



Center for Inter-American Studies



UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ

Koordinationsstelle für
Geschlechterstudien und Gleichstellung



UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ

Graz School of Interdisciplinary
Transnational Studies



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Photo credit: Elizabeth Layton "Buttons - Her Strength is in Her Principles"

Age and Gender in the Humanities and Social Sciences

**Symposium dedicated to Roberta Maierhofer
and her Scholarship in Aging Studies**

Introduction

Feminist theory and gender studies have deconstructed the dualism of sex and gender, questioning their assignment to the realms of nature and culture respectively. Similarly, the binary construction of 'age' as youth versus old age is displaced by 'aging' conceived as an ongoing process throughout life, foregrounding change. The productive interplay of the two categories of age and gender for critical perspectives in the humanities and social sciences is expressed, for instance, in Susan Sontag's essay "The Double Standard of Aging" (1972) where she contrasts old age (as a real "trial") and growing older (as an imaginary "ordeal"), the latter of which she depicts as more shameful and distasteful for women as a result of the gendered double standard of aging. In response to this specific ageism addressed at women personal interventions on the subject of aging from feminist perspectives by Germaine Greer (1992) or Betty Friedan (1993) were published. From the perspective of feminist literary studies, Roberta Maierhofer in the late 1990s introduced the term "anocriticism" to analyze literature concerned with female aging processes. Whereas women were a central focus of early Age/ing Studies, in response to the more severe discrimination encountered by women as they aged into invisibility, analyses shifted to intersectional approaches in the twenty-first century to include different concepts of gender, femininities and masculinities, queer and trans identities and sexualities, incorporating identity categories such as race, class, social status, ethnicities, and (dis-)abilities.

In this symposium, we aim to explore current research on the intersections of age and gender in cultural Age/ing Studies and Critical Gerontology, as well as historical and intergenerational perspectives on the matter. Taking Roberta Maierhofer's work as a starting point, we invite contributions which explore the complexities and ambivalences of the cultural and social intersections of age/ing and gender. As recently argued by Ratzenböck (2020), Maierhofer's lens of anocriticism draws attention to four analytical dimensions: (a) age and aging's collective cultural construction and relation to gender, (b) the individual dimension of aging, (c) people's interpretative power and narrative performance with regard to age and aging, and (d) age and aging's potential for resistance and change. In addition to contemporary contexts, we wish to re-examine the historical trajectory of critical perspectives in the humanities and social sciences, tracing how these evolved around the two categories of age and gender. Intergenerational perspectives have been important within the field of Age/ing Studies, whether for "Inventing Generational Models" beyond the still influential psychoanalytic model of two binary generations (Woodward 1999) or within "Narratives of Mentorship" (Casado-Gual, Dominguez-Rué, Oró-Piqueras 2019) that trace lines of influence beyond the (mostly male) "Anxiety of Influence" (Bloom 1973).

The symposium features individual presentations, panel discussion and anecdotal contributions; all celebration Roberta Maierhofer and her scholarship in Aging Studies.



Program

9.00-9.30 --- Welcome Coffee ---

9.30-9.45 Welcome Remarks

Nicole Haring (Organizer, University of Graz)

Florian Bieber (Director of the Graz School of Interdisciplinary Transnational Studies)

tba (Representative of the City of Graz)

9.45-10.30 Gender and Age: Maierhofer's Scholarship in Aging Studies Revisited

Heike Hartung (University of Potsdam, Germany) and Nicole Haring (University of Graz, Austria)

10.30-11.00 --- Coffee Break ---

11.00-12.30 Queering Age

Moderator: Elfi Bettinger (Free University Berlin, Germany)

Exploring the Epic of Older Women's Lives

Núria Casado-Gual (University of Lleida, Spain)

Queer Temporalities in Contemporary Spanish Cinema and TV Series

José Armengol (University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain)

"To love, to create, to express, to live" – A Typology of Aging Poems by Older Men

Dovrat Harel, Liat Ayalon (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)

12.30-14.00 --- Lunch break ---

14.00-15.30 Round Table: Aging Studies: Contested Territories in Times of Crisis

Moderator: Barbara Zach (ÖAG, Austria)

Aagje Swinnen (Maastricht University, Netherlands): Development of ENAS

Panelists: Ros Jennings (Gloucestershire University, UK), Kim Sawchuk (Concordia University, Canada), Linn Sandberg (Södertörn University, Sweden) and Roberta Maierhofer (University of Graz, Austria)

