

Ageing in Everyday Life: Materialities and Embodiments

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This edited volume brings together a collection of ten essays that reflect on the lived experiences of ageing realised through complex everyday interactions of material means and (ageing) bodies, primarily in the context of Europe and North America. As the editor, Stephen Katz, points out in the introductory chapter, the essays in this volume explore ‘often taken-for-granted moments, spaces, things and experiences that evoke what it means to grow older’ (p. 1) against the backdrop of rapidly changing social, economic and political milieux. These rapid changes in socio-cultural contexts and conditions demand dynamic and situational strategies to respond to the concerns at hand. This volume brings together such strategies adopted to understand age, ageing and embodiment anew in the current times: through reading of material possessions, intimate relationships, films, representation of online dating in newspapers, dancing, driving technologically advanced vehicles, clothing, exercising, *etc.* Comprising 12 chapters, the volume begins with an introductory chapter by the editor, followed by ten essays by various scholars and a concluding chapter. The ten essays are organised under two sections: ‘Materialities’ (Part 1) and ‘Embodiments’ (Part 2). Each section comprises five essays and begins with a short, helpful, introductory note by the editor, foregrounding the overarching theme of the following chapters. While the section on ‘Materialities’ presents a collection of essays focusing on tangible aspects of everyday ageing environments and living spaces such as things and material possessions, designs of residential care institutions, mobility and physical movement, and popular media (cinema and online dating websites), the section on ‘Embodiments’ explores the lived experiences of ageing bodies through an analysis of their relation with clothing, technologically advanced vehicles, dementia care practices, touch and sexuality, and health technologies and practices. The concluding chapter by Kim Sawchuk, which is a part of the second section, identifies and eloquently brings to the fore the common themes across the seemingly dipartite essays.

One such interesting theme, identified by Sawchuk, is the importance of ‘relationality’ underscoring the meaning-making process in later life. Pia Kontos and Alisa Grigorovich (Chapter 9), for instance, recount the ‘relational citizenship’ expressed by the residents in Jewish care homes for seniors with dementia, through their various body movements. In the process, through their ethnographic examples, Kontos and Grigorovich question the popular understanding of dance, dementia and selfhood that privilege cognitive capabilities. Similarly, David J. Ekerdt (Chapter 2) attempts to understand the convoy of material possessions created in later life. They emphasise that the affectual values assigned to material

goods over instrumental values transform 'personal belongings of autonomous individuals' (p. 34) to 'an intergenerational and collective matter' (p. 35). Julia Twigg (Chapter 10) also explores the concept of relationality and interaction through her study of clothing and fashion in later life. She argues that choice and presentation of clothing have a 'mediating performative dimension' which opens the potential for communication and interaction. Twigg's discussion highlights the pleasure that is materialised through bodily connections of touch through clothing (which according to Twigg is the environment closest to us). Touch as a means of experiencing and expressing self and establishing relationality is also at the core of Linn J. Sandberg's study (Chapter 7) on exploring later-life intimacy and sexuality among men. Based on the narrative accounts (constructed through a combination of embodied diaries and interviews) of three older Swedish men, Sandberg forces us to reconceptualise intimacy, pleasure and sexuality in later life. Further, keeping in line with the overarching theme of relationality, Susan Braedley's (Chapter 3) ethnographic work on nursing homes in Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America analyses the dominant or ruling linguistic metaphors (of 'hospital', 'home' and 'hotel') structuring the organisational principles of these residential care systems (mostly for people with dementia) and the social relations enacted within these spaces. Adopting a feminist-Marxist stance, she suggests that the introduction of 'collective living' and 'collective caring', scant in industrialised countries, could be a more equitable, respectful and inclusive later-life living arrangement and care practice. This chapter concludes with an enthusiastic call for new and alternative ideas of residential homes such as the ones with therapeutic environments in the UK. The discursive power-relations (evident in the dominant form of nursing home in Braedley's work) based on materiality and embedded in everyday practices and performances is explored further by Sally Chivers (Chapter 5) in her discussion of the two 'Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' films. As Chivers points out, though the two films set out to suggest alternative ways of ageing successfully by adjusting and adopting to the newness of a changed locale (the senior British protagonists migrate to Jaipur, India), they are limited by sexist and racist portrayals of a 'presumed white old age'. The cultural worth of the protagonists (senior Britons who migrated to India in pursuit of an affordable old age) is restored by reintroducing them to the culture of consumption in a relatively affordable habitat and making them a part of the production process (in the process, making their whiteness trump over age). This process of negotiating and renegotiating identities in later life within the dominant discourse on successful ageing driven by consumerist market enterprises is also explored by Julia Rozanova, Mineko Wada and Laura Hurd Clarke (in Chapter 6, through an analysis of representations of online dating in Canadian newspapers), Jessica A. Gish, Amanda M. Grenier and Brenda Vrkjan (in Chapter 8, in their analysis of driving technologically advanced vehicles in later life) and Barbara L. Marshall (in Chapter 11, in her analysis of health monitoring and fitness devices). Through an analysis of everyday embodied experiences of living with technological advancements, these essays explore the new post-human meanings of 'active' and 'successful' ageing and recognise that the daily experiences of ageing are imprinted with the larger social, cultural, political and historical realities.

This book makes significant methodological and theoretical contribution to ageing research. It informs the reader about the possibility of adopting emerging and inter-disciplinary methods to relook at questions of age. For instance, Gavin J. Andrews and Amanda M. Grenier (Chapter 4) introduce a refreshingly new approach to understanding movement and space in later life. Adopting geographer Nigel Thrift's non-representational theory, they employ a socio-geographic lens to redefine five elements of movement in older age: rhythm, momentum, vitality, infectiousness and encounter. By constantly comparing the scientific and medical understanding of these terms with their everyday popular usage in describing later-life events and experiences, Andrews and Grenier relook at what it means to be human by focusing on the immediate events and environments: 'everyday events in life and the everyday places where they occur' (p. 66). Similarly, Rozanova *et al.* present a content analysis of media representation of online dating services for older adults. Braedley too, in her cross-national study of residential care homes, employs an interesting combination of interview records of the participants and field notes of the investigators to present her ethnographic analysis.

This book is a well-structured, engaging and easy read, and will be equally relevant for scholars in the disciplines of gerontology and contributing disciplines of sociology, kinesiology and public health, as well as policy makers geared towards later-life care and assistance. The collection will also be helpful for classroom use to demonstrate inter-disciplinary approaches in gerontological research. It informs the reader of new and alternative ways of understanding later-life interactions (with humans, materials, technologies and environments) and identities, especially in the context of Western industrialised societies. Though the editor points out that the theoretical and methodological contributions of the volume are relevant to other parts of the world, one is left wondering if incorporating similar studies in the context of the global south (*e.g.* Lamb *et al.*, 2017) could have been academically more enriching; especially in light of the challenges of an expanding ageing population in these regions and the growing emphasis on salience of cultural context (with the recent cultural turn in gerontology; Twigg and Martin, 2015) in understanding the plural meanings of ageing.

References

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