Continental Philosophy Review
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-024-09630-w

Ageing-in-the-world

Pascal Massie[1] · **Mitchell Staude**[1]

Accepted: 29 January 2024

Abstract
Ageing brings together biological, personal, and social horizons. Attempts to reduce it or to privilege one of these dimensions over the others fail to fully capture the phenomenon. The temporality of ageing presents an irreducible complexity. It is the inextricable intertwinement of three temporalities, three rhythms on different scales: biological time, personal-narrative time, and historical time. In all these dimensions something is of crucial concern: time and temporality. Yet, many philosophers who have thought about time (even those who take seriously the lived experience of temporality) have paid little attention to ageing. Drawing from Heidegger, Scheler, and Schutz, this paper argues that ageing is an irreducible complex of different temporalities where one encounters the historicity of the world through a process of losing touch with it.

Keywords Ageing · Heidegger · Lived experience *Erlebnis* · Phenomenology · Scheler · Schutz · Temporality

1 Introduction

This essay aims to give an account of time and temporality from the standpoint of a phenomenology of ageing. Philosophers, for the most part, have ignored or avoided this issue. Even those who do not offhand dismiss lived experience overlook ageing and tend to assume a universal and constant middle-aged self as the baseline of temporal processes. Yet, ageing is arguably the most concrete way in which we are directly confronted with the temporal dimension of our existence.

Since English grammatical conventions accepts two spellings ('ageing' or 'aging') for the sake of coherence, the following paper will systematically use 'ageing' except when quoting a book or paper that uses the alternative spelling.

✉ Pascal Massie
massiep@miamioh.edu

Mitchell Staude
staudem@miamioh.edu

[1] Miami University, Oxford, USA

Published online: 16 July 2024

Perhaps the relative silence of philosophy betrays a more general reluctance to talk of ageing. It is, for many people, a taboo issue, an unpleasant reality, a topic we would rather not think about. The abiding persistence of ageism in modern societies betrays our uneasiness with this phenomenon and this uneasiness as spread to philosophers as well.

A second reason why ageing is rarely mentioned in philosophy is due to the assumption that time's essential structure is assumed to remain identical throughout the course of one's lifetime. The main contenders in the philosophy of time, presentism, eternalism (a.k.a. "block universe"), "growing" or "shrinking" time block theories may hold different views on the ontological status of past and future events but these views are completely divorced from the consideration of existence and its temporality.

An investigation of the experience of ageing disrupts this standardization of time. The temporality of ageing does not take a linear form but presents an irreducible complexity. The intertwinement of these temporalities is inextricable; they represent three rhythms on different scales: biological time, personal-narrative time, and historical time. Rather than reduce all temporal experiences to the same, we must recognize that every stage of life has its own temporal integrity. [Ageing is neither a mere biological phenomenon], nor exclusively a first-person account, nor only a social phenomenon. It harbors an irreducible complexity that encompasses all these features in a whole embodied person's relation to the world.

To establish this thesis, we will draw some resources from Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Scheler's *Tod und Fortleben* [*Death and Survival*], and Schutz's *The Stranger* in order to ground our analysis in a phenomenological inquiry that focuses on lived experience [*Erlebnis*] rather than merely assume chronological time. Chronological age (i.e., whatever number you answer whenever someone asks how old you are), after all, is just an index. By ordering events in causal sequences, it institutes linearity as a default mode of perceiving history and biography. Chronometric time is instrumental; it is time reduced to its measurement, to the recording of regularities and the repetitions of sameness. Of course, ageing is a process, and, like all other processes, it is measurable and quantifiable; yet, in order to understand ageing, something else is needed; namely, a grasp of *what it is like* to grow old, and chronometric time has nothing to say about it. We will show that ageing, on the contrary, is qualitative and differential.

2 Ageing and disability

A significant amount of recent work on ageing in the context of contemporary Western societies seems to be a matter of adding one more -ism to an already long list of prejudices and exclusions: "racism," "sexism," and "classism" probably came first; Peter Singer famously added "speciesism," and we are now familiar with "ableism." In 1969 the gerontologist and psychiatrist Robert Neil Butler coined the

term "ageism."[1] All these terms designate the systematic subjection of subordinated people to privilege and strengthen dominant groups. Whenever any of these terms are used, we point to a systematic assignment of characteristics of lesser worth that is sometime explicitly stated and performed or, at other times, remains covert and systemic. This contributes to the persistence of an exclusionary prejudice although those who promote them may not even be fully aware that they are doing so. What's more, the very victims of discrimination can themselves perpetuate a prejudice they have internalized as they were exposed throughout their lives to repeated negative stereotypes. These characteristics apply to all above-mentioned forms of discrimination. Yet, ageism has peculiar features that distinguish it from these other -isms.

At first glance, there appears to be a connection between disability and ageing since people who have lived long lives are prone to various physical and mental impairments (e.g., most people with Alzheimer's disease are 65 and older). Further, ableism and ageism seem to cover up a similar fear of dependence that manifests itself in the tendency of abled and younger people to distance themselves and disconnect from people who are disabled or old. This is probably why many arguments traditionally raised against ableism tend to be reused, sometimes with little variation, in the case of ageism.[2]

Whether there is an actual connection between ageism and ableism, however, is unclear, for to conflate them is to assume from the start that old age *is* a disability which leads to the reiteration of the very prejudice one claims to eradicate. "Old age" suggests a proximity with the end of life while this connotation doesn't exist in the case of disability (a child can be disabled but is not presumed to be near the end of their life). We cannot say of an abled person that she is *not yet* disabled while we can say of a young person that she is *not yet* old. Thus, when it comes to ageism, we are concerned with a form of prejudice against a fate that, surprisingly, the very people who exhibit discriminatory attitudes will experience themselves since the only escape from old age is to die young. A person who is racist and sexist has no reason to assume he may one day wake up to find out that he is a black woman, but when one jokes about or gets irritated by old people this irritation and these jokes are likely to be about what they will eventually become. How can we explain this bizarre discrimination?

