For the time being – temporality, ethics, aging.

Conversations between anthropology, art and philosophy

Aarhus, April 27th 29th, 2022.

April 27th

Joel Robbins, University of Cambridge

On the Prospects for a Comparative Study of the Good: Beyond the Bad and the Ugly in Anthropological Relativism

In her influential recent article on "Dark Anthropology," Sherry Ortner questions the critical potential of anthropological studies of ethics, and particularly of research focused on studying people's perceptions of and efforts to achieve the good. Instead, she suggests that anthropological efforts are best directed at examining how people critique the darkness that besets their lives. In this paper, I argue that critical anthropology is significantly handicapped by posing itself in opposition to the study of the good. I develop this argument both through a consideration of recent work in critical theory and by means of reconsidering the critical potential of the anthropological study of difference. This critical potential, I suggest, has itself been hampered by the way anthropological relativism has tended to focus on the dark sides of various cultural formations. In response, I argue for an approach to difference based on a pluralism of the good. In developing this position, I illustrate my claims in part by considering recent work on what even now, long after the mainstreaming of the anthropology of Christianity, scholars continue to consider somewhat repugnant forms of the Christian faith.

Lotte Meinert, Aarhus University

Seer of the Sun and the ID plastic card: Mountain Ethics and Temporalities in Uganda

Late Komol was the 'seer of the sun' in the Ik mountains where he kept track of seasonal time by monitoring the movement of the sun over the course of the year in relation to a line of rocks. As seer he held the authority to announce times for clearing land, planting and initiating the new year rituals. For Komol 'the good' about being seer was related to the awareness of seasonal and climate changes as well as annual repetition. The good was also in having the knowledge to help others, being respected, and playing a small role in a

larger bio-geo-social entanglement. Tuned into mountain time Komol was aware of the slow and deep history of the ancient mountains, as well as the fragile rhythms of changing mountain ecologies.
Now the 'seer way' of tracking seasonal time is fading as paper calendars, clocks, and mobile phones show the time. As part of presidential elections in 2016, most citizens got a plastic ID card including their estimated year of birth. A Senior Citizen Grant was introduced the same year for citizens above a certain age. Time in the body – age – got fixe on the plastic card. Komol was wondering: "What is this card good for?" The card provided access to cash and another way of being a time being, other bits of 'good life' during old age in the mountains.
In this paper I follow Komol's reflections on 'seeing time' and changing ways of being a 'time being' with ideas about aging, time measures, spacetimematter entanglement, and dynamic forces. Is time experienced differently when the way of measuring it changes? If time is a fluid force depending on spacetimemattering what happens when space and matter change from sun and rocks to national digits and plastic? What is lost, gained and experienced as 'the good' when time is nationalized, globalized in a common digital time regime?

Lone Grøn, VIVE

Presents in Dementia – Temporality and Ethics at a Danish Dementia Ward

"The problem is how to make time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident, time at all times underlying the notion of time, not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being." (Merleau Ponty 1992:415). Taking up Merleu Ponty's reflections on time, I will explore how we can make time explicit as a dimension of our being in an ethnographic setting like a dementia ward. How do moments, ruptures, structures and scapes speak to "time at all times underlying the notion of time"? How do spectral pasts, futures and presents make themselves evident in lives with dementia?
In my fieldwork at a Danish dementia ward multiple, distinct and conflicting time-images, time-experiences and time-works exist, which are often seen by those who do not live at the ward, as pathological through and through. Taking up Robbins concern with ethics and the study of difference, I will explore life at the ward as a mode of being in the world, a way of being in time which, through difference, provides both a lense and a critical perspective on the outside world. I will reflect on my interlocutors as time beings in their own right and explore the possible presents of their presents, i.e. the gifts of being in time they might offer

Lawrence Cohen, Stanford University

Enemies: the estrangements of home in late life

Risking melodrama, this essay examines a theme across disparate aging worlds: the becoming-unfamiliar of the home and the experience of being under siege, beset by enemies. Its focus is on estrangement as a temporal problem. It moves between four settings, some based on research and some on personal and civic experience: a street in a Kolkata (India) neighborhood in which one woman is heard to cry she is imprisoned in her home by strangers; an apartment building of retired professionals in a downtown San Francisco (USA) neighborhood in which one woman has become paralyzed by the certainty that hackers continue to have access to her computer and telephone; a lane in a residential San Francisco suburb watched by a woman increasingly alert for thieves lurking in the shadows; two women living in adjoining apartments in a Montreal (Canada) neighborhood who listen for hours on end to the radio, increasingly attentive to what one calls the enemies that threaten their personal and national identifications. The essay asks how the figure of the enemy may mark not only or even primarily the dislocation and presumptive paranoia of some dementia experience, but can more broadly characterize a mode of development in late life, one that appears to collapse the world into a state of siege but which may as well be part of a (painful) opening to the possibility of the world, to a kind of natality.

