

REVIEW

Critical Humanities and Ageing: Forging Interdisciplinary Dialogues

Marlene Goldman, Kate de Medeiros and Thomas Cole (eds),
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Exploring the intersection of humanities and ageing studies, *Critical Humanities and Ageing: Forging Interdisciplinary Dialogues* brings together a wide range of scholars, predominantly from the humanities and social sciences. The book experiments with a new format promoting collaboration between researchers working in separate disciplines within ageing studies. Each article, with one exception, is followed by a shorter response article from a different discipline or sector, usually a social sciences researcher commenting on an essay by a humanities scholar. After an editorial introduction, 29 contributions are grouped broadly into sections on meaning, disability, activism, and care, each comprising three or four essays plus responses. The editors claim this format values 'the power of tensions and discussions' to progress our understanding of ageing (p. xiv). Together the contributions offer examples of work that challenge the primacy of big datasets in gerontology using methodologies from humanities as diverse as literature, philosophy, film and critical studies, as well as from wider approaches in sociology, anthropology, gender studies and health policy.

The editors' Introduction outlines the field of critical humanities and ageing, emphasising this book's place as the fourth in a loose series of guides to this emerging area of study started in 1991 and connected through Thomas Cole's co-editorship. Apart from one sub-section which overplays the role of literary studies in a book that ranges much further, it provides a neat overview of the heritage of critical humanities and inter-disciplinarity in ageing studies today.

Part I, 'What Does It Mean to Grow Old?', begins with Corinne Field's historical account of the intersection of race, gender and age in 19th-century America through reassessment of influential figures in the women's rights and abolition movements. Tamara Baker provides a response based on the contemporary stereotype of the Strong Black Woman and mental health. Sari Edelstein similarly uncovers various literary depictions of ageing by women and/or people of colour in 19th-century America that challenge conventional associations of ageing with

decline and frailty. In Julia Twigg's response, she expands on Edelstein's intersectional argument in a contemporary context. Next, bioethicist Bruce Jennings challenges the dominant neurofunctionalist approach to dementia care in favour of a more relational sense of agency. Rather than expanding on this, Chris Gilleard responds with a reality check questioning the practicalities and contingencies of providing such care in current settings. In the final pair in this section, Michael and Linda Hutcheon discuss agency in relation to their ongoing work on late-life creativity and Aagje Swinnen contextualises these thoughts in her response on the possibility of successful ageing in long-term care facilities for artists.

Part II, 'Aging: Old Age and Disability', starts with Elinor Fuchs essay, originally published in 2014, bringing ageing studies into contact with theatre studies through reference to Henrik Ibsen's plays. Neil King briefly discusses Fuchs's work alongside his own research on positive depictions of ageing in mainstream Anglophone cinema. Joel Michael Reynolds and Anna Landre's essay and Michelle Putnam's response give a similar overview of the relevance of disability studies to ageing studies since older people often live with disability without accessing the support and solidarity that some find through identifying as disabled. Sally Chivers's article proves one of the most compelling since it picks up on the collection's subtitle and emerges from conversations with the editors. Her account showcases her own inter-disciplinary research in care homes alongside some high-level thoughts on ageing and the 'generative ambiguity' of humanities approaches (p. 146). Janelle Taylor's close reading of geriatrics journals responds by introducing her own novel application of the literary techniques Chivers might advocate. Linda Hess's article on narratives of queer ageing closes this section by delineating the links between ageing and both queer and crip theory. David Ekerdt's response represents a genuine conversion: as he read Hess's essay, he realised that his own social science approach has 'been incomplete' through adhering to certain norms of what it means to age (p. 174).

Part III, 'Aging, Old Age, and Activism', begins with Paul Higgs's standalone genealogy of ageism which sums up his established argument that ageism is really 'fourth ageism' based on society's rejection of the human body's mortality and (inter)dependence. It has no respondent and sits oddly alongside Kathleen Woodward's edited republication of an essay on 'Ageing in the Anthropocene' from 2020, which uses a novel by Margaret Drabble to advocate thinking in terms of generations to incite climate action. Both Woodward's article and Daniel Hoornweg's response (which refers to sections of Woodward's 2020 article not in the current collection) seem Western and anthropocentric compared to May Chazan, Tasha Beeds and Jenn Cole's decolonial conversation around positive ageing futures. Like the earlier in-conversation with Sally Chivers, their discussion about ancestors, custodianship and relationships with the land makes up for any lack of academic rigour by demonstrating the process of inter-disciplinary collaboration and dialogue in real time. Sandy Grande's response distils their conversation in terms of Indigenous cultures and kinship through an account of ageing as a privilege.

Finally, in Part IV, 'Old Age and Humanistic Approaches to Care', Rüdiger Kunow outlines a fairly utopian account of intimacy and distance in relationships of care. Des O'Neill's response adds needed nuance on, for example, older people's fears around care and the migrant workforce predominantly responsible for

performing it. Amanda Ciafone summarises similar issues surrounding labour inequality in her essay on the politics of interdependence over the last 60 years. Chris Phillipson extends Ciafone's argument about the devaluation of care work by attending to how its centrality to the global economy is hidden by worker precarity and neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility. Amelia DeFalco's piece on posthumanism in the film *Marjorie Prime* uses ethics of care and the 'more-than-human' to demonstrate how depictions of human interdependence with artificial intelligence ignore the messy materiality of existence. Steven Sabat misses the main direction of DeFalco's argument in his response focusing on the importance of human authenticity within person-centred care. The book closes with Kate de Medeiros and Anne Basting's essay on the 'transformative creativity' of calculated risk in care home arts interventions which, at their best, succeed through people exposing their vulnerability in ways rarely amenable to the audit culture of residential care. Pia Kontos's response thinks through the relational benefits of supporting creativity, which are usually ignored as care aims even within arts-based programmes.

Read all the way through, the book presents an overview of the field of humanities and ageing that shows the strengths and weaknesses of the inter-disciplinary openness aspired to by the editors. The paper and response format has the same uneven quality of a large conference – generative rather than definitive. Responses occasionally prioritise the response author's personal interests over the main article's point, perhaps an inevitable consequence of working across disciplines. Yet, at their best, responses clarify and consolidate the main article while also summarising an important aspect of the field, such as successful ageing, post-humanism or intersectionality. Of the book's four parts, Part IV on care is by far the most coherent with the latent politics of the rest of book able to emerge fully in discussions that deal with the difficulties of implementing person-centred care when the labour of caring is so undervalued.

Like many books in the Routledge Advances in Medical Humanities series, the book suffers from light-touch editing and typesetting. Response articles still have the main article author in the header, page numbers for quotes in each response article refer back to the main article as if it started on page 1, and there is no consistency on whether references and footnotes for main and response articles appear separately or are merged. Theoretically, I would have liked more contributions to reflect the shift in the humanities to cross-disciplinary teamworking, or perhaps an editorial afterword that approaches the difficulties of such work. It would be good too to see attention beyond the Anglophone North in any future iteration of this guide, as well as more essays by social scientists with comments from those in the critical humanities to avoid privileging either side.

Nevertheless, the book is a snapshot of the sorts of conversations going on across social and cultural gerontology, medical humanities and ageing studies. It raises many of the current debates or concerns of the field, from ableism to anthropocentrism, from issues of language or embodiment to performativity and productivity. There is, therefore, lots that is new for those working in the field but also much for students or academics engaging with the field of humanities and ageing for the first time.

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