This situation grants some plausibility to Martha Nussbaum's claim that ageism is linked to the emotion of *disgust*, insofar as disgust is haunted by the dread of contamination (or the risk thereof).

> For "able-bodied" people, there's an uneasy comfort, in looking at the bodies of the people with disabilities: they are different, and I'm not like that. With ageing bodies, no such comfort is available; however much a younger person tries to "other" the ageing, at some level, they know that this is them in the future.[3]

[1] Butler (1969, pp. 243–46).

[2] Overall (2006), Gibbons (2016), and Schnell (2018).

[3] Nussbaum (2018, p. 152).

Phenomenologically, the fear of *contamination* that we encounter in disgust is distinct from the fear of *danger* (what a prey would experience before a predator, for instance). While when we experience danger, we fear falling victim to the aggressor, when we experience disgust, we fear becoming what revulses us. In disgust we are distancing ourselves from the other by rejecting something about ourselves that is like the other, i.e., the part of ourselves that relates to the decay and mortality that, inevitably, accompanies our embodied condition. We are dealing with "different kind of 'Other'". "They" are not just the perennial "Others" of de Beauvoir's fame, they are neither women in the gaze of men nor the physically or mentally disabled in the gaze of the healthy and sane. "They" are the others *we will become*. They are the future us. The only way we could escape this fate would be premature death.

It is useful to start by observing our linguistic practices, for our linguistic choices are revealing of our ambivalences. The very word "ageing" is not neutral. In most other European languages, what is called "ageing" does not refer to age but to old (e.g., Latin: *senectute*, German: *das Altern*, French: *le vieillissement*, Italian: *l'invecchiamento*). In these languages (and many others) ageing is literally called "olding." This makes some intuitive sense. When a todler turns three, her age has numerically changed but we wouldn't say that she is old; rather, we simply notice that she is growing up.

There is a tendency in English to avoid the term "old" when applied to human beings on the grounds that the term has a negative connotation. "Ancient," "decrepit," "geriatric," "senile," "obsolete" are, among many others, synonyms of old, while "young" connotes "vitality" and "liveliness." This is why we often revert to euphemisms and talk, for instance, of "golden age," "golden years," or "mature" (a term often reserved to women). Even when we want to refer to something that is old but avoid those negative connotations, we say, instead that it has "aged well" (e.g., a fine wine). Christine Overall notices that "old people are conventionally refered to as 'senior citizens' or merely 'seniors'—terms that are odd not least because no one refers to young people as 'junior citizens' or 'juniors.'"[4] Yet, the very avoidance of the world "old" when refering to people ends up reinstating the ageism one condemns in others.

One could suspect, following Morganroth Gullette, that any talk about "ageing" is ultimately guilty of propagating ageism. "Ageing is the process that, whatever else it is, serves as a trigger for ageism."[5] Media, from advertising to news, portray ageing in terms of loss of physical and mental abilities. Rewarding work, romance, and performance are all the good things that ageing will deprive you of. The quasi-inseparability of "ageing" and "ageism" is visible in the fact that ageism is still often perceived as normal and even humorous, as is noticeable in the over-the-hill jokes one can find in the birthday cards section of any store. The discourse on ageing is saturated by what Morganroth Gullette calls a "hegemonic decline ideology" that portrays ageing as loss and deficit. "Hegemonic decline ideology, although contested, stamps itself all

[4] Overall (2016, p. 15).

[5] Morganroth Gullette (2017, p. xiv).

over, under, through and around the term ageing."[6] Ageing means being trapped in an unappealing and desexualized body, and declining irremediably toward death. The assumption is that younger people are prospectively oriented while older people have retrospective orientation. A sign of this can be found in the fact that most interviews of older people often amount to asking them: "What was it like in your days?" which insinuates that those days are over and that, at best, they are testimonial bearers of a bygone era thus, while present, they are mostly of historical interest.

However, Morganroth Gullette's assumption that ageism is identical with the view of ageing as "loss and decline" is problematic. After all, it is not incorrect to view growing old as involving a physical and mental decline. Old age does come with a decline of our faculties; this, of course, does not justify *ageism* as the attitude that the elderly are useless nor can it justify discrimination. Although we should acknowledge that, as we age, the scope and amount of our possibilities, our potential projects, become more and more restricted, we still have them, we still can be "prospectively oriented."

We started by paying attention to language uses. This, however, is not to say that the issue merely concerns linguistic practices. Language practices are inseparable from the social context in which they operate and of which they are an expression. The socio-economic context in which we live and age, and in which our language is both embedded is capitalism. Capitalism celebrates productivity and worships growth, even at the cost of sustainability.

The introduction of pension systems at the end of the nineteenth century was a deliberate effort to change the elders' social position; yet, it has become a recognized marker of old age and decline. Retirement has become a vividly distinctive phase of life.[7] It is presented as an enabler (it gives time that would otherwise be spent working) but, simultaneously, it casts-off the retirees from the productive world. This has direct consequences for older workers who are often perceived as slow while retired people are judged an unproductive if not useless burden since they have ceased to contribute and have become dependent on society. Thus, it is not surprising that age discrimination occurs in employment, even though it is vastly underreported.[8] For people who have been convinced since their youth that one is what one does, and that what one does must refer to some productive activity, being told that, because of their age, they cannot perform anymore is tantamount to saying that they do not matter and beyond a loss of status this can lead to identity crises. This is why some people experience their own retirement parties as a funeral rehearsal. Before biological death there is social death.

But the social forces that affect ageing do not stop there; they do not merely function as an exclusionary factor. There is a profit angle to be found even in negativity.

[6] Morganroth Gullette (2018, p. 252).

[7] Nadobnik et al. (2021, pp. 1–12).