15.30-16.00 --- Coffee Break ---

16.00-17.00 Online Interventions: North American Network of Aging Studies

Development of NANAS

Julia Henderson (Chair of NANAS, University of British Columbia, Canada)

Recollections of Roberta, a Wonderful Friend

Peg Cruikshank (University of Maine, USA)

Anocriticism and the Performance of Masculinity in Interviews with Older Men

Kate de Medeiros (Concordia University, Canada)

Cultural Spiritual Renewal

Tom Cole (UTHealth Houston, USA)

17.00-18.00 Aging, Mentorship, and the Life-Course

Moderator: Marta Corezo Moreno (UNED, Spain)

Aging at the Margins: Older Transgender Women, Sex Work, and the Gendered Exclusion in Spain

Hernando Gómez Prada (University of Murcia, Spain)

¡Los vaqueros auténticos!: A worlding appreciation of a hemispheric icon

Steve Rabitsch (University of Oslo, Norway)

Metaphors and Sayings

Oana Hergenröther (University of Graz, Austria)

18.00 Closing and Celebration

19.30 --- Dinner at Promenade ---



Abstracts

Queering Age

Exploring the Epic of Older Women's Lives

Núria Casado-Gual (University of Lleida, Spain)

Queer Temporalities in Contemporary Spanish Cinema and TV Series

José Armengol (University La Mancha, Spain)

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Exploring the epic of older women's lives: Alexander Zeldin's *The Confessions* and Jan Vilanova's *The Most Beautiful Thing We Can Do* as intergenerational dramaturgies of the female life course

Núria Casado-Gual, University of Lleida (Spain)

Five decades after the term 'herstory' (Morgan 1970) was proposed, stories which have vindicated the social and historical role of anonymous women have proliferated in different biographical genres. More recently, the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on older people has also generated the need to generate or examine narratives of ageing (Jewusiak 2023) and to strengthen generational relationships (Ayalon et al. 2020). Despite the technical (and sometimes ethical) challenges posed by the act of representing the lives of others in the ageist and sexist cultures of the so-called advanced world (Friedan 1993; Gullette 2004; Sontag 1972; Woodward 1999), writing about or representing the lives of older women in particular can help restore constructive meanings of female old age from which all generations can benefit.

Drawing on the interdisciplinary framework of ageing studies in its intersections with gender and theatre studies, this paper examines two plays which, in London's and Barcelona's theatrical scenes, have recently placed the lives of anonymous older women in the spotlight: Jan Vilanova's *The Most Beautiful Thing We Can Do* (produced by Sixto Paz in 2022) and Alexander Zeldin's *The Confessions* (co-produced by the National Theatre in 2023). While Vilanova's text recreates the life of the author's grandmother, an anonymous Spanish woman who survived two wars and lived as an exile for most of her life, Zeldin's presents the personal journey of the writer and director's own mother, who was born in Australia and found a new life for herself as a divorcée and abuse survivor in London in the 1970s. Through a close reading of the two texts that builds on Roberta Maierhofer's (1999) pivotal concept of "anocriticism," and in the light of Elinor Fuchs' age-focused interpretation of Brechtian theatre, the article observes the dramatic strategies whereby these two intergenerational 'herstories' for the stage can be considered 'epic' narratives of the female life course.

Queer Temporalities in Contemporary Spanish Cinema and TV Series

José María Armengol Carrera, University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)

