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CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGING

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO OLD AGE AND AGING

Edited by Andrea von Hülsen-Esch

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Andrea von Hülsen-Esch

Introduction: Perspectives on Cultural Aging at a Glance

Demographic transformation resulting from low fertility and high life expectancy in developed and developing countries has led to an increase in the numbers of elderly people living in those countries. Moreover, low birth rates, changing family structures, and economic and political crises causing migration and flight are having a significant impact on intergenerational relationships, social welfare systems, the job market, and on what elderly people (can) expect from their retirement and environment. Due to these current demographic developments and changes, the categories *age* and *aging* are quickly gaining in societal relevance and are garnering tremendous attention in various scientific and scholarly fields. Age(ing) is not only a biological and social fact but also a cultural one.

Questions of aging and demographic change, and issues of dependency and the need for care, are central concerns in Europe and in many other countries worldwide. In societies with a growing proportion of older people, concepts relating to who the elderly are and what aging means are becoming increasingly important. Ideas about what they contribute to society and what society gives them, what is known about older people, and how aging processes are evaluated are being put to the test, and the question of how older people perceive themselves is gaining significance. In all societies, concepts of life phases have developed that are reflected in images of old age.[1] Demographic shifts and changes to disease profiles and cultural dynamics (e. g., to family structures, value systems, employment, health, opportunities for political and other forms of social participation) are transforming these images of age, which in turn affect the role that people who are identified as "old" assume in a society. Reflections on old age in the arts reveal not only the concepts of age, role expectations, and stereotypical notions with which we encounter this stage of life but also how expectations of age-appropriate behavior can be subverted, changed, and expanded upon. Yet our society still pays far too little attention to the potential impact made by cultural actors on policy, social programs, and medical research. The current generation and, in particular, the next generation must be prepared for an academic and economic world that comprises diverse ages and an aging workforce, and for

1 Cf. *Sechster Bericht zur Lage der älteren Generation in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Altersbilder in der Gesellschaft. Bericht der Sachverständigenkommission an das Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.* Berlin: Drucksache 17/3815, 2010.

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a work environment with teams of aging employees. In addition, an aging society will necessitate changes to products and services. Many efforts are being made in medicine and science to identify both processes of aging and age-related diseases, and to develop suitable strategies for their prevention and therapy. Nevertheless, these efforts cannot prevent the fact that, in most cases, older people do not feel that they are receiving proper treatment, as behavior toward them depends on patterns that are strongly determined by factors other than biological or sociological parameters. For example, thought patterns play a significant role in this context, patterns that have emerged in the course of cultural history through social practices and that have been continuously transmitted in written texts, images, films, and plays, and in oral narratives, and discourses. Literary texts as well as films and popular text genres are the media in which narratives generate a diverse range of ideas about age. These media contain memories of hybrid cultures that are relevant to current and future age-related problems, and provide an opportunity to examine the features responsible for the elements that construct a narrative, including comparisons of different cultures.

In November 2018, thirty-three experts from Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Canada, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, and the US gathered for three days of intensive discourse at the symposium *Cultural Perspectives on Aging* in Hannover-Herrenhausen, highlighting the significance of the cultural factors that constitute the framework through which cultural constructions of aging can be analyzed and understood. One of the symposium's distinctive features was its integrated concept, which connected scholarly and scientific discourses from the arts and humanities, and from social, medical, and psychological fields of study. By bringing together discourses from the medical and social sciences, and from the humanities (philosophy, art theory, literary studies and history) for the first time and by drawing attention to the importance of cultural factors in the construction of notions of aging "properly," this symposium was able to highlight some new aspects of the dynamics at play in the construction of age and to raise awareness of the consequences of continuously using persistent stereotypes.

The overall objective was to examine age as the result of knowledge and cultural practices, and to discuss strategies to productively address age(ing). However, there is still a marked desideratum with regard to interdisciplinary research – combining natural, medical, social, and cultural scientific discourses – and its public dissemination. Discussions of interdisciplinary research on age(ing) in this volume not only unify the different scientific and scholarly cultures from the fields of the natural sciences, the arts, and the humanities in a new discourse, they also analyze different cultural concepts and the effects of age and aging processes.

The art of cultural aging research

One of the particular goals of this symposium was to bring together discourses both in the various disciplines and in different discussion circles that largely take place parallel to each other. There is a large network of researchers in the Anglo-American world who, starting with gender discourses in Anglophone literary studies and sociology, have shaped age research to date (Gullette 1997; Ekerdt 2002; Palmore et al. 2005; Katz 2010; Twigg and Martin 2015). In Europe, individual representatives of the humanities have played a part in this.[2] Art studies had been largely absent from this discourse but is on the cusp of becoming an integral part of research (Brockhaus 1996; Döring 1993; von Hülsen-Esch 2009, 2013b, 2015, 2018, 2021; Kampmann 2013, 2015b, 2020; Schuster-Cordone 2009).[3] Psychology and ergonomics are closely tied in age research to sociology and work psychology (Kruse 2012; Ng and Feldmann 2012; Siegrist and Dragano 2007; Börsch-Supan 2009; van Dyck and Lessenich 2009; van Dyck 2020; Amann et al. 2010; Staudinger and Häfner 2008). Medical and philosophical ethics, and ancient history have been present in a diverse range of areas; here, the University of Heidelberg has played a formative role in the development of various discourses (Ehmer and Höffe 2009; Kruse 2010; Landschaftsverband Rheinland et al. 2009; Manzeschke et al. 2013; Schäfer 2011; Ehni 2014; Thane 2005; Wagner-Hasel 2012). Although there has been a significant proliferation of theories and methods in recent decades with regard to interdisciplinary cultural gerontology, attempts to define a comprehensive methodology have failed so far. Taking into consideration the globalized world, age(ing) in German-speaking countries has become an object and paradigm of discursive negotiations between different cultures of knowledge in science and scholarship, and society. Therefore, age(ing) must be perceived as an object of knowledge and a concept (van Dyck 2016; Ehmer and Höffe 2009; Elm et al. 2009; Fangerau et al. 2009; Fering

2 The research of the 'Themenkreis Kulturwissenschaftliche Altersstudien' at the University of Vienna in 2007, the research group 'Alter(n)skulturen' at the University of Düsseldorf in 2006, and the Network Aging Research (NAR) at the University of Heidelberg in 2007 marked the beginning of research in cultural parameters of aging in German speaking countries. With the founding of ENAS (European Network in Aging Studies) in 2011, European researchers joined forces, followed in 2013 by the North American Network in Aging Studies (NANAS). In Vienna, the initiative led towards the founding of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Aging and Care (CIRAC) in 2020.

3 The desideratum for a cultural-scientific investigation of age(ing) can also be seen in the fact that the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence – Max Planck Institute joint the MaxNetAgeing researcher's network of the Max-Planck-Institutes.

et al. 2008; von Hülsen-Esch et al. 2013a, 2015). Awareness of the societal implications of aging has risen significantly and is still gaining momentum, and, with it, calls to take a holistic view of medical, cultural, psychological and sociological aspects of aging are increasing (Bratt 2018; Derckx and Lacuelle 2020; Fangerau et al. 2009; Gullette 2002; Herwig 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Pelizäus-Hoffmeister 2014; von Hülsen-Esch et al. 2019; Staudinger and Häfner 2008; Swinnen and Stoesbury 2012; Vavra 2008). If we are to do justice to the phenomenon of "age," research on this topic will have to be carried out in a cross-disciplinary manner and using a variety of methods (Breinbauer et al. 2010; von Hülsen-Esch et al. 2013a). Moreover, evidence of changes in theoretical approaches toward age and aging can be found in academic discourses that have been transmitted in publications and actions and that reflect time and experience. Material traces are thus visible marks of cultural, social, and political change, but can also be read as material evidence of our own identities in flux. However, the interplay between mental attitudes, mindsets that can be put into action, unconsciously held stereotypes of age(ing), and social practices can only be revealed by analyzing cultural factors.

At an individual level, people are paying more and more attention to the issues of how to grow old and where to live in old age. Concepts of age – e. g., ideas, valuations, and "images" of age(ing) – are patterns of interpretation and elementary needs at the intersection of individual and collective life. In order to develop socially relevant concepts, we need to reflect upon different forms of knowledge about age(ing) using both traditional as well as evolving norms and codes. Moreover, we need to analyze experiences shaped by society, perceptions of age, and role expectations. Expectations about what being older means to the individual, on the one hand, result in the images and self-attributions of older people and, on the other, have economic and political consequences. The roots of concepts of aging can be found in historical and philosophical ideas, and cultural traditions; we thus need to subject them to analysis and critical appraisal in order to generate new and potentially more adequate concepts for the society of the future. Therefore, and due to the multidimensionality of the concept, a broad interdisciplinary approach uniting a diversity of disciplines – including, e. g., gerontology, history, art history, cognitive psychology, the ethics and history of medicine, literature, social and occupational medicine, organizational psychology, and philosophy – must be developed in order to produce new perspectives for an aging society.

The methodological approaches in this volume range from text analysis and image interpretation to the analysis of media, and also comprise both qualitative methods (biographical interviews, individual case studies, etc.) and quantitative methods from the empirical social sciences (medical examination, surveys, ob-

servations, laboratory experiments, and field studies, etc.). Psychology's empirical approach makes an important contribution to the measurability of cultural factors, while media – including literary and documentary texts, images and films – not only contribute to the methodological diversity as reflections of social and cultural change but also instigate processes of consciousness and provoke behavioral changes among their readers and viewers due to the way that they address them. This potential for reflection must be utilized widely in order to find out which artistic artifacts, historical documents, and quantitative and qualitative studies convey which concepts of aging for individuals as well as for different social groups and societies. Cultural aspects of aging include the issues of which generational relationships are constructed, which ethical questions are touched upon, and which spaces of possibility are opened up for alternative ways of thinking and acting. There is still a lack of intercultural comparison that could provide the basis for fundamental reflections about how people want to age in certain phases of their lives. Based on the assumption that age and aging – for example in Israel, Japan, North America, Africa, but also within Europe – are constructed differently depending on cultural norms and cultural narratives, the cultural parameters of specific countries need to be integrated more thoroughly into research on aging. The topic of age(ing) is ideally suited to outline new concepts of inter- and transdisciplinarity, and highlights how important it is to apply the results gained from an intercultural approach in society in order to adequately meet the challenges of aging societies and societies characterized by migration.

Future research needs to bridge the gaps between the humanities, the natural and medical sciences, and the social sciences by utilizing the qualitative results of projects from the humanities (art history, philosophy, literature and film studies, history) and testing their impact on contemporary society by applying the methods of empirical research. This means that we need to find a specific scholarly value by creating fundamental links between these disciplines and reflecting upon what the "cultural age(ing)" in the title of this book represents. By reflecting upon current social practices in light of images of age(ing) that have developed through history, we would like to encourage the multifaceted transfer of scientific and scholarly insights into practice and to identify behavior that has been insufficiently questioned in both the private and institutional treatment of people in need of care.

Considering how this subject area has grown, interdisciplinary cooperation should also be directed at the concepts of "active aging" and "successful aging," which have so far been addressed in the social sciences and economics (Avramov 2003; Baltes and Baltes 1990; van Dyck et al. 2013; Götz et al. 2006; Katz 2013; Katz and Calasanti 2015; Schneider et al. 2015; Schulte et al. 2018). Given

the serious demographic challenges facing us both now and in the future, there is an urgent need to better understand the societal and personal conditions required in order for older people to make productive contributions, not only to the economy but also in their interactions with other individuals, to communities, organizations, and society at large. At the same time, there is a need to analyze individual and societal expectations of productivity in older age, as well as the consequences of those expectations. The goal of the concept of "active aging" is to normatively and positively preserve the active and self-determined role of the elderly in society, which is accompanied by the economic objective of activating older workers and keeping them in the workforce for as long as possible (OECD 2000; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2016).[4] Findings on persistent patterns of thought may change our entire work culture: negative stereotypes of aging and age claim that older people are less flexible and creative, that they perform worse physically and mentally, and are less able to learn. These notions very likely have a negative impact on older employees' perceptions of their own ability to work, the way they are treated by others, especially by their superiors, and their role in an organization.

In 2003, the World Health Organization expanded upon the notion of "active aging," coming up with the concept of "productive aging," which it defines more comprehensively as "the continuing participation of older people in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic-political life" (World Health Organization 2003; Morrow-Howell et al. 2001). This approach could be a point of departure, taking into account new forms of participation in the job market in older age, e. g., by considering the issue of replacing salaried employment with voluntary work in older adulthood (Cole and Macdonald 2015; Schulte et al. 2018). In contrast to "successful aging," "productive aging" focusses more narrowly on mental and behavioral outcomes while referring more explicitly to societal values and norms (Schmitt 2004).[5] In connection with the debate about productivity, it is also necessary to investigate life stages in which the boundaries and transitions of productivity and their historical conditions are addressed (von Hülsen-Esch 2018, 2021; Kampmann 2015a; Kriebernegg and Maierhofer 2013; Schäfer 2008, 2010; Sears 1986).

4 The discourse was thus oriented towards the possibilities of a lifestyle in old age on the background of an instrumentalist and economistic understanding of productivity.

5 Thus, the modern understanding of PA developed out of a broader concept of productivity, which is not only associated with the production of goods in the working world but also encompasses the participation and integration of older adults.

Cultural Perspectives on Aging: A symposium

The symposium brought together researchers who had only been aware of each other in different groupings or who had not yet had any contact to certain research. What was special about this interdisciplinary event that took various epochs into consideration was that, during the conference, all participants became aware of the extent to which the meaning of life, bodies, and society, and the connections between them, can be consciously processed and approached for implementation in practice by analyzing and reflecting upon discourses both historical and current. Intercultural comparisons, gender-specific differences, and phenomena of productivity in old age were as much the subject of the papers as questions of longevity with regard to future generations. This clearly revealed the role played by thought patterns that have emerged in the course of cultural history in visual imprints, narratives, and social and discursive practices. Physical changes and how they are addressed – as "attacks" or transitions – were visualized directly and particularly vividly in a lecture-performance by Susanne Martin.

Different perspectives on age(ing) – understood as a cultural construction where "society" is also understood as culturally determined – have made it clear that previous approaches to this decisive phase of life have been very one-sided and that an interdisciplinary and comparative cultural collaboration that takes cultural parameters much more strongly into consideration can develop new strategies for aging societies. Therefore, alongside technical contributions, discussions focused on the political, social, and cultural conditions that shape the way we view and address old age, such as care institutions; the art education departments of museums, theaters, and opera houses; the transfer and assessment of knowledge by physicians and health professionals; improving working conditions for older people through better ergonomics; and improving the ability to work in aging societies.

The various contributions to the conference analyzed the different cultural concepts and implications of age(ing) and aging processes. In six sections, the conference took up well-known, widespread theories of aging such as cultural gerontology and ageism and examined gender and role expectations in old age not only from a cultural studies perspective but also by taking into account cultural diversity. It reflected on ethical issues and on the role played by art in those issues and shed light on the finding that the incorporation of artistic practices – creativity and proximity to art – can improve both awareness of the processes of age and aging, and quality of life for seniors and dementia patients. Participants discussed how new technologies can be made fruitful for the every-

day lives of the elderly and how they can be used to address old age in a non-discriminatory way, as well as analysis of the interplay between working conditions, health, and the ability of employees to work at older ages. These studies are just as relevant for transferring the findings to the worlds of work and politics as the issue of the conditions under which older people want to work beyond retirement age. This volume presents ten of the contributions from the symposium, focusing on the domains of psychology, gerontology, the history and ethics of medicine, American studies and literature, art history, and artistic interventions.

The contribution by Andreas Kruse, "Life Structure, Spirituality, and Transcendence: A Theoretical, Empirical, and Ethical Approach to Human Existence in Old Age," begins with a thematic analysis of personality in old age: what concerns or life issues influence the experiences of old people? This thematic analysis points to a variety of life issues, which – in a further step – are understood as an expression of self-design (or self-responsibility) and world design (co-, shared or joint responsibility). "Self-design" designates people's need for an independent and responsible life, including the even more extensive need to grow emotionally and mentally in old age as well as at earlier ages; moreover, the spiritual growth of many people can be seen as a further component of this growth. "World design" is the human need to do something for other people, to care for them, to transfer knowledge to and reflect upon experience with successive generations. The author argues that an important task for our society is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of age, which also means gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the person. In many cases, aging and old age are reduced to mere physical and neurocognitive processes, which neglects emotional, practical, social communicative, aesthetic, and spiritual qualities. Only when these aspects are systematically explored and addressed will the need for self-design and world design become visible in old age as well and be better addressed and realized. This article also discusses an important basis of creativity and transcendence – as a starting point for spirituality and religiosity. Creativity and transcendence are illustrated using the example of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach.

In his article "Historical Reflections on the Ethics of Aging: Examples from the Sixteenth Century," Daniel Schäfer presents us with examples of the ethical dimensions of aging in relation to an earlier century. He collects historical references to moral behavior in old age from various text sources from the late sixteenth century written by Gerolamo Cardano and Gabriele Paleotti, and compares them with the current concept of the ethics of old age. From a historical perspective, the author argues that old age is not just an anthropological constant but a cultural construct, formed by stereotypes and images both negative

and positive, and influenced by external factors such as labor conditions, income, and medical and technical opportunities. He demonstrates that ethical issues regarding the elderly are not independent of time, that the result of ethical discourse depends on the premises of the discussants and the atmosphere of the respective discourse, and that an ethics of old age must be related to practice.

Heiner Fangerau, Nils Hansson, and Vasilija Rolfes examine ethics in relation to the increasing technization of how the elderly are treated in their article entitled "Electronic Health and Ambient Assisted Living: On the Technization of Aging and Responsibility". The authors consider intergenerational responsibility as a key concept that must be included in ethical evaluations, against which the goals of ambient assisted living tools must be tested. Assuming that the objective of using, e. g., mobile health technologies is to enable wellbeing, safety, and autonomous living for older people while limiting the burden of care on younger people, all measures to achieve that objective, as the authors argue, must be evaluated against human rights and human dignity, and conflicting values. By discussing the idea of responsibility for the care of older people, the authors conclude that there is still a need for clear, human-bound, transparent, and interruptible decision-making hierarchies in the use of technological systems.

The first contributions, which highlight the psychological and philosophical dimensions of how we view and address old age and its implications for our actions, are followed by two investigations that focus on ageism. In her article "Not Your Grandmother's Ageism? Ageism Throughout the Life Course," Erin Lamb explores the idea of ageism using the example of young people: since Robert Butler first coined the term in 1969, *ageism* has been used most often to refer to prejudice against older people, and age studies has primarily focused on aging into old age. But age discrimination is not unique to later life: a recent survey of twenty-nine European countries carried out by Bratt et al. (2018) found "higher levels of perceived age discrimination among younger people than among older people" (176). Erin Lamb explores the utility of *ageism* as a concept applied to younger people and how juvenile ageism in particular plays out. She argues that age studies should address ageism throughout the life course, even though the ageism experienced at the two poles of the life course are not fully equivalent in structure or consequence. In her conclusion, she addresses some of the possible gains that can be made by approaching ageism as a life course concern, e. g., the opportunity to generate more intergenerational solidarity and to reflect upon all age identities more critically.

Heike Hartung's essay "Confronting Loss when 'Life Changes in the Instant': Ageism and Successful Aging in the 'Case' of Joan Didion" examines two different interacting narratives against the background of recent definitions of *ageism* and *successful aging* as social and cultural constructions, using the example of

the American writer and journalist Joan Didion, who became a media icon in her early eighties, as a "fourth-ager." In 2015, she became the face of the Parisian luxury brand Céline and, in 2017, her nephew Griffin Dunne made her the subject of the Netflix documentary *Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold*. While Didion has thus become a media icon of successful oldest age, her cultural significance as a journalist and writer has been enhanced by the publication of her two memoirs based on her experiences of devastating loss. She examines her grief after the sudden death of her husband in *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) and explores the subjects of aging, illness, and death in *Blue Nights* (2011), her memoir to her only daughter Quintana, who died two years after her father. By analyzing these two literary texts, Heike Hartung shows how this writer reflects upon and counteracts aspects of American age ideology and ageism.

The next section assembles contributions that address the language- and image-based stereotypes in arts – theater, literature, and the visual and performing arts – that shape our concepts of aging. In her article "Exploring Old Age Theatrically: The Case of Three British Senior Theater Companies," Núria Casado-Gual explores the value of theater plays in age research and aging societies. Her starting point is the article "'The Play's The Thing': Theatre as a Scholarly Meeting Ground in Age Studies" by Valerie Barnes Lipscomb (2012), who argues that theater studies can enrich the interdisciplinary study of aging from at least three angles: as a means of analyzing the phenomenon of ageism, especially through the study of plays and the analysis of performances; as an instrument to develop a narrative approach to aging and thus to understand old age through its diverse and subjective character; and, finally, by taking into account the "performative" aspect of age and aging, which the theater is a natural means of expressing. The author takes this triple perspective as general framework and regards it as a potential source of exchange between academics, artists, and the community to explore three British senior theater companies (Ages and Stages, Newcastle-under-Lyme; Feeling Good Theatre Company, Leeds; Elders Company, Manchester) that contribute to enriching an "age-wise" circle of conversation between the community, and artistic and academic domains. Her analysis is based on fieldwork conducted with the directors, associated artists, and actors of the three senior theater companies. The author comes to the conclusion that the three companies offer diverse models of age performativity and age ideology, where old age is presented as a dynamic category, and that the affirmative model of aging favored by these ensembles contrasts significantly with the narrative of decline predominant in the mainstream.

In her paper "A Spinster with a Twist: The Amateur Sleuth and Perspectives on Aging and Gender in the *Sunday Philosophy Club* Series," Emma Domínguez-Rué examines the figure of the amateur spinster detective in contemporary detec-

tive fiction. As a popular genre, detective fiction portrays cultural structures and their evolution; in recent decades it has taken up a political agenda that explores and scrutinizes the role of women and the cultural construction of women's lives. Even though contemporary female detectives have taken a decided step toward challenging stereotypes in recent decades – not only with regard to the construction of the detective character but also toward overhauling the genre itself (Klein 1995) – social constructs still offer a predominantly negative view of the aging process, particularly as it affects women. In detective fiction as in life, "the double standard of aging," as expressed by Susan Sontag (1997), combines ageism with sexism in a process of sexual disqualification that patriarchal discourse imposes upon women once they become "too old" to be sexually enticing to men. This contribution briefly outlines the evolution of amateur detectives and their interaction with aging and gender and offers a case study that explores the figure of the amateur sleuth Isabel Dalhousie, who provides a good example of the character's constant transformation by marrying a much younger man and having two children well after her period of maximum eligibility as a woman according to conventional social standards has ended. In this sense, Dalhousie embodies a different image of a detective, one that does not conform either to the genre's character conventions or to roles socially ascribed to a woman of her age. The *Sunday Philosophy Club* series and the character of Isabel Dalhousie unmask persistently negative cultural discourses about women and aging, and existing prejudices against middle-aged women, while revealing that, in fiction as well as fact, new choices are actually available for women out and away from those stereotypes.

In her essay "± 100: Old Age and New Photography," Hanna Baro discusses three projects by a new generation of photographers, recent graduates of a two-year masterclass at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie in Berlin, who negotiate the topics of aging and old age from different perspectives. The photographs by Magdalena Stengel, Natalya Reznik, and Heidi Krautwald each deal with different aspects of aging and its implications for us as individuals and social beings. Stengel's work provides a poetic document of old age through the personal history of male and female centenarians; Reznik's two projects show two quite different aspects of female aging: a utopian process of aging, where women are still defined by their beauty, and an honest, sometimes harsh portrayal of the social, psychological, and physical effects of age; and Krautwald continues a photographic tradition of work that utilizes the periods between photographs of the same people at different stages in their life. The three artists cover a broad spectrum of ages: from extremely old age (Stengel) to middle age (Reznik) to young and middle age, as well as the period between those three life stages (Krautwald).

The last two contributions come from the performing arts and reveal potential ways of approaching age and dementia. Theater, opera, ballet, and performance art – including members of the affected generation itself – have been increasingly engaging with the topics of "age," "aging" and dementia for about fifteen years. The contribution by the choreographer Susanne Martin documents her lecture-performances as artistic research: she has been working on the subject of age(ing) since 2003. Between 2011 and 2016, she made age(ing) the topic of her practice during her research PhD in dance studies. For the very specific conditions of the academic context, she developed dance lectures on age(ing), which combine performance and discussion scenes from age-critical or anocritical stage works. In her performance *Dancing Age(ing): Performing Ambiguity*, she explores what dance has to offer in terms of alternative ways of doing and representing age(ing). In particular, she asks how contemporary dance can address the ambiguity and multiplicity of living through time, and how it can avoid repeating stereotypical progress–peak–decline narratives. She contributes to a critical understanding of age(ing) within and beyond theater spaces by utilizing the creative and reflective tools and methods that she has developed as a dancer and performer.

Artistic Director Birgit Meyer provides an insight into the work performed by the Cologne Opera with people suffering from dementia. As part of the project *Oper für Jung und Alt – Opera for Every Age*, elderly people and dementia patients attend selected performances staged by the Cologne Children's Opera, which are suitable for both children and the elderly. Together, they experience the performance in close proximity to the artists, allowing the music and the dramatic art to have an immediate effect on the audience. This new approach toward dementia not only evokes positive feelings and memories in those affected but also creates the basis for intergenerational experiences that are increasingly being lost in the present-day world.

The approaches taken by the various contributions in this publication go beyond existing research projects and schools that focus on specific aspects of age(ing), and have been made possible by the generous support of the Volkswagen Foundation. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the foundation for hosting the conference at Schloss Herrenhausen, a venue that had a decisive impact on the discussion-friendly atmosphere. I would also like to warmly thank the publishing house De Gruyter for its excellent cooperation, Jon Templeman and Lydia White for their accurate copy-editing, and Ann-Kathrin Illmann for her tireless efforts carrying out the unavoidable editorial work.

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Ethics and Ageing

Andreas Kruse

Personal Growth, Creativity and Transcendence in Old Age. A Psychological Analysis

Life issues in old age

This chapter should begin with some basic questions that people ask themselves at biographical turning points, and thus also in old age: Who am I, where do I come from, where do I go? We owe the following verse to the German Renaissance poem, which expresses these questions very well – a piece of anonymous verse: "I come and I don't know from where. I am and I don't know who. I go and I don't know where. And I'm surprised that I am so happy."[1]

What moves people in old age? What joys, worries and burdens does their current life have? How do they assess their current life situation and how do they see the future? What hopes and fears do they mention when looking to the future? We dealt with these questions in a recently completed research project in which we extensively interviewed N= 400 people in the 75 to 95 age group (Kruse et al. [in press]; Kruse and Schmitt [in press]). The present article starts with the analysis of life issues (dominant concerns) in old age, which was an important task of the project. The results of this "thematic analysis" clearly demonstrate the variety of concerns that people in old age name and describe in a detailed interview. A few statements about the sample as well as the methodology in analyzing the interviews should be made in order to promote a better interpretation of the results of this thematic analysis.

In our sample, we took into account participants from different social classes, people with different degrees of need for care and people in different forms of living (own household, assisted living, living in a nursing home). We did not include people with an (incipient) dementia disease or with depressive and anxiety disorders in the sample. The interview was usually conducted by two people: an interviewer and an interview assistant. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewee was once again informed about the aim of the study: The aim of the study was to get information about how everyday life is personally "structured," about the health and health behavior of older people,

1 In German: "Ich komme, ich weiß nicht von wo, / Ich bin, ich weiß nicht was, / Ich fahre, ich weiß nicht wohin: / Mich wundert, daß ich so fröhlich bin." Quoted from: Euling 1905, 412.

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about dealing with requirements, challenges and burdens, and finally about what old people do for their physical and mental health and how satisfied they are with their health care.

"Life issues" (in German: "Daseinsthemen") were operationalized in this study in the sense of recurring concerns and topics that were spontaneously expressed and explained in the interviews. The subjects were classified on a 3-point scale with the scale points: 1 = rather low, 2 = medium, 3 = rather high. This scaling was based on three characteristics: (a) the frequency with which events and developments were spontaneously mentioned in relation to the relevant issue in the interview; (b) differentiation of the description of the life issue in the interview (especially enrichment with biographical material); (c) emotional intensity with which the life issue was portrayed (in the sense of an inner participation). (The category system of the life issues was developed in a pilot study with N = 30 people.) The mean values (M) and standard deviations (S) for all life issues are given below:

1. Enjoy nature	2.3	.54
2. Old age as a special challenge for the psyche	2.2	.56
3. Enjoyment of being with other people	2.2	.60
4. Physical limitations and losses	2.2	.57
5. Experience of being needed by other people	2.2	.72
6. Being able to give something to other people	2.2	.72
7. Growing importance of the life review	2.1	.70
8. Having a task in life	2.1	.68
9. Satisfactory / good (physical / mental) health	2.1	.63
10. Possibilities for self-responsible living / fulfilling everyday life	2.1	.59
11. Stressful pain experience	2.0	.84
12. Enjoyment of music / art / literature	2.0	.73
13. Faith and transcendence	2.0	.70
14. Worry about increasing loneliness	2.0	.62
15. Mental gains / spiritual growth	1.9	.70
16. Greater reliance on help from other people and institutions	1.9	.60
17. Concern for pronounced sensory losses	1.9	.59
18. Great interest of other people in old age	1.9	.60
19. Concern about cognitive loss and decreasing orientation	1.8	.59
20. Phases of painful loneliness	1.8	.61
21. Living in your own home	1.7	.71
22. Greater reliance on relationships with other people	1.7	.69
23. Worrying about giving up one's own apartment or house	1.7	.66
24. Experience of devaluation, avoidance by other people	1.4	.56

First of all, these life issues show the great importance of *social connectedness* for old people; in the third, fifth and sixth life issues ("existential theme") social relations (characterized by reciprocity of given and received support) are reflected. The eighth life issue – having a task in life – speaks of *concern for other peo-*

ple; in most interviews, promoting the life situation of other people – particularly of young people – was mentioned as an important task in life. This support could also be of a more "symbolic" nature: the motif of *shared responsibility* ("world-design" or "shaping the world") was decisive. The life issues also include maintaining independence and health, as well as participation and maintaining personal interests, which shows how differently and comprehensively the task character of life is interpreted subjectively. This topic addresses the *integration of self- and world-design*. There are five issues (seventh, tenth, thirteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth) in which an increased engagement with one's own self (also in its biographical dimension) is at the centre ("self-design" or "shaping one's person"). Above all, the experience of mental and spiritual maturation in the aging process, the emotional and spiritual gains experienced as well as the growing importance of life stories (biography) argue for this discussion, but experiences of faith and transcendence also point to this. The topic of "joy in nature" has the highest mean; this shows how important access to nature continues to be in old age, how much being involved in nature determines the lifestyle of many people in old age. The topic of "old age as a special challenge for the psyche" has a similar importance to the topic "joy in nature" in the whole group. What is meant by this topic? On the one hand, the experience of increased vulnerability, in topics such as "stressful pain experience," "worrying about pronounced sensory losses," "worrying about cognitive losses and decreasing orientation," "increasing reliance on help from other people and institutions" and "worrying about giving up one's own apartment or house" (due to functional losses, should be added) is clearly expressed. On the other hand are expressed the painful experience of (involuntary) loneliness and the fear of increasing loneliness reflected in corresponding life issues. From the perspective of older people these two experiences are not enough to speak about "special challenges of old age for the psyche."

