

Abstract: My goal is to theorize the concept of film’s aging, or changes in the reception of a film’s aesthetic value over time. Aging can be positive or negative. Negative aging diminishes the aesthetic value of a film that appears dated, and can be caused by acting style, cinematography, dialogue, depicted fashions, and so on. Positive aging, in contrast, improves a film, even one once judged to be aesthetically flawed. This can sometimes involve viewing the film in a new way, e.g., as comedy. Noël Carroll’s “pluralistic category” account (2003, 2008) holds that a film fails aesthetically if it is a poor instance of the genre its creators intended it to belong to, and that the film succeeds if it admirably or excellently follows the conventions of its intended genre. I argue that thinking about film’s aging can contribute to Carroll’s “pluralistic category” or genre-based approach to understanding and evaluating films.

Outline

- I. Carroll’s approach in *Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (2008) and *Engaging the Moving Image* (2003): evaluation of films or moving pictures should be in terms of its genre or should take genre into account.
 - A. Aging: has to do with the changes in the reception of films over time. The experience of thinking a film is dated or aged seems to be common, yet leads to some puzzles: If this film is excellent, why don’t I enjoy it? If a film is good, shouldn’t it remain good? Conversely: If this film is bad, why am I enjoying it?
 - B. The fact that films age may seem obvious, but it is a neglected aesthetic phenomenon, and theorizing it can contribute to Carroll’s theory.
- II. Valence: film aging can be either positive or negative.
 - A. **negative aging:** getting worse due to effects of datedness. E.g., when a dated comedy uses jokes that are no longer funny.
 - B. **positive aging:** getting better due to effects of datedness.
 - More *frequent* case: e.g., enjoying the coloring, previous generation’s actors.
 - Rarer case: e.g., when an older horror movie makes you laugh more than scream because of bad special effects. “*It’s so bad it’s good*”. To what extent is this like indulging in fatty foods and other guilty pleasures? **Genre-crossing** sometimes, but not always, occurs here.
- III. Aging affects various genres differently, e.g. action and horror the most. A period film set in the past is much more resistant to negative aging.
- IV. Possible causes of aging: special effects, commercialization of film, the changing fashions (the “indexical” nature of film images), etc.
- V. It is hard to determine beforehand when a film will seem aged or what exactly makes it feel old.
- VI. **Conclusion**
 - A. The concept of film’s aging can add to Carroll’s theory that if a movie successfully meets the standards of its genre it succeeds (and if it does not, it fails). Specifically:
 1. Negative aging: a good movie, years later, becomes bad.
 2. Positive aging:
 - a. A previously bad movie improves with time.
 - b. A formerly bad movie, as member of another genre, becomes better.
 - B. Deeper issues remain:
 1. ontology of film (Is an aged film the *same* film? What are its aesthetic properties?)
 2. Enjoyment vs. aesthetic judgment (Separate them?). Cf. historical judgment.
 3. Relation between aesthetic value and aesthetic experience.
 4. Education in film: critics and popular taste.
 5. Nature of philosophical theory (Can/must we give causal explanations of aging?)

Filmography

- Acker, Ally (1991). *Editors on Editing*. USA.
Bruckman, Clyde and Buster Keaton (1927) *The General*. USA.
Coppola, Sofia (2006). *Marie Antoinette*. USA. France. Japan.
Gibson, Mel (1995) *Braveheart*. USA.
Kasdan, Lawrence (1981) *Body Heat*. USA.
Hughes, John (1985). *The Breakfast Club*. USA.
Sebastian, Beverly and Ferd (1974) *Gator Bait*. USA.
Cameron, James (1984) *The Terminator*. USA.