Older men's sexualities have recurrently been defined as either "asexual" or "in decline." Their sexualities, when/if represented at all, have also been associated with the "dirty old man" stereotype, which has depicted sex in old age as both unpalatable and grotesque. Delving into these (mis)representations, this presentation will offer an overview of representations of older men's sexual lives in contemporary Spanish cinema and TV series, which seem to reify but also challenge such stereotypes. Thus, for example, both the classic film *El abuelo* by José Luis Garci and the highly acclaimed animation movie *Arrugas* by Ignacio Ferreras, based on Paco Plaza's graphic novel of the same title, present the older men in an old people's home as eminently asexual, while the TV series *Crematorio*, based on Rafael Chirbes' homonymous novel, focuses on the relationship between an aging (heterosexual) man and a younger woman, which thus seems to reinforce the traditional "dirty old man" stereotype. Yet Salvador Calvo's "El trasplante," one of the episodes of the recent remake of Chicho Ibáñez-Serrador's well-known horror TV series *Historias para no dormir*, appears to turn the stereotype upside down, featuring a dystopian story of an older woman who grows increasingly apart from her suddenly rejuvenated lifelong husband. Movies such as *En la ciudad sin límites*, on the other hand, question rigid (hetero)sexual binaries as the dying older male protagonist, a supposedly straight husband and father, is finally revealed as bisexual, while Eloy de la Iglesia's *Los novios búlgaros* depicts a middle-aged man's attachment to a younger boy, who ends up marrying his girlfriend. Using the character of Salvador Mallo as his alter-ego, Pedro Almodóvar's (semi-)autobiographical *Pain and Glory* also focuses on gay aging, redefining it as a "queer" rather than linear or "straight" temporal experience (Halberstam), while one of the latest Spanish horror films, *Malasaña 32*, revolves around a house inhabited by a ghost whose traumatic past as a transgender person living under the Francoist regime comes back to haunt the present. Whilst exploring a number of selected films and TV series that seem to conform to conventional images of older men's sexual lives, this article will thus include alternative film representations that also undermine such limited and limiting images, thereby redefining aging men's sexualities on the contemporary Spanish screen as much more complex and plural than has been acknowledged.

“To love, to create, to express, to live”- a typology of aging poems by older men

Dovrat Harel, Tel-Hai College (Israel)

Poetry writing can serve as a means for personal expression of feelings, thoughts, and attitudes toward various subjects, as well as for a deeper understanding of lived experiences and identity. The present study examined the aging experiences of men over the age of 70 ($N = 15$), living in a continuing care retirement community in Israel, as reflected in the poems they wrote. The poems were analyzed using latent content analysis, resulting in a typology of three types of poems: a) Preparation for end-of-life poems, b) Positive aging poems, and c) Nostalgic poems. This typology can be understood in the context of gerontological theories, suggesting that the poems express emotional processes in old age: awareness of limited time, striving for ‘ego integrity’, and processes of assimilation and accommodation to achieve a sense of inner consistency throughout the life span. The study highlights the contribution of bibliotherapy, which allows older men to express a variety of identities and provides them with opportunities for negotiation, (re-)creation of identities, and agency.

Aging at the Margins: Older Transgender Women, Sex Work, and Gendered Exclusion in Spain

Hernando C. Gómez Prada, University of Murcia (Spain)

This dissertation examines the intersection of aging and gender through the lived experiences of older transgender women engaged in sex work in the Region of Murcia, Spain. Based on in-depth interviews with 18 transgender women—most of them migrants over the age of forty, with a significant proportion above fifty—the research analyzes how aging compounds existing forms of marginalization. Participants' life trajectories reveal prolonged exposure to precarious conditions, including irregular legal status, limited educational opportunities, health risks from unsupervised hormone treatments, and persistent dependence on sex work as their primary livelihood. With aging, these vulnerabilities are further exacerbated: declining health, reduced demand in the sex market, and intensified risks of social exclusion intersect with transphobia, sexism, racism, and the stigmatization of sex work. At the same time, the dissertation identifies strategies of resilience, such as community-based support networks and practices of care within trans groups. Adopting an intersectional and life-course perspective, this work contributes to the field of aging and gender studies by foregrounding the invisibilized realities of older transgender women. It calls for social policies and practices that recognize their rights, affirm their identities, and promote dignity in later life beyond the margins of exclusion.

¡Los vaqueros auténticos!: A worlding appreciation of a hemispheric icon

Steve Rabitsch, *University of Oslo (Norway)*

In his contribution to a 1967 volume titled *The Frontier Re-examined*, Texas historian Joe B. Frantz sweepingly declared that “the feel for the cowboy is everywhere; the symbol of the cowboy is just as pervasive” (180, original emphasis). He diagnosed qualities of the cowboy as well as cowboydom that resonate in postwestern/Global Wests contexts and scholarship (cf. Campbell 2013; Kollin 2007). Indeed, my talk takes its cue from Frantz in that cowboys not only command an “aura popularis” as “a continuing object of interest,” but they also “left [their] tracks everywhere” (169–171). Consequently, it is high time that the cowboy is *worlded*. This is not to say that the US-American permutation of the horse-mounted livestock laborer and its prodigious mythography are unimportant, or should be excised, far from it; but the (hi)story of the cowboy and cowboydom must not be claimed nor contained by a singular national(ist) discourse since it is always already transatlantic, hemispheric, and, indeed, global (cf. Sluyter 2012; Slatta 1990). Using new materialist theories and methods (cf. Haraway 2008; 2016), worlding the cowboy in this showcasing will attend to cowboying as a profession that is continuously practiced and cowboydom as a culture that is continuously (re)imagined; and, I will do so in decidedly hemispheric, transnational, and global terms. Ultimately, my talk will hopefully do its part in placing the cowboy in their worlds and as a world.