Self-design and world-design

The overview of these life issues shows a central motif in old age: namely the integration of *self-design* and *world-design*. Of course, this motif can also be seen in earlier phases of life. However, we learned in our study – as well as in a thematically and methodologically related study (Kruse and Schmitt 2015) – that this motif does not diminish in old age, rather it retains great importance for the individual. Perhaps it will even go further in old age: *cosmic* orientation and *intergenerational* orientation play an important role in the above-mentioned thematic composition.

The psychological consideration of the potential for self-design and world-design in old age leads me to bring together four psychological constructs (detailed in Kruse 2017): (1) introversion with introspection (in the sense of the "deep engagement of people with themselves"), (2) openness (in the sense of "susceptibility to new impressions, experiences and insights that arise from the view of yourself as well as from the view of the surrounding social and spatial world"), (3) concern (in the sense of "willingness to care for other people, to care for the world") and (4) knowledge transfer (in the sense of the "motif to see yourself placed in a sequence of generations and to create continuity and take responsibility through the transfer of knowledge"). These four constructs are briefly explained below. I interpret two of these constructs ("introversion with introspection" and "openness") as characteristics of self-design, and two ("concern" and "knowledge transfer") as characteristics of world-design.

The writing *De hominis dignitate* (in English: "On the dignity of man"), written by the Florentine scholar Pico della Mirandola in 1427 is classified in the history of philosophy as one of the first fundamental writings on human dignity. Pico introduces this document with the following statements, which focus on the ability of a person to shape him- or herself and shape the world:

> At last, the Supreme Maker decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him: "We have given you, Oh Adam; no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very centre of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine." (1990, 6 f.)

In an essay on self-recognition in old age, the philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860), describes the process as follows:

> Towards the end of life, much the same happens as at the end of a masked ball when the masks are removed. We now see who those really were with whom we had come in contact during the course of our life. Characters have revealed themselves, deeds have borne fruit, achievements have been justly appreciated, and all illusions have crumbled away. But, for

> all this, time was necessary. The curious thing, however, is that only towards the end of our lives do we really recognise and understand even ourselves, our real aim and object, especially in our relations to the world and others. Very often, but not always, we shall have to assign to ourselves a lower place than we had previously thought was our due. Sometimes we shall give ourselves a higher, the reason for this being that we had no adequate notion of the baseness of the world, and accordingly set our aim higher than it. Incidentally, we come to know what we have in ourselves. (2000, 491)

The motif of *self-design* and *world-design* mentioned here is also important for a changed understanding of aging. It can often be read that increasing disengagement is associated with increasing age. Gerontological studies, including the one reported here, *contradict* this assumption. Rather, these studies indicate that the motif of self- and world-design is also "alive" in old age. The contradiction between the assumption on the one hand and empirical findings on the other suggests thinking about a changed understanding of aging.

A changed understanding of the old person

> And this thing that we dream of
> It is nowhere else than in our spirit –
> We are this once, have travelled ahead of ourselves
> In the spirit, and beckon us from his hems
> As who beckons himself
> (Morgenstern 1986 [1918], 153)

This epigram, written by Christian Morgenstern (1871–1914), expresses a challenge that is also significant for the social and cultural understanding of age issues: there is a need for a changed conception of old age. The basis of this new conception is a comprehensive understanding of the person: age must not – as indeed often happens – be reduced to physical processes. It is, rather, expressly necessary to analyze and to understand the cognitive, emotional-motivational and socially communicative qualities of the individual. The cognitive qualities encompass, above all, an overall view, highly developed knowledge systems and effective thinking, learning and memory strategies. The emotional-motivational qualities include, above all, the increasing awareness of one's own self, the embedding of one's own life into wider, cosmic contexts (gerotranscendence) and the growing need to pass on something of one's own life to young people. It also addresses significant preconditions of creativity. Creativity is the ability of people to develop innovative solutions that prove to be particularly successful, addressing both cognitive and everyday practical, emotional and socio-communicative needs. In addition, individual engagement with increased vulnerability may point to creativity – in the sense that innovative coping and processing strat-

egies form the basis with which experienced boundaries may be transcended and a deeper attitude towards life may be reached.

> Mine are not the years that have taken my time
> Mine are not the years that may come about
> The moment is mine, and I'll take care of that
> So is mine who creates year and eternity.
> (Andreas Gryphius, quoted in: Maché and Meid 2005, 142)

With these reflections on time, Andreas Gryphius (1616 – 1664) addresses a theme that is also of great significance for a good, personally fulfilled life in old age: it is about being open to recognizing resources and strengths in oneself, to shaping one's life (self-responsibility) and the surrounding world (shared responsibility) and to participating in social as well as cultural development. This is what is meant by the statement 'the moment is mine'. It is not increasing life expectancy that is the ultimate goal, but rather a *creative, personally meaningful life*, which – if this is possible for humans – also places its own resources at the service of other people (co-responsibility) as well as of society (sustainable responsibility) (Frankl 2006 [1959]).

> I lead you behind the world,
> There you are with you,
> Unerring, bright –
> Do the starlings measure death
> The reed waves the stone, you have
> Everything
> For tonight
> (Celan 1970)

This poem, found in the estate of Paul Celan (1920 – 1970), emphasizes the cheerful and unflinching attitude of man with regard to her or his transience and finitude. To be cheerful is not to be equated with good mood; rather, this word refers to the connection between composure, contentment and optimism, even when looking at one's own transience and finitude. Transience and finitude form the central theme of this poem, but at the same time the ability to overcome them internally. Here, the need for comprehensive – and therefore also psychologically, socially and existentially oriented – palliative care become apparent: the alleviation of physical and cognitive symptoms as well as high mental stress with the goal of increasing the individual's ability to consciously experience and shape the dying process.

In discussing developmental potential in old age, it is necessary to combine three perspectives. The *first* perspective: to what extent was an individual given

the opportunity and did he or she use this opportunity to realize developmental potentials in the different stages life? The *second* perspective: to what extent is the individual capable of and motivated towards realizing the developmental potential in old age? Is it appropriate to speak of developmental potential in this phase of life, given the findings of gerontological research? The *third* perspective: can the potential for development in old age also be interpreted as a sociocultural potential, in this sense that old people contribute to the human capital of society by realizing these potentials? The expression 'Suffering is learning – for ourselves as for others' (Rosen 1987, 68), traced back to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (54 B.C. to 7 A.D.), serves as an illustration of this sociocultural potential of old age.

These three perspectives form the conceptual framework for creativity in old age. The postulate of emotional and motivational as well as mental development throughout the life course suggests the question to what extent older people also have the potential for creativity in thinking and acting and to what extent our society creates opportunities for realizing creativity in old age. Moreover, creativity can be understood to serve as the basis for a *role model* for succeeding generations.

Creativity

Creativity is understood as a process in which the individual develops flexible and original approaches to solving novel problems. The development of such approaches is promoted by divergent thinking (Guilford 1967). In contrast to convergent thinking, which by logical inference reaches a single or best solution (the result being more or less completely determined by the information available), divergent thinking provides several alternative solutions, each corresponding to the given requirements. Both the number of solutions generated and their quality are considered a measure of the extent of divergent thinking. In addition to divergent thinking, flexibility in thinking and the ability to create analogies as well as to create unusual associations are mentioned as factors that have a positive effect on creativity; openness to new experiences is cited as a further positive factor (Kruse 2011). The assumption that creativity is the result of a brainstorm is evaluated critically in creativity research. Rather, we need many years of knowledge-building and translation of knowledge into practical work, says Gene Cohen (2005), so that creative potential – which Lev S. Vygotski claims to be in everyone (1976) – becomes creative achievement, becomes long-lasting, sometimes multi-year processes that often precede creative solutions. They form the core of the four-phase model of creativity developed at the beginning of the

last century by Henri Poincaré: preparation phase, incubation phase, enlightenment, verification (in detail in Wallas 1926). Martin Lindauer (2003) introduces a continuity model of creativity development in his work; he emphasizes that creativity is expressed in different ways in each phase of the curriculum vitae, depending on the specific needs of the individual, as well as on the opportunity structures for the realization of the creative potential.

As susceptibility and curiosity are interpreted as decisive prerequisites on the part of the personality in all phases of life, so this also applies to creativity in later stages of life. It would seem that a child with both high sensitivity and high curiosity could be the parent of such traits to a creative old individual. In order for creativity to be realized, in addition to being receptive to new impressions and curiosity there is also a need for a playful attitude to early stressful life experiences on the part of the individual; here one feels reminded of the concept of "homo ludens" introduced by Friedrich von Schiller in his work on the aesthetic education of man (Schiller 2000 [1795]). George Vaillant (1993, 2002) emphasizes that even old people need to be able to play in order to be creative.

If one considers the question of the essence of creativity from the perspective of the products, then one can name the person's large, long-lasting contributions on the one hand, and the small contributions of the person, their well-being and their surrounding environment, on the other. Decisive for the determination of creativity is the innovation content. To what extent do current emotional, cognitive and socio-communicative performances differ from those that have been achieved so far? Creativity should be defined in terms of the novelty of products, not in terms of their usefulness, their value, their beauty (Carlsson and Smith 2011).

Old age creativity is characterized – if one follows statements on creativity research (Lubart and Sternberg 1998) – by four characteristics: (a) a high degree of subjective experience, (b) a closed form in the sense of unity and harmony, (c) integration of very different ideas and perspectives, (d) a special emphasis on aging processes.

A significant developmental potential in old age consists of the ability to be creative in borderline situations ('Grenzsituationen'). This does not simply mean accepting these situations as something to be tolerated. Rather it means finding a changed attitude towards oneself and the world, modifying partly the criteria of a good life (which conditions have to be given so that I can affirm my life), and finally finding a changed, viable future perspective – which can point beyond earthly existence (cosmic relationships) (Jaspers 2001 [1932]). It seems important to emphasize the creative coping of many old people with borderline situations. Two misunderstandings should be avoided. The first misunderstanding: in old age, life can be continued in exactly the same way as in earlier phases of life

– diseases, limitations and losses are barely noticeable, physical, cognitive and social activity is limitless. The second misunderstanding: in view of precisely these experienced and objectively verifiable limitations the individual no longer has any developmental potential and does not show any motivation to engage in his own further development. The *first* misunderstanding: especially in the ninth decade of life physical and cognitive vulnerability increase, susceptibility to disease increases, functional limitations – in sensory and motor skills, but also in individual cognitive features – do clearly exist in the majority of people. And these limitations and losses are also felt very clearly in a subjective way by old people; in their experience, they often constitute a borderline health situation, if only because the individual sees restriction in her or his range of action. Consideration must be given to the vulnerable body because it is often confronted with persistent or phasic pain conditions. From an external point of view, such experiences may not seem like a limit, not something burdensome, not something threatening. In the experience of those people who have to process such restrictions and losses, they do appear as limits, as something burdensome and threatening. Here, not only *do* medicine, rehabilitation and care need to respond very sensitively but beneficial environments must in part also be created, and beyond that the expression of respect for the dignity of humans in such – also subjectively experienced – borderline situations. The *second* misunderstanding: it is not uncommon to be guided by the assumption that the increased physical and cognitive vulnerability of the individual renders mental and spiritual development potential as well as interest in and engagement for others impossible. Simone de Beauvoir (1972), in her seminal treatise on age – groundbreaking because she practices a found social criticism of social dealings with old people – has already shown that the vulnerability visible to the outside often leads to devaluations, indeed to humiliations of the old people. It is not the age but the vulnerability visible to the outside that she calls the central cause of humiliation. She argues similarly and with increased sharpness, in a book about experiences related to her mother's death.

Especially with regard to old age, it seems necessary to systematically connect two perspectives: those of vulnerability and potential. The vulnerability perspective states that there is a (significantly) increased risk of suffering from a chronic illness or becoming dependent on care, the potential perspective that people over the age of 80 or 85 (that is, in the fourth stage of life) can also have resources and develop them further. Although people are affected by a gradual loss in mobility or by decreasing physical and cognitive performance, they can show strengths and developmental steps in the emotional and motivational area, in the area of personality and in different fields of knowledge, which make it clear how much people can succeed the vulnerability in realizing men-

tal, emotional, spiritual and social-communicative qualities, or as the philosopher and psychiatrist Karl Jaspers once said: "In life, everything is only so far, is still possibility, still a life in the future, from the new reality, and new action can also interpret the past new and different" (1973, 29).

An "example" of creativity in old age: Johann Sebastian Bach

As an example of creativity in old age, I would like to mention Johann Sebastian Bach's late work, which in music history is referred to as the epitome of musical creativity. The analysis of Johann Sebastian Bach's late work makes it clear that the *quantitative* perspective ("How extensive is the work?") does not provide a sufficient basis for statements about creativity. What is more important is the *qualitative* approach, which focuses on features such as depth of workmanship, penetration, complexity, concentration and originality – features that characterize creativity in old age in a special way, and which in many ways can be said to correspond to the creation of a sculpture.

The continuous work on the *Art of the Fugue*, a process that spans at least eight years, is an expression of this creativity – whereby the ongoing creative process is based on the motif of penetrating even more deeply into the object. This increasing depth of processing does not permit the creation of numerous works. Rather, it requires concentrating on a smaller number of works and giving them full attention. The statement often made in psychological gerontology, according to which aging can be viewed cognitively, emotionally and motivationally as a process of increasing concentration and deepening, is reflected in this peculiarity of the late musical work.

Also worth mentioning is Bach's work on the *Missa in B minor* and the *Musical Sacrifice*. The *Missa in B minor* was already available in 1735 in an initial but "small" (limited to the Kyrie and Gloria) form. In the last two years of his life Bach realized his wish of creating a *Missa tota*. To do this, he first used the parody procedure, which means that he used existing compositions which he adapted to the liturgical texts of the mass – albeit often with signs of a profound reworking of the template. The decision to use earlier compositions in numerous parts of the resulting *Missa tota* was in no way founded on the motif of saving time and completing the mass as quickly as possible. Rather, he was concerned – and a look at the original score of the mass demonstrates this – with thoroughly editing these earlier compositions and raising them to an even higher level of composition in the *Missa*. In addition to the use of earlier compositions, the

Missa tota also contains completely new compositions, such as the *Credo in unum deum* or the *Et incarnatus est*, compositions that testify to extraordinary musical density and strength as well as the same art of experimentation, and at the same time are able to create a highly moving listening experience: an expression of further increased creativity (detailed in Wolff 2009).

If one condenses and combines the biographical statements that can be made with regard to the last years of Johann Sebastian Bach's life and the musical-symbolic statements on which his last works are based, the following – expressed in first-person form – can be differentiated (the psychological construct to which the respective topic can be assigned is listed in brackets): I live in God, in other people, in my work (*relatedness*); I perceive my creative powers (*creativity*); I shape my life (*self-design, self-regulation*); I dig deeper into music, strive for its completion (*creativity*); I pass my work on to subsequent generations of musicians (*generativity*); I take responsibility for other people (*shared responsibility*); I perceive myself as vulnerable (*vulnerability*); I perceive myself as part of the divine order (*gerotranscendence*); I look gratefully at my life, my life as a fragment (*ego integrity*); I expect the resurrection of the dead, eternal life (*religiousness*) (detailed in Kruse 2014).

These topics and psychological constructs reflect a rich emotional, mental and spiritual life that makes it clear which creative powers can also be effective in the later stages and at the end of life, provided that this life is related to what motivates them to sense these creative powers and to realize. These "life issues" are clearly recognizable at the end of Johann Sebastian Bach's life: God, family members, students and friends, music. Bach invests a lot of mental and spiritual energy in these relationships.

Helpful here is the concept of "life structures" introduced by Daniel Levinson (1986), in which the personally meaningful relationships to the "others" – people, groups, cultures, ideas or places – are reflected, whereby these "others" represent constitutive characteristics of the self in which you invest a high level of psychic energy. The relationship expressed here thus appears as the basis for realizing creative potential as well as for the self-formation of life at the end of life.

Spirituality, transcendence and ego-integrity in the psychology of aging

In recent decades, there has been a notable increase of interest and respective research on spirituality and religion, in particular on the relationship between

these concepts and psychological well-being or mental health (Koenig et al. 2012; Kruse and Schmitt 2018). However, there is substantial controversy concerning the appropriate definition of the term spirituality. Overlap between the concepts of religion and spirituality becomes apparent in the respective definitions suggested by Koenig and colleagues. According to these authors, religion involves beliefs, practices and rituals related to the transcendent that may be held or practiced in private or public settings but which are, in some way, derived from established traditions that developed over time within a community. Here, religion is understood as an organized system designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the transcendent, and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others in living together in a community. Likewise, spirituality is distinguished from humanism, values, morals, and mental health by its connection to the transcendent. Spirituality is understood as something intimately connected to the supernatural, the mystical, and (sometimes) to organized religion.

However, some authors further argue that spirituality also extends beyond organized religion and begins before it. To quote one of these authors: "Spirituality includes both a search for the transcendent and the discovery of the transcendent and so involves travelling along the path that leads from non-consideration to questioning, to either staunch non-belief or belief and, if belief, then ultimately to devotion and finally, surrender." (Koenig et al. 2012, 3) In his philosophy of the present, George Herbert Mead wrote: "We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing that is less so [...] the past (or some meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future." (1932, 12) Life is organized and structured by people themselves, even in adolescence people begin to create a coherent life story which – in normal circumstances – increasingly becomes a definite story, a basis for reconstructing and understanding the past, for interpreting and evaluating the present, as well as for anticipating the future, setting aims, making plans, goal pursuit and goal adjustment (Birren and Schroots 2006). In psychology, there has long been controversy as to whether self-consistency is an even more important need than self-respect and self-enhancement, since coping with stress and challenges or more general self-regulation processes seem impossible without establishing and maintaining at least some kind of continuity (Seih et al. 2013).

Lars Tornstam (2005), in his theory on gerotranscendence, argues that living into old age, and facing its challenges, brings about a shift in meta-perspective from a materialistic and rational view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one. This shift in meta-perspective involves ontological changes on three levels: the cosmic-level, the self-level, and the social-and-individual-relations level. Developing gerotranscendence implies experience of a redefinition

of self and social relationships, as well as a new understanding of fundamental existential questions. The individual might become less self-occupied, and experience a decreased interest in material things and a greater need for solitary meditation. There is also often a feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, and a redefinition of time, space, life and death. There is an increased feeling of affinity with past generations and a decreased interest in superfluous social interaction.

Developing gerotranscendence goes beyond Erik Homburger Erikson's identity status of ego-integrity (Erikson 1998): In Erikson's theory, ego-integration primarily refers to an integration of the elements in the life that has passed. The individual reaches a fundamental acceptance of the life lived. In this way, the ego-integrity described by Erikson is more of a reverse integration process within the same definition of the world as before, while the process of gerotranscendence implies more of a forward or outward direction, including a redefinition of reality (Erikson et al. 1986). In order to characterize gerotranscendence, it is helpful to take up the differentiation between *life time* (in German: "Lebenszeit") and *universal time* (in German: "Weltzeit") introduced by Hans Blumenberg (1986). Differentiating between individual life time and cosmic universal time highlights the human being's motif for transcendence that can be defined as the motif for feeling embedded into a cosmic order in which he or she can trust.

Development of gerotranscendence is seen as a continuous, endogenous process, normally for individuals, instinctive and transcultural, predetermined by genetics: "Ageing, or rather living, implies a process during which the degree of gerotranscendence increases." (Tornstam 1996, 41) However, not all people in fact develop gerotranscendence when getting old, since the process can be accelerated or retarded by external factors, not least cultural settings: "In most Western cultures neither guidance towards, nor acceptance of, the wise gerotranscendent state of mind exists. In our culture, a person who displays the changes accompanying the gerotranscendence state-of-mind runs the risk of being judged as deviant, asocial or mentally disturbed."

Empirical results point out the increasing willingness of older people to interpret their own lives from a universal perspective where a positively-evaluated religious socialization exists. In this case, the universal perspective not only refers to a cosmic transcendence, but also includes the advance towards generativity, meaning identification with younger people's lives, feeling empathy with them, sharing their concerns, motivating and supporting them. Ahmadi Lewin (2001) analyzed three studies on gerotranscendence in Sweden, Iran, and Turkey. His results further support the hypothesis that "in a cultural setting where mystical-type ideas are not integrated into people's ways of thinking – like the Turkish one – secular people may be expected to have a limited ability to develop

towards gerotranscendence," whereas societies in which religion is integrated into social and cultural life "provide fertile soil for individuals to develop towards gerotranscendence." (Ahmadi Lewin 2001, 412)

Let me return to Johann Sebastian Bach's music. From music-historical contributions one can deduce the statement that for Johann Sebastian Bach the death of his first wife represented a border situation that had a traumatic effect on the composer. Bach goes on a six-week concert tour to Carlsbad. He says goodbye to his supposedly completely healthy wife. When he returns after six weeks, he learns that his wife has died and is already buried, and that his four children have been distributed to the family.

How did Bach respond to this loss, to this shock? His compositional work clearly decreases – viewed from a *quantitative* perspective. However, during the period of mourning, two compositions emerge, which – according to musicological studies – are to be interpreted as a *musical tomb* for his deceased wife. The first work is the *Chaconne from the Partita in D minor for violin solo*. There are promising attempts at interpretation, which, however, do not go un-contradicted, according to which Bach had built numerous chorale motifs into the *Chaconne*; these attempts at interpretation were impressively implemented musically in an exhaustive recording entitled "Morimur." The ability to integrate numerous chorale motifs into a technically and musically highly demanding, far-reaching work is again an expression of the highest creativity. Bach has created a musical tomb here, an epitaph. The *Chaconne* is one of the most important works of our music history: creativity in a border situation!

The second work is the *Chromatic Phantasy and Fugue in D minor for harpsichord solo*. This work must contain a particularly intimate message, as Johann Sebastian Bach only agreed to publish it ten years after its creation. This second work – the Phantasy in D minor – now attracts my attention. Let me start with a few explanatory remarks (detailed in Kruse 2014). The piece is divided into three parts. Part (A) is the real 'fantasy part'. Fantasy in music means transcending forms and keys, as is the case in this composition. The very fast tempo and the absence of chords in particular remind us of a fantasy. Maria Barbara, the deceased wife, lives on in the composer's imagination. At the same time in this part an infinite-seeming, intensely felt grief is audible. Part (B) reminds us of the recitatives of the oratorios composed by Bach: one imagines that one hears the evangelists from the passions, who recite and declaim the biblical texts. These are very serious musical texts, which will be heard in part (B). We can say that the death of his wife is lamented and at the same time placed in a Christian-theological order. We might say it is placed at the point of tension between the order of life and the order of death. Part (C) reveals all the 'musical tenderness' of which Bach was capable. It is a physical tenderness (and not

just a mental one) that the composer places in the musical work, and so it must be played. In addition, Bach goes as far as to modify the harmonies to the utmost and to intertwine them, so that one can say: this already hints at the twelve-tone music of the twentieth century. It is – to put it in metaphors – an impressive spiritual fusion between the composer and his deceased wife. This is where resilience and flourishing come together. What a way to process inner and outer stress, what a form of mental and emotional creativity.

Given vs. lacking openness of society for the potential of old age

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the sociologists Matilda W. Riley and John W. Riley published extensive work in which the question was addressed to what extent the individual potentials of old age correspond with structures that promote realizing the individual potentials and thereby contribute to the further development of society and culture (Riley and Riley 1990). This juxtaposition of individual and societal potential should prove to be significant for the further development of gerontological and sociological theory and research. This question is not only of high theoretical-conceptual value – in the sense that it stimulates sociological and gerontological theorizing. It is also of high political and organizational (institutional) importance. Why? The question is whether political actors recognize the mental, emotional and socio-communicative potentials of the old and whether they create the appropriate institutional frameworks to foster the development or realization of these potentials. Organizations and companies are facing a very similar task. What Riley and Riley point out is this: old people with their individual potentials *are always ahead*; society must follow them in creating appropriate opportunity-structures for fostering the realization of individual potentials. Human beings develop under *actually given* opportunity structures – with the condition that these are determined by the principles of freedom, openness, tolerance and participation – and, I would like to add, new perspectives for the future and new lifestyles, which in turn also constitute a changed, a 'transformed' age. Society needs to respond to this innovation with a continuous change in its structures and institutions – it will necessarily always lag behind the changes on an individual level. Structures and institutions must develop in such a way that they *do not block* these individual changes and transformations. Old people are basically always new pioneers, new frontiers with respect to changing lifestyles in old age.

We have recently recognized this very precisely with regard to the active contribution of older people to a civil society. In one part of the already mentioned Generali Old-Age-Study, we interviewed older people (85 years and older), as well as cultural and social institutions, in detail with regard to interest in civic engagement as well as opportunity structures for its implementation (Kruse and Schmitt 2015). It became obvious that almost all cultural and social institutions showed very clearly that, while they are open to civic engagement of people in their third age (60 – 80 or 85 years), they are not open to the involvement of people in their fourth age (85 years and older). There were also reasons for the low level of openness to the latter group's commitment: these people – in order to quote a statement which was given very often – would not normally have the physical and mental powers to engage in such a commitment, and they would not be interested in it. They tried to play the role of listeners rather than the role of active agents. However, this statement did not correspond with the self-perception nor with the needs and interests of many people in the fourth age. They emphasized the importance of their care, of their concern for other people – in personal relationships as well as in associations or organizations – including in old age. Even in this phase of their life, they wanted to perceive themselves not only as caregivers, but also as actively (proactively) caring people: here, clubs and organizations can create important public spaces (in the sense of the theory of Hannah Arendt 1958) for action. Not a few emphasized that they felt rejected when their offers to become involved in civil society had been rejected – and they felt humiliated (in the sense of the theory of Avischai Margalit 1996). It's not about blaming associations and organizations here, it's about showing how much the individual and societal potential of old age can *diverge:* a *structural gap* that cannot really be reversed, but only reduced; yet its reduction is urgently needed so that the realization of the individual potential of old age can actually succeed.

Conclusions

When contrasting the emotional, motivational and mental development potential in old age with social attitudes towards old age: what are the consequences? Three important conclusions should be mentioned here. The first: In social (public) discourse, this development potential should be recognized and appreciated much more than in the past and in the present; these potentials should also be considered in their value (or as human capital) for our society. The second: The creativity of older people in coping with *existential* issues also should be appreciated much more, as this creativity also can serve as an important resource for

our society. The third: Opportunity structures must be created for an intensive *dialogue* between old and young people – for a dialogue in which *both* generations are teachers *and* learners.

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Historical Considerations on the Ethics of Aging: Examples from the Sixteenth Century

The history of the ethics of aging is a complex and still neglected topic. From a scientific standpoint, we first need a definition: What does ethics mean today? (For instance, should we use a normative, consequentialist, or deontological ethics?) And what would an ethics of *aging*, specifically, be? Does such a specialized ethics exist, or should any ethics apply more generally to every period of life? Supposing we grant the existence of a special ethics for the elderly, should we distinguish between an ethics for the "young old" and another for the "very old"? What are the topics of this specialized "ethics" at present? Perhaps it is only once we have solved these problems that it will make sense to look backwards, asking how the ethics of aging was approached in the past.

Yet we could also proceed in the opposite direction. Instead of looking back, history could help us to look ahead. In this article, we use examples from the sixteenth century to observe what kind of moral questions were discussed in a gerontological context, and explore how these discussions were influenced by historical circumstance and the participants' professional backgrounds. (By focusing on moral questions, we avoid the term "ethics," which is anachronistic in premodern medicine, and even, to a certain degree, in early modern philosophy.) Secondly, we compare these findings with present ethical debates on old age (although necessarily relying on only a limited number of examples). This approach not only enables us to perceive similarities and differences, but to identify some necessary premises for a special ethics of aging.

Cardano's teeth and their moral implications

We start with a text by a sixteenth-century polymath who approached questions of aging in a remarkably detailed, plain-spoken way. The physician, mathematician, and philosopher Gerolamo Cardano was born in Pavia in 1501 and died in Rome in 1576 – a very old man, by the standards of his time (Siraisi 1997). A skilled observer, Cardano accurately listed the physical and mental effects of his own process of aging in his autobiography, *De propria vita* (Ch. 6, 46). We learn, among other things, how many teeth he lost, and when: until the age of 63, he had still a full set, with one or two exceptions; by 75, only "fourteen

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remained, in addition to a diseased one." He informs us that he suffered from stomach problems, a hernia, and itching, and complains above all about his inability to have sex with women (*impotentia ad congressum mulierum*) (Cardano 1663, Vol. I, 5–6, 43–44). Above all, Cardano counts among his most important rules of life that "he wished to care for the elderly and to be with them." (Lib. I, Ch. 23, 15) This is perhaps the reason he dedicated a greater part of his dietetics (*De sanitate tuenda*, Lib. IV) to gerocomy, the care of the elderly. The same text includes a chapter on his own manner of life in his late sixties (Vol. IV, Ch. 10). Once again, he reports that, up to that age, he had lost twelve teeth, primarily in his lower jaw – adding, this time, that he adapted his diet to match his ability to chew. His morning bread had to be fresh and soft, or soaked in water (Cardano 1663, Vol. VI, 258–259; cf. Schäfer 2003).

In two other texts, Cardano discusses aging from a philosophical point of view. As is typical of his moral philosophy, he attempts "to apply moral laws to the concrete circumstances of [...] life." (Giglioni 2019) Book two of his trialogue *Theonoston* is devoted to the extension of life (*De vita producenda*). A nameless citizen seeks advice from a hermit and a philosopher on how to achieve peace of mind (*tranquillitas*) and a happy life. According to the hermit, old age gives one every reason to sink into tedium, and a long and healthy life is determined, first and foremost, by a person's congenital condition. Nonetheless, it is possible to reach a venerable age provided one recognizes its advantages and uses one's mind to balance out the weaknesses old age typically imposes. The hermit locates such a weakness, once again, in the teeth, which he says will naturally fall out as acrid humors, flowing constantly from the brain, damage and erode their roots. The same applies to the vapor rising from the stomach. The permanent change from cold to hot may have a similar effect (Cardano 1663, Vol. II, 376). Nevertheless, even in the sixteenth century, there were remedies at hand, as demonstrated by the hermit, who rinses his mouth with a mixture of wine and spices before dinner (but recommends doing so only once or twice a month) (Cardano 1663, Vol. II, 382). Another example is provided by the stomach troubles from which almost all elderly people suffer, making it particularly important to start a diet as early as possible in life: one should eat little, but of good quality, and one should have not one but several meals a day. Many more recommendations follow – for instance, about the manner of life of the elderly – with the hermit adopting a surprisingly liberal position, that of "equal variety" (*varietas aequalis*): people must make a choice based on their physical condition, the season, and their stage of life, but once they do so it should be maintained (Cardano 1663, Vol. II, 389).

