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Introduction. Ageing time beings: Temporality and ethics in old ages

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What can we learn about temporality by studying different ways of measuring time, institutional time regimes, and (a)typical experiences and creations of time when growing older? This introduction sets perspectives on this question from the anthropologies of ageing, ethics, and temporality. Understanding humans as time beings, we argue that attention to connections between large-scale history, collective temporal registers, and small-scale singularities of the experience of time can reveal and destabilize common representations of ageing and time. We propose an analytical direction that acknowledges and attends to situations of uncertainty and suffering, while also foregrounding questions about 'the good', not only through paying attention to cultural values such as 'active ageing', 'filial piety', or 'desired dependency' (and critiques of them), but also smaller scale, oppositional, and atypical values and poetics of ageing and time. We introduce the contributions in the special issue with close-up ethnographies from Canada, Denmark, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, and the United States, and the core argument across the contributions regarding how time manifests in multiple ways but is ontologically groundless. This lays the ground for critiquing various dogmas about age and time and opens up possibilities of affording plural temporalities in social life.

Human beings are time beings (Ozeki 2013*a*) for whom temporality matters in profound ways for our sense of living and thriving. In Ruth Ozeki's novel *A tale for the time being*, it is Nao (the sound of 'now'), a teenager, who tells us that all creatures are time beings. Nao's 104-year-old Zen Buddhist grandmother, Jiko, teaches Nao about the moment, this moment, as all there is. The past is gone, and the future is not yet. The old nun explains to the teenager that if we are too preoccupied with the past and the future, life in the present slips away. If you discover the power of the present, you discover your 'supapawa' according to the old nun (Ozeki 2013*a*).

The term 'time being' comes from a thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master, Dogen, who wrote an essay translated as 'Time being' or 'Being time'. Ozeki draws upon Dogen's

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century-old Zen Buddhist insights about time and being as non-dual 'existence-time' – as well as many other forms and manifestations of time and being. Ruth Ozeki wonders if Heidegger was inspired by this when he wrote the opus *Being and time* (Ozeki 2013*b*). In *Being and time*, Heidegger (1962 [1927]) arrives at some of the same insights as Dogen with the concept of *dasein*. Also, basic concepts from phenomenological philosophy about the threefold present (Husserl 1991 [1905]), which is always – normally – thick with past and future, are reflected in Dogen. These fundamental insights from both early Zen world philosophy and later European philosophy about time-existence bear important potentials for anthropologies of time and ageing. Not least if and when the basic time structures of past, present, and future collapse and change with experiences of ageing and cognitive decline (Ozeki 2013*b*).

In this special issue we take up this potential and explore: How does time-existence matter in older age, and in the current historical era when most societies are witnessing historically unprecedented longevity? Demographic transformations are impacting life courses, ageing processes, social dynamics, kinship and state formations, forms of care, and lived temporalities in unparalleled, culturally diverse, and unequal ways (Amrith & Coe 2022; Danely & Lynch 2013; Leinaweaver 2022). This, we argue, puts the study of old age and ageing experiences and processes at the centre of general anthropological interest and concern. Not only because increasingly larger proportions of national and global populations are living within this life phase, but because old age provides specific and situated points of view, like the view of Nao's grandmother, Jiko, from where to grasp the human condition and the world in which we co-exist.

Along with the growth of globally ageing populations, the anthropology of ageing is also burgeoning and making distinct contributions to general anthropology.[1] The aim of this special issue is to contribute to this literature by attending carefully to relationships between experiences of ageing, time, and ethics. We explore the experience of time in old age through close-up ethnographies from Canada, Denmark, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, and the United States. We propose an analytical direction that acknowledges and attends to situations of suffering, while also foregrounding questions about the good in situations of ageing. We take inspiration from Robbins' call for 'value pluralism' (J. Robbins 2023) and explore different ideas and experiences of the good when life declines, time runs out, and conditions are harsh. We attend, however, not only to highly held cultural values (J. Robbins 2023), such as 'active ageing', 'filial piety', or 'desired dependency' and critiques of them, but also to smaller scale, oppositional, and atypical values and poetics of ageing and time, because these point to qualities of ageing that reach beyond consensual prototypes.