[8] Only 40% of respondents who experienced age discrimination filed a charge or complaint with the relevant government agencies or their employers.
Chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hiscox.com%2Fdocuments%2F2019-Hiscox-Ageism-Workplace-Study.pdf&clen=607517&chunk=true (Last accessed 12/15/2021).

Marketing seeks to identify "pain points," i.e., root problems that a prospective customer may experience, and it paints the purpose of business as the discovery of solutions. "Pain points" can occur, for instance, in the financial features of a business, in productivity or in customer outreach and support. This, at least, is the official narrative. In many instances, however, the real task of marketing is to create pain points in the first place as a necessary condition to sell a solution. Ageing has become such a pain point and the target is often, although not exclusively, women. L'Oréal offers an "Age perfect serum" while Estee Lauder sells a "Night repair serum" that has a "youth generating power." Advances in techniques such as laser surgery, cosmetic injectables, chemical peeling, and liposuction have made it possible to erase signs of ageing that were previously considered indelible. While the "technologies of rejuvenation" are readily accessible for those who can afford them, their ethical implications have gone largely unquestioned.

> Anti-ageing can work as a response to such socially constructed pain only as long as ageing functions as a synonym for illness-decline-and-death (which helps people remain naïve about the claims). Attacking anti-ageing claims is unlikely to have helpful outcomes without our making a specifically linguistic effort to target this word ageing.[9]

Corporate interests have discovered that they can make huge profits by selling regenerative medicines, cosmetics, and plastic surgery procedures as coping mechanisms. "Ageing well" is thus marketed as staying young. Ageing well is something that must be concealed under a mask of youthful appearance. In these instances, to create a pain point is to create a sense of embarrassment (if not outright shame) for one's aged self. Thus, the dominant construction of ageing in Western society tends to reinforce ageism and it is inseparable from social practices and interests that benefit from it. Thus, a phenomenology of ageing must be rooted in an analysis that encompasses its social and cultural dimensions.

3 A phenomenological sketch

What is it like to grow old? When we say of a *thing* that it is old, we may mean different things and the term can convey positive and negative connotations. Negatively, "old" is synonymous with "decayed," "decrepit," "obsolete" or "out of fashion." In these instances, whatever is new surpasses the old and is *ipso facto* deemed superior; typically, people want the latest version of a technological device because it is assumed to be an improvement over earlier versions. But a thing can also, on the contrary, gain in value with the passing of time. Most antiques increase in value as time goes by even though they irremediably belong to a by-gone era. A 1950's Bentley car, for instance, is a status symbol for a handful of wealthy people; even though (or maybe because) it is an odd sight in the twenty-first century. Whether the

[9] Morganroth Gullette (2018, p. 259).

connotation is positive or negative, however, in all these instances things get old but they do not age, while you and I do.[10]

What, then, is the difference between *getting old* and *ageing*? After all, every object that is exposed to time will be exposed to wear and tear; on the other hand, we do say of a fine wine that it "aged well." Looking at the examples given above, it would appear that life is a distinguishing factor. Ageing may be a feature of living things but not of inanimate ones. But this raises the question of whether ageing is a feature of all living things, or of just some. Life certainly seems to be a necessary condition for ageing; yet, it is not a sufficient one. Some living organisms do not age or have only negligible ageing. Although they are [referred to in the literature] as instances of "biological immortality" it may be wiser to use the expression "bioindefinite mortality." The Hydra, a solitary freshwater animal can regenerate, allowing it to recover from injury and to reproduce asexually. The same has been observed in the case of moon jellyfish that do not show signs of senescence. It is possible to characterize the type of rejuvenation that some lifeforms go through as reproduction by way of cloning rather than cases of long life. Stem cells and gametes can also be regarded as immune to ageing. In those instances, as Bavidge puts it:

> They [cases of biological immortality or bio-indefinite mortality] may be of great interest to biologists and may turn out to be medically very important. They are alive but they do not 'live a life': they are not suitable subjects for a phenomenological investigation. We live a life because we are aware of our lives as having a shape – a beginning, a middle and an end – and as making, or failing to make, a sort of sense.[11]

Bavidge's claim suggests that something immortal cannot age and that "living a life," which he sees as a necessary component of ageing, requires the awareness of not just the passage of time, but the passage of *my* time. Some living things (humans and some animals) experience their own ageing by contrast with cars, wine, or jellyfish.

Further, the way ageing affects personal identity has a social and intersubjective component. "The constitution of [this] subjectivity shall be considered as a continuous interaction between 'I' and 'Me,' which is a dynamic relation between how a person sees themselves and how they imagine themselves to be in the eyes of others."[12] The subject's capacity to see themselves as an object (reflexivity) is mediated. In particular, the dependency on others, which is salient in childhood, reappears in old age. Nadobnik et al., mention the life-shattering transformation of the self in elderly people in need of care who become the objects of others' actions. Their lives are in the hands of the caregivers on which they depend. This reduces their prospects of being seen as agents entitled to making their own decisions.[13] The

[10] The case of animals may present an intermediate to the simple opposition of things vs. persons. If we say that a dog is getting old, we may refer to his difficulties getting up and down the stairs and going on walks that may indicate arthritis—a condition neither dogs nor humans are immune to.

[11] Bavidge (2016, p. 210).

[12] Nadobnik et al. (2021, p. 3).