In another philosophical text, *De utilitate ex adversis capienda*, Cardano borrows heavily from Petrarch's famous *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. Both au-

thors try to convince their reader to derive benefit from calamity, and argue that "bad old age" can serve as a useful example. Whereas the hermit in *Theonoston* is an advocate for the final phase of life, Cardano himself begins *De utilitate* (Lib. II, Ch. 4) with an attack on old age, arguing that there is no greater and at the same time less remediable evil than old age. In addition to illness and physical weakness, Cardano emphasizes the mental and personal failings of the elderly. They are nearly invisible to their relatives, and so shunned by them. Yet there is an escape from this unpleasant situation: Cardano again advises the use of one's reason, which only deteriorates in the final stages of life, along with the senses, some time after the body (compare Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II, 14). He compares old age to war: one must maneuver in enemy territory, not relying on supplies from one's immediate surroundings, but on reserves stored up in advance. Cardano lists all kinds of possibilities, drawing from his own experience and his practice as a physician. For example, one should sire offspring early, while still fertile. It is also important to keep one's friends. Cardano describes a number of expedients for this: avoiding complaining and talking excessively, and cultivating good table manners. In particular, the elderly persons should be silent while eating, so that particles of food do not fall from their toothless mouths, and so that they do not spit on the person across the table. Oral hygiene should be strictly maintained to avoid bad breath, visible remnants of food, and rotten teeth. From animals, one should take the lesson to fight with the weapons best suited to one's own constitution. One should not use strength or speed, but rather reason and counsel to overcome others and win them over. Cardano also insists on the importance of storing up material resources to provide for the contingencies of old age, and so avoid any potential hardship later on (1663, Vol. II, 50).

Assessing the ethical substance of Cardano's texts, we must recognize that they do not contain ethical principles as we understand them today. We will not find in them any scientific reflections on moral behavior. Nonetheless, he addresses a number of traditional questions in moral philosophy, expressing his view both as a physician and as someone affected by the issues at hand (all these texts were composed after his fifty-fifth birthday).

Cardano's work implies a simple deontology for the elderly: one "should" behave in such-and-such a way simply because it is befitting for a patient or an elderly person. Premodern dietetics is typically normative. Cardano, however, defends a milder form of obligation, and, with the exception of his defense of prudence, we find no elements of a normative virtue ethics. One of his trenchant rules is *secundum medicina sine medicina vivere:* to live according to the rules of medicine, but without medicine (*Theonoston*, Lib. II; Cardano 1663, Vol. II, 390). At first sight, this wording applies only to laxatives, a special kind of *medicina*,

but it can be generalized to represent Cardano's broader view. Old age has not yet been "medicalized."

Cardano's teleological approach is much more prominent than his deontological one. In *Theonoston*, the pursuit of happiness (*felicitas*) is emphasized, and, as a consequence, aches and pains should be avoided: even old age, epitomized by the hermit, can be a happy condition. Without examining the whole of Cardano's philosophy, we can nevertheless conclude that such happiness is, fundamentally, not a eudaemonic, but a hedonistic and pragmatic goal, tailored to the needs of each individual. Old people may interpret happiness differently from young people: Cardano, then, must propose a special "ethics of old age." Occasionally, we encounter a keyword of Stoic philosophy – peace of mind (*tranquillitas*) – as a goal for the elderly, although not exclusively for them.

The title of Cardano's second moral text, *De utilitate*, exhorts the readers to pursue advantage (*utilitas*) by conforming to particular ways of behaving. As the example of war makes clear, the author champions a consequentialist utilitarianism (a hundred years before Hobbes!). Although the elderly cannot avoid losing their teeth, in spite of their precautions, they should derive as much benefit from doing so as they can: losing teeth encourages the prudent man to choose the appropriate food, and to keep silent when eating, and the higher goal of retaining his friends keeps him from complaining about his own suffering. When the pursuit of advantage and happiness represents a moral-philosophical aim extending into old age, teeth become relevant – as do the problems they cause.

Nevertheless, Cardano and many of his contemporaries make clear that happiness can only be achieved when timely provisions are made. Preventative measures – not only regarding teeth, but also finances and the care provided by one's children – were a central topic of premodern gerontological medicine, which was almost helpless in therapeutic terms. Virtue is not Cardano's immediate topic. It nonetheless has an indirect bearing on people, by informing them of beneficial behaviors while there is still time for them to be useful. Happiness in old age can only be achieved when one strives for it. To use another of Cardano's phrases, *cito senesce:* grow old in time, that is, be prepared to the years to come (*De sanitate tuenda*, Lib. I, Ch. 8; Cardano 1663, Vol. VI, 36).

Paleotti's fruitful old age

We have a second impressive example of gerontological ideas from a similar time (only a quarter of a century later) and a neighboring area, Rome. But there are substantial differences, as we will see, for our second author was writing in a

very different cultural context. Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597) was a Bolognese canonist and an eminent mediator at the Council of Trent. He spent his final years as a cardinal in Rome, where, two years before his death, he published a treatise "On the Good of Old Age" (*De bono senectutis*) (Prodi 1967, esp. Vol. II, 563–594). The text was probably written on the occasion of the upcoming eightieth birthday of the (later canonized) priest Filippo Neri. Paleotti was a member of his "Congregation of the Oratorio" (Schäfer 2018).

We can already see just how far this cultural setting differed Cardano's. As a cleric, Paleotti had made a distinguished career in the Catholic gerontocracy, and, as a jurist, he had an inherently more positive image of old age (cf. the lively discussion on privileges granted to the elderly in juridical treatises of the time; see Duve 2008, 204–244; Schäfer 2011, 180, 233). Intended as a congratulatory text between clerics, *De bono senectutis* had to fulfill certain expectations very far from the scepticism advocated by Cardano.

The text nonetheless contains some surprisingly original thoughts. *De bono senectutis* follows the tradition of texts defending old age (Sigismund 2003; Moog and Schäfer 2008), but it goes far beyond classical model set by Cicero's *Cato maior de senectute*. Paleotti regarded this text as one of several platforms from which to start a normative discussion of old age. In his first part, he brings up the claims which Cicero had already argued against: that old age impedes the *vita activa* by sapping bodily strength and draining away sensual pleasure, and that it marks the approach of death. In particular, Paleotti describes the *tristitia animi*, a mental depression caused by the restrictions and tribulations of old age (cf. Stern and Cassirer 1946). He prescribes medical treatments to counter bodily frailty, and philosophical remedies to counter *tristitia* (Paleotti 1595, 33–36).

This is where the debate on the *bonum senectutis* in the main part of the treatise occurs: it is meant to offer the elderly a positive view of this phase of life, despite its adversities. As the second part of the treatise will show, the debate centers not only on defending and comforting the old – something that falls within the consolatory tradition – but also on precisely defining just what aging means.

What exactly do Paleotti and his contemporaries understand by *bonum?* Paleotti primarily uses an Aristotelian-Thomistic definition, according to which *bonum* is something that corresponds to its own pattern (*forma*). For human beings, this means a condition in harmony with the rational (which is humanity's most important characteristic) and thus a goal worth striving for. Therefore, while a good does not have to be "good" in the sense of being enjoyable or pleasing, it must be "reasonable." Paleotti insists that the *bonum senectutis* also applies to elderly people who are not getting on "well," either physically or mentally – in-

cluding bed-ridden people (*languentes*), whom he refers to time and again (1595, 52–56).

Paleotti discusses in detail the various preconditions ("roots") of the *bonum senectutis*. Because of their listless senses, the elderly are less susceptible to the passions. Their great experience offers resistance to transitory phenomena like beauty, strength, and eloquence. The prudence which results from their experience is unparalleled in younger people. Since prudence and reason (the most important characteristics of a human being) form a whole, Paleotti describes old age as the stage of life which best suits human nature: old age is the "soul of life" (*senectus vitae anima appellata*; Paleotti 1595, 82). Even meditation on death (*meditatio mortis*) contributes to the *bonum:* it not only strengthens the (religious) fear of God, but frees the mind, purifies the conscience, and produces scorn for human matters, sincerity in speech, the desire to help others, ataraxia (*animi securitas*), and an improvement of life (Paleotti 1595, 82).

The last part of the treatise returns to Paleotti's main topic. He emphasizes his vision of the *bonum senectutis*, which is not equally immanent in all human beings. This also applies to good old age (*bona senectus*), which Paleotti connects – as a condition of external happiness – with longevity and physical and mental health. In opposition to this, the philosophical *bonum* of old age is not a gift of nature but a matter of human will. It is a choice, and, once this choice is made, age turns out to be most favorable for "living a honorable life, cultivating virtue, and refining rational human nature" (*bonum senectutis est honeste vivere, virtutes colere, et naturae hominis, quae ratione praedita est, convenienter operari*; Paleotti 1595, 165). This short definition of the *bonum* defines no external conditions, but rather a moral and religious goal: to live in harmony with the purpose which humans possess as rational beings. The "roots" which Paleotti describes give forth fruits (*fructus*), in terms of our behavior, which can be harvested and enjoyed in old age: under the constant influence of virtue, old age is fertile, like a field ready for the harvest (Paleotti 1595, 211–213). Paleotti distinguishes between fruits which are for God, those for one's neighbors, and those for the elderly themselves. Due to external illness and the decline of their senses, the elderly are no longer susceptible to desires and excess, and tend towards sober-mindedness and virtue. Finally, their long experience counters extreme self-love, for the elderly are aware of their weaknesses and able to realistically assess their abilities. The result is not a gloom but cheerfulness, with the elderly laughing about themselves (Paleotti 1595, 226–227).

As already mentioned, Paleotti's normative moral philosophy of old age clearly differs from Cardano's. This is due partly to their professional backgrounds, and partly to the different expectations of their readers. Cardano offers

a hedonistic, materialistic account of coping with old age, whereas Paleotti, who turns to virtue ethics and voluntarism, tries to subtilize and idealize it as the "soul of human life." But both see old age as a task, and rely on the prescient, prudent mind (*ratio*) as the crucial mediator in making a difficult situation bearable.

Comparing early modern morality and present ethics of old age

We move now from premodern morality to the postmodern ethics of old age. We focus on a number of issues heavily discussed over the last twenty years. (A good overview of these is available in Schweda 2018, and Baranzke et al. 2019.) Some are familiar: for example, should old age as a whole to be regarded as a disease, or as good health (Schramme 2009)? Are measures to delay old age justified or not (Maio 2011)? At first sight, these appear to be medical questions, but we can only approach them through philosophical and ethical considerations about the nature of humanity, and through a comprehensive definition of health and disease. Other issues appear relatively new: for instance, the question of inter-generational justice which arises from a shift in working lifetimes and the standard retirement age. Only with the introduction of private and public pension funds in the nineteenth century did people widely begin to enjoy the sort of lifespan which meant they did not have to work until death. The question of "how many old people we can afford" (Boss 2007) is a concern for modern economies, but was rarely posed in premodern times, when the pattern of aging had classic pyramidal form. Furthermore, although their physical capabilities were seen as reduced, old people were in general not regarded as unproductive, for productivity was understood and experienced differently (Metzler 2013, 92–153).

Another topic often treated by the postmodern ethics of old age is largely neglected by Cardano and Paleotti (although it occurs in premodern social-historical sources; Ottaway 2004, 116–126). This is the issue of limited self-determination in old age. In 2010, Claudia Wiesemann, a medical ethicist in Göttingen, defined old age as follows: "In my opinion, we should only speak of old age when people's capability of self-determination is restricted." (Breuer 2010) For old men in the sixteenth-century cultural elite, the topic did not exist, or was taboo. For demographic reasons, senile dementia was relatively uncommon at the time (Schäfer 2009). With no special provisions for old age, the elderly were required to look after themselves until the end of their lives. The sort of self-responsibility described by Andreas Kruse (2007) was a matter of fact, up

to and including begging. Cardano and Paleotti also experienced forms of ageism, which they fought either by preparing themselves for "the march through enemy territory," or by giving the situation a radical, religious reinterpretation: "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9)

Interestingly, in recent times, a basic premise shared by Cardano and Paleotti – that people bear their own responsibility for "successful," "active" aging – has emerged in gerontological and ethical debates once again. Van Dyck and Graefe (2012) thus criticize a growing trend towards responsibilization and moralization in modern old-age policies, emphasizing the limits of self-responsibility and the right to live and age in an unplanned way.

In conclusion, looking beyond the details of historical moral philosophy and the present ethics of old age, and the differences and common features between them, what can a historical viewpoint tell us about modern debates? We can propose four theses:

1. Old age is not just an anthropological constant but a cultural construct, formed by both negative and positive images and stereotypes, and influenced by external factors like labor conditions, income, and medical and technical opportunities.
2. Ethical issues regarding the elderly are not independent of time. Rather, they emerge in their respective cultural-historical contexts, and are influenced by the main philosophical and religious themes of the age. Self-determination on the part of the elderly is a twenty-first century topic, rather than a concern of the sixteenth century, and historians see such problems as typical of our time and its paradigms. But this new emphasis on ethical problems does not necessarily indicate that the situation has grown worse in the present – only that such problems have grown more important for us in the age of autonomy.
3. Although Cardano and Paleotti experienced aging in a similar way, at almost the same time, and in close geographic proximity, their different stances reveal that, in spite of the rationality of their arguments, the result of ethical discourse is not neutral or even objective. Rather, it depends on the premises of the discussants and the atmosphere of the respective discourse.
4. Early modern texts show that an ethics of old age must be related to practice. While the disadvantages of aging must be acknowledged, we should also recognize its advantages before we draw our conclusions. The well-intentioned appeal to the elderly to use their minds and make provision will only be helpful for those who live accordingly. From the point of view of modern psychology, it seems essential to encourage positive stereotypes of old age, celebrating it as a *bonum*, as Paleotti did – or, at least, accepting it as an important part of human life.

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Heiner Fangerau, Nils Hansson and Vasilija Rolfes

Electronic Health and Ambient Assisted Living: On the Technisation of Ageing and Responsibility

Mobile health systems, electronic health systems and technologies for so-called "ambient assisted living" (AAL) are schemes based on information technologies that focus on "empowering people's capabilities by the means of digital environments that are sensitive, adaptive and responsive to human needs" (Parisa and Mihailidis 2013, 579). Tools developed under this paradigm are designed to offer supportive human–machine interaction technologies, which help users to cope with their daily environments and tasks including medical care and self-care.

Senior citizens today are confronted with a range of such mobile health technologies developed for their benefit. Many of these intend to support the prevention of disease (e. g., by continuously monitoring chronic conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes) or are designed for supporting the delivery and effectiveness of therapies or improving adherence. A major reason for older people to use these tools might be their expectation that modern, highly technical, web-based mobile solutions could increase their quality of life better than the use of conventional support methods (Ammicht Quinn et al. 2015). Simultaneously, in advertisements, public media and popular culture, ageing is propagated as a dynamic and modifiable process such that senior citizens are increasingly being represented as active and responsible for their own well-being. Thus, push and pull effects regarding the use of mobile health utilities by the elderly seem to go hand in hand. Besides their obvious advantages, however, the use of these devices is also linked to some ethical considerations.

In the following, we intend to focus on ethical questions related to the use of ambient mobile and electronic health technologies by people of advanced age. Our goal is to evaluate their usage in the context of intergenerational responsibility. We consider intergenerational responsibility to be a key concept to include within an ethical evaluation against which the goals of AAL tools must be tested. The major propagated goals of health-related technologies for the aged include securing privacy, autonomy, participation and justice. In our assessment, we will focus on these values and discuss them in the broader context of moral responsibilities.

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Responsibility

Moral responsibility is the idea that "a person is morally responsible for her behavior, [which] involves – at least to a first approximation – attributing certain powers and capacities to that person and viewing her behavior as arising [...] from the fact that the person has and has exercised these powers and capacities" (Matthew 2019). It is a capacity usually attributed to humans only and only to those who have the power and capacity to adopt or reject certain actions.

Like many ethical concepts, that of responsibility has ambivalent features. It can be a duty, it may become a burden and it may be a shield to hide behind after some actions performed in the name of responsibility prove wrong in the end. According to the philosopher Robert Spaemann, the concept of (moral) responsibility has gained increasing importance in modern societies (2007, 39 – 41) – in the least, the term is being used more and more in public debates. One reason for this trend might be that modern technologies have enhanced the number of possibilities to provoke change in and/or influence humans, their destiny and their environment substantially. Another reason could be found in the supposed expansion of the possibilities of human foresight and the early recognition of dangers and risks, which means that actors cannot rely on ignorance anymore.

Meanwhile, Spaemann suggests a more differentiated justification for the increase in responsibility in modern societies, offering four intertwined explanations linked to the social development of Western societies over the last 70 years that are captured at its best by the sociological concepts of individualisation and the development of a risk-oriented society. First, our living conditions have become more complex over the years, resulting in relatively high individual and public discretionary powers. We have also experienced the further differentiation of social subsystems with the consequence that an individual must fulfil a multitude of roles simultaneously, which may lead to decisional conflicts. Our orientation toward assessing risks (instead of dangers) has brought about an increasing level of knowledge of the results of actions (as far as risk estimations are concerned). Finally, social acceleration and accelerated innovation cycles of technologies have led to a hastened outdating of norm-sets or sets of rules. Therefore, more abstract principles – like responsibility – have gained importance as reference frames for the moral evaluation of actions and results.

Ideally, responsibility refers to both the past as well as the future. The concept has a retrospective alignment when applied to past actions and a prospective orientation when applied to the assessment of plans and future actions. Regarding past actions, deontological moral structures determine what is considered as a responsible action. In the realisation of the obligatory ("to

deon" = the duty), the actor realises the commandment without paying attention to the success or failure of that action. Actions are carried out and attributed because they fall under general rules that specify what is to be done in the individual case. Actions are evaluated against these rules as either responsible (following the rules) or irresponsible (neglecting the rules). In contrast, responsibility regarding the future is normally evaluated following teleological moral structures, directing action toward the achievement of preferential goals ("to telos" = the goal, the purpose). An action is teleologically necessary and thus considered responsible if its implementation leads to an excess of positive versus negative consequences. Responsibility in this sense can only be linked to actions, the consequences of which could have been foreseen by actors under normal circumstances. Therefore, a responsible action requires either the obeying of a rule or an orientation toward desired consequences while avoiding risks (Birnbacher 1995, 143–183; Frankena 1994; Spaemann 1975, 323–335).

Responsibility is a highly relational concept, one that relies at least on a triple relation constellation in which there is the responsible subject, the object of responsibility and the authority who assigns and judges responsibility, respectively. Additionally, the concept includes temporal and moral dimensions. Basically, responsibility asks "who is responsible (subject) for what (object) to whom (authority), when (time) and how (mode)" (Figure 1) (Werner 2006, 521–527; Zimmerli 1993, 92–111).

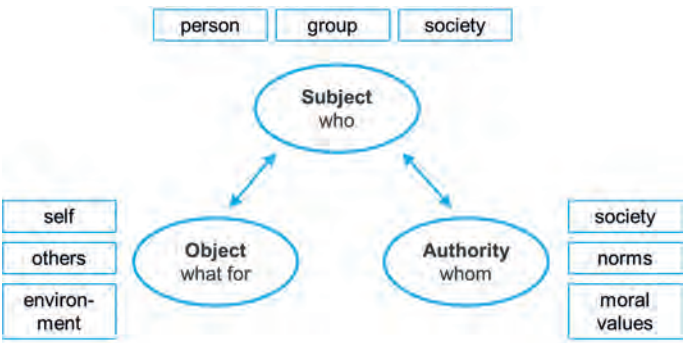

Figure 1: Web of responsibility (The figure was created based on Zimmerli 1993, 102).

The constellation presented in Figure 1 may change over time on all levels. Mechanisation and secularisation processes, for example, have a major influence on some elements of the concept: at the level of the authority, God, for example, has been replaced by the totality of all rational beings. Additionally, the object of responsibility is extended by technologies. Above all, the division of la-

bour, especially in the field of technology, together with its associated risks and the unpredictability of the consequences of its use has changed the responsible subject. In modern societies, it is no longer possible to limit the responsibility for certain actions to an individual. Furthermore, it can be difficult to determine the responsibility for actions with unpredictable consequences. In summary, the relational aspects may cause tensions in the attribution of responsibility. Basically, only subjects – either individuals or groups – who can act can be imbued with responsibility. In this case, responsibility is either taken by a subject or attributed to the subject by other individuals or groups within a certain area. This results in the responsible subject's need to legitimise actions concerning the object to an "authority", which can again be installed by the individuals or groups attributing the responsibility. In societies, this constellation is generally guided by the often implicitly stated idea of subsidiarity. The most immediate subject takes responsibility first for the immediate object in front of the most immediate authority (Zimmerli 1993, 92–111).

Responsibility of ageing and the link to intergenerational justice

The concept of responsibility can be applied also to intergenerational questions of society or the duties and roles of different age groups in a given society. The generational order in societies determines the institutionalised distribution of rights and duties among different age groups. It is, in effect, a cornerstone of the social order establishing obligations or commitments including intergenerational solidarity (Eisenstadt and Binder-Krauthoff 1966); yet, the generational order also constitutes fundamental inequalities in a society, giving rise to unequal duties or rights (Leena 2009, 159–174).

In this context, for a long time in Western culture, younger family members have been considered to be the primary source of support for older people; indeed, this constituted a responsibility for them. Traditionally, those who were old and frail had to rely on being taken in and cared for by their own children to continue experiencing some quality of life. In practice, however, this was not always possible, either because the families were too poor or for other reasons. In such cases, churches, local authorities or charitable foundations sometimes intervened. At the same time, however, older people had to care for young children as well. Thus, the middle generation carried the responsibility of caring for both the old and the young at the same time. This image is best represented in popular culture and media by the image presented in Greek mythology of Ae-

neas carrying his father away from the burning Troy while at the same time holding his child's hand. This cultural icon has been reproduced in various forms until today.

With the development of social welfare schemes and health insurances, the responsibility of citizens caring for their own parents was eased at least in states that have subscribed to social welfare. In other words, society took over some of these responsibilities. Moreover, elderly people in need of care can also now rely on insurances and societal support. However, the claim for this support involves the examination and determination of the conditions necessitating the claim according to social laws. As a consequence, the rights of the subject in need and the collective liability become the guiding formula instead of individual responsibility of, for example, the family members. Similarly, in privately funded social systems, older people only have the right for the support they have paid for. Here, responsibility is eclipsed or accountability is distributed in a manner where the responsible subjects become opaque or are hard to identify.

From the perspective of the younger population, this shift of responsibility from (family) subjects to social insurance systems is a relief. Some social health insurances advertise this freedom from responsibilities to care for others. Instead of the well-known Aeneas motif, they display happy people caring for themselves instead of others. Figure 2 shows an advertisement by a German public health insurance company, Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse (AOK). In the image, a lady is lying relaxed in the bathtub and the accompanying text can be translated into English as: "Take a breath. The father is well taken care of. Thank you, AOK. 52 nursing consultants are on-site" (figure 2).

A context factor for such a shift in responsibilities and the subsequent emerging imagery of the generational order might be seen in the demographic development in many industrialised countries. Medical advances, better nutrition, improved housing and working conditions have improved the average life expectancy steadily since the middle of the nineteenth century and researchers focusing on ageing assume that this trend will only continue. Forecasts made by the United Nations say that, in countries like Austria, Germany or Sweden, an increase of a further 5% in the average life expectancy until 2050 is possible (United Nations 2019). The relatively long life expectancy in existence now has already led to a significant increase in the absolute number of older people in the industrialised world. This trend, reinforced by low birth rates, will lead in the future to a significant long-term increase in the proportion of older people in the population. The – current and future – demographic shifts are seen by some politicians as a danger or an obstacle for further globalisation and European integration and drivers of new demands for occupational flexibility, region-

Figure 2: Advertisement from AOK (Odeonsplatz Munich, foto taken by HF 22.10.2016)

al mobility and migration (European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change 2020).

The implications of these demographic changes are of particular interest for the sociology of the family, life-course research and ageing sociology. More old people meeting with fewer younger people who at the same time need to remain mobile, active and flexible given a globalised job market challenge the classical generational order. This development instigates the demand for a division of caring tasks and responsibilities between the family, the welfare state and the voluntary sector.

The demand becomes even more urgent when considering the increase in the number of people suffering from dementia, which comes along with the increase of older people in a society. The term "dementia" encompasses a whole group of disease patterns, in which important brain functions such as memory, orientation, language and the ability to learn are gradually and irretrievably lost. Most dementias are associated with advanced age. The probability of developing dementia increases dramatically after the age of 65 years and, due to the greater life expectancy associated with female sex, statistically more women are affected than men. Because the group of children, children-in-law, grandchildren or professional caregivers does not grow as fast as the number of older people due to the aforementioned demographic development, a "caring gap" exists (World Health Organization [WHO] 2011). In other words, the question is "who cares" if neither families nor welfare systems have enough young people available to

meet the caring needs of the elderly. Although there is an intergenerational responsibility to care for the elderly, there is simultaneously an understanding based on intergenerational justice that this responsibility cannot result in younger people giving up all of their own needs and expectations for the sake of the elderly.

Technical solutions

Even in nursing homes, the lack of staff and funding together with time pressures have made it difficult to meet the demand for a dignified existence for all residents (Schüssler and Lohrmann 2017). This is especially true for people with dementia, who require special attention from caregivers. To give an example: many people with dementia feel the urge to move. Walking helps them to relieve tension, to perceive themselves and the environment. They strive to get outside, but, outside, they get lost easily and can even endanger themselves and others (Sütterlin et al. 2011). As the sense of balance diminishes, the risk of falling also increases. At home or in nursing homes, falling in old age can easily lead to dreaded hip or femoral neck fractures (Petersen et al. 2020). Responsibility for care means, in these cases, that either these people are accompanied when walking around or are prevented from walking. When staff and time are short, the idea of pulling up the bed barrier or closing the safety belt of a wheelchair is obvious. According to studies, 12% to 49% of all residents in nursing homes and homes for the elderly are fixated in some way. In Germany, it is 26% to 42%, including 5% to 10% of whom are fastened with belts (Sütterlin et al. 2011). Even if the fixation is justified with the security of the elderly person in question, such means an unwanted coercive restriction of autonomy and freedom in the moral as well as in the life-practical sense, which is possible, for example, in Germany only within strong legal limits (BMFSFJ/BMG 2019; Walther 2007). Fixation creates stress. In addition, the forced immobility aggravates balance problems and the muscles regress, exacerbating the degree of physical instability.

Ways out of the dilemma between coercion and autonomy or safety and freedom include activating methods such as adopting a special way of communicating with demented residents/relatives that encourages them in their actions. This also includes accepting strange behaviours. If language is no longer possible, addressing sensory perceptions is an option. Physiotherapy strengthens balance and mobility. Finally, structural changes such as exterior doors that are somewhat concealed, long corridors leading around in circles or special “tangle gar-

dens" create the possibility for these individuals to move safely and without endangering others (Walther 2007).

However, all of these measures are, again, time-consuming to enact and require either personal engagement by relatives or enough qualified personnel in nursing homes. Because both human resources are scarce in an ageing society, politics have tried to address the problem with the help of information technologies like AAL systems. For example, by promoting "age-appropriate assistance systems for a healthy and independent life", the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research supports holistic solutions based on new technologies, services and benefits. The development of regional networks is also encouraged. Providers of complete systems, companies, service providers, the housing industry, doctors and health insurance companies together with the users themselves should cooperate and be involved. Technical tools to help in caring for the elderly with reference to the previous example include sturdy shoes, built-in hip pads or sensor mats that signal to the staff that a resident is leaving their bed.

Technological developments that unobtrusively support the everyday life of elderly people address several goals and values that may be summarised as increasing the quality of life. According to the inventors and producers as well as users, key values addressed by, for example, AAL systems include autonomy, safety/security, social contact, participation and wellbeing (Lee and Kim 2020; Siegel et al. 2014; Gaßner and Conrad 2010). Furthermore, evaluation models emphasise factors such as effectiveness, patient perspective and organisational and economical aspects (Kidholm et al. 2017; Manzeschke 2015, 263 – 283). As a political goal, justice may be added to that list. The tools should be made affordable and accessible to everyone.

The range of systems that have been developed so far is huge and new startups that offer new AAL solutions continue to pop up. Available products include tools for information assistance, which provide information and services that a person needs in their current situation, or intelligent environmental behaviour systems capable of learning from user actions and offering appropriate functions (e. g., when the owner gets up in the morning, the system turns the lights on, radio on and bathroom light up). Other systems predict emergency situations based on changes in behaviour (of the user) or changing physiological data. For example, a peak in blood pressure may suggest a future emergency situation. Intelligent environments should also detect unusual situations and act accordingly (promptly). Particularly, older people seek security, especially when they are physically and mentally challenged. Technologies addressing this need include, e. g., the recognition of an unlocked door or effective authentication mechanisms. From the perspective of responsible caregivers, surveillance of the behaviour of the elderly might also contribute to safety. Bracelets measuring

pulse and reporting irregularities or intelligent companion puppets can address this requirement. Door sensors show when an individual is leaving a property and how long they are absent, helping to alleviate concerns about wandering or to confirm when action is needed as well as letting family and professionals know whether scheduled care calls and visits have been carried out. Finally, social contact can also be simulated with AAL systems; for example, there is an AAL product under development that was promoted by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 2016 known as the companion puppet "which is capable of sensing the emotional and health condition of the care recipient. This puppet can also detect states of unwanted situations (e. g., the care recipient is agitated) and can animate the care recipient to perform certain activities [(i. e., the care recipient is asked to play a simple card game or describe images etc.)]. In the case of a stressful or critical situation, the puppet will try to calm the care recipient and at the same time ... offer support to the caregivers. Apart from the puppet, [this] system [is] also comprised of a central computing unit (e. g., a smart home gateway) capable of sensing and controlling the environment" (BMBF 2016).

Tensions between values

We could extend the list of technical aids and AAL systems infinitely, but the given examples may already illustrate certain tensions that are central elements of almost all of these technological solutions. These tensions concern finding a balance between the pairings of

- Security and freedom
- Support and disenfranchisement
- Control and indifference
- Standardisation and individualism
- Enabling participation and enforcing the use of technologies

Moving too much to either side of a pair becomes problematic if responsibility does not only include the physical safety of an old person but also their psychological and social wellbeing. Support, understood as total appropriation, which wants to take away all burden from a person, overlooks the fact that a certain burden belongs to life. Responsibility for the care of older people might in this way have its limits when it results in the pressure to be satisfied with certain technical aids and thus remain socially inconspicuous.

The danger of enforcing the use of these technologies on the aged is present due to the limited human or financial resources, the reasons of which were given

above. It might even be morally justified if we turn the idea of responsibility around. Intergenerational responsibility does not only demand that the young care for the old but also that the older generation tries to limit the burden for the younger generation. An example where senior citizens are reminded of this responsibility can be seen in public health campaigns that attempt to nudge older citizens in the direction of leading a healthy way of life. The preventive "active ageing" approach propagated by the European Union and the WHO is based on the idea that it is possible for individuals to shape and plan their lives. Accordingly, old people are nudged to be active to prevent or at least delay their individual dependence on other people. The term "active ageing" is thereby often linked to the terms "healthy" and/or "successful" ageing (WHO 2002; European Commission 2012; European Commission 2019).