- We ask: What can we learn about temporality by studying different ways of measuring time, institutional time regimes, and (a)typical experiences and creations of time when growing older?
- We argue: Attention to connections between large-scale history, collective temporal registers, and small-scale singularities of the experience of time can reveal and fundamentally destabilize common representations of ageing and expand our knowledge and understanding about humans as time beings.
- We discuss: If we accept that *time does not exist* per se, but comes into being through experience, in relations, in practices, in memories of the past and anticipations of the future, what might we gain by including alternative and

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atypical ways of experiencing time? Could we embrace a more generous repertoire of temporal experiences? What are the ethical implications of approaching the experience of time through old age, diversity, and inequality?

The overall contribution of this special issue concerns the ethics of creative potentials in temporality, the multiple time poetics – poesis and ethics – which appear and are made manifest and visible in ethnography. When we allow our ethnographic materials to breathe and speak, they show that time is not as fixed as we think, time is ontologically groundless. Likewise, ageing as the embodiment of time is a plural project of times and of ages manifesting. Yet we see and feel the work of time in our own and others' ageing bodies, relations, and historical changes as very real. Time embodies itself in human beings as ageing, but this is not a straightforward one-way road (not even biologically). These destabilizing realizations make us turn our critical attention towards concepts such as 'time' and 'age'. Times (even clock time) appear in multiples (Stevenson 2014), in the same moment; and ages appear in multiples, in the same human being, in a moment. It is the critical potential in 'perplexing particulars' (Mattingly 2019) in ethnographies from around the world that leads to this fundamental destabilization of concepts of time and age.

Before introducing the three themes that have arisen from how the contributors have grappled with the bullet point questions, we situate this special issue in existing studies on old age, the good, and on time, all of which precede and have inspired the collective work presented here.

Anthropologies of ageing and the good

A range of amazing work has been done in anthropologies of old age. On an existential level, old age can be said to be a temporal point of view from where one has lived through most of a human life span that has constituted one's (local) moral lifeworld (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick 1994), while perhaps simultaneously having a sense of 'an ageless self' (Kaufman 1986; Segal 2014), or witnessing changes and transformations in one's ageing self and everyday life (Degnen 2012). For some, old age is an outlook on the nearness of death as the next phase of being (Desjarlais 2016; Gill 2023; 2025); for others, it may provide a novel temporal horizon of awareness from 'time lived' to (probable) 'time left' alive for oneself (Danely 2014) or with intimate others (Bildgard & Öberg 2015). Old age may be a time for stopping or decreasing particular activities or work life (but not always) (Nadobnik, Durczak & Ławrynowicz 2021) and perhaps turning to care for generations that have followed (Savishinsky 2001). Often, old age is also a temporal point of view from where vulnerability and frailty come to matter (Laceulle 2018). Perhaps awareness is occupied by the dissolution of that which has constituted one's sensory body, relations, and lifeworld (Desjarlais 2003); perhaps increased time is spent on sustaining, maintaining, and mending body, mind, relations, and life (Loe 2011). In a sociocultural sense, old age is a generational point of view: of having lived through different generational positions and hierarchies (Alber, van der Geest & Whyte 2008; Fortes 1984); of having lived through particular historical times and socioeconomic changes (J.C. Robbins 2020); and of looking out at a world that is spinning in novel ways, while one's own role and temporal position in it may be slowing, receding, or even fading away (Myerhoff 1978).

Various terms about ageing human beings have been used and discussed in the literature and are being applied in this special issue. We applaud the multiplicity of

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saying and writing "old", "old age", "old people", and "the elderly" as well as terms which may be considered more fitting and relational such as "older age", "older people", and "later life" (see Degnen 2012; 2018). We choose this multiplicity of terms to acknowledge the critique of inflexible, categorial terms that can appear as stigmatizing, and the point about ageing as a gradual and relative process. Yet we do not want to exclude terms such as "old" and "old age" because they are terms interlocutors often use, and to some they are respectful terms.