[13] Nabodnik et al. (2021, p. 11).

expanse of the "I can" shrinks progressively (as in I can move the sofa or climb the stairs). This contributes to a sense of frailty, which denotes factors beyond the agent's control that nevertheless determine their innermost being. The experience of frailty is not the result of the agent's intentions or projects but the result of what *may* happen, no matter what the agent wishes to achieve.[14] The construction of one's identity, and specifically of oneself as an aged person, occurs through a conflict of acceptance and resistance that trades on the contrast between how people feel about themselves and how others perceive them. As Bavidge observes:

> Feeling one's age suggests matching how one feels against an age profile ... We correlate how we feel with the way we imagine we are supposed to feel at this place on the curve of life … We can reject stereotypes, but we cannot understand our own aging without reference to something independent of our own feelings of ageing.[15]

Our lives are ageing lives. This means that we are not "in" time as a piece of wood carried by the flow of the river; rather, we are part of the flow. Heraclitus' DK Fr. B49 states famously that "we both step and do not step in the same rivers," but the fragment does not stop there. It adds the following crucial remark: "we are and we are not [*eimen te kai ouk eimen*]." It is not just the river that changes because the water that was upstream a moment ago is now downstream, but we step into and out of the river as different beings. Minkowski observes that while lived time is

> synonymous with dynamism, it is, however, quite compatible with the phenomena of duration and stability (which are completely different from immobility and death). Further, while there are phenomena which flow *in time*, they also contain time in them and constitute, as it were, "temporal figures." These are, to cite a few examples: memory, with its recall of the past, and desire and hope, which, because of their very nature, turn toward the future, continually contributing to its creation and recreation before us.[16]

We are not just carried by time (to make sense of this, a quantitative and chronometric understanding of time would suffice); we are changed by it. This calls for a qualitative and differential understanding of temporality that requires a phenomenological analysis. Further, there is no reason to assume that only the quantitative account of chronometric time is objective, while the second one (qualitative and differential) is subjective. Lived time has itself an objective structure.

This has important consequences for personal identity. One may claim: "I am no longer the person I used to be." Let us assume, for the time being, the sincerity of this claim. It remains that the self I am no longer is still me, albeit in a different guise. We do not relate to our past as if it were someone else's who just happens to be long gone. I still am that person who is no longer. This bygone self is still part of

[14] See Fredrik Svenaeus https://www.academia.edu/99700986/The_Phenomenology_of_Frailty_Existentialism_and_Old_Age_Vulnerability (last accessed 06/20/2023).

[15] Bavidge (2016, p. 216).

[16] Minkowski (1970, p. 17).

my personality. There is no need to assume a transcendental ego distinct from the psychological one to make sense of this.

Consider the experience of looking at a picture of oneself at a younger age for instance.[17] One has the uncanny feeling of seeing the picture of someone who not only had a past of their own at the time the picture was taken but also had a future which now constitutes the past of the one who looks at the picture. Different temporal horizons are blending. What will happen to the person in the picture now belongs to my past. Looking at the picture, we do not simply see what is no more, we simultaneously see our own past which, for the person in the picture, was a future they could not fathom. Thus, qualitative and differential alteration does not rule out identity but forces us to reframe it in terms of enduring transformation.

However, to turn to a phenomenology of lived experience may seem problematic because typically we do not actually experience ageing directly: we realize *that we have aged* (present perfect tense) but we do not feel that we are aging (present continuous).[18] Ageing is a process that is never directly experienced as it occurs. It is a matter of reflection. Ageing is acknowledged in retrospect rather than caught in the act. It is discovered in a glance back into the mirror of memory. Ageing is what has occurred between what we last remember of ourselves and what we observe now. The time of experience is the present continuous, but ageing occurs between experiences; it is the rhythm of lived experience. Just as, in music, we do not hear the rhythm but the notes, we do not feel the presence of ageing in our lived experience; yet, it punctuates it. To pursue the analogy with rhythm and melody, ageing is the inseparable tempo of [lived experience if it is not lived], and yet, it is the flow of lived experience. The temporality of ageing constitutes the temporal frame of lived experience.

4 Time and temporality

The temporality of ageing does not take a linear form and is deeply linked to embodiment. Max Scheler may have been one of the first phenomenologists to be concerned with this. His essay *Tod und Fortleben* [*Death and Surviving*][19] is primarily concerned with death insofar as "the limit that death imposes to the vital process is always given as raised in some way *by the vital process* [*Lebensprozeß*] itself". [20] This is to say that we do not discover our mortality as a result of a reasoning that notices similarities between ourselves and other organisms to reach the conclusion "therefore, I am mortal," as the famous syllogism that begins with the two premises: "all men are mortal," and "Socrates is a man." Rather, we understand our mortality from within the vital process itself. Life, at least in one sense of the term, is

[17] An artistic account of this can be found in "Reflections of the Past," a photo series by Tom Hussey. https://digitalsynopsis.com/design/reflections-of-the-past-tom-hussey/ (last accessed, 12/18/2021).

[18] We do not say "I feel getting old," but we can say "I feel that I am getting old." In the second case, this does not express a direct experience of ageing as a process.

[19] Scheler (1957, pp. 9–64). All translations ours.

[20] Scheler (1957, p. 24).

> a process given in a particular form of conscience and that occurs on the basis of an essentially *present* constant: the body as ground of all organic impressions and itself object of an irreducible modality of consciousness.[21]

Such a temporality is embodied. Scheler argues that living beings have a particular embodied consciousness of the progressive flow of their life process. Yet, by itself, such a consciousness is still not sufficient to account for ageing. Whereas in chronometric time the arrows of the past and the future tend equally toward infinity, in ageing, time is experienced as a process where the past increases while the future diminishes. It is as if the past would take a bite out of the future as futural possibilities are constantly waning.

> We experience and we see in every indivisible moment of our vital process "something fleeing away" and "something approaching." Furthermore, the content of immediate memory or immediate expectation is primarily given as acting [*als wirksam*] on our present lived experience and not as some representation.[22]

In lived experience the play of past and future grants us a feeling of our life as forming a totality, but it is an asymmetric one: the past keeps growing while the future shrinks.