Maria Louw, Aarhus University

Specters of possibility

In Kyrgyzstan, the *arbak*, ancestor spirits, remain involved in the lives and worlds of the living. They care for the living and often do so by pointing their attention to possibilities they might not have noticed themselves, communicating with them through dreams. In my paper I will discuss how the temporality of the possibilities they offer change as people get older. Among the younger generations, the *arbak* most often bring omens for the future, helping them envisioning and revising life trajectories. Among the elder, they more often appear as hinges to unlived lives: lives that could have been but were never realized. Drawing on fieldwork among elderly Kyrgyz who become old in the absence of their younger relatives, I approach *arbak* as specters of possibility; sometimes haunting, sometimes comforting, sometimes provoking wonder. The *arbak* gain in importance in the lives of many elderly as connections with living others fade. Allowing spectral presences more space in one's life should not be seen as a dwelling in the past (contrary to the common idea that nostalgia is a distinguishing feature of old age) but, rather, a dwelling

in possibility itself; in a world in the subjunctive mode. This dwelling in possibility *may* sometimes be accompanied by moods of nostalgia, but equally often by, say, regret or bitterness, or by wonder, amusement or humor. In more abstract terms, the paper explores the relationship between the possible and the real in human life, and how an attention to the spectral may help us think about this relationship.

Maria Speyer, Artist

Drawing the Figure as Presence and Response

In this paper, I will talk about the five tall, charcoal drawings that form my part of our project on aging. Each drawing is addressed to one of the anthropologists in our group and, through them, to a particular experience of aging – all in challenging circumstances. Specifically, the drawings respond to a set of papers whose common theme is 'intimate others in old age'.
The drawings all focus exclusively on the figure, but these figures aren't representations of bodies. Rather, they are a residue of trying to come to terms with our presence in the world. As an investigation into intimate others in old age, each drawing explores how a sense of self might be expressed, fought for or acted out in response and in relation to the intimate other. How might each situation be considered as an insistence on presence? And how might the figure in aging be considered as relational presence, and as the not yet finished, rather than a body defined by its proximity to finality?
I will probe this notion of presence and the 'not yet finished' both in terms of the figure, but also in terms of the drawing process. I will talk about what a drawing is as it is drawn, that is, as uncertainty and as something not yet finished and about how these five drawings have been developed as an ongoing response to academic research.

Robert Desjarlais, Sarah Lawrence College

These Images Burn: An Afterword to "Imagistic Care: Growing Old in a Precarious World"

This paper reflects on the intricate themes of images, aging, temporality, and relational care evident in the chapters collectively published in Imagistic Care: Growing Old in a Precarious World (ed. Cheryl Mattingly and Lone Grøn; Fordham, 2022; with chapter contributions from Grøn, Mattingly, Maria Louw, Rasmus Dyring, Lotte Meinert, Harmandeep Kaur Gill, Susan Reynolds White, Helle Wentzer, and Maria Speyer). In drawing from the writings of Georges Didi-Huberman, especially his concepts of "firefly images" and "images that burn (brûle)," I reflect on the ways in which the various persons

portrayed in the book are caught up in complex circumstances of life, patterned by intricate arrangements of bodies, consciousness, time, power, relationality, alterity, cultural sensibilities, and institutional matrices. Many of the images evident in the pages of the book "burn" with motifs of aging, of a slow decline in a person's life or a sudden disaster, illness, injury, loss, death. The images burn with alterities of aging, and alterity more generally. The images burn with concerns of increased dependency on others, and complex weaves of interdependency. The images burn with the span of generations and inheritance and the emergences of time. They burn with the fragility of bodies and selves, as well as the continued strength and vitality and potential in a life. Above all, the images are burning with time. They burn with the multiple, interlacing temporalities constituting an aging life, and the many histories that course through a life and relationalities in life more generally.

April 28th

Anne O'Byrne, Stony Brook University.