Anocriticism and the Performance of Masculinity in Interviews with Older Men

Kate de Medeiros (Concordia University, Canada)

While anocriticism is a feminist framework for considering the positioning of older women, this paper attempts to apply an anocriticism approach to consider how hegemonic masculinities support and resist cultural stereotypes of age and chronological age for older men. I first begin by considering how gender studies and feminist perspectives apply to the experiences of men through gender performance. I then link gender performance to narrative performance in the context of oral interviews and life stories. Next, I provide a brief overview of anocriticism and its use in the social science contexts. Finally, I present examples of an analysis from interviews with older men using an anocriticism framework.

Roberta Maierhofer: Metaphors and Sayings

Oana Hergenröther

Widely known for her reach outside of academia and her personal touch in the sometimes rigid scientific community, Maierhofer has shaped, in her role as official and unofficial mentor, the careers, and lives, of scholars of various backgrounds and generations. In her interactions with audiences, big or small, she has also developed a certain personal (and colorful) repertoire of sayings and metaphors. A firm believer in practicing what one preaches, Roberta Maierhofer is famous for thinking not only outside the box, but rather behind it, or, even better, for taking the box apart and studying where it was produced, by whom, and why. As someone who juggles well between universality and particularity, a look at some of her compressed wisdoms applied to diverse situations thus represents a meaningful exercise in the analytical contemplation of the everyday sublime.

Networks

ENAS – European Network in Aging Studies

History

The European Network in Aging Studies (ENAS) was first established in 2010 within the framework of the project “Live to be a Hundred: The Cultural Fascination with Longevity,” funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) in the program Internationalization in the Humanities. When the NWO-funded project came to an end in 2013, the European Network in Aging Studies was re-launched as a formal international association with seat in Graz, Austria.



Organization

ENAS is an official association with a governing board as well as an advisory board.

Membership

ENAS is an official association with a governing board as well as an advisory board.

Mission

The European Network of Aging Studies (ENAS) aims at prompting a thorough reflection on the ways in which we experience age and aging, on the cultural meanings of the aging process, and on theories and policies on aging. ENAS facilitates sustainable international and multi-disciplinary collaboration among all researchers interested in the study of age and aging, most notably from the humanities and social sciences. Through fostering collaboration and networking, promoting interdisciplinary approaches, and supporting researchers at an early stage of their career, ENAS enhances intersectional visibility and stimulates conversations between academia and the general public. To this end, ENAS has developed:

The ENAS Mentorship program,

Bi-annual ENAS conferences,

Two ENAS Awards,

Online ENAS talks/seminars,

Summer Schools, and

The Aging Studies Book Series and Age, Culture and Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal (in collaboration with the North American Network in Aging Studies)

ENAS’s inaugural conference was held in Maastricht (NL), 6-9 October 2011

NANAS – North American Network in Aging Studies

The North American Network in Aging Studies (NANAS) was established in January, 2013 by a small group of humanities and social science scholars who were interested in critical examinations of older age that moved away from the experimental sciences and instead spoke to fundamental questions of human existence.



NANAS was inspired by the creation of the European Network in Aging Studies (ENAS), whose mission is to “facilitate sustainable, international and multi-disciplinary collaboration among all researchers interested in the study of cultural aging.” Plans to form NANAS began at the inaugural ENAS conference, held in Maastricht, The Netherlands, in October 2011. In July 2013, NANAS held a planning retreat at Hiram College in Ohio, which was attended by scholars from the United States, Canada, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Austria. NANAS hosted its first research conference in May 2015 at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and its first joint conference with ENAS in April 2017 at the University of Graz, Austria.

NANAS’s ongoing mission is to facilitate sustainable interdisciplinary collaborations and methodologies that bridge the medical and social sciences and the humanities, supporting research that increases understandings of the cultural meanings of the aging processes across the lifespan in order to challenge stereotypes and provide creative approaches that improve the health, care, and quality of life for people aging into old age.















