

Welcome to *Childhood & Youth in Contemporary European Cinema* - John Marks

In this 5-week course, we will look at recent European films that depict the intense and complex experience of childhood and adolescence in contemporary society. Through close analysis and discussion of the films and their context we will consider why and how current European directors have chosen to focus on this subject. We will examine the portrayal of children and adolescents both as witnesses to the inadequacies and injustices of the adult world, and also as active agents who participate in the construction of society.

The depiction of children and young people on screen is a fundamental feature of the cinematic imagination. The capacity of film to make viewers see and feel the world in new and unusual ways is facilitated by the child's perspective and experience of the world. As Vicky Lebeau suggests in *Childhood and Cinema* (2008), the visual and aural richness of cinema seems to bring it closer than other art forms to the enigmatic perceptions of childhood and youth. The films we will be watching and discussing certainly demonstrate in a variety of ways these striking cinematic qualities: the child's world on screen is dynamic, intense, and often aesthetically arresting.

However, cinema's fascination with children is always underpinned by a fundamental tension, since films about children are usually made by adults. As we will see, some contemporary filmmakers draw on the cinematic tradition – famously associated with Italian neorealism – of seeing the world through the eyes of children. Others attempt to make films that capture the world of children as distinct from that of adults. Another approach is to explore the complex interactions and negotiations between what we might think of as the society of children and that of adults.

The first week (**Friday November 15th**) will be a brief introduction, followed by a discussion of the first film, *Close* (2022) by the Belgian director Lukas Dhont. Subsequent weeks will focus on two films that deal with a particular theme. The programme is as follows:

1. **Introduction:** Lukas Dhont, *Close* (2022)
2. **School:** Ilker Çatak, *The Teachers' Lounge* (2023); Laura Wandel, *Playground* (2021)
3. **Supernatural powers:** Joachim Trier, *Thelma* (2017); Eskil Vogt, *The Innocents* (2021)
4. **Parents & children:** Céline Sciamma, *Petite maman* (2021); Charlotte Wells, *Aftersun* (2022)
5. **Children as observers:** Robin Campillo, *Red Island* (2023), Colm Bairéad, *The Quiet Girl* (2022)

There are lots of other films that I could have included, and I will suggest some that you might want to watch as the course progresses. There are also other themes concerning children and youth in film that you might want to explore subsequently. I hope the course will inspire you in that respect.

All of the films are available to stream at a reasonable cost, and it would be good if you can watch them in advance of each week's 90-minute session.

I look forward to starting the course on Friday 15th November, kicking off with an introduction and a discussion of *Close* (2022).