Thus, leading an active life becomes a responsibility of the older individual. In this way, the risk of age-related dependency (fostered by inactivity) is also individualised. The collective social risk of age dependency is rhetorically transformed into the individual responsibility to reduce the risk through activities. As a consequence, responsibility is taken away from society and children and attributed to the elderly. Here, again, technology is offered as an aid; "wearables" such as health trackers, step counters or motivation systems have been designed to foster active ageing. The European Commission for example promotes a strategy that explicitly states: "Digital technology can help older people to stay healthy, independent and active at work or in their community for longer and it helps to improve our quality of life" (European Commission 2019). Old people are assigned the responsibility to use these aids for the sake of intergenerational justice. Otherwise, they have to subscribe to the promises of AAL and other systems, whether they want to or not. Here, we see a classical catch-22 situation: old people can either use the technology to improve their activity and keep their self-determination or they have to use the technology to relieve the burden of care from the young. Thus, the technisation of old age can increase or decrease intergenerational justice.

Conclusion

The relations of responsibility are based on the question of who is responsible for what to whom, when and how. During the development of technologies to care for the elderly, not only the old themselves but also the younger generation are the responsible subjects. Moreover, other responsible parties include caregivers, physicians, engineers and manufacturers. The authority to whom all these groups have to justify their responsible behaviour is constituted by human rights

and human dignity. If the goal of AAL technologies is to enable wellbeing, safety and an autonomous life for older people and at the same time to limit the burden of care for younger people, all measures to achieve these goals need to be evaluated against these authorities and conflicting values. The main goal conflicts discussed in today's moral debates include tensions between privacy and transparency as well as between autonomy and control in the use of data collected via the technical products to support the elderly and to control the vital parameters. The risks of application must be proportionate to the expected benefits, which, in turn, means that valid and reliable information must be used beforehand to be able to make such a decision in the first place.

Above all, technology should not overtax the assisted person. Consent to the use of the systems at stake must remain voluntary and must not be enforced in a paternalistic sense "for one's own good". In addition, the technologies should not be based on economic utility but instead solely on the well-being of the potential users. The idea of responsibility for the care of older people also means that there is a need for clear, human-bound, transparent and interruptible decision-making hierarchies in the use of technological systems. Otherwise, the old person might be eclipsed by an efficient and time-saving yet unwanted caring system only responsible for a limited set of elements within the meaning of care.

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Towards a New Theory of Ageism

Erin Gentry Lamb

Not Your Grandmother's Ageism: Ageism Across the Life Course

Sometimes we learn the most through teaching. I regularly teach an age studies course to college students, most recently titled "Aging, Ageism, and Embodiment." My goals in this course are to introduce students to basic age studies concepts and to craft them into savvy cultural age critics. Students write a significant research paper addressing an aspect of aging. A few years ago, I had a student who wrote about "Ageism Against the Youth." Her starting premise was that prominent American age critic Margaret Morganroth Gullette – a few excerpts of whose work we had read – was ageist because she focused only on ageism against older people. The student's paper called out all of age studies more generally – and my course in particular – for talking about ageism but only including the older population. She wrote about her own experiences with ageism in her mid-twenties, as she has had 10 hip surgeries and two total hip replacements, leaving her with an invisible disability that constrains her from functioning fully in her work as a nurse, but these constraints are often dismissed by her co-workers who tell her she is "too young" to have hip pain.

Not only did her essay make me think about ageism as a force operating on the young or all along the life course, but it also made me reflect on why I had not previously thought or taught *more* about ageism as a factor across the life course. In trying to help students understand the mechanisms of ageism, I regularly ask them to identify moments when they have been stereotyped based on their age, told they were "too young" for something. Additionally, as I focus much of my class on America's anti-aging culture – the consumer aspects of which focus on people beginning in their 30s or even late 20s – I make it clear that negative associations of age begin long before any chronologically recognized category of "old age." But until my student called me out, I had never considered the idea of ageism against young people as meriting any *real* attention, in my teaching or in my scholarship.

In this essay, I explore how ageism functions in other parts of the life course – particularly as experienced by young adults and children. While my sources are international, nearly all of my examples come from the national context of the United States, and I suggest that national context is important in terms of how juvenile ageism in particular plays out. I argue that age studies should be attending to ageism across the life course, even though ageism as experienced at the poles of the life course are not fully equivalent in structure or conse-

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quence. In my conclusion, I speak to some of the possible gains to come from approaching ageism as a life course concern if we want to more effectively combat ageism – old or otherwise.

Defining Ageism

In 1969, when gerontologist Robert Butler coined the term *ageism*, he defined it as "prejudice by one age group toward other age groups." (1969, 243) This initial formulation, what Bill Bytheway calls "the broader definition" of ageism, allows for any age group to be "oppressed by [...] dominant expectations about age [...] that dictate how we behave and relate to each other." (2005, 338) However, Butler's further formulations of the term draw a more narrow definition, in which ageism pertains to later life and is analogous to other forms of oppression: "Ageism can be seen as a systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people *because they are old*, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender." (1989, 138 [emphasis mine]) This focus on ageism as affecting only older people – paralleling our understanding of racism as affecting non-whites, and sexism affecting women and non cisgender individuals – is certainly the most common formulation of ageism. As one example, the 2005 *Encyclopedia of Ageism* does not include *any* entries that address juvenile ageism or middle-ageism (Palmore et al. 2005).

When the categories of children or young adults are acknowledged as possible targets of ageism, the tendency is to dismiss these categories as less important or irrelevant. Consider a chapter in the 2002 social psychology volume *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons*. Authors Jeff Greenberg, Jeff Schimel, and Andy Martens explain:

> Ageism can most simply be defined as negative attitudes or behaviors toward an individual solely based on that person's age. Defined this way, negative attitudes toward people because they are young would qualify as ageism. However, throughout this chapter and consistent with the spirit of this book, we will use the term ageism to refer specifically to negative attitudes and behavior toward the elderly, focusing exclusively on *this most troubling and consequential form* of ageism. (2002, 27 [emphasis mine])

Like social psychology, gerontology and age studies have both tended to focus almost wholly on ageism as it affects older adults.

There are, of course, exceptions to this focus, perhaps the most notable of which within age studies is Gullette's early focus on mid-life. Gullette coined the term "middle-ageism," describing it in her 1997 book *Declining to Decline* as the "anticipatory fear of midlife aging" inspired by culture (1997, 6). This

fear, the decline narrative of aging, is experienced by adolescents and young adults as readily as older age categories. In contrast to my student's claims, Gullette studies the effects of ageism across the life spectrum, though to be fair, her focus is almost wholly on ageism as prejudice-against-growing-older rather than ageism as prejudice-against-being-young.

In this essay, I will explore what ageism looks like when youth – being "too young" – is its focus. How such ageism works, how prevalent it is, and what its consequences are vary depending on whether we are talking about young adults or about children, so I will address these two age groups in turn.

Young Adult Ageism

What is meant by "young adult" – particularly within formal studies of ageism – varies significantly, sometimes including adolescents, sometimes expanding into the 30s. "Young" and "old" are relative terms and vary significantly depending on context and company. Young and old adults alike are often branded generationally; within the United States especially, the generational labels "Millennial" and "Boomer" have been used as stand-ins for conflicting young and old generations, even though Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) might already be in their late 30s and Boomers (born 1946 – 1964) might be only in their late 50s (Dimock 2019). 2019 saw the rise of the "OK Boomer" and "OK Millennial" social media memes. "OK Boomer" is a way to dismiss the older generation for being out of touch and establishing or eliminating policies to build their own wealth at the expense of future generations; "OK Millennial" is a way to dismiss the younger generation as uninformed, over-coddled, and unwilling to work hard (Animashaun 2019). Together, such aspersions illustrate that we are equally likely to group and stereotype young adults as we are older people. They also point to how representations of ageism frequently pit the young against the old and vice-versa, leaving middle-aged people out of the picture.

Often referred to as *reverse ageism*, age-based prejudice against young adults manifests as ageist ideology (negative stereotypes, beliefs, and attitudes) and age discrimination ("behaviors that exclude certain people and/or disadvantage them relative to others solely due to their age") (Raymer et al. 2017, 152). Ageism – experienced by both young and old – "can manifest in hostile forms (e. g., neglect, abuse or mistreatment), but also in more benevolent, subtle ways (e. g., patronizing, simplified and slow communication)." (Bratt et al. 2018, 168) Ageism against young adults, according to psychologists Jessica Hehman and Daphne Bugental, stems from young adults being "assigned low status in our society," as are older people, "but of a different type; stereotypically, they are seen as

'not yet ready' for the responsibilities of adulthood." (2013, 1397) On the younger end of the young adult spectrum, Hehman and Bugental argue that "[i]n response to this perception [of young adults as 'not yet ready' for adult responsibilities], practices have been implemented that serve to regulate their behaviors in ways not applied to full adults." (2013, 1397) For example, young adults have fewer rights – in the United States, they cannot buy cigarettes or drink alcohol until 21, or rent a car until 25. Hehman and Bugental suggest that stereotypes of young adults as rebellious, imprudently willing to take risks, and irresponsible make it more likely that young adults are "stigmatized in social situations that require moral reasoning and decision making." (2013, 1397) Whether or not behaviors such as risk-taking are part of a still-developing brain, the ascription of such characteristics to *all* young adults makes them stereotypes. Laws that dissuade young adults from engaging in possibly dangerous activities such as drinking and smoking may provide an acceptable level of paternalistic protection. However, the belief that such behaviors will translate into all aspects of young adults' lives make the stereotypes problematic.

Prevalence of Young Adult Ageism

Recent data suggest that perceived age discrimination – i.e., discrimination that people report experiencing based on their age – may be an equal, if not greater, concern for younger people than it is for older people. A 2007 study in the United States by sociologists Gilbert Gee, Eliza Pavalko, and J. Scott Long used longitudinal data on women to examine self-reports of age discrimination in the workplace among different age cohorts. Even across cohorts that entered adulthood in significantly different cultural moments, they found a consistent pattern: the percent of women in their early to mid-20s reporting age discrimination in the workplace was relatively high, but dropped as these women moved into their 30s, and peaked in their 50s before somewhat declining again. Thus, ageism was reported most by young adults and those in mid-life or late mid-life. These findings are similar to a 2005 cross-sectional study by social scientists Teri Garstka, Mary Lee Hummert, and Nyla Branscombe – again within the United States, but this time studying both women and men – that queried participants about being "deprived of opportunities that are available to others because of my age." (2005, 328) Their study revealed the highest levels of perceived age discrimination among young (18–26) and old (61–92) adults in comparison with middle-aged adults.

More recently, a 2017 study by psychologists Christopher Bratt et al. based on data collected in 29 European countries found higher levels of self-reported age

discrimination among younger people than among older people, with significant variation between these countries. The survey asked participants how often anyone has shown prejudice against them or treated them unfairly because of their age, with two additional questions querying the frequency of experiencing hostile forms of ageism (someone "insulting you, abusing you, or refusing you services") and benevolent forms of ageism (someone "ignoring or patronizing you") (Bratt et al. 2017, 169). In 14 countries, they found high levels of age discrimination among young adults that decreased steadily with age. In most of the other 15 countries, perceived age discrimination was highest among both young and old resulting in a u-shaped distribution with lowest reported levels at mid-life; however, levels were highest among younger respondents. In only five of 29 countries – Cypress, the Czech Republic, Greece, Russia, Ukraine – was reported age discrimination higher among older than other age groups. Bratt et al. do caution that it is "uncertain to what extent differences in subjective experiences of age discrimination reflect actual differences in age discrimination," as negative attitudes are not always expressed overtly, or younger people might be more inclined to attribute conflicts or rejections to age discrimination (2017, 177).

Consequences of Young Adult Ageism

The arena in which ageism faced by young adults is perceived to be the most consequential is the workplace. A 2017 study summarizes the literature on reverse ageism: "young employees are viewed less favorably in general [...] as well as in terms of important work-related attributes, such as leadership ability [...] and accountability. [...] [C]ontrary to popular belief, young employees experience age discrimination at levels that are as high as, or even higher than, those reported by old employees." (Raymer et al. 2017, 149) The link between ageist ideology and age discrimination bears more research support, but young adult workers do face difficulties within the workplace "when establishing their work careers, including rules favoring workers with seniority and employer preferences for workers with prior job experience." (Gee et al. 2007, 282) Young adults are more likely to be unemployed than all older age groups and more likely to be laid off (Raymer et al. 2017; Indiviglio 2009).

This area of workplace ageism is one where national context almost certainly comes into play: "In Europe, all age cohorts are protected by law [against age discrimination in the workplace], unlike in the United States, where the law addresses only people forty years of age or older." (Mercat-Bruns 2016, 211) As management scholars Colin Duncan and Wendy Loretto have suggested, the inclusiveness of European law may make it – in comparison to other workplace

discrimination laws – more difficult to enforce, "as everyone is of an age and therefore prone to age discrimination, [making] it [...] difficult to distinguish oppressor from oppressed." (2004, 97) On the other hand, American law makes workplace ageism experiences of younger adults structurally invisible and impossible to redress.

Another area where ageist perceptions of young adults – particularly perceptions about their moral reasoning and responsibility – may have negative consequences involves activism. Hava Rachel Gordon, in a sociological study of adolescent activists, argues that age-stereotypical perceptions affect young people's ability to effect social change: "most examinations of age as a social inequality [...] tend to leave out young people's voices and agency. This serves to inadvertently reify young people's political passivity and silence, and portrays them as social objects unaware of social problems rather than as active subjects." (Gordon 2007, 635) Such age-based dismissal is evident in the United States' government's responses to teenage activists. For example, in January of 2020 Treasury Secretary Stephen Mnuchin dismissed climate activist Greta Thunberg by suggesting, "[a|fter she goes and studies economics in college, she can go back and explain that to us." (Hodgson 2020) Similarly, in March of 2018, former senator Rick Santorum told the teenagers advocating for gun control in response to school shootings through the "March for Our Lives" protest and "Never Again" movement to take CPR classes instead, implying they should be in classrooms, not marching in Washington demanding change from lawmakers (Hodgson 2020). Such dismissals are a clear attempt to use age to discredit ideas that challenge the status quo.

Juvenile Ageism

The above discussions of workplace discrimination or dismissal from political activism do not readily apply to ageism against children. Likewise, children are almost uniformly not included in studies that ask participants about their perceived experiences of age discrimination. Juvenile ageism – both as it manifests and in how we study it – is significantly different from ageism against young adults.

First referred to as "adultism" in the early twentieth century, prejudice against children has been more widely explored under the terms *childism* (particularly by psychoanalyst and philosopher Elisabeth Young-Bruehl), and *juvenile ageism* (whose most prolific proponent for the past two decades has been psychiatrist Jack C. Westman). For the purposes of this argument, I use their preferred terms when discussing Young-Bruehl or Westman, but I prefer Westman's

nomenclature; it offers more possibilities if we want to specify age cohorts within the category of ageism; old ageism, middle ageism, young adult ageism, and juvenile ageism seem clearer to me than possibilities like elderism or middle adultism, particularly as adultism has previously meant prejudice *in favor of* adults (Young-Bruehl 2012, 8).

In his 2019 book *Dealing with Child Abuse and Neglect as Public Health Problems* – a volume whose key focus is describing and combating juvenile ageism – Westman explains juvenile ageism through parallels to other forms of prejudice. For example, he offers George Bernard Shaw's quote "Youth is a wonderful thing. What a crime to waste it on children!" and argues: "However, if the words Jews, Blacks, or gays are substituted for children, prejudice is instantly apparent. The fact that we do not take offense at this slur against children illustrates how ingrained our hidden prejudice is against them." (Westman 2019, 39) The nature of such hidden prejudice is not about the stigma of being "too young" as we see with young adult ageism, but is rather about being regarded as inferior on the basis of age: "Neglecting the interests of children because they are less important than and are inferior to adults is the same as neglecting the interests of persons whose race or gender is seen as relegating them to an inferior status." (Westman 2019, 79) Westman clarifies, however, that "unlike racial and gender groups, children usually are inferior in mental and physical abilities [...]. Juvenile ageism cannot be invoked simply because children are treated differently due to their immaturity. However, the comparison of old ageism and juvenile ageism with racism and sexism holds up when equality means equality in rights and opportunities." (2019, 46 – 47) Thus, to recognize juvenile ageism most clearly, we need to pay special attention to structural conditions and social policies rather than looking at individual experiences.

It is at this level of the structural and social that Young-Bruehl seeks to initially illustrate childism, which she defines quite simply as prejudice against children, by pointing to the "shameful fact" that "America incarcerates more of its children than any country in the world." (2012, 2) The United States, she points out, is the only country besides Somalia that has not ratified the 1989 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child which forbids child imprisonment (Young-Bruehl 2012, 3). America's high levels of incarceration are one manifestation of widely held anti-child views, such as that children should be removed from sight, that children are dangerous and burdensome to society, that children should serve adults, that they are property, and that they are rebellious and adults' key responsibility to them is to discipline them (Young-Bruehl 2012, 3 – 4). To these views, Westman would add that cultural devaluation of parenthood is also central to juvenile ageism, particularly within the United States which "[u]nlike other Western nations [...] does not recognize the economic

value of parenthood." (Westman 2019, 84) In support of this claim, Westman points to the American cultural emphasis on paid employment and the cultural and economic devaluation of caregiving and homemaking, the lack of social supports like paid family leave or universal childcare that make children costly liabilities instead of economic assets, our emphasis on individualism and adult rights that leads us to regard children as the property of their parents, and our hands-off approach to competent parenting wherein our society doesn't articulate clear expectations for parents nor does it intervene until children are damaged by neglect or abuse (2019, 83–88).

There are both benevolent and hostile forms of this prejudice again children, according to Westman. Benevolent juvenile ageism, he argues, lies behind a "pro-children rhetoric" that allows adults to feel good while they make decisions that may be in their own economic or other best interests rather than those of children. For example, he argues that benevolent ageism – both old and juvenile – justifies age segregation and institutionalization more broadly: "Benevolent ageism [...] allows us to believe that the elderly are better off receiving special care away from their families and that children are better off in educational environments away from their families," enabling parents or family members to evade responsibilities for caretaking (Westman 2019, 43). Westman suggests that more hostile forms of ageism come in the way we treat children as property, for example in divorce proceedings, or when we make childcare and work arrangements for the convenience of parents rather than in the developmental interests of the child.

Because it takes so many forms, and because we must seek its existence in structural and social arrangements because the children who experience it often cannot name it, juvenile ageism may be harder to recognize. "When childism pervades a society," Young-Bruehl suggests, "even people who genuinely want to make the world better for children may find it hard to realize that it exists." (2012, 4) Prejudice against children "is built into the very way children are imagined." (Young-Bruehl 2012, 5)

Prevalence of Juvenile Ageism

As gathering reports of self-perceived ageism – the most common measure for ageism among other age groups – poses difficulties when the subjects are children, it is more challenging to determine the prevalence of juvenile ageism. One measure we can clearly speak to is the prevalence of child abuse. Westman points out that "elder abuse and neglect have been readily identified as reflecting ageism, whereas childhood abuse and neglect have not." (2019, 41) The

World Health Organization suggests that while elder abuse is a significant problem experienced globally by 1 in 6 people over 60, child abuse rates are even higher, experienced by 1 in 4 children (2020b, 2020a). Abuse and neglect can lead to child fatalities. Within the United States, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) reports that in 2019, an estimated 1,840 children died from abuse and neglect, a rate of 2.50 per 100,000 children in the population (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services 2021, ii). Focusing on all forms of abuse, Young-Bruehl claims that "America has the highest rates of child abuse in the world." (2012, 16) Not all child maltreatment is a result of juvenile ageism, Westman acknowledges; it might, for example, be the result of incompetence, ignorance, or simply meanness. He suggests that "juvenile ageism exists when adults use their superior power to mistreat children as inferior persons in order to further their own needs and desires." (Westman 2019, 46) While abuse is certainly the most pointed to manifestation of juvenile ageism, Young-Bruehl argues that "when childism is prevalent in a society *all* children are hurt, not just those classified as 'the abused'." (2012, 15)

Consequences of Juvenile Ageism

In addition to abuse and neglect, Young-Bruehl suggests there are many behaviors and actions that we should recognize as examples of stereotyping children and childhood: "child imprisonment, child exploitation and abuse, substandard schooling, high infant mortality rates, fetal alcohol syndrome, the reckless prescription of antipsychotic drugs to children, child pornography, and all other behaviors or policies that are not in the best interests of children." (2012, 7) American Studies scholar Claire Greslé-Favier argues we should view abstinence-only sex education as a form of juvenile ageism as it ultimately frames children as the property of their parents and of the state (2013, 723). To this list, we should also add the policies and practices that devalue children and parenting or caregiving more broadly. Despite the pro-child rhetoric in the United States around fetal rights, for example, the U.S. consistently fails to address childhood poverty and remains one of the few developed nations that does not provide parental leave or universal early child care for its citizens, failing to recognize healthy child development as essential to maintenance of the state (Lubrano 2019; Mongeau 2016). In terms of parental leave, the American federal government provides only FMLA, the Family and Medical Leave Act, which ensures that one's job remains available to them for only 12 weeks of *unpaid* leave for any family caregiving needs, including childbirth (Mongeau 2016). Daycare and preschool – which provide "critical preparation for a successful school and adult life" –

are, except for the poorest of children who qualify for federally- or state-funded programs, wholly the burden of parents (Mongeau 2016).

Our devaluation of children and parenting also manifests in the low salaries and low prestige of professionals who work with children, such as day care workers and elementary education teachers (Bailey and Meltzoff 2001; Westman 1991). Mark Bailey and Nancy Meltzoff describe the low status traditionally accorded to early childhood educators – such as perceptions that the job is not challenging or that there is little legitimate teaching that takes place – and how this interpersonal and interprofessional disregard plays out monetarily: "Our society does not support paying a preschool teacher the same amount [as a high school teacher] regardless of whether the teachers at each age level are equally qualified, a case of juvenile ageism as ingrained economic policy." (2001, 50) Larger surveys show that "Childcare Workers" and "Personal Care Aides" are among the lowest paying occupations in the U.S. (McGrew 2016). Further, these industries are heavily dominated by women, a situation that has troubling consequences for gender equality (McGrew 2016).

Consider the strong parallels here to old ageism: long-term care workers, both within institutions and within home settings, face low salaries, lack of prestige, and experience high turnover. A *Vox* exposé by Alexia Fernández Campbell of personal care and home health aides who care for older adults within the United States revealed the employment inequities faced by this population. On average, home health aides – a population anticipated to grow from 2.9 million in 2016 to 4.1 million in 2026 – earn $11.57 an hour – less than janitors, cooks, and farmworkers. These positions are typically excluded from U.S. labor laws. Live-in caregivers or caregivers who spend less than 20 percent of their work time helping clients with basic tasks are not entitled to minimum wage or overtime pay under federal law. They are also not protected from racial discrimination or sexual harassment, and they lack collective bargaining rights (Campbell 2019). Even considering the health care occupation with the highest salaries (physicians), in a country like the United States where medical salaries vary significantly by specialty, the care specialties related to children and older adults are the least lucrative: geriatricians, pediatricians, and family practice physicians are at the bottom of the list (Salary.com 2020). That we comparatively so devalue caregiving and nurturing work related to both the young and the old suggests ageism – inherently valuing children and old people less than not-old adults – is at play.

Another key consequence of juvenile ageism comes in the political arena. "Young children don't vote, and because of this, they have a minimal amount of power to affect public policy," argue Bailey and Meltzoff (2001, 47–48). This lack of representation contributes to further structural inequalities; for example,

"government-funded programs for children such as public schooling [...] are continually underfunded in relation to the programs of older students" or other age groups (Bailey and Meltzoff 2001, 48). There is particular irony here in that, while children in the United States can't vote until age 18 when they reach "legal adulthood," children of 14 and above are regularly tried as adults in criminal hearings for certain violent crimes, a disturbing form of structural juvenile ageism. This political disenfranchisement is arguably not experienced by older adults.

Ultimately, Westman argues, we need to recognize discrimination in juvenile ageism as "violations of civil rights that would be regarded as rejection, segregation, harassment, oppression, violence, torture, and murder if they targeted an adult. Lumping together all these egregious offences under child abuse and neglect – less evocative terms – demeans children." (2019, 50) We also need to take into account how adverse childhood events may have long-term consequences that echo throughout an individual's lifespan. Considering those long-term effects of child maltreatment, Westman sums up the consequences of juvenile ageism within the United States:

> [...] a political system that fails to create safe environments for children, a commercial system that exploits the young, social services that are overwhelmed by child neglect and abuse cases, an impaired workforce, and a fragile economy. It has resulted in staggering costs from violence, habitual crime, and welfare dependency [...] the ultimate products of child neglect and abuse. (2019, 79 – 80)

Comparing Ageisms

If we conclude that ageism is an issue at other points of the life course, particularly within the first two to three decades, the question remains of whether this ageism merits equal attention to ageism at the end of the life course, whether the consequences of juvenile ageism and young adult ageism are as serious as those faced by older persons. The structural devaluing of caregiving positions for both children and older adults are equally concerning. And if we attribute any amount of child abuse to juvenile ageism, then we must respond yes to the above question in relation to children. Child abuse and neglect are among many other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that have been shown to manifest problematically in adulthood outcomes such as poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, risky behaviors, and toxic stress, and these effects may be passed on to their own children ("Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences"). Thus, Westman argues that "[f]rom society's point of view, juvenile ageism is a

more serious problem than older ageism, because children constitute the next generation." (1991, 253)

For young adults, the answer is less clear. The research is full of conditional statements, like this one by Bratt et al.: "Young people *might* experience age discrimination and it is *quite possible* that the consequences of age-based discrimination against younger people [...] *may be* as serious for their material and psychological well-being, or even their physical health, as has been found among older adults." (2018, 168 [emphasis mine]) One reason for such uncertainty about the seriousness of young adult ageism may lie in the possibility that age-related stigma as experienced by young adults is less damaging or less internalized than that experienced by older adults. A study by psychologists Hehman and Bugental compared the performance of older (62–92) and younger (17–22) adults on a task when exposed to messages that suggested either an age-related advantage for one group or that invoked stereotype threat. They found that older adults performed more poorly when told the task would favor speed and current knowledge (seen as youth advantages), a stereotype confirmation effect. However, in the equivalent condition where younger adults were told the task would require wisdom and life-experience (an age advantage), they actually performed *better* than under the youth advantage condition, a stereotype challenge effect. Hehman and Bugental suggest that one key difference in stigma experienced by younger versus older adults concerns the permanence of their group memberships. Young adults will grow past the stigma of "too young," but for older adults, "too old" is a permanent status. It may be that the temporary nature of young adults' group status protects them from the negative consequences of age-related stigma. Thus, it may be reasonable to conclude that the consequences of ageism for young adults are less pressing than those of old ageism. The same argument likely does not hold true for juvenile ageism, however, if we consider the potential lifelong consequences of our underfunding of education and caregiving, and the prevalence of child abuse and neglect.

Acknowledging Ageism Across the Life Course

The field of age studies needs to explore the parallels and disjunctures between old ageism, young adult ageism, and juvenile ageism. I initially approached the prospect of ageism against the young with reservations; I see "young" as a far more culturally privileged identity than "old," so it seems troubling to suggest age studies should focus more on youth. But there are practical benefits to be found in focusing on ageism across the life course.

Teaching – the activity that led me down this path in the first place – is one example where a life course approach to ageism may reap benefits. Many people have pointed to the need to teach about old ageism to students of all ages. Ideas about old age are formed when we are quite young: "Humans internalize age stereotypes about the same time as they do race and gender stereotypes, around four to six years of age, and their prejudices strengthen with age." (Marshall 2008/2009, 57) Thus, greater knowledge about aging, early in human lives, may be one route to addressing many issues of ageism. Teaching children about ageism *as it affects them* could be an important part of combatting juvenile ageism. Westman suggests that addressing juvenile ageism "requires a civil rights approach [...]. This means sensitizing the public to the existence of juvenile ageism and to the developmental requirements of childhood and adolescence." (2019, 80) Curriculum that helps children recognize that they have rights and that helps them identify behaviors and policies that threaten those rights may help children and parents alike be more willing to name maltreatment when they see it and may help increase parents' and others' willingness to invest in education and caregiving.

Certainly, teaching about ageism across the life course may have benefits when educating young adults about ageism. Presenting the arguments for juvenile ageism and young adult ageism can increase students' interest and show them their stake in the topic more directly than the message that they should care because they will someday be old. In teaching about ageism, one of my challenges is to help my traditional age college students recognize their own ageist thoughts and behaviors. This approach positions the students as perpetrators of ageism. In fall of 2019 while teaching my aging course, I adjusted my strategy to include readings that dealt with juvenile ageism and young adult ageism alongside my typical readings on old ageism and asked my students whether they felt these additional forms of ageism were more, less, or equally important to focus on as old ageism. While the majority indicated that all forms of ageism are equally important, there were students who advocated for the greater importance of each category of ageism. The resulting discussion was quite vigorous, and while I have only anecdotal memories to support this claim, my impression was that they were more comfortable debating ageism than were previous cohorts of students. The ability to see oneself as both perpetrator *and* victim of ageism seemed to help students more readily accept the widespread and under-acknowledged existence of ageism, and to more readily identify it as a problem in need of addressing.

In addition to its practical utility in teaching, I see another one of the key benefits of exploring ageism across the life course as the opportunity to create more intergenerational solidarity and to oppose the ways our media and our pol-

icies often pit "old against young." Westman sees key opportunities for political coalition between old and young: "The increasing vitality of the elderly may well enable grandparents, in particular, to devote time and energy to addressing juvenile ageism. In this way, the politically-represented segment of the population subjected to ageism could speak for the politically-unrepresented children who also are the victims of ageism." (1991, 253) Too often, policies or actions that benefit the old or the young are presented as coming at the expense of the opposing age group: "Kids vs. canes [...] makes great headlines." (Applewhite 2016, 22) Ageism activist Ashton Applewhite points out that the young and old are "least likely to be economically 'productive' in a capitalist system" and thus "ageism pits the disenfranchised against each other in order to maintain the power of the ruling class." (2016, 22) However, addressing the policies that devalue and disenfranchise those who care for the young and old is a project that, ostensibly, people of all ages could support, as "adults" are often the cohort that bears the time and financial burden of caregiving, educating, etc. Perhaps seeing ageism as a force across the life course may help us distort the perceived divides between Boomers and Millennials.

Unsettling "young" as a privileged term over "old" may help us think more critically about all age identities. Pushing for more respect for *all* parts of the life course, including childhood, would positively contribute to lessening all forms of ageism by decreasing adolescent desire to rush into the category of adulthood and generating less fear of leaving middle-adulthood behind. By considering ageism across the life course, we might increase the interest of both young and old in addressing the stigma and structural consequences of all forms of ageism.