Aging in Generational Time

Heidegger describes our condition as futural being-in-time, and identifies being-towards-death as the way in which we live our existential thrownness. This captures something vital about how we exist between our coming to be in the world and our passing from it, but it is not particularly helpful regarding the fact that we experience futuricity, mortality and time very differently through the course of our lives. This changeability and the forms of the change are often studied in terms of the arc of growth, maturity and aging of our bodies, but it is crucial to also think of them as relations to the world we inhabit, a world that was there when we came and which we assume will continue after we have gone. It is a world populated by those older and younger than we are. Alongside growth, maturity and aging we undergo changing, generational modes of sharing the world: we are brought into it by those older than us, inherit it alongside our contemporaries, and pass it on to the new ones.
That is to say, futuricity falls short if we understand it only as a matter of projection on my own death. Even as we experience ageing as feeling less at home in the world (as Jean Amèry describes), we also care about the world that we hope will continue after we die. Being born we owe the world a death (as Hannah Arendt puts it); we are aware that we die so that others may live (in Samuel Scheffler's terms). In this presentation I will examine the elliptical temporality of being-towards-death that changes as we age, and also the fugue of overlapping temporalities of our generational being-in-the-world.

Cheryl Mattingly, USC and Aarhus University

Natality, Historicity, Errantry

Both Hannah Arendt and Edouard Glissant portray natality as deeply rooted in our historicity. For them, lived time is complexly relational, thoroughly embedded in social histories, and yet open to futures that initiate new possibilities of relationality. Arendt portrays natality as an existential feature of action itself. Action (in the restricted sense she defines it) has the potential to interrupt predictable patterns of re-action. It names the human potential to bring something new and unexpected into life. Glissant investigates natality under a particular historical condition initiated by the slave trade that brought Africans to the New World. He theorizes natality as an activity of errantry, a fugitive creativity among slaves (and their descendants) that emerged as a desperate response to wholesale cultural and physical devastation. He offers the metaphor of the slave ship's hold as a "womb abyss." Despite their very different points of departure and scholarly leanings, both Arendt and Glissant provocatively consider – indeed highlight – natality as a potential human response to situations of violence and injury, including (in Glissant's case) genocide.

In this talk, I engage both Arendt and Glissant to explore how an errant form of natality arises as a response to antiblack racism. I consider "Mama Summer," a physically vulnerable grandmother who is raising her five grandchildren while her daughter is in prison. Her personal history intersects with two key events in the history of African Americans: (1) the "great migration" from the rural south to urban centers in the north and west (1940-1970); (2) the 1980s "drug epidemic" and the concomitant, and still on-going, mass incarceration of Blacks. But Summer's temporal experience is also constituted by singular events, moments of natality that disturb a social history of racism and violence, setting something new in motion and propelling her own errant creativity. I explore the salience of time interruptions as moments that perplex Summer in their mysterious singularity while also shaping her future and marking her deepest sense of self as a historical being. I ask: How can close attention to small histories and small moments – the singularities of experience -- simultaneously reveal and destabilize typified "collectivist" representations of aging and social history? What can such attention teach us about humans as time beings?

Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, Aarhus University

Ghosts from the past – German elders and the presence of World War 2

Abstract – In a nursery home for men, driven by a public charity related to the Catholic Church in Germany, biographies crossed in a way that exhibits the intricacies of German history. The material of this paper goes back to a ten-months-stay at a particular nursery home in the city of Aachen thirty years ago. In those years, victims of the Nazi-regime were living side by side with their perpetrators, having to deal with the daily prospect of eating together, celebrating Christmas or Cologne carnival, going to service on Sunday etc. These settings did not only encompass the actual victims or Nazi-representatives, but their relatives and family care-givers too, as well as the professionals (the nurses, the priest, the community service people etc.). How does one conceptualize these intergenerational experiences in and with history? – Drawing on a phenomenological account, the paper will try to elaborate the idea of lived history as responsive experience, when one has to respond to the claims of the past.

Tine Gammeltoft, Copenhagen University

Temporal sensibility: Living with chronic disease in late life in rural northern Vietnam

In this paper I explore what it means to grow old and approach death in a social setting where personhood exceeds individual existence. The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork among people with type II diabetes in rural northern Vietnam and highlights the importance of intergenerational engagements and mutual ethical attunements for the ways in which people submit to the demands of a slowly progressing, debilitating disease. Drawing on hermeneutic philosophy and the thoughts of Vietnamese Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh, I develop the notion of temporal sensibility as a tool for understanding how aging is lived in this ethnographic setting.