> As life given as lived and its ulterior efficacy increases at each instant, there is a reduction of the possibilities of experiences as they present themselves in the immediate vital expectation.[23]

This experience of time is informed by a description of the individual's life and how it proceeds in objective time or, in other words, how objective ageing is conceived individually. Scheler claims that the temporal extensions of the past, the present, and the future have their own expanses [*Umfängen*]. The sum of these forms the total extent of one's life. In the process of ageing, these expanses are reallocated according to the general direction of life [*Lebensrichtung*] towards death. As for the expanse of the present, it gets increasingly compressed in between the growing past and the shrinking future. This leads to the well-known effect that one experiences the present as an increasingly evanescent phenomenon whereas the past feels heavier with the day and the future is more and more determined by our actions and life-choices.[24]

The specific temporality of ageing is manifest in narrative time. "Narrative time" does not simply mean that time is a constitutive aspect of all narratives (whether biographical or fictional) – this would be *narrated* time and, indeed, no story would make sense without the assumption of a before/after structure. But Ricoeur's claim

[21] Scheler (1957, p.18).

[22] Scheler (1957, p. 19).

[23] Scheler (1957, p. 20).

[24] This explains why as mentioned earlier, we wouldn't say of a child who celebrates her tenth birthday that she is "ageing" but rather that she is "growing up."

is not simply that narrations require a temporal backbone, but rather that time requires a narrative structure. As Ricoeur observes, narration and temporality are

> as closely linked as 'language-game' in Wittgenstein's terms is to a 'form of life' … Narrativity is the mode of discourse through which the mode of being which we call temporality or temporal being, is brought to language.[25]

The self is created in the performance of its narration and its reception by others. Narrative time does not exclude or oppose chronometric time. Within it, however, chronometric time plays a modest role (the right date or the precise duration of an event is mentioned only if it is relevant in the narrative context). In other words, narrative time intertwines past, present, and future.[26]

Catherine Degnen, an anthropologist who did fieldwork on the elderly population of Dodworth (an English village north of Sheffield), was struck by the non-linear features of the narratives of the people she interviewed. It is as if the past entered their narrative accounts in a much more fluid way than in the linear accounts of younger people.[27]

As we saw, a defining characteristic of the temporality of ageing is that an important part of life has already taken place. But this characteristic of "having-already-taken-place" doesn't mean that the past is fully completed, since actual changes keep affecting and modifying our perception of it. As Baars puts it:

> Memory as presence of the past does not just comprise *what* or *how* we *want* to remember. We only evoke a part of our memories consciously, another part evokes *us*, keeps asking for our attention, even when we might prefer to forget it.[28]

While the past of chronometric time is irreversibly achieved (its grammatical form is the preterit) and is as equally infinite (or indefinite) as the future, the past of ageing remains fluid. A changing perception can lead to new questions about the past and a reordering of memories. This includes not only personal but also transgenerational perspectives on shared events—for instance, a veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars may encounter one or more reorderings of her personal recollections fifteen or twenty years later as new generations ponder history.

There is an undeniable incompleteness of the narrative past. Life harbors an inexhaustible surplus and narrations of the self occur not once but repeatedly throughout life. People's lives always exceed the narratives they can weave about themselves. They are the unfathomable source of these narratives and the font of their inexhaustible supplementarity that prevents us from ever finding "the last word." "The many possible meanings of what humans experience and do during their lives can be *partially* articulated, shared and clarified, through narratives but cannot be *exhausted*

[25] Ricoeur (1991, p. 91).

[26] Baars (2012, pp. 151–153).

[27] Degnen (2005, pp. 50–63).

[28] Baars (2012, pp. 151–2).

by them. [29] In that sense, the narration is the self in its continuous format and reformation.

We should, however, not limit our attention to person-oriented life world perspectives (the biographical or autobiographical kind of narrative) and ignore the systemic perspectives of the social fabric in which the former unfolds. We must therefore extend the concept of "lifeworld" to include not only the individual's experience but also the public sphere where ageing occurs and to do so, we must consider ageing and the world as one social temporal phenomenon.

5 Body and time

Embodiment is an irreducible aspect of ageing. This may seem an obvious observation. How would we know that someone is growing old if it were not for their grey hair, their wrinkles, posture or movements; thus, if it were not for noticing the alteration of their body? Yet, this apparent self-evidence contains an ambiguity, for it can be taken to suggest (perhaps with a measure of denial) that it is not really me but rather my body that is ageing.

Aristotle hints at this. While *De anima*'s initial claim is that the soul is the first actuality of a body that has life potentially and, consequently, that many powers of the soul are inseparable from the body (thus, should the body be destroyed, the corresponding psychic abilities of nourishment, sensation, and locomotion would disappear), it remains that nothing prevents some "parts" (viz. "functions") of the soul from being separable, since they do not seem to be the powers of any recognizable physical organ or organ system. To support this claim Aristotle appeals, precisely, to the case of ageing:

> Old age consists of something that has happened *not to the soul*, but to that *in which the soul* is, just as in inebriation and diseases. And indeed, thinking [*to noein*] and contemplating [*to theōrein*] fade away when *something else* within is destroyed, while in itself it is imperturbable [*De an*]. 408b23.

Thus, it is the body that ages and in so doing, it drags down with it the soul ("*psyche*" in this passage refers to the noetic faculties of thought and contemplation) that remains incorruptible. Thought does not age. Following the analogy, an intake of alcohol or a fever affects the body and inhibits the intellect from performing its function. Now, if we add one further premise to the argument, namely: P 2: "I" = my thoughts, then the conclusion follows: "I" do not age, only my body does; ageing is something that happens to my body but not to me.