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Heike Hartung

Confronting Loss when 'Life Changes in the Instant': Ageism and Successful Aging in the 'Case' of Joan Didion

Introduction: 'Ageism' and 'Successful Aging' as social and cultural constructs

From a social perspective, human aging is embedded in "social contexts and is shaped by social factors." (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer 2018, 1) When we over-generalize our "explicit and implicit assumptions about older people" to the extent that we ignore individual differences and "treat older people, ageing, and old age in a stereotypical manner," we participate in the discriminatory practice of 'ageism' (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer 2018, 1). First introduced by the American psychologist Robert Butler, ageism was defined by him in analogy to racism as "a systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old." (Butler 1989; quoted in Achenbaum 2015, 11)

From a cultural perspective, ageism can be related to the ambiguities inherent in narratives about the aging process itself, theorized in concepts such as the "dualism of aging" encompassing the two poles of a normative and healthy, self-reliant old age set against a decrepit, dependent old age, which emerged in American cultural narratives of the late nineteenth century (Cole 1992). As an aspect of the narrative construction of a culturally conceived age identity, ageism has been analyzed by Margaret Morganroth Gullette as a "decline narrative" that she distinguishes from age-related "narratives of progress." (1988, 2004) More recently, she has focused exclusively on the decline system of "ageisms, in the plural," (Gullette 2017, xviii) arguing that the concepts of aging and ageism are being conflated in contemporary American society to the degree that aging is seen as the "*process that serves as the trigger for ageism.*" (Gullette 2017, xiv [emphasis in original])

In order to analyze the relationship between aging, old age and ageism, I consider two different cultural age narratives that can be seen to interact in the instructive 'case' of the American writer Joan Didion. In the first of these narratives, Joan Didion was featured in 2015, at the age of 80, as 'the face' of the Parisian luxury brand Céline. This campaign, which is related to a recent in-

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crease in women in beauty advertisements belonging to the fourth age[1], builds on Didion's cultural authority as a journalist and writer, and on the glamour of the younger Didion. As a media icon in her eighties, Didion's 'case' can be seen as exceptional and as counteracting the "visual ageism"[2] of the media with their avoidance of the frailty of oldest age (Loos and Ivan 2018, 171). However, Didion's case also embodies the contradictions inherent in the discourse of successful aging, since she represents the positive age stereotype of the resilient older woman who is "allowed a certain visibility to tell us how to grow old gracefully." (Segal 2015)

Whereas the stereotypes on which ageism relies can be positive, they are more often negative images, even more frequently so when the focus is on older women. The positive stereotyping that is an aspect of the discourses of 'successful' or 'active aging,' available to the 'young old' or the 'third age', turns predominantly negative when the focus is on the 'oldest old' or the 'fourth age.' While the gerontological concept of "successful aging" was introduced in postwar America as an active aging paradigm set against "traditional narratives of decline" in old age, its primary focus on "individual adaptability and adjustment in later life" has been criticized as socially exclusionary, since "[b]oth access to the means of success, however defined, and the very definition of success itself are matters of social inequality." (Katz and Calasanti 2015, 27, 31) Thus, both ageism as a harmful decline narrative of old age and successful aging as an optimistic narrative of positive aging are based on ambiguities that come to bear on cultural images of aging. I will explore these ambiguities with reference to the second cultural age narrative of loss and grief that comes to bear on Joan Didion as the writer of two bestselling memoirs based on the devastating losses she experienced. Didion examines her grief after the sudden death of her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne, in *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), a text of "discovery" written against the insanity of grief (Fay-Leblanc 2018

1 For other examples, see Jerslev 2018, 350: "The past couple of years have seen a number of not-so-young and elderly celebrities and models figure prominently in campaigns for luxury fashion brands; among these are Leslie Winer for Vivienne Westwood (spring/summer 2014, including the ageing designer herself), Catherine Deneuve for Louis Vuitton (spring/summer 2014), Joni Mitchell for Saint Laurent (spring 2015), Julia Roberts for Givenchy (spring 2015), Bernadette Peters for Kate Spade (autumn 2016), Helen Mirren for L'Oreal (2015) and Jessica Lange for Marc Jacob's fragrance Beauty (2014)."

2 See Loos and Ivan 2018, 164: "We coined the term 'visual ageism' to describe the social practice of visually underrepresenting older people or misrepresenting them in a prejudiced way. [...] Visual ageism includes older adults being depicted in peripheral or minor roles without positive attributes; non-realistic, exaggerated, or distorted portraits of older people; and over-homogenized characterizations of older adults."

[2006], 126 – 127). She explores the subject of her own aging in her reflections on her only daughter Quintana's illness and death in *Blue Nights* (2011), maintaining that "like aging, Quintana's death wasn't supposed to happen." (Ulin 2018 [2011], 145) I will analyze these literary texts in order to show how Didion reflects on and counteracts aspects of American age ideology, encompassing both 'successful aging' and 'ageism', in the context of loss and grief.

Joan Didion for Céline: The 'Cool' Look and the 'Youthful Structure of the Look'

In the spring of 2015, Joan Didion featured in a campaign for the French luxury brand Céline. The photograph of her was shot by fashion photographer Jürgen Teller in his typically realist manner. Didion's aged face is frontally focused on and casts a shadow on the upper part of the wall. She is depicted in a domestic setting. She is wearing large black Céline sunglasses, a tight black dress and a large golden pendant necklace. The photograph can be linked to other previous media images of the younger Didion circulating on the internet which were taken in 1968, when the *Time* magazine commissioned photographer Julian Wasser to take photographs of Didion after her first essay collection *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) was published.

In these photographs, taken at the beginning of her writing career, the young Joan Didion is represented as 'cool,' 'detached' or 'tough,' initiating a style that has also been regarded as characterizing her writing (Daum 2015; Nelson 2017). The dark eyeglasses in the earlier photograph become her signature mark and recur – as a kind of quotation – in the Céline ad. In this way, the fashion photograph is situated in the life history of the well-known writer. According to Anne Jerslev, "[t]he fashion photograph constructs an unsentimental, edgy clash between a temporality of time passed inscribed in the ageing face and body, and a temporality of cool presence." (Jermyn and Jerslev 2017, 221) In chosing the 80-year-old Didion as the subject for their advertisement, Céline apparently resists the more prevalent association of beauty with youth in fashion photography. As Jerslev points out, youthful beauty is replaced in this ad for "a look of coolness, which is inscribed not only across the writer's ageing appearance but also across the whole ad through its invisible web of references to Didion's history and iconic portraits from her from the past decades." (Jerslev 2018, 355)

The fashion advertisement thus puts the aging face at the center emphasizing rather than hiding Didion's real age and her frailty. If the 'cool look' replaces the focus on youthful beauty to constitute a "kind of free space in old age, where

ageing is neither made invisible nor hypervisible," the question remains whether this representation of a cool aesthetic "expresses a subtle form of ageism, a new way of denouncing the signs of an ageing body and face by masquerading as young and trendy." (Jerslev 2018, 359)

Jerslev's analysis of the 'cool look' in its age ambiguity recalls Kathleen Woodward's notion of the 'youthful structure of the look' which she defines as "the culturally induced tendency to degrade and reduce an older person to the prejudicial category of old age." (2006, 164) Woodward links this concept closely to the ageism of visual mass culture and argues that the youthful structure of the look is further inflected by gender in that "the older female body [is rendered] both hypervisible and invisible." (2006, 163) She argues that in this structure the spectator is positioned as both younger and superior to the older person seen in an image or on the screen. In order to counteract this ageist structure of the look, Woodward highlights age performances by older women artists who focus on the difficult performance of 'psychic' age, which makes it possible to "contain different age-selves" within the aging process (2006, 166). Whereas Didion's performance of the 'cool look' in the Céline advertisement may be said to transform the normative and binary youth-old age system, I will now examine how this relationship is configured within Didion's own narrative style.

Joan Didion's Approach to Narrative: Ironic Detachment and 'Toughness'

Didion's agency in the context of ageism and successful aging is related to her own narrative interventions and the style for which she has become known: her cultural 'capital' as a well-known writer, journalist and public icon. The definition of 'cool' which Jerslev gives in the context of fashion defines it as "an attitude of detachment and aloofness that expresses a thought-out position on the edge. Cool is a public appearance, an expression of individualism, detachment and a certain superiority." (2018, 357) The aspects of detachment and aloofness in this definition are attributes often ascribed to Didion as a writer. Didion even keeps her 'coolness' in the face of the devastating losses she experienced, becoming a kind of role model of 'cool aging': "[W]e needed her to grow old before us and, even amid unthinkable personal tragedy, show that it's possible not only to remain visible and vital but also to remain unimpeachably, ineluctably cool." (Daum 2015) Didion's biographer Tracy Daugherty associates her coolness with her crafting "another persona, not entirely at odds with the Joan Didion in her formal writing but not completely consistent with it either" and regards this as

a strategy of creating a "brand" that was "first promoted by Didion herself." (2015, xxii)

In her recent book on 'tough' women writers, Deborah Nelson defines the 'unsentimental' approach to suffering and the representation of a painful reality that Didion shares with writers like Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, as a countertradition that provides an alternative to an ethics based on empathy:

> They [these women writers] neither sacralized pain nor remained indifferent to it, and in this way, they constitute a countertradition that has been mistaken for heartlessness and coldness. But it is, in fact, something else altogether, something I want to call toughness. They were drawn to suffering as a problem to be explored and yet remained deeply suspicious of its attractions. It is easy to confuse their toughness with indifference or callousness, but that would be to misconstrue their project. They sought not relief from pain but heightened sensitivity to what they called 'reality'. [...] In discourses where pain is a serious ethical and political question, as it was for them, the explanatory authority of trauma has rendered unintelligible both ordinary suffering and the *ordinariness* of suffering. (2017, 7–8 [emphasis in original])

Beginning her writing career during the 1960s, Joan Didion has been associated with the formal conventions of the 'New Journalism.' She shares the focus on experimentalism, the reinvention of journalistic forms, the insistence on authenticity and the emphasis on subjectivity. However, as Nelson points out, her acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the reporter leads her not to writing autobiographically but, rather, to a treatment of her own feelings as "part of the data." (2017, 149) Depersonalizing her own experience, narrative style, for Didion, is a moral imperative, which shapes her aesthetics. In her 1965 essay, "Questions about the New Fiction", Didion announces that "[t]o write with style is to fight lying all the way. [...] To tell something, really tell it, takes a certain kind of moral hardness." (quoted in Nelson 2017, 153) As a moral component of her style, 'hardness' is introduced into Didion's writing as an aspect of her Californian 'roots,' as a "coping mechanism that provides forward movement, no matter the cost." (Nelson 2017, 166–167)

More broadly, Didion's approach to narrative style can be seen as an interrogation of the progress narrative of the 'American Dream.' In a recent essay that relates Didion's writing to interrogations of this dream as a "destructive and evasive fantasy," Joel Alden Schlosser reads her work as "a site of struggle with and against a pervasive thought form in political life today." (2018, 28, 29) Schlosser sees her nonfiction as confronting the delusions of this 'dreamwork,' while he highlights her grief memoirs as a "culminating self-examination" that "prompts a reassessment of her entire life and a recognition of the delusions

under which it was lived." (2018, 29) Through rendering "intelligible what had been inarticulate," (2018, 37) Didion is thus involved with the analysis and rewriting of narratives of progress and decline in the context of her writing about old age, death and grief. At the same time, she questions the redemptive power or therapeutic function of narrative.

The Loss of the Husband, Grief and Narrative Resilience: The Year of Magical Thinking (2005)

Didion's approach to American progress and decline narrative and thus, to the ambiguities of ageism and successful aging, is at stake in her particular version of the grief memoir. During the last two decades, grief memoirs have become a popular form of life writing, of which the following characteristics have been identified: First, the narratives occupy a threshold space between intimacy/private grief and public mourning. Second, they provide a testament to the life of the departed and serve the function of remembrance. Third, they function as books of consolation and guidebooks for coping with loss, thus serving a therapeutic function. And fourth, in their focus on meaning-making out of life, grief memoirs are frequently concerned with 'anti-death writing' and constitute, thus, a literal form of 'life writing.' (Kusek 2017, 175)

As the British writer Julian Barnes suggests in his review of American grief memoirs by Joan Didion and Joyce Carol Oates, a change has occurred in Western societies' attitude towards death and grief, which entails that

> we in the secularising West [...] have got less good at dealing with death, and therefore its emotional consequences. Of course, at one level we know that we all shall die; but death has come to be looked upon more as a medical failure than a human norm. It increasingly happens away from home, in hospital, and is handled by a series of outside specialists – a matter for the professionals. But afterwards, we, the amateurs, the grief-struck, are left to deal with it – this unique, banal thing – as best we can. (2012, 216)

In the situation Barnes depicts, – the isolating experience of dying in modernity and the privatized response towards grieving – the imaginative writer's narrative response to grief can become a substitute guide to fellow suffers. In support of this, claims have been made that we are living in an age of the memoir, in which personal narratives written not only by established writers proliferate. In terms of their truth value or the possibility of truthfully representing the self or the other, however, biographical memoirs have been read critically, for instance, by Sigmund Freud: "Anyone turning biographer commits himself to lies, to conceal-

ment, to hypocrisy, to flattery, and even to hiding his own lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had." (quoted in Berman 2012, 11–12) In response to Freud's pessimistic view, Jeffrey Berman, who has written extensively on the grief memoir and what he calls 'the end-of-life memoir,' argues that the specific form of biography that focuses on the death of a person close to the writer offers truthful revelations, albeit mainly on the writing subject herself (2012, 12).

As we have seen, Joan Didion regards her writing style as a moral imperative to "fight lying all the way," which also determines her approach in *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Dwelling on the phrase "life changes in the instant" as the first words she wrote after the event, Didion describes the book as her attempt to "find the meaning" in the meaningless event of her husband's death (2006, 3, 8). While she is skeptical of the therapeutic function of narrative, she is concerned with telling the story of the first year after this death in order to restructure the perspective on life that has been disrupted by it. This disruption affects "any fixed idea I had ever had about death, about illness, about probability and luck, about good fortune and bad, about marriage and children and memory, about grief, about the ways in which people do and do not deal with the fact that life ends, about the shallowness of sanity, about life itself." (2006, 7)

At the beginning of this memoir Didion thus depicts the event of her husband's sudden death as triggering a loss of beliefs about life and the security of accumulated ideas about it throughout the life course. As a writer she resorts to narrative in order to recover this loss. In doing this throughout the memoir, Didion analyzes and rejects a number of familiar narratives she has employed throughout her life to construct her self identity. These narratives transport ideas of both decline and progress. They contain aspects of an American ideology of success concerning both age and death. These narratives include the personal dualism of "magical thinking" and "the question of self-pity;" family narratives of resilience and self-reliance as a form of progess narrative; the (American) narrative of success, management and control; and personal narratives of self identity which are linked to Didion's narrative style that encompasses chronology, repetition and attention to detail.

The connection between what Didion refers to repeatedly as "magical thinking" and "the question of self-pity" is their significance, even inevitability, in the context of her grief. "Magical thinking" refers to the "initial (and overwhelming) madness of grief" (Gilbert 2006, 553) and concerns Didion's "slippage from right reason" (Wood 2006) during her first year of grieving. It is also a kind of narrative that disputes facts and makes them rewritable. Didion describes how she rejects the idea of an obituary for John, regarding it as a kind of narrative that would inscribe the fact of his death. Instead she wonders, considering the time differ-

ence between New York and Los Angeles, whether they could have had "a different ending in Pacific time." (Didion 2006, 31)

She compares her thought processes to those of small children: "as if my thoughts or wishes had the power to reverse the narrative, change the outcome." (2006, 35) While Didion refers to this form of alternative thinking pejoratively as "disordered" or "delusionary thinking," "craziness" or "fund of superstition," (2006, 22, 35, 125) this strategy is also characterized by a sense of (narrative) agency and given a curative function in the context of grief. In an interview titled "Seeing Things Straight," Didion describes the writing process of this book as "discovery": "In retrospect, it is about a search for my own sanity and the discovery that I have it." (Fay-Leblanc 2018 [2006], 127)

By contrast, self-pity is repeatedly dismissed as a negative form of self-indulgence and set against narratives of resilience and self-reliance.[3] Self-pity is intimately linked to grief, but as something to be avoided at all costs. It is described by Didion as "the most universally reviled of our character defects, its pestilential destructiveness accepted as given." (2006, 193) While Didion dismisses and guards against the reiterated "question of self-pity," she nevertheless analyzes her shift from a relational to a singular self through the loss of her husband as a ground for self-pity: "We are repeatedly left [...] with no further focus than ourselves, a source from which self-pity naturally flows." (2006, 195)

Self-pity as a configuration of this narrative of grief can be seen as a form of internalized decline narrative, similar in its punitive results to (self-)ageism[4]. Although Didion analyzes grief as a natural source of self-pity, she remains aware of its negative attributes. If self-pity is part of a decline narrative Didion writes against in her memoir, narratives of progress she invokes include a family narrative of resilience and the American narrative of individual self-reliance. While the family narrative is drawn upon in times of crisis, – for instance, when she recalls her childhood training: "read, learn, work it up, go to the literature. Information was control." (2006, 44) – the American progress narrative is questioned by the inevitability of the crises which envelop Didion.

She describes a progress narrative of privilege with reference to the "habit of mind usually credited to the very successful," (2006, 98) namely their absolute belief in their management skills. This is an attitude she has shared, while questioning it at the same time even before her experience of loss. Didion reflects upon another facet of this progress narrative when she considers the limits of

3 As Jeffrey Berman points out in his book on spousal grief memoirs, Didion's memoir is, compared to those by other writers' books about their dead spouses, the one that is "the most self-blaming." (2010, 13)

4 On the concept of self-ageism or "implicit ageism," see Levy and Banaji 2002.

her ability to cope with grief. She ponders her self-narrative when she begins to feel physically "fragile, unstable" (2006, 167) and realizes "that my impression of myself had been of someone who could look for, and find, the upside in any situation." (2006, 171) That she is no longer able to do so again brings up for her the "self-pity question." (2006, 172)

Finally, the American narrative of progress is questioned in its punitive effects concerning death, when Didion dwells on "how open we are to the persistent message that we can avert death." This attitude towards death as an "anomaly" (Wood 2006) is linked by Didion to "its punitive correlative, the message that if death catches us we have only ourselves to blame." (Didion 2006, 206) Didion counteracts this ambiguous 'progress narrative' with her own narrative strategies.

Most concretely, she places the autopsy report against the punitive effects of the American narrative of success. Since the autopsy report names the heart condition that would eventually kill John Gregory Dunne, it serves as a kind of curative narrative, which allows Didion to "begin to believe" that she could not have prevented his death (2006, 206).

More generally, Didion's writing strategies serve to counteract the punitive aspects of "the question of self-pity" and the progress narrative of success in the context of grief. First, she identifies her own approach to narrative when she highlights the positive effect which the reading of Emily Post's 1922 book on funeral etiquette has on her: "This tone, one of unfailing specificity, never flags. The emphasis remains on the practical." (2006, 58)

Second, Didion resorts to her strategy of detailed and detached description to counteract a reflection on the meaninglessness of grief. In this passage towards the end of the book Didion rejects the expectation of healing or forward movement in grief memoirs to emphasize the extremity of grief in "the unending absence that follows, the void, the very opposite of meaning, the relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the experience of meaninglessness itself." (2006, 189) Against this pessimistic statement she places a narrative of the search for meaning and its recovery in earlier life stages, as a child, a wife and mother, finding meaning, for instance, in "the repeated rituals of domestic life." (2006, 190) This encompassing view of aging across the life course recalls what Kathleen Woodward terms 'psychic age': a more differentiated, complex form of age identity that allows for the simultaneous enactment of different age-selves that may counteract the pervasive cultural ageism.

Third, as Didion has pointed out in interview, she has tried "to write without style" and to keep the narrative "raw" rather than "polished" in her grief memoir. Even though she realizes that this is not entirely possible – "Then it became clear to me that is was written as opposed to not written. I had thought I was not

writing it" (Fay-Leblanc 2018 [2006], 127) – the style of the book in its rhythmic repetition of short, bare sentences is subdued.

Fourth, a strategy that Didion uses repeatedly in her memoir is a resort to chronology in her return to the scene of her husband's death.[5] This strategy seems to provide a minimal form of narrative in the chronology of events, which she can return to and rewrite, thus enacting the magic that keeps her close to her dead husband. In his analysis of the forms of historical writing, Hayden White has defined the chronicle, in contrast to the annals, a list of events, and the history proper as a fully realized story, as representing real events "to human consciousness in the form of unfinished stories." (1987, 5) Like the chronicle, Didion's memoir resists closure. Dwelling on her unwillingness to finish the memoir, Didion provides a scenic ending to it, which shows her swimming with her husband in and out of a cave on the coast of Southern California. Swimming with the tide entails, as her husband tells her, "to go with the change." (Didion 2006, 227) The closing image thus provides the possibility of consolation in a memoir that deals with progress and decline narrative by questioning both and providing an alternative narration of fragments that reconcile the contradictory tendencies coming to bear on grief.

Old Age, Frailty and the Loss of a Daughter: Blue Nights (2011)

Whereas *The Year of Magical Thinking* focuses on the early stages of grief rather than on coping strategies, it has been received as a 'successful' grief memoir seen in the context of literary elegy (Kelleter 2012, 542), the "[brilliant] elegy of a family," (Gilbert 2006, 556) turning, in its formal restraint, "grief into literature." (Pinsky 2005; McCrum 2016 [2005]) While the book ends on a hopeful note, the 2011 memoir dedicated to Quintana, *Blue Nights*, is characterized by darker undertones. Since both books were bestsellers, the memoir on Quintana's death has been measured against the earlier, unanimously praised book. Frank

5 In addition to this focus on time and chronology, Didion also introduces what she describes as "the vortex effect," (2006, 107) places that conjure up memories of the time before her husband died and her daughter became seriously ill. These memories often have painful effects, which she depicts as hitting "more dangerous water." (2006, 110) For a more extended analysis of "the interrelated concepts of grief as spatialized experience, place as preserver of and trigger for memories, and remembering as a crucial aspect of the mourning process" in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, see Bladek 2014, 935–952, here 940.

Kelleter, for instance, highlights questions of taste when he asks whether there is not something indelicate about one single writer producing two 'classics' of grief literature (Kelleter 2012, 545). On a more serious note, he points out that there is a pervasive sense of Didion's retreat from life and of her fight against the urge to commit suicide (2012, 546), a topic that is introduced in the book's second chapter. Various reviewers emphasize the fact that the book focuses more on Didion's own experience of old age, frailty and the closeness of death than on the loss of her daughter Quintana. Didion's intensely self-questioning stance in the book has been perceived as an instance of "staging herself." (Wilmers 2011) Pointing out that the two books describe widely different events, – the death of a husband as a common aspect of human experience is set against the tragic loss of a child as "unmitigated chaos: which writer could ever hope to exact order from it?" (Cusk 2011) – Rachel Cusk ultimately dismisses *Blue Nights* as Didion's failure to master her material, which instead manifests her "fragility, the dwindling and fading of the artist's ability to create order out of the randomness and chaos of experience." (2011)

Blue Nights has two beginnings as well as two topics: Didion's loss of her only child Quintana and her sudden awareness of her own aging and frailty. Although it is linked to the focus on loss, the narrative does not deny its autobiographical impulse. Rather than seeing the memoir as a failure, I would argue that it addresses both mourning, old age and frailty in unorthodox ways, which are represented in an intensely ambiguous narrative.[6] While the first chapter is descriptive and sets the tone of the memoir in its use of second-person narrative, – the 'you' that can be both an address to the reader and a kind of soliloquy – the second chapter as a second beginning introduces Quintana in a dramatic visualization of her wedding day as a memory of Didion's of exactly seven years ago. The descriptive first chapter evokes the distinctive atmosphere of the 'blue hour,' in characteristic detail, as a material phenomenon before turning, at the end, to a definition of the title that remains ambiguous: "Blue nights are the opposite of the dying of the brightness, but they are also its warning." (Didion 2012, 4) Thus the beginning of the book presents a paradox in its dual concern with illness, aging and death, on the one hand, and the more positive associations of the blue nights, on the other hand, which are then qualified by the warning at the end of the sentence.

6 For a reading that stresses the contradictions and dualism in Didion's memoir, see also Robert Kusek, who defines the text as a paradigmatic form of autobiography that is, in the words of Nancy K. Miller, an act of "writing against death twice: the other's and one's own." (quoted in Kusek 2017, 171)

The dramatic second chapter provides a scenic description of Quintana on her wedding day, presenting her "sentimental choices," a phrase that is repeated throughout the chapter (Didion 2012, 6, 7), for her special day, linking them, both to Quintana's and to Didion's own memories of earlier family scenes. Other phrases that are rhythmically repeated throughout the chapter, reinforcing the trope of memory, are "This was like yesterday" and "Time passes." (Didion 2012, 8, 13, 16, 17) Thus the second chapter provides a detailed and positive image of Quintana on her wedding day, which at the same time sets the frame for Didion's experience of loss. It also includes many of the stylistic elements and themes of the memoir: the interrelation of memories of daughter and mother; abrupt changes of focus like the topic of Didion's feelings of loss in relation to places, to her moving from California to New York; the indirect introduction of the topic of suicide with reference to a psychologist's book on people's very ordinary reasons for doing it; a return to the topic of the loss of a child, which introduces another sentence that is repeated throughout the memoir: "When we talk about mortality we are talking about our children." (Didion 2012, 13, 16, 54)

The way in which the chapter introduces different topics, times and places by juxtaposing scenes rather than developing them in narrative sequence is characteristic for the memoir. Didion links the wedding day to the two other events that happened later that year, – the sudden death of her husband and her daughter's illness – and highlights their unconnectedness, how "utterly unprepared" she was for them, measuring the twenty months during which her whole life changed against the rhetorical questions she addresses to herself or to the reader. This strategy of repetitive sentence structures, questions or short declarative sentences or paragraphs, underlines the unexpected aspects of her experience, which lends the prose at the same time a dramatic or lyrical quality. Furthermore, this rejection of developmental narrative fits with Didion's view of aging. At the end of the chapter she dwells on the idea of time passing to describe her own experience of aging as something that happens in a similarly sudden way as her experience of loss. Rather than perceiving aging as a gradual development she becomes old and frail in an 'instant':

> Could it be that I did not figure in either the general nature or the permanence of the slowing, the irreversible changes in mind and body, the way in which you wake one summer morning less resilient than you were and by Christmas find your ability to mobilize gone, atrophied, no longer extant? [...] The way in which your awareness of this passing time – this permanent slowing, this vanishing resilience – multiplies, metastasizes, becomes your very life?
>
> *Time passes.*
> Could it be that I never believed it?
> Did I believe the blue nights could last forever? (Didion 2012, 17)

The end of the second chapter thus reveals the specific relationship to 'time passing,' to her own instant awareness of old age (rather than aging) and frailty, as ways in which Didion in *Blue Nights* approaches also the topic of loss.

In her analysis of the many meanings Didion attaches to frailty in her memoir, linking it to "the death of her daughter as well as to her own body," Kathleen Woodward argues that frailty is also a kind of turning point in this narrative that resists notions of development: "Frailty is the word that marks a *before* and an *after* in her life, a definitive sea change." (2015, 351) As Woodward points out, research in the social sciences has revealed that older people usually avoid describing themselves as frail, since frailty is still perceived as a stigma. Didion's directly addressing and foregrounding "this issue of frailty" in *Blue Nights* can be seen as courageous (2012, 106), since she has been accused, in an ageist review of the book by Caitlin Flanagan, of the "'crime' of getting old." (quoted in Woodward 2015, 355) While frailty is an important issue in Didion's awareness of old age in *Blue Nights*, her resilience also remains an important part of this narrative endeavor. As Jeffrey Berman points out: "It takes resilience to survive the death of one's husband and daughter, to give interviews and lectures, and to write about frailty. She has always written with power and conviction, and her creativity shows no sign of failing her." (2015, 167)

Conclusion

Didion's performance of the 'cool look' in the 2015 Céline campaign is placed against her frail old age and serves to transform the normative youth-old age system. In her grief memoirs, Didion challenges aspects of American age ideology in the context of grief in her narrative strategies. Exploring the ambiguities of ageism and successful aging, *The Year of Magical Thinking* analyzes and rewrites the narratives of progress and decline in the 'magical' invocations of her dead husband and the self-examination of her grief. In the first memoir, these narrative strategies encompass the search for meaning and its recovery in earlier life stages, thus promoting an age identity that focuses on the simultaneity of psychic age rather than on developmental models of aging. Resisting closure, *The Year of Magical Thinking* provides a minimal form of narrative, the chronicle, that lists events without narrative conclusion. In denying the notion of development that invokes narratives of either progress or decline, Didion creates an alternative narrative structure to make sense of her loss. In *Blue Nights,* she extends this strategy of alternative narration into a performance of frailty. As another way of counteracting the ambiguous American progress narrative of suc-

cess, she rewrites aging into an instant occurrence, drawing on a narrative style of rhythmic and lyrical repetition.

As a prolific writer and media icon, Joan Didion's is, of course, a privileged case, in which the contradictions of the decline narrative of ageism are qualified by her easy access to the means of success. Nevertheless, the ambiguities of both ageism and successful aging shape her narrative engagements. If the 'cool look' replaces the focus on youthful beauty in the Céline campaign by highlighting Didion's fragile old age, her writing style of ironic detachment and 'toughness' provide her with agency and serve to reveal the contradictory tendencies of decline and progress narrative as they come to bear on loss and grief.

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The Arts and Old Age

Núria Casado-Gual

Exploring Old Age Through the Theatre: Three British Senior Theatre Companies

In a seminal article published in 2012, Valerie Barnes Lipscomb states that theatre studies can enrich the interdisciplinary study of ageing from at least three angles: as a way to analysis of the phenomenon of ageism, as an instrument to develop a narrative approach to ageing, and, finally, by taking into account the "performative" aspect of age and ageing, which the theatre is a natural means of expressing. A fourth perspective could regard the theatre as a potential source of exchange between academics, artists and the community, where meanings of age can be circulated and, consequently, an integrative, more complex, more enriching discourse on ageing can be constructed. In the light of these complementary perspectives, this paper explores the case of three British senior theatre companies that contribute to an enriching an "age-wise" conversation between the community and the artistic and academic domains. Our analysis is based on fieldwork conducted with the members of Ages and Stages (associated with the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and closely related to Keele University), the Feeling Good Theatre Company (based at Leeds Playhouse) and the Elders Company (from the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester). We draw on recent developments in the increasingly interconnected fields of ageing and theatre studies to provide our theoretical framework (Basting 1998; Bernard et al. 2015; Lipscomb 2016; Mangan 2013), as well as data from participant observation, interviews conducted with the companies between May and July 2018, and some of their most recent scripts. The theatrical and social practices reflected in these testimonial and creative texts will be examined in order to observe the social practices these ensembles promote, and the cultural capital they generate for an anti-ageist society. As will be shown, through their emancipatory resort to the theatre both as a vehicle of self-expression and of social empowerment, Ages and Stages, Feeling Good, and The Elders Company can be aligned with an "affirmative" discourse of ageing (Sandberg 2013) which transcends the theatrical spaces they inhabit.

