analize nalazi se hrvatski igrani film *Noćni brodovi* (2012), reditelja Igora Mirkovića. Tema filma je partnerska veza koja se razvija između korisnika jednog staračkog doma u Zagrebu osvetljujući, između ostalog, brojne probleme i teškoće sa kojima se suočavaju stari ljudi koji pokušavaju da otvore novu ljubavnu stranicu na samom kraju života, u specifičnim domskim uslovima. Novoformirani par beži iz doma, kao svojevrsni čin otpora,

ostavljajući prostor za analizu vizuelnih predstava čitavog niza deprivacija sa kojima se susreću stari. Prikaz fizičke, emocionalne i ekonomske zavisnosti koje rezultiraju nemogućnošću nezavisnog donošenja odluka, u saglasju su sa rezultatima višegodišnjeg terenskog istraživanja sprovedenog u domovima za stare u Republici Srbiji. Ovo istraživanje, orjentisano ka proučavanju novih partnerskih veza kao strategijama delovanja korisnika, biće dovedeno u komparativnu vezu sa vizuelnim rešenjima filma. Tumačenje vizuelnog prikaza deprivacije i pretpostavljenog svojstva nemoći sa kojom društvo povezuje stare ljude, podrazumevaće i semiotičku interpretaciju simboličkog izraza kojim se film služi.

Ključne reči: film, starost, semiotika, partnerske veze, deprivacija

Analyse anthropologique de la représentation de la déprivation dans la vieillesse à travers le film Bateaux de nuit

Au centre de l'analyse anthropologique se trouve le film croate *Noćni brodovi (Bateaux de nuit, 2012)* réalisé par Igor Mirković. Le film traite la relation du couple développée entre les résidents d'une maison de retraite à Zagreb, éclairant, entre autres, les nombreux problèmes et difficultés auxquels sont confrontés des gens âgés tentant d'ouvrir un nouveau chapitre amoureux à la fin de leur vie dans des conditions spécifiques dans cet établissement. Le nouveau couple s'échappe de la maison de retraite, comme un acte de résistance, laissant place à l'analyse des représentations visuelles de toute une série de déprivations auxquelles sont confrontées les personnes âgées. La représentation de la dépendance physique, émotionnelle et économique qui résultent par l'incapacité de prendre une décision de manière indépendante, est conforme aux résultats d'une recherche de terrain menée pendant plusieurs années dans les maisons de retraite en République de Serbie. Cette recherche, orientée vers l'étude de nouvelles relations du couple comme stratégies de l'action des résidents, sera comparée avec les solutions visuelles du film. L'interprétation de la représentation visuelle de la déprivation et de la présumée caractéristique de l'impuissance associée aux personnes âgées par la société, comprendra également une interprétation sémiotique de l'expression symbolique utilisée par le film.

Mots-clés: film, vieillesse, sémiotique, relations de couple, déprivation

Primljeno / Received: 23.07.2024.
Prihvaćeno / Accepted for publication: 03.10.2024.