Of course, one may find many faults with this argument. It would be easy to point to evidence of cognitive decline that accompanies ageing to reject the whole reasoning, but even faulty arguments reveal meaningful insights. A certain duality (if not dualism) is already assumed when one experiences a discrepancy between the inner sense of one's body and its actual performance and appearance. The wrinkles I see in the mirror are not how I imagine myself. It is our body that informs us that we

[29] Baars (2012, p. 155) emphasis added.

have aged and we may want to disbelieve the news. In other words, there seems to be a discrepancy between body-image and actual physical reality that is perhaps akin to dysmorphic disorders that people suffering from anorexia experience (of course, in anorexia the body-image is imagined too fat while in ageing the body-image is assumed younger and stronger that the actual body is).[30]

Such a duality is not between a mind and a body construed as distinct substances but rather between what I think my body looks like and is able to do and what it actually can do. Furthermore, it is my body that forces me to do things I would rather not have to do or prevents me from doing things I would like to perform. In other words, with ageing, my body seems to gain an agency of its own that resists my will and, at times, even overrides it. One's own body becomes less familiar; it is almost a stranger. Here again, a struggle between rebellion and acceptance is at stake and this, as de Beauvoir suggests, is mediated by intersubjectivity:

> [F]or the outsider it [ageing] is a dialectic relationship between my being as he defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him. Within me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself.[31]

The objectification the outsider performs is first and foremost that of my body that becomes this other which, at the same time, I must recognize as myself. In this sense, ageing may not entail a commitment to the classical metaphysical mind/body dualism, but it retains a duality.

6 Aging-in-the-world(s) and generational time

Strangely, we may now live longer (the average human lifespan has significantly increased over the last centuries), yet we seem to age earlier. To account for this, we must consider how ageing interacts with a rapidly changing world. Rooted in embodiment, ageing is also a social experience; we become aware of the passing of our own time in relation to and in contrast with the time of others. It takes the stare of others, their (more or less sincere) solicitude or, on the contrary, their contempt to tell you that you are old, that is, outmoded.

For this reason, the phenomenology we seek is a social phenomenology. Davis has argued that phenomenology can operate as a form of critical gerontology by taking into consideration the age in which different temporal horizons (Scheler's expanses) are given.[32] As Davis observes "There is not a singular time in which one lives, but a time in transformation."[33] Despite the fact that discussions of the narrative self tend to assume a constant middle-aged subject, time's structure doesn't remain identical throughout life.

[30] Lewis-Smith (2014, pp. 134–35). It is to be noticed that in both cases, women form most cases.

[31] de Beauvoir (1972, p. 284).

[32] Davis (2009, pp. 52–54).

[33] Davis (2009, p. 52).

We tend to assume that time's essential structure remains identical throughout the course of one's lifetime.[34] Yet, a phenomenological investigation of ageing disrupts this standardization of time. Rather than reducing all temporal experiences to the same, an investigation of *Erlebnis* must acknowledge that every age has its own temporal integrity.

Ageing is neither merely a biological phenomenon, nor exclusively a first-person account, nor only a social phenomenon. It harbors an irreducible multiplicity that encompasses all these features in a whole embodied person's relation to the world. To establish this thesis, we will draw some resources from Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Schutz's *The Stranger*.[35] While neither work discusses ageing per se, nor pays much attention to embodiment, they nevertheless contain important insights that can illuminate our inquiry.

It is well-known that Heidegger's term *Dasein* is shorthand for the complex existential structure of "being-in-the-world;" but what exactly is the *world*? The word is both common to the point of being trite and nebulous to the point of being obscure. One could initially assume that being-in-the-world simply means being surrounded by a multiplicity of other things. "World," after all, usually means the sum of all the things that are. This is the ordinary concept of the world, but as a consequence the world, as such, does not exist since it is neither an object of experience (objectively present) nor in use (at hand). Yet, Heidegger has something else in mind. To talk of "being-in-the-world" means, first of all, that the "world" is a constituent of Dasein's being.

"In every understanding of world, existence is also understood and vice versa" (SZ, 152). This is made clear by the fact that Dasein tends to interpret itself in terms of the possibilities that are already delineated by the world. Heidegger even goes as far as talking of "the inclination of Dasein to be 'lived' by the world in which it is" (*SZ*, 195).

Being and Time aims at going beyond the ontical concept of world as the totality of things present-at-hand to disclose the ontological-existential concept of worldhood [*Weltlichkeit*]. Worldhood refers to the a priori character of anything that can be taken to be a world. To say so is to acknowledge that, in a sense, there is not just one world but a multiplicity of them (a farm, a hospital, a medieval monastery, a military base, an Indian village are all different worlds). These are various configurations where factical Dasein engages in meaningful activities. In each instance, things and places "make sense." Worldhood (i.e., the a priori structure that makes any world a world) occurs in each one of them and this allows us to understand the world as both framing and framed, that is, both as a network of pre-existing concepts and possibilities and as the historical determination of that network. Innerwordly beings become intelligible and meaningfully relevant by virtue of their belonging to a pre-interpreted and holistic network of a referential context of significance. Things (for instance, a hammer in a workshop, a waiting room at the doctor's practice, a tractor in a farm) have an identity determined by how they are related to other things

[34] It is this view of time that, in our opinion, accounts for why the philosophical tradition has, for the most part, paid little attention to ageing.

[35] Heidegger (2010). Page number refers to the German text (*SZ*). Schutz, (1964, pp. 91–105).

in their environment (the for-the-sake-of and in-order-to structure). Because of the equiprimordiality of Dasein and being-with, this world is also a social reality.

For his part, Schultz observes that our ordinary interpretation of the world is marked by an alternative of familiarity and strangeness. Both being-at-home and being-estranged presuppose being-in-the-world of which they are modalities. For the most part, everyday life is characterized by what Schutz calls a "relatively natural conception of the world" [*Relativ natürliche Weltanschauung*].[36] This is the world one navigates by simply following "common sense" (the practical judgment concerning everyday matters shared by most members of a community). Such an understanding is "common" in the sense that it does not belong to anyone. As Schutz's commentator puts it:

> In this context, I go to work, engage with my family, vote in elections, and eventually die. The world is for me ordered and understandable because I apprehend it not as my solitary world, but rather as "our" world, the world in which we have common projects, fears, and aspirations.[37]

Here one feels *at home*, such a world functions as a shelter that provides a veil of security. What Schutz dubs "thinking as usual" provides a hermeneutic map that allows us to navigate everyday life as a stable, predictable, and intersubjective space. In ordinary social interactions, we expect others to act and react "typically."