Introduction

The themes of ageing and, in particular, old age, have been part of the history of drama since its origins. However, critical attention to "ageing" within theatre

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studies is much more recent. This should not come as a surprise, considering the short trajectory of cultural gerontology as a field. Nonetheless, in her seminal book *Aged by Culture*, Margaret Morganroth Gullette used the theatre as an invaluable cultural frame to discuss age as a construct (2004), and even before then, Anne Davis Basting had explored the potential of theatre to undermine rigid views of ageing (1995, 1998). Since then, the connection between ageing or age studies and theatre studies has started to bear significant fruits through the academic work of other scholars like Michael Mangan (2013), Elinor Fuchs (2014, 2016), Valerie Barnes Lipscomb (2012, 2016), Bridie Moore (2014, 2018), and Sheila McCormick (2017), to name but a few. Inspiring theatre-based research projects, such as those conducted by Miriam Bernard and David Amigoni at Keele University (Bernard et al. 2015) or Anne Davis Basting at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Basting et al. 2016), and other academic initiatives around performance and age, such as monographic volumes (Lipscomb and Marshall 2010; Goldman and Switzky 2016; Bronk 2017; Gough and Nakajima 2019), or a working group led by Julia Henderson and Ben Gillespie within the Canadian Association of Theatre Research (2017–2020), have contributed to the growth of what is nowadays a thriving area of ageing studies.

In a pioneering article published in 2012, Lipscomb states that theatre can enrich the interdisciplinary study of ageing from at least three angles: it may be regarded as a source of analysis of the phenomenon of ageism; it can be considered another instrument to develop a narrative approach towards ageing; and, finally, it enhances the "performative" aspect of age and ageing, for which the theatre is a natural element of expression. As a complement to this triple perspective, a fourth view could be added, regarding theatre as a potential source of exchange, whereby meanings of age can be circulated and, consequently, an integrative discourse of ageing can be re-constructed. This fourth view is developed by different projects involving senior theatre, but is especially implemented by those that connect local communities with artistic and/or academic institutions. These fruitful interdisciplinary and transversal forms of collaboration have generated spaces of communication with a strong potential to overcome social barriers of different kinds, including those generated by age-based stereotypes. Nevertheless, as Lucy Munro and Miriam Bernard claim, "[d]espite many valuable critiques, the role that older people play in making theatre . . . is poorly understood" (2015, 61).

This chapter attempts to give academic consideration to senior theatre as a source of anti-ageist artistic practices and, consequently, of alternative conceptualisations of ageing. In particular, three British senior theatre companies that successfully create, to borrow Gullette's pun (2011), an "age-wise" circle of conversation between communities and their respective artistic or academic do-

mains will be considered as case studies. These are "Ages and Stages", the company formed within Bernard's age-and-theatre project with the New Vic Theatre from Newcastle-under-Lyme; Feeling Good Theatre Company, the long-lasting ensemble associated with Leeds Playhouse; and The Elders Company, based at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. A corpus of unpublished playscripts written by and/or for these companies serves as the basis for the study. These plays are examined through close readings developed within the framework of ageing studies, complemented with data from fieldwork conducted with the three companies in 2018.[1] These data were mostly obtained through participant observation in workshop sessions of two of the three ensembles (Ages and Stages and The Elders Company), as well as through several semi-structured interviews with members of the three companies and their artistic directors.

The analysis of the companies' creative processes and their resulting playscripts, together with the consideration of testimonial narratives generated by our fieldwork, enhance the integrative, anti-ageist and developmental view of old age that these ensembles promote. In particular, the work produced by Ages and Stages, Feeling Good, and The Elders Company can be aligned with an "affirmative" discourse of ageing, in Linn Sandberg's terms (2013), which surpasses deeply-rooted cultural binaries of decline and success related to old age and youth, respectively. As will be shown, the dramaturgical mechanisms whereby the three formations re-present old age in their plays, as well as the artistic strategies through which those mechanisms are prompted and explored, foster a complex representation of later life that both counteracts and at the same time accepts and highlights the so-called challenges of age. The chapter is divided into two sections, which correspond to the double observation of the companies' dramaturgical and workshop methods. The conclusions of the study de-

1 I would like to thank Dr Mim Bernard, Dr David Amigoni, and Dr Dana Rosenfeld for their generous hospitality during my research stay at Keele University between May and June 2018, as well as the directors Jill Rezzano, Andy Barry, Nicky Taylor, Machteld De Ruyck, and the members of the three companies studied in this chapter, for having shared their work and experiences with me. Very especially, I am grateful to Jill and the members of Ages and Stages for having welcomed me in their rehearsals in the last term of their 2017–2018 season, and having made me feel part of the company for a while. Their work will remain a source of inspiration for me, both as an academic and theatre maker. I would also like to thank the José Castillejo mobility programme for young researchers of the Spanish Ministry of Education, which allowed me to conduct this study; Dr Andrea von Hülsen-Esch, for having invited me to the international symposium in cultural gerontology she organised in Hanover in 2018, where I presented the first results of my research on senior theatre; my colleagues from the Canadian Association in Theatre Studies, with whom I shared an analysis of my fieldwork at the 2019 conference in Vancouver; and Ms Inesa Shevchenko, for her help in the transcriptions of the interviews.

scribe the companies' particular ways of using theatre as a vehicle of self-expression and social empowerment for the anti-ageist agenda they all have in common, an ideological feature that mainstream theatre is only beginning to display.

Re-Presenting Old Age: Dramaturgical Mechanisms for an Anti-Ageist Theatre

In an extensive review of the cultural value derived from experiences of theatre-making by older people, Bernard and Michelle Rickett contend that, with very few exceptions, "the aesthetic quality of older people's drama" and the "transformative potential of devised productions, derived from co-constructed research with older people" remains under-researched (2016, 22–23). Indeed, the scripts that result from some of the workshops and co-devised work of the companies considered in this chapter offer an interesting source from which both their theatrical creativity as well as the narrative of age that results from it can be observed. Significantly, their plays tend to avoid, or even explicitly confront, the "declinist" view of old age that is found at the heart of ageism and which, according to Elinor Fuchs, is mostly generated by the predominantly peak-and-fall structures of Aristotelian/dramatic/naturalistic dramaturgical models (2014, 72; 2016, 153). Working within the incipient interconnection between theatre and ageing studies, Fuchs has initiated an inspiring theoretical framework whereby lifecourse theory is interwoven with the creative and ideological implications of Brechtian theatre. In her theatrical theory of age, Fuchs recognises the capacity of Brechtian or epic theatre to promote a developmental view of ageing, and so contest what she denominates "the Sublime of Age", namely, "a visceral horror of physical decrepitude" (2014, 70). This declinist "sublime" corresponds to a conceptualisation of age that the senior theatre companies observed here clearly resist through their epic, anti-Aristotelian scripts. Indeed, Ages and Stages, Feeling Good Company, and The Elders Company clearly promote a Brechtian approach to theatre whereby an open and, hence, developmental model of theatre-and-ageing, understood in Fuchs' terms, is generated. Either as an explicit or implicit response to the mis-representation of older people in the mainstream stage, which the members of Feeling Good and Ages and Stages acknowledge in their focus-groups discussions (Ages and Stages 2018; Feeling Good 2018b), the texts in which the performers of these companies tell their own stories broaden the narrative of old age through the use of eclectic dramaturgical devices.

The anti-decline discourse of active ageing that underlies their creations is made explicit in the founding documents of the Feeling Good Company, which is defined as "a group of older people dedicated to challenging the negative stereotyping that often surrounds the older generation" through the presentation of "real and positive images of later life" in their shows (Dobson 2018). Over their eighteen-year history, Feeling Good has produced successful shows for Leeds Playhouse and other community centres in West Yorkshire. The active-ageing ideology of their original, often commissioned, pieces entails an emphasis on the older person's capacities, and places the ageing body centre-stage as a source of ongoing physical and social activity. This is clearly the case for *Active Ageing* (Feeling Good 2018a), a piece that highlights the negative effects of passive lifestyles, and connects them with the characters' chronic ailments. It is also reflected in *The Look of Love* (Feeling Good 2013b), in this case through the show's physical-theatre approach, which enhances the performers' body as a source of beauty and places the actors' emotional life centre-stage. In a similar vein, *Benchmark* (Feeling Good 2013a) exploits the polysemic power of the theatrical sign (an element of the setting, in this case) to generate a palette of characters who reflect "an often unseen positive image of ageing" (West Yorkshire Theatre 2013). While using a clichéd image of old age (namely, that of ageing characters sitting on a bench), the piece subverts declinist views of later life through its dialogues and situations, in which humour plays an important role. Indeed, comedy is the main genre and acting register whereby the members of this company convey their anti-decline narrative of old age. At the same time, their scripts avoid the superficial optimism of the successful-ageing discourse by resorting to self-parody in order to integrate negative aspects of ageing, such as social isolation or fragility, without making them the sole defining features of the experience of growing older. A clear example of this is the sequence of comic sketches in *Doorstep Crime* (Feeling Good 2014), through which the company shows different scams that older people who live by themselves could fall victim to. The comic twist is often found at the end of every sketch, where the performers empower their older viewers to respond to this extended form of crime by increasing their awareness of its methods.

At Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, the Elders Company and their artistic director Andrew Barry have developed a rich repertoire of adaptations and also devised plays that draw from different theatrical styles. In one of their most recent original shows, *Moments that Changed Our World* (Barry 2018a), physical and visual theatre are combined with reminiscence theatre to convey a collective "life review" that is inextricably related to the performers' current age identities. Through the text's fusion of personal and public moments of transition, the show interweaves the different life stories of the cast with the issues of gender,

sexuality, class, and race that intersect with the performers' experience of ageing. To mention an example, Graham develops a life narrative in which his homosexuality becomes a source of marginalisation as well as of identity. At the same time, he defines himself as a "baby-boomer" (Barry 2018a, 6), and, as such, his "coming-out" story is inextricably bound up with and conditioned by his generational identity. The other testimonial stories of the play complete the theatrical collage of personal experiences of ageing through the lens of identity politics, and all of them culminate in the acquisition of age-related identities as pensioners (Barry 2018a, 9), grandparents (Barry 2018a, 11), and, in all cases, theatre artists (Barry 2018a, 12). Interestingly, the participants' varied late-life self-definitions refer to the experience of growing older as a continuous process of development and self-realisation in which past and present become conflated and, in this way, a more complex sense of self emerges out of this new timeframe. As Brenda vividly puts it when re-enacting her debut as a senior performer: "That was when I knew. THIS IS ME! THIS IS WHO I AM! This is where I am meant to be. THAT WAS MY MOMENT!" (Barry 2018a, 12). Through its multi-temporal angles, and its amalgam of class-, gender-, sexuality-, race-, and age-related stories, The Elders' latest piece generates a polyhedral "age autobiography", in Gullette's terms (2004, 26), in which "[a]ging becomes maturation, change, history -more complex than a simple minus or a plus" (2004, 10). At the same time, by using an epic montage structure that highlights "moments" rather than a sequential narrative, the piece enhances the multi-dimensional experience of time that becomes more evident in later stages of life (Baars 2012), while at the same time acknowledging the various ages that are contained within the performers' testimonial stories. On the whole, *Moments that Changed Our World* is an "age-defying" piece, to use a term from Barry's evaluation report for this piece (2018c, 13), insofar as it challenges reductive assumptions about old age that some of the performers themselves had internalized when approaching the retirement age – "I'm not one of them!", claimed Brenda, in her ironic recollection of her 60th birthday (Barry 2018a, 9). But, more than "age-defying", it is an age-*defining* show, inasmuch as it stresses the complex age-identity resulting from the accumulation of perspectives and experiences over time.

Under the direction of Jill Rezzano, since its creation in 2009, Ages and Stages has also developed dramaturgies with an overtly anti-ageist orientation. Resulting from a research project co-led by Bernard at Keele University and The New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme, one of the distinctive features of this company's theatrical style is the frequent use of audience participation. As expressed in one of their shows, significantly entitled *Live Age Conversation:* "We believe that what you have to say, what audiences have to say is as important as what is said on stage" (Rezzano 2012, 14). Directly related to the Forum-

theatre techniques of their training, their plays frequently break the fourth wall to ask audience members about the meanings certain scenes bear for them. Moreover, some of their plays involve collaborations with the New Vic's young company, which fosters intergenerational exchange on and off the stage. The intergenerational piece *Our Age, Our Stage* (Rezzano 2012), the first in the company's history, combines documentary drama, reminiscence drama, and an open-ended, forum-theatre structure that emphasises the cultural value that the Old and New Vic Theatres have had for several generations in their respective communities. *Live Age Conversation* (Rezzano 2012), which similarly pays tribute to the city of Stoke-on-Trent, where the Old Vic theatre was built, uses maps as symbolic props, and associates the cultural and historical heritage of Stoke with the actors' bodies, experiences, and words, as well as with those of the audience. In *Out of the Box* (Rezzano n.d.), which uses a TV contest as dramaturgical framework, the "viewers" of the show are invited to think of art and culture as sources of (self)-transformation for all ages (Rezzano n.d., 9). *Happy Returns* is another inter-generational play that illustrates the effects of ageism across the lifespan (Rezzano 2013, 17). The play, which once again creates a space of exchange among different generations in the audience (Rezzano 2013, 17), finishes with an open-ended scene in which an exchange of birthday presents and cards helps the audience examine and question "age appropriateness" (Rezzano 2013, 19). The final sequence concludes with an invitation to the audience members to say what birthday present they would like to receive in the future (Rezzano 2013, 20). Significantly, this ending enables the visualisation of the viewers' older selves as having specific desires and needs that may differ, or not, from their current ones, while at the same time presenting age as a "performative" in which the possibility to "do / imagine / write" one's age-identity remains both personal and open at all stages.

Rehearsing Age: The Unlimited Re-Creation of Later-Life

Through their rich dramaturgical forms and age narratives, the shows devised or co-devised by the three companies render old age a cultural engine, more than a receptacle. This provides an interesting contrast to the predominant idea that older people play an important role in the theatre only as an predominant component of its audiences. If, as maintained by Bernard and Rickett (2016, 23), further research into the aesthetic and transformative power of senior theatre "could enhance our understanding of the cultural value *provided by* older peo-

ple, rather than just the value they derive from their participation", the image of older people as potential theatre practitioners and, therefore, as significant generators of culture, would pave the way for a truly anti-ageist theatre.

As shown in interviews and focus-group discussions with the participants and their directors, these companies's shows are transformative for those involved in their own right. Nonetheless, the creative processes from which they emerge also need to be examined, in order to understand how far these plays' integrative narratives of age continue to circulate beyond their theatrical domain. Through the conversations they generate on and beyond the stage, the three companies promote a developmental view of old age in which late-life creativity plays a key role. In her theatrical theory of age, Fuchs recognises the capacity of Brechtian or epic theatre to promote a developmental view of ageing (2014, 70). Indeed, the companies considered in this paper clearly promote a Brechtian approach to theatre to generate an anti-declinist view of old age. To start with, the members of Ages and Stages, the Elders Company, and Feeling Good are all active participants in seasonal rehearsal processes that are not necessarily aimed at devising a specific show. The sense of openness favoured by the companies' rehearsal processes reinforces a positive, dynamic view of later-life creativity, since every session paves the way for a new discovery, challenge, or lesson, for which performers are ready.

The rehearsal methods adopted by these companies are also Brechtian in the way they use anti-naturalistic aesthetics and, hence, allow for "anything to happen" in their minimalistic *mise-en-scènes*. This includes the emancipation of the ageing body itself from the constraints of the realist scene. Naturalistic drama tends to emphasise the actor-characters' "chronological" and "social" ages, to the detriment of their "personal" age, to use Kathleen Woodward's understanding of the age construct (1991, 149). By contrast, in the anti-naturalistic settings employed by these companies, the actors' bodies may express the performers' "personal age" and, in this way, their characters become simultaneously "ageless" and "multi-aged", depending on the situation. Especially through the frequent use of improvisation as both creative and training device, social and cultural readings of the actors' chronological and biological ages are often ignored and/or even transgressed. The Elders Company and, particularly, Ages and Stages, play with the life cycle as if it was a non-linear, malleable continuum of stages, whose associated masks actors can freely put on or remove. On the other hand, the members of Feeling Good prefer to align their chronological age with that of their characters, enhancing, in this way, the value of their later years (Feeling Good 2018b). In fact, the company's first name was "Act Your Age", which was also the title of their first show, intended to revalidate what it means to be an older person. However, they also defy essentialist

views of old age through the stories they focus on, and equally resort to the bare stage as a source of dialectic drama.

Through the companies' dramaturgical openness and epic theatricality, participants co-construct a critical artistic language whereby they may regard themselves in both the first- and the third-person, very much in the way that Fuchs, drawing from Brecht and the age critic Kathleen Woodward, defines the "estraged" or "detached" form of subjectivity that is produced in later life (2016, 144). This "double gaze", or "double consciousness", which Michael Mangan identifies as part and parcel of the art of acting as well as of the process of ageing (2013, 37), is inherent in the creative laboratory format adopted by the three companies. The "double form of being" implicit in acting and in the experience of ageing enables the members of the three groups to integrate the process of growing older within an artistic medium that can also be extended to other members of the community. As Rezzano argue (2018), the rehearsal period of Ages and Stages keeps the participants' creative flow open, and simultaneously prepares them to become enthusiastic co-leaders of outreach workshops. In a similar vein, the members of Feeling Good contribute to "Heydays" (Leeds Playhouse 2018), the creative programme for people over fifty-five run by Leeds' Playhouse (Feeling Good 2018b). Likewise, the actors of the Elders Company "graduate" from the company's training programme after a year of membership, becoming collaborators with the company's new members (Barry 2018b).

The personal and critical interpretations of old age that result from these companies' creative work and their related forms of social engagement are clearly reflected in personal interviews and focus-group discussions. Both participants and directors re-conceptualise old age in three main ways: a) as a phase in which a new kind of creativity can emerge, b) as a stage of self-validation, and c) as a source of positive change. The alternative narrative they co-construct through these views can be directly related to Sandberg's conceptualisation of "affirmative ageing", in that it is derived from the practitioners' direct knowledge and experience with their own acting/ageing bodies, whose "material specificities" are not denied, but rather "understood as possessing force and agency to also shape subjectivity and society" (2013, 17). The participants' corporeal, personal, and social engagement with the theatre enables them to define their later-life creativity in anti-declinist terms, as therapeutic (Ages and Stages 2018), empowering (Feeling Good 2018b) and closely connected with physical manifestations of quality of life (Ages and Stages 2018) – and, more significantly, as freer and braver (Ages and Stages 2018; Barry 2018b), more focused on the present moment (Barry 2018b), more complex in terms of skills and philosophical in inclination (Ages and Stages 2018), and more critical (Feeling Good 2018b), especially in comparison with creative work from earlier life stages. At

the same time, the creative opportunities offered by the companies' projects inform a predominantly positive perception of old age as an "equally enjoyable" life stage in comparison to other phases of life, comparable to "the best job [one could] ever ha[ve]", in which new forms of "fulfilment" are found (Ages and Stages 2018). Even the most negative response offered by one of the interviewees ("I have found this part of my life the worst time ever. From the age of seventy onwards, I've struggled every bit of the way") is also positively connected with the theatre: the interviewee says that she joined the company to overcome her personal difficulties. Finally, the participants' integrative views of old age clearly present the ageing body as a continuous agent of "difference". Such "difference", as Sandberg interprets it, borrowing from Deleuze (2013, 19), is not a form of alterity, but, on the contrary, a source of positive change.

Both participants and directors are aware of the counter-model that their projects represent, not only in the spaces of performance in which they intervene but also within the broader context of theatre. One of the actresses of Ages and Stages, expressing the group's general opinion, would like to "get away from the standard typical old person and old person's problems" that, all too often, are associated with tragic and biased renderings of dementia. Similarly, the members of Feeling Good and Ages and Stages describe the personal and social barriers they break down through their community projects, including reductive views of old age. All three artistic directors allude to the anti-ageist ideology underlying many of their artistic strategies and practices, such as developing a digitalised narrative of ageing for a particular show (Barry 2018b), or making it a basic principle that participants lead or co-lead their own work (Rezzano 2018; Ruyck 2018).

Conclusions

The creative processes of three senior companies writing, producing, and promoting theatre in the UK today constitute important anti-ageist practices, both through the anti-decline and diverse image of old age offered in their workshops, and the sense of agency they confer – not only to their performers, but to their audiences and workshop participants. Having considered their "epic" rehearsal methods, their eclectic dramaturgical styles, and the age narratives their work processes produce, we argue that Feeling Good, The Elders Company, and Ages and Stages offer diverse models of age-performativity and age-ideology, where old age is presented as a dynamic category. At the end of our research, the three ensembles continued to extend the circle of their re-presentation of age to more sectors of the local community, by recruiting new members (Elders

Company), producing new intergenerational shows with participants of different ages and social backgrounds (Feeling Good), and organising an annual arts festival in which ageing is foregrounded as a source of creativity (Ages and Stages).

It is worth noting that the affirmative model of ageing favoured by these ensembles contrasts significantly with the predominance of the narrative of decline on the mainstream stage (Mangan 2013; Bronk 2017), where, as Gullette contends, being "the oldest person in the dramatis personae is suddenly glued to cognitive weakness" (2016, 231). As shown by Lipscomb, the dialogue between research, professional arts, and community theatre is difficult, but not impossible (2016; and the theatre (in both professional and non-professional contexts) still has much to offer in the exploration of the intricacies of ageing and in the circulation of meanings ascribed to old age. In considering these three companies here, we have attempted a modest contribution to an field, one that invites further research into different socio-cultural contexts in which senior theatre is thriving, and which, hopefully, will generate more "age-wise" representations and conversations.

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Emma Domínguez-Rué

A Spinster with a Twist: The Amateur Sleuth and Perspectives on Ageing and Gender in the Sunday Philosophy Club Series

Introduction

It is almost a hundred and fifty years since the American writer Anna Katharine Green (1846 – 1935) wrote *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), the first of a series of detective novels featuring the amateur sleuth Amelia Butterworth. Green's character is considered to be the literary mother of all the spinster detectives of the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction, among them the celebrated Miss Jane Marple. Since then, a flock of amateur sleuths has populated the pages of detective fiction, displaying, among other things, how the status of women has evolved alongside the genre. As Kathleen Klein notes,

> The stereotype of the woman detective – the elderly spinster, the naive young woman, the bored housewife – has never been easy to sustain. The contemporary crop of detecting women is not only a critique of those earlier stereotypes and a promise for women's roles in a more open future society but also a challenge to the limitations of women's current roles. (1995, 12)

This paper contends that Alexander McCall Smith's Sunday Philosophy Club series provides yet another example of such evolution. McCall Smith's unusual detective stories, while broadly following the conventions of classic Anglo-American detective fiction, propose a gentler alternative to the more cynical, violent version of the genre prominent in contemporary detective fiction. In turn, the character Isabel Dalhousie, a philosopher and amateur sleuth, initially seems to be a classic Marple-like detective who unexpectedly ends up making different life choices, becoming a wife and mother in her mid-forties – thereby subverting negative stereotypes about women and ageing.

Alexander McCall Smith (1948–) was born in Bulawayo, in the former British colony of Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe). One of the most prolific authors in contemporary fiction in English, he was a professor of Medical Law at the University of Edinburgh and a member of the UNESCO International Bioethics Commission, while serving as vice-chairman of the UK's Human Genetics Commission and sitting on a number of other bio-ethics committees. In 2005 he

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abandoned all his professional activities to dedicate himself fully to literature, which he calls "a cathartic experience" (McCall Smith 2007). McCall Smith has written more than a hundred volumes (most of them after the age of fifty), including novels, children's books, short stories, non-fiction, and several series. Among the latter are the celebrated No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency novels, featuring beloved Precious Ramotswe, the 44 Scotland Street series, the Von Igelfeld books, the Corduroy Mansions series, and the Sunday Philosophy Club. This article concentrates on the last of these, which features the middle-aged philosopher and amateur detective Isabel Dalhousie, whose deep philosophical interrogations and intensely human dimension shed light on women's middle age while interrogating fundamental notions about ethical living and life at large.

To my knowledge, only one scholarly article (Domínguez-Rué 2018) has analysed Isabel Dalhousie's character from the perspective of ageing studies. Taking feminist theory, ageing studies, and detective fiction genre criticism as a methodological basis for my analysis, and using examples from the above-mentioned series by McCall Smith to substantiate my argument, this paper will try to elucidate whether these novels (in particular, and literature in general) might help to raise awareness about negative stereotypes of ageing and gender to a massive audience of female (and male) readers. In order to provide an illustration of such view, examples will be provided from the first, sixth, and eleventh novels in the series – *The Sunday Philosophy Club* (2004), *The Lost Art of Gratitude* (2009), and *A Distant View of Everything* (2017) – with the aim of offering a brief but comprehensive overview of the issue examined. My aim is to reveal the extent to which Dalhousie and the series as a whole can become a catalyst for change that not only offers an innovative version of the amateur spinster detective character, but also vindicates the empowering possibilities involved in embracing a more positive view of women and ageing-into-the-middle-age.

The Spinster Detective

According to Jennifer Weiss, it is usually accepted that a detective story should contain the following elements: 1) a detective figure; 2) a crime that seems difficult or impossible to solve; 3) an investigation; 4) a final explanation of what happened and, finally; 5) the arrest of the criminal. The clue is a further key element of the detective story, the unit par excellence in the genre (Weiss 2014). Similarly, as Cheri L. Ross contends, the conventions that make up a detective story are usually the following:

> (1) commission of a baffling crime by an unknown person; (2) *a professional male detective who may need assistance in solving the crime from an amateur (also male)*; (3) the arrest of an innocent person; (4) use of devices such as locked rooms and red herrings; (5) a suspenseful narrative; (6) emphasis on observation and deduction; (7) a visit to the scene of the crime; (8) identification of the criminal, who is usually the least likely suspect; and (9) a credible solution based on information in the fiction itself (1991, 77 [emphasis mine]).

Before Anna Katharine Green's creation of the first spinster detective in fiction, professional detectives were men – *Auguste Dupin, the* fictional character created by Edgar Allan Poe, made his *first* appearance in Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and is widely considered the first detective character in English literature (Poe 1985). Women were usually either villains or victims – not amateur sleuths, and rarely even main characters. The arrival of Green's Amelia Butterworth inaugurates a procession of middle-aged spinsters and "old maids" who missed their chance (willingly or not) to be eligible in the marriage market and who will later populate the genre: feminine without being sexually desirable and curious without being dangerously intelligent – that is, harmless and invisible in their superannuation.

The female detective gained great popularity at the onset of the twentieth century, with fictional characters like the illustrious Miss Marple (Craig and Cadogan 1986). According to Linn Style (2012), writers of the time created female characters who became detectives either to restore the damaged reputation of a friend or relative, or because mere coincidence had put them in the wrong place at the wrong time – in any case, not because of their own will. Still, these characters gave voice to a group of women at that period who were trying to find a space in a male-dominated society that considered them superfluous in their spinsterhood. As Style writes, "through the mouth of an old maid, [writers] were able to get away with social criticism that from a younger, more attractive woman would have been perceived as provocative" (2012, 7). Indeed, younger female sleuths such as Dorothy Sayers' Harriet Vane, Agatha Christie's Tuppence Beresford, or Anne Perry's Charlotte Pitt (a more contemporary author, although the setting of the novels is Victorian) are married off by their creators to their professional male partners in crime – the reader assumes, to preserve their respectability while doing "an unsuitable job for a woman", to quote P. D. James' 1972 novel featuring professional detective Cordelia Gray (2010). In contrast to these younger, easily marriageable women, the middle-aged spinster was considered a grotesque anomaly, having lost her chances to be eligible for marriage and thus to occupy her "natural" space in the domestic sphere (Lepine 2007). As Anna Lepine observes, "the spinster of a certain age becomes a ghostly presence haunting normative femininity. If she does not vanish, taking herself and her unreproductive sexuality out of sight, [she] seems to become ridiculous

and grotesque" (2007, 36). However, and paradoxically, it is her discretion and her sexual (and social) invisibility what essentially confers spinsters their greatest power of detection, as their harmless appearance and their purported inferiority allow them to gain access to spaces and information barred to the more authoritative and aggressive-looking male professional detective, as Lepine remarks: "as an unmarried woman, she was an exile in relation to the idea of home but, as a woman, she possessed innate homemaking abilities. Consequently, she was able to infiltrate areas of the home inaccessible even to the ideal domestic woman" (2007, 12).

Despite the social and political accomplishments achieved by feminism in the twentieth century, both in fiction and in fact, researchers focused on ageing and gender agree that negative stereotypes of ageing affect women more than they do men, since women are still socially valued primarily for their beauty (see, for example, Woodward 1999; Wolf 2002). Jacquelyn Zita asks herself a significant question in relation to the analysis of the novels that concern us here: "Age affects both sexes, but why are the more odious meanings of ageism unevenly dumped on the female body?" (1997, 108) The answer seems to lie in the patriarchal status of woman as reproductive and as object of desire, which has culturally relegated mature women to gradual invisibility, especially in the light of the "double standard of ageing" described by Susan Sontag:

> The double standard of ageing shows up most brutally in the conventions of sexual feeling, which presuppose a disparity between men and women that operates permanently to women's disadvantage [...] Women become sexually ineligible much earlier than men do [...]. For most women, ageing means a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification. Since women are considered maximally eligible in early youth, after which their sexual value drops steadily, even young women feel themselves in a desperate race against the calendar. They are old as soon as they are no longer very young. (1997, 20)

Zita similarly reveals the mechanisms of patriarchy to be accountable for the social invisibility of mature women, which she explains as follows:

> The sensuous confirmation needs of heteromasculinity read the aged female as a negative sign. She is gladly left out of the picture, except for benign grandmother roles, gladly forgotten, and gladly replaced by younger females, whose bodies match the Platonized ideal of unchanging and "unageing" female beauty, captivating the psychic needs of a culturally constructed heteromasculinity. The crone becomes spectral, an appearance without substance. (1997, 108)

In light of these views, the ageing model determined by chronological time and the youth cult has been reinforced by patriarchal discourses, perpetuating the invisibility of mature women – despite a number of studies that reveal this peri-

od as one of flourishing and new opportunities (see, for example, Heilbrun 1988, 1990, 1997; Banner 1992; Pearsall 1997; Gullette 1997). Such discourse thereby precludes more positive discourses on gendered ageing. In short, despite our regular interaction with middle-aged women who live happy and fulfilling lives, and fictional accounts that confirm this, many women still perceive the accumulation of birthdays as a gradual loss. Such loss is often not caused by any biological process, but by self-perception and by the degree to which women have either internalised or rejected the double standard of ageing, as Sontag has observed:

> Ageing is much more a social judgement than a biological eventuality. Far more extensive than the hard sense of loss suffered during menopause [...] is the depression about ageing, which may not be set off by any real event in a woman's life, but in a recurrent state of "possession" of her imagination, ordained by society – that is, ordained by the way this society limits how women feel free to imagine themselves. (1997, 21)

In order to counteract pervasive cultural discourses about women and middle age, I argue that detective fiction as a popular cultural product and a re-examination of the figure of the spinster detective in particular may contribute to interrogating the decline narrative and counterbalancing the predominantly negative correlation between womanhood and maturity. In her 1979 work *Reinventing Womanhood*, the feminist theorist Carolyn Heilbrun had already remarked that existing stereotypes of spinster detectives needed a profound reassessment: even before her creation of the Columbia professor and amateur sleuth Kate Fansler under the pseudonym of Amanda Cross, Heilbrun wrote that "whether they have been left on the shelf or have climbed upon it voluntarily, they [spinster detectives] turn their solitude into power and their superfluity into freedom" (1979, 96).