Studies of ageing have shown considerable diversity in what is considered a good older age in different social and cultural contexts (Fry *et al.* 1997; Keith *et al.* 1994; Sokolovsky 2009) pointing to values and ideals such as filial piety in East Asian societies (Shea, Moore & Zhang 2020), elderly wisdom in various places in Africa and Ghana (Alber *et al.* 2008; van der Geest 2008), meaningful decline in India (Lamb 2014), desired dependency in Kenya and Uganda (McIntosh 2017; Whyte 2017), growing old with God among American Catholic nuns (Corwin 2017), and as a softening of gender identities in Mexico (Wentzell 2017). However, as noted by Carr, Biggs, and Kimberly already in 2013, this diversity in possible models and ways of ageing has for several decades been declining: 'notions of "flexibility" and "opportunity" quickly morphed during the 1990s and 2000s into a new rigidity, legitimising certain pathways of growing old. The current international policy environment promotes work and productive activities over and above other sources of meaning such as religion, spirituality and existential concerns' (Carr, Biggs & Kimberley 2013: 4). Successful ageing has become a global phenomenon.

A recent edited collection (Lamb 2017) devotes in-depth attention to this paradigm of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn 1987) as a contemporary social-cultural, political-economical, and medical-philosophical project prevailing in North America and Western Europe (where it often goes under the heading of active ageing), but also with instantiations and exports spreading around the globe. The main tenets of this paradigm are summarized as four cultural-historical values: individual agency and control; the value of maintaining independence and avoiding dependence; the merit of productive activity; and a vision of permanent personhood or not ageing at all (Lamb, Robbins-Ruszkowski & Corwin 2017: 7). Throughout the volume, a wealth of alternatives to the four main values of the successful ageing paradigm appears, not only in contexts outside North America and Western Europe but also within them. However, these alternative versions of the good often live an 'underground' life, are not easily voiced, spoken about or argued, especially in health promotion and gerontological settings. As stated by Steven Katz on the active ageing part of the paradigm, '[t]he association of activity with well-being in old age seems so obvious and indisputable that questioning it within gerontological circles would be considered unprofessional, if not heretical' (Katz 2000: 135).

Yet, widespread critiques have been raised against the successful ageing paradigm, which can be summed up as follows: that it is profoundly ageist, both in its negative and positive formulations (i.e., both when you succeed and when you fail); that it overlooks social inequalities; that it perpetuates gender stereotypes; that it is ethnocentric and tied to dominant American cultural ideals; and that it lacks the voices of older people themselves (Lamb *et al.* 2017). There is, however, also a danger of over-determining the reach of the successful ageing paradigm, or the 'bio-power' argument that often accompanies it, instead of looking for contestations, tensions, conflicts, alternatives, doubts, and disagreements (Whyte 2017). Or, to put it another way, we might forget

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to engage in critical scrutiny of the concepts and ideas of our own discipline (Mattingly 2019). By paying attention mainly to the experiences of our interlocutors, which confirm their allegiance to this dominant paradigm – even if this is done in a critical vein – we run the risk of silencing other values, ideals, and practices by which they live. In this volume, we seek to counter that risk by paying close attention to versions or experiences of the good of our ageing interlocutors, none of whom is ageing in ways that can be captured by the dominant discourses and imaginaries of ageing actively and successfully.

Perspectives on temporality and ageing

The awareness of human beings as time beings and the significance of temporality for thriving in older age have grown and intensified in social science studies of ageing (Degnen 2012; Hazan 1984; Kavedžija 2020; Myerhoff 1978). Ageing as a time process may be defined as the 'accumulation of and embodiment of time' (Leibing 2014: 225), and we can ask about the significance of these experiences of accumulation and embodiment. What is the value of temporality for a good old age (Grøn & Mattingly 2018; Kavedžija 2020)? How does time influence human flourishing in elderscapes (Kao & Albert 2020)?