> [T]hese attitudes, by their very anonymity and typicality, are placed not within the actor's stratum of relevance which requires explicit knowledge *of* but in the region of mere acquaintance in which it will do to put one's trust.[38]

This "mean social stock of knowledge" represents what one knows insofar as it approximates what everyone else knows. It refers to a cognitive horizon that is coextensive with that of the group itself. This can be translated into Heidegger's language:

> Dasein is initially, and in certain limits constantly entrusted to this interpretedness [*Ausgelegtheit*] that directs and apportions the possibilities of the average understanding and the attunement belonging to it. In the totality of its structured contexts of signification, expression preserves an understanding of the disclosed world and thus equiprimordially an understanding of the Dasein-with of others and of one's own being-in (*SZ*, 168).

These "others" are not so much those from whom I distinguish myself as those with whom I tend to identify. Initially, I am simply "one of them." Even if some others become a thematic subject of investigation (for instance, if we attempt to conduct an anthropological survey of a given population), they are not simply encountered as present-at-hand. Rather, we meet them "at work" so to say, that is, in their being involved with the world. Encountering someone else does not require that we meet

[36] Schutz borrows this expression from Max Scheler.

[37] Williams (2017, p. 25).

[38] Schutz (1964, p. 102).

them as a mysterious entity that we must somehow comprehend through our cognitive and emotional capacities. We understand ourselves, others, and our environment all at once based on this mode of being-in-the-world. Finally, it is not just human beings that are historical but the world itself.

> The thesis of the historicity of Dasein does not say that the worldless subject is historical, but that what is historical is the being that exists as being-in-the-world. *The occurrence of history is the occurrence of being-in-the-world*. The historicity of Dasein is essentially the historicity of the world which, on the basis of its ecstatic and horizonal temporality, belong to the temporalizing of that temporality (*SZ*, 388; Heidegger's emphasis)

With this historical being-in-the-world, things have always already been drawn into the history of the "world;" works, buildings, and institutions have their own historical fates.[39] With respect to ageing, to say that the historicity of Dasein is the historicity of the world is to stress the inextricable intertwinement of life, narrative self, and world.

In the phenomenon of ageing, the historicity of the world is at stake in a very specific way. Yet, this may be, historically, a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of the estimated 300,000 years of homo sapiens' existence on this earth, changes were mostly rare. The mores, the laws, the technology, the traditions of a person born in Europe in the early 1400s would remain barely unchanged at the end of her life. Most of our ancestors died in a world that was very similar to the one they came into.

This is not so anymore. In the 18th century David Hume started observing that "human society is in perpetual flux."[40] Today, we must integrate social change as a constant and this has important consequences for ageing. It reveals not only the importance of the historicity of the world, but also the history of ageing. Ageing, as we understand it, is a modern phenomenon and not simply because people live longer.

Any social change causes a disruption that imposes an obligation of adaptation. Failure to do so condemns one to obsolescence by excluding them from possible activities. While a 60-year-old person is, in many ways not "old" with respect to the average life expectancy people in developed countries enjoy; she, nevertheless, can feel quite ancient if she is left out from using recent information and technologies. In this case, it is the world that leaves her behind, i.e., the world's time runs faster than her.

In the case of the stranger discussed by Schutz, the immersion in a different cultural context shows that the previous hermeneutic pattern no longer functions as a system of tested formulas; it reveals that its applicability was in fact restricted to specific conditions.

[39] Heidegger adds this observation: "even nature is historical [...] as a countryside, as areas that have been inhabited or exploited, as battlefields and cultic sites" (*SZ* p. 388).

[40] Hume (1985, p. 476).

> The discovery that things in his new surroundings look quite different from what he expected them to be at home is frequently the first shock to the stranger's confidence in the validity of his habitual "thinking as usual" … the whole hitherto unquestioned scheme of interpretation current within the home group becomes invalidated. It cannot be used as a scheme of orientation within the new social surroundings.[41]

A parallel can be drawn between the newly arrived immigrant discussed by Schutz and the case of ageing, with two important differences:

1. First, unlike what is experienced by a stranger, in ageing the changes result not from an immersion in a different culture, but from gradual changes within what used to be a familiar world. It is the surrounding world that progressively becomes opaque (technologies, cultural references, fashion, public behavior, mores, and so forth become progressively unrecognizable). In ageing, the world (in the sense of totality of meaningful references) contracts and progressively vanishes into the past while the new one becomes unrecognizable.
2. The second important difference is that in the case of Schultz's stranger, we can expect some eventual adjustment. The newcomer eventually integrates the in-group whose patterns become a "matter of course, an unquestionable way of life, a shelter, and a protection. But then the stranger is no stranger anymore."[42] In the case of ageing, however, adaptation is difficult and is often replaced by estrangement. It is not just the meaning-structure of the world that has changed, but with it, one has become irrelevant. It is the world that retracts from the ageing person and leaves her progressively outside.

Applying an analytic framework provided by Schutz's essay, Williams argues that ageing in a time of rapid social change contributes to older people feeling like strangers in a culture they have known their entire lives. To illustrate this point, Williams shares a personal recollection:

> When men first walked on the moon in July of 1969, I was eight years old. Born in 1888, my grandmother watched the landing with me ... Born when horses and steam-powered trains were common modes of transportation, she witnessed the invention of automobiles, refrigeration, the radio, television, nuclear energy, and space travel. In those later years of her life, I cannot help but think she must have felt in some ways a stranger, a stranger who lived her entire life within a two-hundred-mile geographical radius.[43]

Ageing, thus, appears here as a matter of being out of sync with the world. In times of rapid social change, all that is needed to create a divergence between what Schutz calls a "mean stock of knowledge" and what an ageing person recognizes

[41] Schutz (1964, p. 99).