Isabel Dalhousie provides a good example of the constant transformation of the character – in Isabel's case, not into independence and self-determination, since she is already a financially independent professional, but rather out of the label "spinster" by marrying a much younger man and having two children well after the period of maximum eligibility as a woman according to conventional social standards. In this sense, Dalhousie embodies a different image of a detective, one that does not conform either to the genre's conventions of the character or to the socially ascribed roles expected of a woman her age.

In her comprehensive volume on feminism and the detective novel, *Murder by the Book*, Sally Munt contends that the 1970s and, in particular, the 1980s witnessed the ascendancy of a particular type of female crime writer and female detective, "typically white, middle class and often holding a PhD from a well-known university" (2004, 33). According to Munt, the rise of academic detectives and campus murder stories follow the settings of the British and American tra-

dition of crime fiction and use education as a way to social improvement and as a means to solve the mystery. Dalhousie could be counted among this group of highly-educated amateur detectives, holding degrees from Cambridge and Georgetown and using her own private code of "moral proximity" as a way of solving mysteries and living ethically while doing so. Despite the character's privileged status, and as Anne Cranny-Francis acknowledges, a female character performing a traditionally male role transforms both such role and also the plot itself. Therefore, a female detective character who is to be credible both as a detective and as a woman must necessarily be "more than just an honorary male" and therefore "requires a radical reassessment of the characterisation of the detective and the narrative" (Cranny-Francis 1990, 143). The following section will analyse the ways in which the character of Isabel Dalhousie provides a revision of the social and cultural prejudices attached to mature women, while at the same time re-examining the conventions of the genre.

Isabel Dalhousie, a Spinster with a Twist

Sensitive, empathetic, well-mannered, curious and sharp-eyed, Isabel works as editor of the *Review of Applied Ethics* while also investigating the mysterious situations she encounters in her native Edinburgh, showing her inherent humanity and compassionate nature while doing so. It is her growing reputation as compassionate person – "you seem so sympathetic" (McCall Smith 2009, 65) – rather than her detecting skills that typically bring her into contact with the conflict: "the reason I thought I should speak to you is because I know you have helped various people" (McCall Smith 2009, 66). In this sense, she conforms to the paradigm of the amateur sleuth, driven to detective work by coincidence or at the request of someone in need, rather than by inquisitiveness or professional interest. The very act of becoming involved in a situation that most of the time does not concern her is triggered less by curiosity than by the moral obligation to do what she thinks is correct: "It was moral proximity again: this man standing before her was not a moral stranger to her – he was asking her for help and she could not turn him away. She simply could not" (McCall Smith 2009, 137). As Isabel explains to herself in the first novel of the series, *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, "there was no reason why she should become involved in the affairs of others, but she seemed to be irresistibly drawn into them. And every time that she did it, it was because she imagined that there was a moral claim on her" (McCall Smith 2004, 76). The reason for her involvement in cases is her very own private theory of moral proximity, which she describes as "the basis of those obligations that came into existence when we found ourselves close enough to others to be

able to witness or feel their needs, or when we were in some other way linked to their plight" (McCall Smith 2017, 160 – 161). As the character explains,

> If she had never studied philosophy and never wrestled with issues of our moral obligation to others, she would not have had to act at all. But she had done, and she could not unlearn everything she had acquired in Cambridge and Georgetown; nor could she forget that she was a citizen of Edinburgh, of the city of David Hume. I am obliged to act, she thought; by geographical propinquity, and by the mere fact of being human, I am obliged to act. (McCall Smith 2009, 117)

The inherent philanthropy of Isabel's investigations – devoid of financial or professional purposes – aligns the character with classic Marple-like spinsters. In Isabel's case, however, her ethical behaviour is further grounded by a thorough professional training in philosophy. Despite that, however, The Sunday Philosophy Club series is lacking some of the characteristics described by Weiss and Ross in the previous section: the amateur sleuth is a single, middle-aged woman, and the male professional detective in completely absent in this case. What is more, no one is ever arrested; the police do not even feature, much less intervene in the plot. To make the series and its detective even more unconventional, the ending of the Isabel Dalhousie novels offers an unexpected solution (and often no solution) to the initial conflict – that is, there was actually no murder, or no theft. Even when an act punishable by law has been committed, the elucidation of the initial mystery does not involve arresting the offender. For example, in *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, Isabel discovers that the young man who allegedly fell to his death from a balcony after a concert in the Usher Hall in Edinburgh did not actually fall but was accidentally pushed by a friend. However, Isabel decides not to report it as there is no clear evidence to incriminate him apart from his confession, and she believes there is no point in destroying the future of another young man who will anyway carry the weight of remorse for his whole life. Similarly, in *The Forgotten Affairs of Youth* (2011), Isabel helps Jane, a visiting scholar who was adopted and sent to Australia as a child, to trace her family origins and find her biological father. After a number of investigations in old university records and a series of interviews with people who had known Jane's mother at the time, a man is eventually discovered who had been having a relationship with Jane's mother at the time when she got pregnant, and who is very likely to be Jane's father. When Isabel learns from his wife that this man cannot be Jane's biological father because he is actually sterile, Jane asks her not to reveal that truth to him, as both are very happy about having found each other and this acquaintance has filled an emotional gap in the lives of both. Despite her moral doubts about letting an age-

ing man believe a lie, Isabel decides that their newly-found joy and the emerging warmth they feel for each other is more important than DNA.

The example from a later novel, in which Isabel offers support to a younger colleague, reveals another feature of contemporary female detective novels, as well as in feminist explorations of middle age. In contrast to traditional patriarchal discourse, which emphasises a tension between (surrogate) mothers and daughters and competition among women in the marriage market, fiction that features amateur sleuths as well as middle-aged women reveals the great value such characters confer to their relationships with other women. As opposed to the cultural disqualification of women through a process of gradual downgrading and invisibility as they age, scholars like Heilbrun (1988, 1997) have explored the possibilities that the onset of middle age can offer them, among which is the fulfilment of friendship with other women. Similarly, Shulamit Reinharz argues that "in contrast with men, women in general don't begin to challenge the politics of their lives until later [. . .] during their youth women are most valued for their full potential as workers, wives, sex partners and child bearers" (1997, 80 – 81). Women of all generations need each other for friendship, support, and encouragement, in a mutually enriching relationship that is not necessarily restricted to biological motherhood. As Reinharz argues,

> The severing of bonds may actually reflect a male definition of radical activity, flowing from the boy's breaking the tie with the father as the means of liberation. By contrast, what is radical for women is the ability to bond with women, to forge sisterhood with other women rather than separateness. (1997, 81)

Besides her altruistic (if sometimes not very professional) investigations, the role of Isabel's female network can be observed in her daily relationship with the members of her family, biological or surrogate. References to Isabel's dead mother appear in every novel as a faint but constant presence, especially when memories of her are triggered by familiar places in Edinburgh, or when she reflects about what her mother would do or say in a certain situation:

> Her mother – her *sainted American mother* – had died when Isabel was eleven, and the memories were fading. Months and years blurred into one another, and Isabel's mental picture of the face that looked down at her as she was tucked into bed at night was vague now. (McCall Smith 2004, 16)

Even when "her sainted American mother" is revealed to have had an affair with another man, Isabel takes the news as a chance to reassess her idealised view, and to see her as a human being, without bitterness or regret.

Apart from her absent biological mother – and maybe because of that absence – Isabel's affection for her housekeeper Grace provides a good example of female bonding within a surrogate family. Grace, another "spinster lady of a certain age" to quote Agatha Christie's *The Murder at the Vicarage* (2010, 41), is a truly lovable character who nevertheless remains stern in her disposition and inflexible in her (sometimes unconventional) beliefs. Even if her strong personality and her often peculiar views often make her difficult to live with, and even if Grace is Isabel's employee, Isabel tries to feel thankful for the life she has and fortunate for having Grace in her life: "Gratitude was a lost art, she felt. People accepted things, took them as their right, and had forgotten how to give proper thanks" (McCall Smith 2009, 158). She constantly reminds herself not to take advantage of her more privileged position to be harsh to her housekeeper and remains aware that, despite her rather unconventional ways, Grace ultimately acts with Isabel's and her family's wellbeing in mind: "There were many other ways in which Isabel's position was so much more fortunate than her housekeeper's, and the cumulative effect of these was that Grace was forgiven: she could be as demanding or as sniffy as she liked – she was forgiven" (McCall Smith 2017, 74).

Throughout the series, Grace remains a prominent character, and the reader comes to regard her as a member of Isabel's growing family, as is Cat, Isabel's problematic niece. Isabel helps Cat in her delicatessen and constantly tries to brave her sometimes thoughtless actions and unfortunate choice of men. A clear example of the ups and downs in Isabel's relationship with Cat takes place in *The Sunday Philosophy Club* (2004), when Isabel, suspicious from the beginning that her niece's fiancé Toby is not the most suitable man for her, follows him in the street and accidentally finds out that he is having a relationship with another woman. Even though it is imperative that Cat should know as soon as possible that Toby is being unfaithful, Isabel is conscious that the information will deeply hurt her feelings, and that it is morally inappropriate to intervene in her niece's relationship. Isabel – a philosopher by profession and a philanthropist by vocation – is fully aware that "it was easy, terribly easy, to become with time a middle-aged spinster with a sharp tongue" (McCall Smith 2004, 142). However, and even if she has tried to convince herself that Cat is old enough and should deal with her relationship herself, she cannot avoid revealing her secret when Cat announces her engagement to Toby:

> She had not meant to say it – she knew it was wrong – and yet it had come out, as if spoken by somebody else. Immediately she felt miserable, thinking: So are wrongs committed, just like that, without thinking. The doing of wrong was not a hard thing, preceded by careful

> thought; it was a casual thing, done so easily. That was Hannah Arendt's insight, was it not? The pure banality of evil. Only good is heroic. (McCall Smith 2004, 196)

Despite Cat's often spiteful and inconsiderate behaviour and her unwillingness to listen to any advice, Isabel remains affectionate towards her and tries to understand her feelings, prompting herself to evoke Arendt's view and make the "heroic" effort of not losing patience with Cat. In Isabel's view, the only worthy man on the list of Cat's former partners is Jamie, a young bassoonist with whom Isabel develops a friendship initially based on their mutual love for music. McCall Smith is an amateur bassoonist himself, having founded The Really Terrible Orchestra with the businessman Peter Stevenson in 1995: both the orchestra and Stevenson appear in the series. Despite the fact that Jamie is already presented as Cat's ex-boyfriend in the first novel, he and Isabel continue to meet occasionally, and he becomes involved in the investigation at Isabel's request. The fact that Jamie is fourteen years Isabel's junior, coupled with his former relationship with Cat, features in the novel as a strong impediment for the development of a relationship between them, as Isabel is fully aware of her status as single and middle-aged:

> Barely had Jamie left the house than a thought occurred to Isabel. It almost sent her running after him to tell him about it, but she desisted. It was not at all that late, and several neighbours walked their dogs along the street at that hour. She did not wish to be seen running after young men, in the street at least (though the metaphorical context would be as bad.) (McCall Smith 2004, 153)

The character's descriptions and actions make it obvious to the reader that Isabel is not an overtly subversive and rebellious woman, but actually very conscious of her age and the sociocultural expectations associated with it. Besides her awareness of the cultural discourse around women and ageing, the novels often include instances where others define Isabel's proper place in normative womanhood by highlighting not only the evidence of her abnormality as a single middle-aged woman but the "futility" of her condition:

> "Don't tell me my job, Isabel."
> "Ms. Dalhousie, actually."
> "Oh yes, Ms. Dalhousie. Spinster of this parish." He paused. "Surprising, that. You being an attractive woman, sexy if I may say so." . . .
> "You have some beautiful things", he said. "Money?"
> (McCall Smith 2004, 36 – 37)

Kathleen Woodward (1991, 1999) has written extensively about the pervasive gerontophobia with which Western culture has endowed representations of old age.

When reflecting upon the feelings of anxiety that ageing brings about, she argues that "fear of age is not a strictly 'personal' problem. Our culture's representations of ageing are predominantly negative" (1999, 4). These negative images affect women much more than they do men: being relegated to cultural invisibility once they reach middle age, mature women's success is largely measured in terms of how closely they can approach the appearance of a younger woman (Woodward 1999, 159). Being fully conscious of these cultural discourses and well knowing what her "proper place" is as a woman in her early forties, Isabel cannot help feeling uneasy when she makes her investigations accompanied by Jamie, not yet thirty, and is aware that people will make judgements about their possible relationship: "He's wondering what the relationship is. Toy boy, probably; or so he thinks. But even if that were the case, why should he be surprised? It was common enough these days" (McCall Smith 2004, 166). Despite her reflection that a growing number of women nowadays have much younger partners, and recalling Woodward's words, pervading prejudices against middle-aged women unconsciously lead to such a perception of oneself and one's place in the world: "She was anxious in the pub, waiting for Jamie. It was a masculine place, at least at that hour, and she felt ill at ease. Women could go to pubs by themselves, of course, but she nonetheless felt out of place" (McCall Smith 2004, 161).

Isabel will in time start a relationship with Jamie and unexpectedly become pregnant, events that occasionally make her relationship with Cat tense, but do not diminish Isabel's affection for her niece. Cat's new choice of fiancé in *The Lost Art of Gratitude* (2009) is a tightrope-walking stuntman whose appearance and personality make him look even less suitable for Cat than her previous boyfriends. Moreover, Isabel suspects that Cat has rushed into engagement out of spite after learning that she and Jamie are themselves about to be married. Despite Isabel's frequent reflections about the appropriateness of her relationship with Jamie and two occasions in which she believes Jamie could be taking up with a younger woman, her maternity and her marriage to Jamie prove to be happy and harmonious, revealing the change in available roles for women in their midlife, as well as the internal and external conflicts they may face.

In *A Distant View of Everything* (2017), Isabel's help and detecting talents are required by an acquaintance, the vocational match-maker Bea Shandon. Isabel is asked to investigate the reputation of a bachelor who has been dating one of Bea's female friends, the very promising but somewhat dubious surgeon Tony MacUspaig. Despite the fact that Isabel's character has been shown to deviate from ageist and sexist conventions, the novel is well aware of the pervading presence of negative stereotypes attached to women at midlife. The novel presents the reader with the fact that being single is still regarded by many

women as a degrading and undesirable status, mainly through the accounts of Bea Shandon and her match-making: in her words, "there are far more women than men looking for someone" (McCall Smith 2017, 51). At Isabel's perplexity about men's eligibility as potential partners despite her friend's doubts about their suitability, Bea replies that "he was a man and there were always, always women who would take on a spare man, even if he was completely porcine" (McCall Smith 2017, 52). As she explains, "if you're a man and you're wanting to meet somebody, then you're absolutely guaranteed to find somebody. Guaranteed. The only reason you won't is if you're utterly impossible – which few men are" (McCall Smith 2017, 51). Bea's comments, the reader infers, reveal that the figure of the middle-aged spinster with all its adjoining patriarchal weight of negativity is still a fearful destiny to be avoided at all cost, as if it were a sign of personal failure: "They have to join the queue. They find out that for each spare man there are ten or twelve, maybe more, contenders. Widows, divorcees – there are hundreds of them milling about, all desperate to get one of the handful of spare men available" (McCall Smith 2017, 52).

Nonetheless, in *A Distant View of Everything*, Isabel is in her late forties, has married Jamie, and has recently given birth to their second child: those events have transformed her, according the conventions of the genre, from being aligned with the Amelia Butterworths and Jane Marples to falling into the category of the Harriet Vanes and Tuppence Beresfords – only twenty years older than the latter group. Rather than guaranteeing Isabel's respectability in her unusual occupation as amateur detective, as is the case of Vane or Beresford, or culturally inscribing her "success" in life as a married woman and thus bringing her back to normative femininity, the character shows the changing mores of changing times, as well as providing a more contemporary alternative to the available roles of the character in the genre of detective fiction. McCall Smith's fiction thus constitutes a mirror for interrogating existing prejudices against gendered ageing, providing new available social and cultural roles for mature women.

Conclusions

The higher life expectancy and general improvement of the status of women in the Western world, together with political, cultural, and socio-economic change, have granted women longer, healthier and more independent lives. The love lives of celebrities like Madonna or Jennifer Lopez offer a public (if not altogether truthful) picture of women's choice to start a relationship with a much younger man, a practice that has become more common in recent decades, but which had

been traditionally considered inappropriate and often ridiculous, in contrast with the widely accepted notion that men may marry considerably younger women. Scholars have noted that female detectives – even during the Golden Age of the 1920s and the 1930s – have traditionally represented patriarchal prejudices while revealing the limitation of women's roles: however, it has taken time for them to deconstruct these roles (Slung 1977; Mann 1981). Detective fiction of the last decades, as well as other types of contemporary popular fiction, has begun to use the genre with a political agenda in mind to explore and interrogate the role of women and the cultural construction of women's lives. As Jessica Mann has asserted, "the modern detective story lifts the mask of polite society, the veil of incomprehension, to reveal something from which one might prefer to avert one's eyes" (1981, 239). In this sense, The Sunday Philosophy Club series and the character of Isabel Dalhousie unmask persistently negative cultural discourses about women and ageing and existing prejudices against middle-aged women, while revealing that, in fiction as well as fact, new choices are actually available for women out and away from those stereotypes.

As Lois Marchino has observed, "popular culture often provides clues to fundamental social issues, and one of the most striking current developments in genre fiction is the use of the mystery novel to challenge the traditional roles of women" (1989, 89). The coherent "I" that prevailed until the twentieth century has been subject to innumerable fractures, dislocations, and ambiguities, while the unified notion of self, especially since Postmodernism, has been replaced by a multiplicity of fluid subjectivities. Differing from French feminist theories, which mainly placed the essence of the female self on the body, Sidonie Smith (1990, 15) argues that gendered identity, being culturally constructed rather than biological, is also subject to constant change. If that is true of gender, it is also true of age. While women may still be prisoners of cultural ideas of gender, the examination of detective fiction that deconstructs stereotypes of gender normativity allows women to interrogate their own subjectivities in middle age (and beyond) and create perhaps equally unstable and fluid but less constrained identities for themselves.

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Hanna Baro

± 100: Old Age and New Photography

"Until very recently the contrast between the visible signs of ageing and the absence of their representations in visual culture was striking", Anca Cristofovici writes in *Touching Surfaces: Photographic Aesthetics, Temporality, Ageing* (2009, 2). This situation has changed somewhat since then, although there still is a considerable lack of such representations in our society. In this essay, I discuss three projects by a new generation of photographers who negotiate the topics of ageing and old age from different perspectives. The photographers in question are recent graduates of a two-year masterclass at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie in Berlin. Under the guidance of Ute Mahler (photographer and co-founder of the Ostkreuz agency) and Ingo Taubhorn (curator of the Haus der Photographie, Deichtorhallen Hamburg), fourteen photographers work side by side to develop their own projects. In February 2020, the results were exhibited in the Kunstquartier Bethanien in Berlin under the title "True Stories_"[1]. The fourteen projects could not be more diverse, including portrayals of everyday life in a small village next to a nuclear power plant (*800 Meter Tief* by Nina Hansch), excavations of the photographer's own archive (*Prelight Days* by Attila Hartwig), and a quest for identity and belonging as the child of a migrant worker in the GDR (*Garcias Tochter* by Alina Simmelbauer). However, three of the projects are connected by the theme of old age and ageing. The photographs by Heidi Krautwald, Magdalena Stengel, and Natalya Reznik each deal with different aspects of ageing, and its implications for us as individuals and social beings.

New Perspectives on Centenarians

Plus minus hundred (*±100*) is the title of Magdalena Stengel's series of photographs, representing both the approximate age of its protagonists and the overarching theme of the series. Over two years, Stengel (*1987)[2] researched and documented centenarians (and those who were about to become centenarians) across Germany. Stengel explains: "They somehow found me. I contacted local

1 The exhibition in Berlin was on display from February 15 – 23, and was supposed to travel, in a slightly reduced version, to Hamburg in April 2020. Given the current situation, with a global pandemic in place and a general halt to cultural and social activities, it remains questionable if and when it can be shown again.

2 https://www.magdalenastengel.com/about (March 10, 2020).

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newspapers and asked them whether they could write a very brief introduction about me and my project and that I am looking for centenarians. Afterwards, I simply waited and was contacted by them either directly or via their relatives".[3] Stengel then visited several of her new contacts, spending hours with them and getting a glimpse into their lives – their present lives and the lives already lived. Her work not only depicts old people, but also opens a window onto their personality, leaving space for interpretation. The series does not give an exhaustive, complete picture of old age in general, but instead offers glimpses into very personal examples of old age. In one of Stengel's photographs, chosen for the cover of the exhibition invitation, an elderly man is seen peeking through a thick, orange velvet curtain which covers the entire image (fig. 1). He uses his left hand to draw back the curtain a crack, partially revealing his laughing face. He seems happy. For the moment. Taking a closer look at him, or the parts of him that can be seen, we notice an odd object around his wrist. For most viewers, the detail would be easily overlooked at first sight. Once seen, however, it cannot be unseen – and, for most people who have elderly family members, a new layer of the story starts to unfold. The wristband with its distinctive red button is an emergency alarm, worn by many elderly people who still live by themselves. The button is directly connected to the welfare organization which has provided it. When pressed – if the person fell down, feels sick, or is otherwise in distress – a member of the organisation immediately replies and, together with the elderly person, decides whether to send an ambulance or any other help. The service is available 24/7, every day of the year, and enables many elderly people to stay in their own homes and maintain a degree of independence. Having discovered this wristband, we can infer that its owner – the laughing man behind the curtain – probably still lives on his own, despite his age. Is this perhaps a reason for his happiness?

Compared to other photographs depicting centenarians – apparently in great demand these days – Stengel's do not show only their faces, but try to capture their subjects' personality.[4] This leads both to happy images – showing, for example, a centenarian surrounded by his large family at his hundredth birthday party (fig. 2) – and ones in which a certain sadness resonates, as in the image of a 98-year-old woman standing in front of a sewing table (fig. 3). Stengel explains that the woman still has to take on occasional sewing jobs, as her pension is too small to live on. In addition to the photographs, *±100* consists of three short

3 Interview with Magdalena Stengel from February 15, 2020.

4 See for example the series by Karsten Thormaehlen where he photographed centenarians all over the world, published in Karsten Thormaehlen, *100 Jahre Lebensglück: Weisheit, Liebe, Lachen* (Munich: Knesebeck, 2017).

Figure 1: Magdalena Stengel, *±100*, carbon print, 42 x 29,7 cm, 2019
© Magdalena Stengel

videos of three of the people photographed. One shows a man dancing; another shows a man playing the harmonica; in the third, we see a man's hand holding a bouquet of artificial flowers upside down, turning them slowly in his fingers. The artist notes that the bouquet was made by his deceased wife, and that it stands in for her in the video. Rather than a portrait of the husband, this is a portrait of the wife's absence.

"The photograph tells me the death in the future"

While Stengel's photographs are about their lives, there is always another topic present within this celebration. The thought of the end of these lives lurks be-

Figure 2: Magdalena Stengel, *±100*, carbon print, 42 x 29,7 cm, 2019
© Magdalena Stengel

neath the photographs – or, as Roland Barthes puts it in *Camera Lucida:* "Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (1981, 32).[5] Looking at the photograph of a young man in his prison cell, waiting to be hanged, he writes: "But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. . . . Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe" (Barthes 1981, 96). For Barthes, the *punctum* of a photograph is the spontaneous, affective moment when a small, often random detail catches the viewer's interest and draws their attention closer to the image and the story behind it. Looking again at Stengel's photograph of the laughing old man behind the curtain, the emergency but-

5 For more studies on photography and death, see the seminal study by Katharina Sykora, *Die Tode der Fotografie*, *Vol. 1: Totenfotografie und ihr sozialer Gebrauch* (Munich: Fink, 2009), and *Vol. 2: Tod, Theorie und Fotokunst* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2015). For a study on Sontag, photography, and death, see Matthias Christen, "*All Photographs are Memento Mori:* Susan Sontag und der Tod in der Fototheorie", *Fotogeschichte* 32.126 (2012): 23 – 36.

Figure 3: Magdalena Stengel, *±100*, carbon print, 42 x 29,7 cm, 2019
© Magdalena Stengel

ton around his wrist becomes the *punctum*. Given that the people portrayed by Stengel are, or are approaching, a hundred years old, it cannot be denied that their lives are coming to an end. They are already years beyond the average life expectancy in Germany. This reality sets in when Stengel received a message, during the exhibition opening, that one of the women she photographed had died, the day after her hundredth birthday. For the woman, the anterior future has become the present and her photograph instantly becomes a memento mori, a past that no longer exists.

A 'Greynaissance' in The Old World

Natalya Reznik's (*1981) series, *The Old World*, offers a contrast to Stengel's depiction of old age.[6] The title does not refer to a bygone world, but to an imagined future world where people become older and older, changing society. Reznik tries to imagine a future of increasing numbers of fit, energetic elderly people,

6 *The Old World* consists of eight photographs so far, but is an ongoing project.

taking an active role in society. Her view of this scenario is positive, something that resonates in her work. Here, photography is not a window onto the past, but the future. Beautiful elderly women pose gracefully. In the blurred backgrounds, we sense cities and their skylines (fig. 4), or a view of a natural landscape by the

Figure 4: Natalya Reznik, *The Old World*, 2017-2019 (installation view, Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin 2020)

sea. Only the subtitles reveal where these women were photographed, and where they likely live. Reznik chooses balconies and terraces as settings for her portraits, alluding to such places' character, which oscillates between private and public: both part of its owner's private environment (the house or apartment), and of the public sphere where people passing by can see you. The balcony is neither completely private nor completely public, but includes both worlds.

The Old World recalls idealised female portraits from the Renaissance, where the sitters were depicted using symbols like jewelry or clothing that referred to their social status within early modern society.[7] Then and now, both gender

7 For an elaborate overview of female Renaissance portraits and their cultural and social constructions, see David Alan Brown, *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renais-*

and age are social constructs, rather than given biological categories, and this understanding permeates Reznik's project. Like Renaissance portraits, *The Old World* shows most of these women in half-length and three-quarter profile. Each wears elegant black robes, their hair done, make-up partially hiding their wrinkles (fig. 5). While the portraits are staged, they were not re-touched.

Figure 5: Natalya Reznik, *The Old World (Hexana)*, Munich, Germany, carbon print, 67 x 100 cm, 2018

sance Portraits of Women (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Paola Tingali, *Women in Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997).

Reznik explains that some of her sitters asked to have certain wrinkles eliminated in post-production, but that she refused, since she wanted to show these women as they are.[8]

"The Greynaissance starts here", writes Reznik in her short description of *The Old World* (Reznik 2020). "Greynaissance" is a term coming from social media, used to describe beautiful elderly models, mostly women over the age of fifty or sixty, some of whom are featured in *The Old World*. Instagram contains numerous images of these models under the hashtag '#greynaissance'. The beauty standards at work, however, are just the same as for younger models: all of them are tall and slim, with high cheek bones and delicate features. Only their silver hair and wrinkles differentiate them from the younger models that have dominated the media for so long. There is no diversity in the 'Greynaissance'. Even though the women in *The Old World* have aged chronologically (they are fifty- and sixty-plus), their biological, social, and cultural age seem far younger.[9] Wrinkles aside, they do not seem to have aged much, and are still presented as strong, youthful women. Socially and culturally, they do not fit the category of "old women": they might have retired from their previous jobs, but have now become models or social media influencers, with thousands of followers on Instagram and other platforms. One of the most famous examples of these models is the American Iris Apfel, still a fashion icon at the age of 98. In 2005, The Metropolitan Museum of Art devoted an entire exhibition to her, *Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Apfel Collection*.[10] While this positive outlook on old age and increasing representations of it in media is good, Greynaissance women like Apfel remain the exception rather than the rule. We wonder where the fragile, non-eccentric, vulnerable, lonely aspects of old age – which affect a large part of elderly men and women – are represented, and why they remain largely invisible in our visual culture. Despite the positive representation of old age in visual culture and media, we must remember that this is social media, where image and identity are highly curated and staged.

8 Interview with Natalya Reznik, February 15, 2020.

9 Cf. Kathleen Woodward's distinction between chronological, biological, social, and cultural age in "Performing Age, Performing Gender", *National Women's Studies Association Journal* (NWSA) 1.1 (2006): 163.

10 https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2005/rara-avis-selections-from-the-iris-apfel-collection (March 10, 2020).

The Other Side of the Coin: Hope and Vulnerability

In another project dealing with ageing and old age, Reznik works in a completely different pictorial language. The way she portrays her grandmother in *Hope* (2011–2019) could not be more different to her method of presenting the beautifully dressed and groomed women of *The Old World*. Nadezhda, Reznik's nonagenarian grandmother, is shown in her everyday outfit at home in Perm, Russia, without make-up, no styled hair (fig. 6). The pictures resemble spontaneous

Figure 6: Natalya Reznik, *Hope*, 2011-2019

snapshots of the everyday life of an old woman who cannot live alone anymore, requiring help from her family, and especially from her own daughter, Reznik's mother (fig 7). There is a vulnerability in these images, underlined in the text accompanying the project:

> She feels disgust towards her changed physiology, infirm body and illnesses. She has desire to love and to be loved – and at the same time she feels being unworthy of it. She constantly feels being offended because she thinks that people have the laugh of her, because of her

> weakness (doesn't hear properly, almost blind). Sometimes she tells that she hates herself. She stays at home all the time (old house, no elevator). Sometimes she is angry and tells my mother and me: "You don't give me keys, I can't go outside!". But in fact she knows that she can't go alone without us because of her health. (Reznik 2011)

We become aware of Nadezhda's struggle, as an old woman who dislikes her ageing body and her failing health, which make her dependent on others. She feels trapped, in her house and her body.

Reznik's two projects could not be more different, and show two quite different aspects of female ageing. *The Old World* depicts an utopian process of ageing, where women are still defined by their beauty. *Hope*, by contrast, is an honest, sometimes harsh portrayal of the social, psychological, and physical effects of age: loneliness, immobility, dependency, sickness, and shame. Is there a 'double standard of ageing', as Susan Sontag (1972) wrote in her famous essay – not only between men and women, but also between women themselves?