Rasmus Dyring, Aarhus University

"Older than Being": For a Critical Phenomenology of Aging and Generationality

This paper explores the temporality of human coexistence in terms of aging and generationality. The paper takes its point of departure in the apparent paradox that philosophy, while focusing excessively on death and time, has tended to neglect "aging" as an essential feature of the human condition. While this could be taken simply as a function of the pure formality of ontological or transcendental conditions, on closer inspection it turns out to hide an age-bias that seems to favor the future-rich, active, projective life of the able-bodied and –minded adult. Building on these critical insights, the paper proposes a phenomenology of aging understood as a generational phenomenon. Generationality here means two things: (1) Aging *is* generation since it is the carnal

emergence of being over time. (2) Aging is inter-generationally constituted such that this carnal emergence of being over time unfolds in, and is structured around, the perpetual shifts, deferrals and interruptions of social relations that occur with such vital events as births, miscarriages, illnesses and disabilities, puberty, marriages, divorces, parenthood, grand-parenthood, bereavements, deaths etc. Drawing on anthropological literature on vital conjunctures and kinship time, the paper develops an understanding of the "generational differentiation" that happens in these ontologically charged interruptions where lives cut across and emerge in and out of each other. At this point, we touch a plane of ontological indeterminacy in the phenomenon of aging that – as Derrida wrote of his so-called *différance* – is "older" than being itself.

Susan Reynolds Whyte, Copenhagen University

Still Here: Age and Generational Time

The passage of time is experienced in the shifts of generational place: becoming a grandmother; losing a father. One conventional way to consider generational place and time is in terms of life stages—child, parent, grandparent. Another is to show the correlations of generational time and social place as did the scholars of lineage societies where descent from a common ancestor was key. The approach I take is more intersubjective. In following the ways in which aging persons are 'still here' for themselves and others, we may begin to understand how people in any given society age through relationships to others. In the African setting I know best, persons are unique individuals, but they are always also place markers in a living social constellation: the daughter of that son, the brother of this father. Older people are links in a lattice of relationships built up over a lifetime, connecting their children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, friends and enemies. When they die, their children assume their places, though never exactly. Historical conditions affect the links in generational time and the state of being 'still here' in a changing web of intimate others. Death, burial and the location of the grave are managed and negotiated in terms of generational place. The dead person is insistently 'still here' as a spirit or memory and place holder. Those left behind may feel not only that they have aged, but also that their connections to one another have taken on different shades.

Anne Marie Pahuus, Aarhus University

Meaning of the Past in Human Interaction and Human Interdependency

Loneliness is never a pleasant state to be in. But what do we get from close human relationships that are so vital to us? And what is the meaning of remembered or lived time in close relationships – relationships of care and love? The past is present in two different ways, one is of particular relevance to respect and esteem, another to accept, friendship and love. Respect has to do with our individual needs and a person's dignity and autonomy. If we do not find that we are respected in our old age, we might search for respect by telling about past merits, the work done, things completed in the past – past contributions. Even in a state of great need, we hope to receive care and treatment, and to be treated with dignity and respect at all times. To secure this, a story about the lived life can be told and help us see the person behind the needs, and we can pinpoint the common and universal value of having preferences and the respect we owe to these. Another way to go about this in care ethics is to introduce a notion of trust and openness as a spontaneous expression of life in the sense that the Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup introduces in *The Ethical Demand*. Openness towards past experience in friendship and love is not about summing up past experience, but about recognizing the continuity, the unique and particular way that the other person meets the world and seems to have done this since the day he or she was born. An openness towards this transforms the relationship into a question of not only being a decent and respectful person, but also being a good person and a friend. Friends care about each other's pasts. Not only the uniqueness of the person we love, but also the uniqueness as a pattern in lived time come to the fore when we turn from respect and dignity to openness and emotional engagement in love and friendship. Shared past or sharing pasts is of particular relevance to a phenomenological understanding of trust.

April 29th

Jason Danely, Oxford Brookes University

Doing Time in Deviant Spaces: Aging and the Carceral Condition in Japan

Older offenders in Japan are not only the fastest growing incarcerated demographic, but they also have a higher recidivism rate than any other age group. While older offenders in most countries are associated with 'lifers' serving long or indeterminate sentences who age in prison over years, most older prisoners in Japan are serving short sentences for

petty crimes such as shoplifting. This paper looks at how this pattern of re-offending constitutes a particular way of growing older as "doing time," encompassing a range of practices, habits, and moods that spill across the borders of carceral spaces. No matter what side of the wall they are on, older re-offenders continue to do their time, moving in and out of different institutional spaces in ways that deviate from both the slow denouement of aging gracefully or the active aspirational ager. As anthropologist Carolyn Sufrin (2017) observes, recidivism and care are not only "sutured," but produce a "rhythm" over the life course that both connects and separates the lifeworld inside and outside of custody. Drawing on my fieldwork with older ex-offenders in the Greater Tokyo area, this paper argues for a need to critically question not only the ethics of incarcerating older people with care needs, but also current approaches to offender resettlement based on the moral return to normative temporal embodiment. I suggest that doing time opens up possibilities for rethinking the connection between the temporal and the topological in dimensions of aging, and provokes us to think about how deviant configurations of these dimensions can carve out space for agency and care even in the most constraining circumstances.