[42] Schutz (1964, p. 105).

[43] Williams (2017, p. 18).

is a very small differential between the rate of social change and the older person's familiarity with these changes. This has consequences for our being-with-others.

> I can no longer assume that what I-take-for-granted is also taken-for-granted by you. At best, I come to see what I know as provincial, as a distinct cohort of the larger social stock of knowledge. While I may share this cohort with others of my approximate age, with respect to the larger culture, I feel like a stranger.[44]

In "ageing-in-the-world" we encounter a double estrangement: on the one hand, the world loses (at least in part) its familiarity but also, if Heidegger is right when he claims that Dasein is "entrusted to this interpretedness that directs and apportions the possibilities of the average understanding and the attunement belonging to it," Dasein becomes a stranger to itself Heidegger (2010, p. 168).

7 Conclusion

The temporality of ageing not only intertwines past, present, and future but also biological, personal, and social time. In ageing, one retracts from a world whose idiom becomes increasingly incomprehensible. The structure of being-in-the-world erodes. Yet, one still attempts to view oneself through the eyes of such a shared world (insofar as one continues to exist, one is still necessarily a being-in-the-world and a being-with-others). As the sense of world diminishes, the sense of time becomes heightened. To age in a rapidly changing social reality is to witness the world as flux, changing at an increased pace while the self appears to remain constant, stuck in a totality of meaningful references which are not understood by younger people and recedes into the past. The synchronicity of world and self (what Minkowski calls "lived synchronism" [45]) which we take for granted in the ordinary familiarity of being-at-home-in-the-world, is thus progressively decoupled. Time is out of joint; the world's transformation accelerates while the self is left behind. Thus, the temporality of ageing reveals a complex phenomenon of intertwined temporal horizons.

The exclusionary prejudice of ageism we started with constitutes the political horizon of the question of what it is to age in the modern world. Yet, our analysis shows that the process we are describing is neither inevitable nor necessary as suggested by the fact that the sense of ageing we are exploring here is a relatively recent one. While it might take more effort for an 80-year-old person to keep up with social media, blockchain technology, the interactive home, etc., it is not impossible. What is required, however, is for the elderly to remain embedded and involved in the lives of the younger generations, and to be considered by members of those generations, as part of their lives and their world rather than excluded by ageism. Just as we are learning to live in a multicultural world, we must learn to live in a multi-generational world. If such is possible, then it would be possible to grow old without ageing. It would also be possible to witness the world as flux, changing at an increased pace and for the self to change with it.

[44] Williams (2017, p. 25).

[45] Minkowski (1970, pp. 64–78).

References

Baars, Jan. 2012. Critical Turns of Aging, Narrative and Time. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 7 (2): 143–165.

Bavidge, Michael. 2016. Feeling One's Age: A Phenomenology of Aging. In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Aging*, ed. Geoffrey Scarre, 207–224. London: Palgrave.

Butler, R.N. 1969. Age-ism: Another form of Bigotry. *The Gerontologist* 9 (4): 243–246.

Davis, Zachary. 2009. Aging and Social Justice: A Phenomenological Investigation. *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry* 4 (10): 46–54.

de Beauvoir, Simone. 1972. *The Coming of Age*. New York: Putnam's Sons.

Degnen, Catherine. 2005. Temporality, Narrative, and the Ageing Self. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 25 (2): 50–63.

Gibbons, Hailee. 2016. Compulsory Youthfulness: Intersections of Ableism and Ageism in 'Successful Aging' Discourses. *Review of Disabilities Studies* 12 (1–2): 1–18.

Heidegger, Martin. 2010. *Being and Time*. Albany: SUNY.

Hume, David. 1985. *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Lewis-Smith, Helena. 2014. Ageing, Anxiety and Appearance: Exploring the Body Image of Women in Midlife. *Journal of Aesthetic Nursing* 3 (3): 134–135.

Minkowski, Eugène. 1970. *Lived Time, Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies*. Nancy Metzel Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Morganroth Gullette, Margaret. 2017. *Ending Ageism, or How Not to Shoot Old People*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Morganroth Gullette, Margaret. 2018. Against 'Aging'—How to talk about Growing Older. *Theory, Culture, and Society* 35 (7–8): 251–270.

Nadobnik, Halina, Krzytof Durczak, and Maciej Lawrynowics. 2021. Temporality and the Ageing Self. How Subjective Time is Folding over its Linear Progression. *Journal of Aging Studies* 57: 1–12.

Nussbaum, Martha. 2018. Aging, Stigma, and Disgust. In *The Empire of Disgust; Prejudice, Discrimination, and Policy in India and the US*, ed. Zoya Hasan, Aziz Huq, Martha Nussbaum, and Vidhu Verma, 146–163. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Overall, Christine. 2006. Old Age and Ageism, Impairment and Ableism: Exploring the Conceptual and Material Connections. *The National Women's Studies Association Journal* 18 (1): 126–137.

Overall, Christine. 2016. "How Old is Old? Changing Conceptions of Old Age. In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Aging*, ed. Geoffrey Scarre, 13–30. London: Palgrave.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1991. Narrative Identity. In *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood. London: Routledge.

Scarre, Geoffrey, ed. 2016. *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Aging*. London: Palgrave.

Max Scheler, 1957. Tod und Fortleben in Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 10: Schriften aus dem Nachlaß, Manfred Frings ed. 9–64 Bern: Francke Verlag,

Schnell, Suzanne. 2018. Aging and Disability. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 41 (4): 92–96.

Schutz, Alfred. 1964. The Stranger. In *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, ed. Arvid Broderson. The Hague: Nijhoff.

Williams, Jerry. 2017. Growing Old: On Becoming a Stranger. *Schutzian Research* 9: 13–28.