Hope recalls work by other artists, like Phillip Toledano's series *Days With My Father*, which Reznik has written a brief essay about (2013).[11] After his mother's sudden death in 2006, Toledano began to take pictures of his elderly father, who suffers from short-term memory loss, as "an ongoing record of my father, and of our relationship. For whatever days we have left together" (2006). Toledano's father cannot remember that his wife has died, or that he attended her funeral. Toledano describes the unbearable situation: "After a while, I realised I couldn't keep telling him that his wife had died. He didn't remember, and it was killing both of us, to re-live her death constantly. I decided to tell him she'd gone to Paris, to take care of her brother, who was sick. And that's where she is now" (2006).

Memory – or, rather, the loss of it – is at the core of *Hope*. In Russian, 'Nadezhda' means 'hope'. The series is therefore titled *Hope*, as is an accompanying photobook containing selected images of her grandmother, who suffers from Alzheimer's. Reznik stitched together each of the fifteen photobooks by hand. Using red thread to gather these photographs of her vanishing grandmother, Reznik pays tribute to the fact that Nadezhda "used to sew clothes for herself and her children in Soviet times, when there were shortages in the stores" (2019). Furthermore, as both an artist and Nadezhda's grandchild, Reznik "literally stitched the

11 Born in Russia and now living and working in Germany, Reznik is an artist and photographer, holds a PhD in philosophy of culture from St. Petersburg State University, and writes about photography and ageing.

pieces of memory for her together in the photo book" (2019).[12] Stitching and sewing are typically associated with women's work, recalling artists like Annegret Soltau, who used needle and thread to stitch together photographs of the bodies of four generations of women: her own, her daughter's, her mother's, and her grandmother's (*Generativ – Selbst mit Tochter, Mutter und Großmutter*, 1994–2005). Photographs become corporeal collages of different generations. The photographic tradition of portraying one's elderly parents as a form of coping with their ageing process can already be seen in works by Richard Avedon (1993) and Nan Goldin (Jenkins 2003), among others. Photography is not the only medium for documenting and reflecting upon the relationship between the elderly, their grown-up children, and inevitable loss. In *pas pu saisir la mort* (Impossible to Catch Death) (2007), the French artist Sophie Calle filmed her dying mother over many days and hours. An edited eleven-minute version of this private observation at her mother's death bed was shown at the Venice Biennale in 2007. Asked why she chose to record such intimate, private moments, Calle replied: "I just wanted to film her death because I feared not being there at the very last moment, or missing a final word from her to me. Apparently people always choose to die the minute you look away, so I wanted to be there" (Pfeiffer 2010). Filming the process of dying and the moment of death is one way to cope with such existential loss. In *Une mort très douce* (A Very Easy Death) (1985), Simone de Beauvoir uses the written word to come to terms with her mother's death in 1963. Writing a year later, Beauvoir meticulously recounted the process of death in a Parisian hospital. It is a powerful account of a loved one's last days, as well as an honest, extremely personal reflection of a complicated relationship during its final six weeks.

Performing Age, Performing Gender

The theme of generation runs through Heidi Krautwald's (*1960) work, although her photographs speak a slightly different language. The topic of ageing is not as strongly present as in *±100* or *The Old World* and *Hope*. Instead, *In der Zwischenzeit* (In the Meantime) negotiates questions of identity, Krautwald's role as a woman, and the complex, simultaneous role of daughter, mother, and wife.

12 "My grandmother's name, Nadezhda, means 'hope' in Russian. She has been always interested in fashion. She used to sew clothes for herself and her children in Soviet times, when there were shortages in the stores. Now she is 94, blind, and has almost lost her memory due to Alzheimer's, but still keeps hoping to be able to sew again. I literally stitched the pieces of memory for her together in the photo book 'Hope'." (Reznik 2019)

Figure 7: Natalya Reznik, *Hope*, 2011-2019
© Natalya Reznik

Krautwald began taking photographs of herself in 1982, after her first child was born. She used the self-portrait as her artistic language between 1982 and 1993, when she stopped to concentrate on other ways of photography. She returned to the self-portraits for the Meisterklasse in 2018.[13] *In der Zwischenzeit* (fig. 8) consists of several photographs, taken between 1982 and the present day and is accompanied by a photobook.[14] By combining early photographs with later ones, ageing and the passage of time in general become evident. Looking at the juxta-

13 Interview with Heidi Krautwald on February 15, 2020.

14 On display at the exhibition wall were fifteen digital photographs (30 x 45 cm) and six black-and-white analog photographs (20 x 30 cm) (https://www.heidikrautwald.de/projekte/2016-2020/in-der-zwischenzeit/). The photobook consists of eighteen analog black and white photographs and ninety-eight digital photographs. There are no titles for any of the photographs, but an index within the photobook reveals the date and place where they were taken.

Figure 8: Heidi Krautwald, *In der Zwischenzeit*, 1982-2019 (installation view, Kunstquartier Bethanien, Berlin 2020)

position of her self-portraits as a young woman and a new mother in her early twenties (fig. 9) with works that show her as a mature woman in her fifties (fig. 10), we necessarily think of the time between those two moments, and of the experiences of the woman in the picture. Seeing two photographies of Krautwald, we imagine the time between them – the unseen time that has passed from one moment to the other. Her work shows ageing more subtly than Stengel and Reznik do. Krautwald joins a photographic tradition of work, by artists like Roman Opalka and Nicholas Nixon, which uses the time in between photographs of the same people at different stages in their life.[15] Opalka's photographic section of his lifelong project *1965 / 1–∞* is meticulously executed, like everything else in the work, with each photograph showing the face of the artist in exactly the same position, with the same facial expression. Only by looking at several photographs alongside each other can we see the ageing process reflected in

15 For a brief but excellent analysis of these two series, and especially temporality and the ageing face, see Sabine Kampmann, *Bilder des Alterns: Greise Körper in Kunst und visueller Kultur* (Berlin: Reimer, 2020), 130 – 135.

Figure 9: Heidi Krautwald, *In der Zwischenzeit*, 20 x 30 cm, 1989
© Heidi Krautwald

his face. In Nixon's series *The Brown Sisters*, the time span between each image is much longer. Nixon photographed his wife and her three sisters every year when the family gathered. We see how time has changed their faces, their bodies, and the fashion they wear over more than forty years.

In the photobook accompanying *In der Zwischenzeit*, Krautwald includes images in which she poses with her children, representing herself as a mother. In her other works, however, we only see the artist herself. Sometimes she stages herself recreating the settings and poses of well-known self-portraits by artists like Frida Kahlo, facing the camera and the viewer directly. In others, she covers her face, either with a bouquet of flowers, an ironing board, a mirror, or an older photograph of herself. Some photographs show Krautwald's nude body, both younger (fig. 11) and older (fig. 12). By including portraits in which her naked body is the main focus, and which enable a direct juxtaposition between her young and old body, Krautwald makes a subtle statement about the ageing fe-

Figure 10: Heidi Krautwald, *In der Zwischenzeit*, 30 x 45 cm, 2019
© Heidi Krautwald

male body and its sexuality – a topic which is still to some degree invisible in our society. As Kathleen Woodward writes, "the body has been the locus of attention for many years, but the older female body has been significant only in terms of its absence" (2006, 162). In Krautwald's work, the ageing body is present, visible despite the youthfulness of her later self-portraits. The passage of time and the process of ageing materialise in the ageing body (Hülsen-Esch et al. 2013, 25).

Though Krautwald's appearance, poses, and body change over time, one aspect is consistent throughout: her long, curly hair. Time has no effect on Krautwald's hair: it does not go grey, apparently, and her hair style does not change over the years. This is in stark contrast to her body. Does the artist cling to her long hair as a timeless token of female beauty?[16]

16 Hair has a complex and fascinating history in the visual arts and culture. For a study on hair

Figure 11: Heidi Krautwald, *In der Zwischenzeit*, 20 x 30 cm, 1987

"Time's relentless melt"

The three artists discussed here offer three quite different perspectives on ageing and its representation in photography. Stengel's work provides a poetic document of old age through the personal history of male and female centenarians, with vitality and autonomy playing an important role. Reznik presents us with two scenarios of old age: one optimistic, focused on a utopian world in which ageing is associated with beauty, good health, grace, and activity, and the other – much more personal – confronting the viewer with the opposite. *Hope* documents the decline of her grandmother, who struggles with all the aspects of old age neglected in *The Old World:* failing health, memory loss, loss of identity, loneliness, dependency, frustration and sadness. Krautwald's *In der Zwischenzeit* adds yet another layer, focusing on the changing role of a woman throughout time: from a daughter and young girl to a wife and lover, finally start-

and its cultural implications in art and theory of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, for example, see Julia Saviello, *Verlockungen: Haare in der Kunst der Frühen Neuzeit* (Emsdetten and Berlin: Edition Imorde, 2017).

Figure 12: Heidi Krautwald, *In der Zwischenzeit*, 30 x 45 cm, 2018
© Heidi Krautwald

ing a family herself. Not only age but gender are performed.[17] All three artists offer a female perspective on ageing. Stengel focuses on both men and women, while Reznik and Krautwald look at different representation of women and ageing in our society. The three artists also cover a broad spectrum of ages: from extreme old age (Stengel) to middle age (Reznik in *The Old World*) to young and middle age, as well as the time span in between those two life stages (Krautwald). Even though their projects differ, the majority of the works discussed here are a sort of "memento mori", as Susan Sontag describes it: "All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing

17 Cf. Kathleen Woodward. "Performing Age, Performing Gender", *National Women's Studies Association Journal* (NWSA) 1.1 (2006): 162–189.

out thus moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (1977, 14).

Mortality, vulnerability and mutability – especially among the elderly – are more present than ever in the current health crisis. COVID-19 has revealed the vulnerability of the elderly in ways we have managed to forget, despite all the research that has been done into ageing, and despite the increased visibility and appreciation of elderly people in our society.[18]

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18 The British Society of Gerontology issued a press release on March 20, 2020, "call[ing] on Government to reject policy responses to COVID-19 based only on chronological age". Their first key point addresses exactly the ageist and stereotypical view of elderly people that still plays a crucial part in our society: "It is wrong and overly simplistic to regard people aged 70 and above as being vulnerable, a burden, or presenting risks to other people. Many people in this age group are fit, well, and playing an active role in society. Older people participate in paid work, run businesses, volunteer, are active in civil society and the cultural life of communities, and take care of family members including parents, spouses/partners, adult children (especially those living with disabilities), and grandchildren." Furthermore, the Society "expresses its objection to any policy which differentiates the population by application of an arbitrary chronological age in restricting people's rights and freedoms. While people at all ages can be vulnerable to COVID-19, and all can spread the disease, not all people over the age of 70 are vulnerable, nor all those under 70 resilient. Given older adults' multiple social roles, quarantining the more than 8.5 million people over 70 years of age will deprive society of many people who are productive and active and who can be a key part of the solution by supporting the economy, families and communities".

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Susanne Martin

Performing Age(ing): A Lecture Performance

1 Prologue

This text is the written version of a 30-minute long lecture performance on images and narratives of age(ing) from a contemporary dance perspective.[1] I developed this lecture performance for the international symposium "Cultural Perspectives on Ageing" in Hanover, Germany and performed it there on November 29, 2018. As a researcher on the subject of dance and age(ing) with a practice-as-research approach (Nelson 2013) – usually called "artistic research" in continental Europe (Borgdorff 2006) – it is my concern that my performative, embodied practice and artistic methodology is visible in my academic research. In the lecture performance, therefore, my live dancing body played quite an important role. To retain the performance-based form of the lecture in this publication, I have integrated into my text both the verbal contents of the lecture and short descriptions of my actions and dances, in a similar manner that stage directions are included in dramatic text. The photos taken by age researcher Peter Derkx during the performance offer important additional information. Even though such photos do not convey the dynamics of the actual dancing, they do give an indication of the aesthetics of the overall event.

2 Warm-up

The symposium participants enter a spacious lecture space with two rows of chairs in a wide semi-circle. While they find their seats, I test and explore my dancing body and the space. During my improvised dance exploration, I say something like the following:

1 I work with the term "age(ing)" throughout this text. My understanding of 'age(ing)' is influenced by the writings of the German age researcher Miriam Haller, who works with the terms "Alter(n)" and "Alter(n)sstudien" (2010, 2013). The use of brackets in her work emphasizes that her field of inquiry is not limited to old age. In addition, I see the use of brackets as an intentional stumbling block, thus rendering the often-used word "aging" unfamiliar. Indeed, the brackets accentuate the fact that aging is the gerund of age. As such, they show that aging is not a discrete period of life – as, for example, in the much-used phrase "an aging woman" – but rather a continuum. I suggest that the brackets open the word 'aging' to multiple meanings.

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This is a warm-up dance. It is my time to get used to moving my body in your presence. It is also your warm-up time: a transition, a moment to find the right channel inside of you to receive this kind of information. This information is called contemporary dance. So, you warm-up and seek the frequency for this special edition of contemporary dance (*gesturing at my moving body*). And I warm up to dance here and now in front of you and for you. And I bring the air into motion a little bit. Maybe that helps.

By the way, my presentation does not focus on old age, but on age(ing) as a lifelong process.

3 Dancing Age(ing)

Figure 1: At the lectern, photo: Peter Derkx]

Getting installed at the lectern, reading from my script:

I'm a dancer who makes choreographies; I'm a choreographer who improvises; I'm an improviser who earned a PhD for a research project that is called *Dancing Age(ing)*. *Dancing Age(ing)* has now transformed into a book (2017). But it is also an extensive video collection that documents the practical artistic

research process, as well as two stage performances. Taken together, all of this material asks the following questions:

- How can dance intervene in our age(ing) culture?
- What alternative ways of both doing age(ing) (Swinnen and Stotesbury 2012) and representing age(ing) can dance provide?
- How might dance relate to the tension arising from the fact that we, in post-industrial societies, get older and older, while the need to stay productive, at peak performance levels, and perfectly functioning keeps increasing, together with a neo-liberal decrease in social security systems and practices of solidarity (Formosa 2013)?

Dance has a strong tradition of celebrating youth and youthfulness. Accordingly, a number of studies show that the majority of professional dancers transition out of their performance careers in their early to mid-thirties (Baumol et al. 2004; Dümcke 2008; Dickinson 2010; Levine 2005; Schwaiger 2012; Wainwright and Turner 2006a, 2006b). However, dance – and specifically contemporary dance – is also a site for questioning and inventing new ways of experiencing and presenting human bodies in movement, and for questioning and dismantling stereotypical body and age-related values and images (Benjamin 2010; Brayshaw and Witts 2014; Hoghe 2005; Albright 1997).

In *Dancing Age(ing)*, I describe two interesting territories in contemporary dance practice that offer a critique of ageism and follow alternative pathways of doing age(ing) and representing age(ing). The first is improvisation practice.

Among dance artists whose work is improvisation-based, what I see most often and what is most convincing in terms of critiquing ageism is a continuity of practicing and performing dance throughout midlife. I identified specific strategies within the field of improvisation that support a potentially life-long physical creative practice, which also means to do and possibly to conceptualize age(ing) differently. I looked at colleagues of mine above the age of fifty, at their doing, thinking, and practicing as expert improvisers, and I also looked at my own improvisation practice. I found strategies at work that keep the practice alive and developing, that keep us interested and deeply engaged, and that keep us financially sustained as performing artists. In summary, these strategies focus on:

- Establishing working and exchange structures on the fringes of the art market,
- Dealing with ever-changing physical constraints within the practice, and
- Practicing reflexivity.

The second territory I examined is performance. By that I mean these moments of showing dance in public. I analyzed a range of current dance works and created two performances myself as result of my research. They are called: *The Fountain of Youth* (2013) and *The Fountain of Age* (2015). This approach allowed me to articulate four specific strategies for presenting alternative images, imaginations and representations of age(ing) to an audience. These are:

- Resisting the youthfulness of dance
- Reconciling with age(ing) and death
- Colliding with age norms
- Ambiguating age(ing).

I argue that dance pieces with an "age-critical" (Martin 2017, 14) or "anocritical" (Maierhofer 2007, 23) impetus employ one or several of these strategies. Today, I will not expand on the categories through which I analyze improvisation practice and performance strategies. However, I trust that the keywords above will resonate and inspire your thinking as I now give you some more concrete insights into my own age-critical performance making.

4 Performance excerpts from JULIO

4.1 Introduction

While my theoretical engagement with age(ing) on and off stage started with my PhD project, my choreographic examination of age(ing) started quite a few years earlier. I have been making performance pieces around questions of age(ing) since 2003. Between 2003 and 2009 I created two larger performance series in a rather theatrical style (*JULIO*, 2003–2006 and *Rosi tanzt Rosi*, 2007–2009). By this I mean that I developed characters older then myself and imagined their biographies. Each of these characters had a specific style: their own way of dressing up and of being in the body, a specific muscle-tone, a certain rhythm, a particular taste in music, and an idiosyncratic way of dancing. I would like to show you two examples: two excerpts from the *JULIO* series that I made in my mid-thirties.

On a biographical level, the characters staged in these two solos were visions of my own future, if a few things in my life had turned out differently. On a cultural level, it was a great discovery and a pleasure for me to embody these dance amateurs who were a bit older, less attractive, and less confident than I thought I could allow myself to be as a dancer and choreographer. The work thus allowed me to recognize and reflect upon the expectations and fears around age(ing)

within my own contemporary dance milieu. The solo *Herr K. Müh* is twenty minutes long and the solo *Claudia* is thirty minutes long. Both solos start with quite a stereotypical embodiment of gendered age(ing), but over the course of the pieces, both characters gain greater physical, social, and emotional complexity. Here and now, I can show you only these beginnings. I just hope that some of the density and depth of the characters comes through in these excerpts.

Figure 2: First excerpt from the performance series *JULIO*, photo: Peter Derkx]

4.2 Herr K. Müh

I go to the chairs with props placed on one side of the informal stage area, change into a black shirt, shoes and tie, put a male mask over my head and take a folder

with me. Back in the space I take sheets of paper out of the folder, marked: AMIGOS; FREUNDE. Then begins an old-school masculine style of gymnastics: moving shoulders, neck and head in an abrupt, jerky mode; hard stretches of thigh and achilleas; side-bends, knee-circles, back-bends and elbow-pushups. I switch on music. While Charles Aznavour sings "Yesterday when I was young", I go back to the folder, where I find other marked sheets to hold up: I NEED TO EXPRESS MYSELF; NOW A SPONTANEOUS IMPROVISATION; FOR CLAUDIA. Then, in a corner, some ritualistic movements of preparation are followed by an energetic but arrhythmic moving through the space. After a while, this slows down, with more gestural moves and less fighting with the rhythm of the music. Then, passionate moving on the spot and more virtuosic knee-circles. Then a rather disillusioned walk towards the back wall until the music ends. I go back to the chairs, remove the shirt, shoes and mask. The song repeats itself.

Figure 3: Second excerpt from the performance series *JULIO*, photo: Peter Derkx]

4.3 Claudia

I put on skin-colored nylon socks, a short grey wig, a light scarf, and move closer to the audience to speak with nervous enthusiasm over the music – the Charles Aznavour song is still playing.

My name is Claudia, I think I will do my dance right away, then it's done, yeah?

I begin, a bit shyly, to move to the music.

The music is a bit heavy, a bit sad; I think I have something else.

I change the music at the lectern. Now we hear Julio Iglesias singing "Begin the Beguine", by Cole Porter.

This is Julio Iglesias, I like him, I have been to three of his concerts – they were very, very special.

I start a kind of party dance in the center of the space, elastically and in tune with the music but at the same time nervously fluttering, with interruptions of very nervous and embarrassed laughing. Finally, I break off with shrill laughter, running to the lectern to switch off the music.

Enough, too much, so embarrassing.

I go to the chairs, take off the wig, scarf and nylon socks, then continue the lecture at the lectern, reading from my script.

4.4 Analysis and contextualization of the performance excerpts

Looking back at these works I would say I was working on habitus, and how biography becomes inscribed in the body (Bourdieu 1987). I let each of these characters collide with or break away from the normative script of their age-biography (Gullette 2004). In other words, I worked with the performativity of age(ing), and the intersection of age and gender performativity (Woodward 2006). I learned a lot from that.

From K. Müh, the male character Klaus, I learned how relieving and enjoyable it was when I found a way to expose and artistically exploit the stiffness, sadness and tiredness I actually really felt at the time I made this piece. It was the fact of changing my face and playing with the ambiguity of the double image of male and female, older and younger, that gave me permission to do so.

From Claudia I learned how disempowering it is to move in slippery nylon socks and how energizing it is to have a three-minute rock 'n roll freak-out to cheesy music. This is learning through practice. Later I learned to theorize the context-, culture-, and class-specific fine distinctions between what is adequate

and appropriate, and what is inadequate and inappropriate for, let's say, a petit-bourgeois middle-aged woman like Claudia (Bourdieu 1987). Claudia and Klaus move inside traditional gender roles and gender requirements. But they are also in the moment of moving themselves out of these. A bit clumsy still, and with a big portion of vulnerability, they are exposing themselves to ridicule.

5 Performance excerpt from The Fountain of Youth

5.1 Introduction

In the performance *The Fountain of Youth* (premiered 2013), which is part of my doctoral thesis, I do not work with characters, and I am not performing one of my imaginary age selves. Even more than in my earlier works, I was searching for ambiguities and how I can use my vaguely middle-aged body to stage a multiplicity of concepts, phenomena and open questions regarding age(ing). I show seven scenes that each offer a different perspective and relationship to age(ing). The scene I show in a moment is called *Improvisation & Dementia*.

The decision to include dementia as a subject in my performance comes from my improvisation practice. In other words, the initial spark neither derives from a case of Alzheimer in my family nor from age theory discourses. It comes from the recurring challenge of finding and maintaining focus and orientation during solo improvisation. Solo improvisation gives me a very specific, partial and situated perspective on the dementia discourse. When I practice solo improvisation, I experience again and again a crisis of disorientation. I struggle to access the compositional knowledge, the improvisational curiosity, the necessary mindfulness that helps to find purpose, focus and orientation in improvised solo dancing. I argue that disorientation is an integral part of improvisation and of an improviser's subjectivity – a subjectivity that tries to be open to the unknown and to change. The research literature on improvisation agrees that the experience of disorientation is not something that experienced practitioners eventually overcome, but that it is one of the shifting constraints, as well as potentials, that improvisation deals with and works with (Albright 2011; Novack 1990; Smith 2003).

5.2 Improvisation & Dementia

Figure 4: Excerpt from the piece *The Fountain of Youth*, photo: Peter Derkx]

I take off my reading glasses and I start to dance again. This dance picks up on the movement style I established in the warm-up. I concentrate on and play with each change and movement that I generate from moment to moment. Instead of embodying a character or a story, I invite the audience to follow me, engaging with dance as composing the body in time and space. While dancing, I speak the following words, which is the original text from the scene "Improvisation & Dementia".

Why do I keep thinking that they have something going on... improvisation and dementia... something like a friendship or kinship?

In a demented state, what is weak and gets progressively weaker is the orientation in space, the orientation in time, and the ability to respond, to be responsive, reactive verbally, physically, socially.

In improvisation I'm dealing with these same issues, again and again, each time I improvise. I'm constantly warming up my orientation. I'm trying to find a relationship here, now; relating myself, here... here... in relation to this... to this...

Which distance? Where? In relation to... you here... me there.

How to adapt? How to place myself... in time?

How long? How fast? How slow? When to start? When to give up? How often... can this make sense?

Improvisation as the never-ending warm up, especially open solo improvisation, painful, painful. I warm up my orientation, my relations into the empty... here... like so... relating... and then – it's gone. So, I start again here... I connect... create some heat... I socialize here, now, and now it's still there... and now it's

gone. I'm in a loop of constantly building my grounds, my basics into the nothing, and it's OK as long as I keep doing it, but when I stop doing it, it stops doing it.

I need something to respond to, to start moving at all. To respond I first need to sense something, recognize something, feel something.

How does that feel, what can I do with that?

How does that feel, what can I do with that?

How to sense something so clearly that I even have a choice of how to respond, maybe even make up a brand new, totally arty, never-been-there-before kind of a response.

And when doing this I'm very soon in this territory... in dementia research this could be called culturally inappropriate behavior, disinhibited, while I'm still just looking for relationships.

The stage can take much more of this than the street or the family.

Then I walk to the lectern and continue the lecture reading from my script.

5.3 Analysis and contextualization of the performance excerpt

I see an interesting tension between embracing states and times of disorientation in dance and mass media discourses that address dementia as the "twenty-first century plague" (Smyth quoted in Swinnen and Sweda 2015, 9). Drawing on Aagje Swinnen's argument that these discourses invoke a kind of "Alzheimer Apocalypse" (2013, 12), I contend that the discourse of fear around this age-related illness contributes to establishing a threat-scenario about the looming loss of one's sovereignty and autonomy. Such a threat, in turn, suggests that the self-controlled, sovereign, autonomous subject exists in the first place and is perceived as normal. This supposed normality reinforces the demand on the individual to do everything to prevent or delay this loss. As an artistic response, the dance in the scene *Improvisation & Dementia* functions as an affirmation of a constantly struggling, ever precarious body-mind, one that accepts disorientation to find orientation, which again is always only temporary.

6 Epilogue

I think that is enough for now. To wrap it up, and before opening to your comments and questions, let me say that I'm serious about dancing in academic lectures and about performing my arguments. I am interested in the critical poten-

tial of bodies and movement, and in giving that a presence instead of just talking about it. On top of that, to keep finding ways to do, to dance, to perform my arguments forces me to keep moving, dancing, working out performances. And this brings me right back to one of the major points of *Dancing Age(ing)*, to strategies of making dance a lifelong physical artistic practice. I want to continue being a dancer, while I also want to share my research. I want myself to be a part of that exciting phenomenon that dancers stay visible and explore dance, show dance and take part in defining dance with a twenty-year-old body, a forty-year-old body, a sixty-year-old body – and if I'm very lucky, an eighty-year-old body.

So, I will keep working on danced lectures, because everything I do is also what I train myself in. And I usually get better at things when I train a lot.

Thank you for your attention.

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Birgit Meyer

Opera for Every Age – Opera for People with Dementia

The project "Oper für Jung und Alt – Opera for Every Age" – which won the 2017 Rudi Assauer Prize, the most important award for dementia projects in Germany – enables people with dementia and their companions to attend performances at the Cologne Opera. They come to see selected performances from the regular program of the Cologne Children's Opera. These productions are suitable for children and adults alike, and showcase music and acting at the highest level. Audience members experience performances in close proximity to the singers, coming into direct contact with them, and the entire ensemble is prepared for the audience reactions. Attending the opera together with the young audience members thus becomes an intergenerational experience.

Since its inception more than 20 years ago, Cologne's Children's Opera has proven to be a model of success. Singing and performing at the Children's Opera are the soloists of the Cologne Opera ensemble, the singers of the Opera Studio and the musicians of Cologne's Gürzenich Orchester, which also accompanies the performances on the main stage. It is not opera with singing children, but opera for children – musical theatre at the highest level, in terms of both music and set design.

When selecting the pieces, special emphasis is placed on their length and subject, and on ensuring that plots are transparent and easy to understand. Da capo repeats, long instrumentals and some chorus passages are cut, and the composition is rearranged for a smaller orchestra, meaning that performances run for about an hour. They tell stories from fairy tales, sagas or the "1001 Nights"; ghosts, knights, heroes, villains, princesses, kings and countless singing animals populate the stage. It is easy to find pieces with subjects and plots like these, as they account for the majority of the most frequently performed operas anyway. Mozart's "Magic Flute" just had its premiere, and the first premiere next season will be Wagner's "Siegfried," the third part of Cologne's "Ring for Children." This kind of repertoire selection means that there is a lot of overlap between children's and adult theatre. Although the initial intent was for children and teenagers to participate in adult culture, it is now clear that it is also possible to participate the other way around – in the project "Opera for Every Age" at the Cologne Opera.

Both recent research and a number of practical projects have clearly shown that music has a positive influence on quality of life for people with dementia,

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and encounters with children have also proven to have an invigorating effect on them. Music and children are precisely what Cologne's Children's Opera is all about, and this is how the idea to enable people with dementia to attend the Children's Opera came to life roughly five years ago. There was never any conceptualization of special performances for people with dementia; instead, regular visits to the performances of the Children's Opera make inclusion and cultural participation possible for people living with dementia; they are able to access opera performances in the normal atmosphere of the opera house with which they are already familiar.

There are a host of formal factors that are favourable to a project like this – here just a selection:

- For people with dementia, it is important that the performances predominantly take place in the morning or afternoon, when their physical and psychological capacity are at their highest. Moreover, it is easier to integrate early appointments into the schedules of care facilities. Finally, this also means that the attendees can go and have a cup of coffee after the performance.
- The recommendation is that performances last about an hour, but it has also been demonstrated that people with dementia can follow operas of longer durations.
- Cologne's Children's Opera has 200 seats, which means that attendees experience a performance in close proximity to the musicians and singers, and come into direct contact with them. Attending the opera together with the young audience members thus becomes an intergenerational experience that brings everyone together.
- Children's performances have their own rules. In moments of great excitement, everybody suddenly stands up. Rhetorical questions are not understood as such; rather, you put your hand up to answer them. If there are a lot of performers on the stage, children sometimes decide that they are tired of taking a passive role and would like to get involved in what is happening instead. They comment on the events. There are opportunities to sing along. And the best way to find out how a feathered costume in Stravinsky's "Nightingale" is made is by touching it – maybe you can even take a feather home as a souvenir... The entire ensemble is thus prepared for the audience reactions. The fear held by many carers that the person with dementia who they are looking after might forget the kind of social conduct required at an opera performance is thus irrelevant – and, incidentally, almost always unfounded.

The project is a very successful, permanent component of the Cologne's Children's Opera. At the beginning, it was only possible to offer four performances per season, but there are now more than 20 and they are all well attended. The offer is taken up by both family members caring for somebody with dementia at home as well as care facilities. Moreover, the needs and resources of the target group require certain frameworks to ensure visits are carried out successfully, but they have now been thoroughly tried and tested. In addition, during the 2015/16 season, an empirical study was carried out as part of a master's thesis. The findings and success factors have been summarized and are provided to private members of the public and institutions that support people with dementia. There are also materials relating to the performances – for example, illustrated or written retellings of the story, composer portraits, excerpts from the scores of selected arias for singing along, etc. – that can be requested and that attendees can use to engage with the content and music of the opera in advance. Right before the performance, there is an opportunity for the performers to introduce audience members to their roles and for attendees to take a look at objects like props and costumes, which increases recognition during the performance. At care facilities, attendees can reflect upon their visit to the opera during practical musical-theatre follow-up workshops. (The initial focus of the first follow-up workshop was musical: participants sang easy-to-learn opera excerpts and other well-known songs with a thematic link to the content of the opera. Since then, paper theatre has also proven to provide attendees with a good opportunity to reflect upon their experiences by means of practical theatre. Those living with dementia retell the story of the opera and perform it in the paper theatre using costume designs that have been repurposed as little puppets. Musical excerpts from the opera accompany the play or are sung by participants.)

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