Harmandeep Kaur Gill, Oxford Brookes University

"Setting off from the Mountain Pass": Facing Death and Preparing for the Journey Ahead

In my paper, I explore the everyday life of a 92-year-old Tibetan monk, Genla ('teacher') Tashi Gyaltsen who is a resident at the Tibetan Children's Village Old Age Home in McLeod Ganj, a small hill station in Northwest India, also known as the Tibetan capitol in exile. Due to a large on-migration in recent years of exile-Tibetan youth to Western nations, Genla Tashi is like many elderly Tibetans, aging and facing death in the absence of family. Impermanence comes to pervade all sides of the elderly's lives: from an aging body, the absence of family to the uncertainty of death and rebirth. Like most elderly Tibetans, Genla Tashi's days are spent in religious practices in the preparations for death and rebirth. While different religious activities make up one important part of his days, exercise is another. Exercise is for him an important means to tame the unpredictability of increasing old age and for avoiding a bedridden future and death. Whenever I asked Genla Tashi about what thoughts occupied his mind, he only had one answer for me: death. This paper explores how the impermanence of life manifested in Genla Tashi's everyday life. How did he handle the uncertainty of future and work for a good death and rebirth in the absence of family? What hopes and worries is he and others accompanied by at life's end?

Natashe Lemos Dekker, Leiden University

Negotiating divergent temporal horizons in euthanasia with dementia: Timing, Responsibility and Subjectivity

This paper shows how people with dementia and their family members try to find the "right" time for euthanasia by negotiating divergent horizons. For many interlocutors in my ethnographic research on the end of life with dementia in the Netherlands, the imagined future with dementia was a reason to request euthanasia, which they saw as a way to prevent an otherwise inevitable, and apocalyptic future. However, timing euthanasia with dementia is extremely difficult and often results in the deferral of established boundaries.
Underlying this is a dynamic in which the person with dementia is considered to lose the ability to oversee and decide on the timing of their euthanasia request, resulting in an agonizing trade-off between being 'too early' and the fear of being 'too late.' In searching for ways to work through this conundrum, some advocate that family members should gain legitimacy to decide on the timing of euthanasia, based on a written will. While this shifts responsibility to the family, it may not solve the issue of timing.
In this process, I show that divergent temporal horizons emerge as perspectives and insights can differ between the person with dementia, their family members, and medical professionals. Showing how my interlocutors negotiated such divergent horizons and the extent to which they considered the future to be imminent, I reflect on timing as a temporal mechanism. How does timing work to make the future concrete in the present? How do temporal inequalities play a role in negotiations on timing? And how does this affect notions of subjectivity?

Tine Rostgaard, Roskilde University

Time and temporality in long-term care for older people

This paper investigates the meaning of time and temporality as it is institutionalized in long-term care policy and practice. From the perspective of older people receiving home care and the care workers assisting them, we focus on how time as a dimension structures the organization of care provision and its relations. This includes how time with the New Public Management focus on efficiency has increasingly been used as a marker to control care provision, applying rules for when, how quickly and for long care is to be given, but also governing the maximum length of time of the relationship between the cared-for and the care-giver in order for the care relationship not to become too intimate. The paper describes how time as a structuring factor is ever present but nevertheless sought

disguised in the organization of care, as it disturbs the inherent notion of care rationality and therefore the ability for the care worker "to think and act on the level of the particular and individual (…) and to understand from the position of an insider" (Waernes, 1984:197).

Janelle Taylor, Toronto University

The Clock-Drawing Test: Reading Temporalities of Dementia from Clinical Chart Notes

How do older adults and clinicians invoke and address time when dementia looms near? In this paper I examine chart notes taken from the medical records of older adults participants in the Adult Changes in Thought (ACT) study who went on to be diagnosed with dementia, situating the discussions of time that they record within multiple layers and forms of temporality. Time is incorporated into the very design of the ACT study, a longitudinal study of incident dementia that follows participants over years, or sometimes decades, to see which will go on to develop dementia. Time is embedded as well in the cognitive testing central to each biennial ACT study visit. When performance on these tests triggers a diagnostic evaluation, one among many forms of evidence considered is the participant's medical history. This medical history is summarized in the form of a document composed of clinical chart notes taken directly from the person's medical record, sometimes over many year. These chart notes describe clinical encounters in which histories are taken, present situations discussed, and futures conjured – often, futures in which dementia will progress, capacities decline, and care needs increase. I also address the particular temporalities entailed in my own project of reading these documents ethnographically.