Anthropological engagements with temporality in older age may be characterized in three approaches. In the first strand of studies, time is taken to be chronological and linear, and most research in this strand engages with how older people are governed based on dominant understandings of ageing as a natural, universal process that follows chronological time (Arxer & Murphy 2013; Baars 1997; Ferraro 2014; Kirtsoglou & Simpson 2020). This approach to governing through temporality is based on a Foucauldian tradition and analyses of what Bear (2020) terms *chronocracy*, with critical attention to temporal structures of inclusion and exclusion of various population groups. The chronological notion of time is not questioned as such, but the governing of older people through gerontological knowledge that is based on chronological time is criticized (Cohen 1998; Sivaramakrishnan 2018). This body of literature points to how temporal organization of the life course into stages of development and decline is loaded with moral scripts and aesthetic values (Charise 2020; Cole 1992). Chronocratic discourses largely shape ideas and schedules in old age institutions and also influence ideas about mitigating the 'accumulation and embodiment of time' to become 'healthy ageing' (Lamb 2014; Traphagan 2006). In this special issue we carry forward some of this perspective on chronocracy in relation to time in old age through critical engagements with temporal institutional regimes and routines in ageing lives.

The second strand of studies is based on ethnographic traditions of studying how time is measured in variable ways, and, likewise, how age is perceived in culturally variable ways, and how humans understand, record, and perceive age with great historical, cultural, and societal variation (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fortes 1984). In most of this ethnographic tradition, the ontology of time is considered to be flexible (i.e., both linear and cyclical; Leach 2001 [1961]), and the relationship between ageing and time is multiple and more complex than linear chronological understandings would suggest (Nadobnik *et al.* 2021). Time is what actors and communities do in and with time: how they temporalize actions in cultural and social worlds (Flaherty 2011; Gell 1992; Munn 1992). Ethnographies from across the world present both ageing and temporalities as multidimensional, varied, and changing phenomena, and attention is given to how older people are not only shaped by temporal structures but also play an active role

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in shaping temporalization through narration and memory talk (Degnen 2012), and other forms that may be cosmological, mythical, religious, and aesthetic (Aulino 2019; 2020; Danely 2014; Hallisey 2010; Myerhoff 1978). The experience of both passive and active temporalization in old age differs and is intersected by class, gender, and other socioeconomic characteristics (Danely 2022; Degnen 2018). The studies presented here draw largely on this long-term ethnographic tradition of documenting and describing varieties of how age and time are constituted in cultural and social worlds.

This special issue builds even more on a third phenomenologically oriented anthropological perspective (Desjarlais & Throop 2011; Schnegg 2024) that focuses on the critical potential and affordances of multiple and lived temporal experience from within worlds of ageing. With this approach, the relationship between time and experiences of ageing is not taken for granted but regarded as malleable and, as we argue, ontologically groundless. This raises the critical potential of this form of phenomenology, where 'perplexing particulars' (Mattingly 2019) from ethnography speak, not only to the multiplicity of time and age perceptions in the world, but also inform critiques of theoretical underpinnings and claims of concepts such as time and age. All contributions in this volume take their ethnographic particulars as ground for critical questioning, and several authors also position their articles as contributions to an emerging field of critical phenomenology (Al-Saji 2019; Dyring 2022; Dyring & Grøn 2022; Guenther 2020; Mattingly 2019; 2022; Meinert 2020; Weiss, Murphy & Salamon 2020). Time may be experienced as radically different in old age, in ways that bring to mind what disability scholars and activists have referred to as 'crip time' (Kafer 2013), a notion that has recently been related more directly to cognitive difference and dementia in old age (Foth & Leibing 2022; Lie 2019). The notion also captures that more time may be needed for singular activities in disability worlds (Ginsburg & Rapp 2024), which is also true for many who age precariously.

This attention to time's malleability and affordances provides opportunities for all of us to embrace plural repertoires of temporal experiences with important implications for meaning and happiness (Kavedžija 2019; 2020) and the ethics of care (Danely 2022; Mattingly & Grøn 2022) in late life. Studies with this approach zoom in on how time perceptions and practices influence – or could influence – human flourishing in various elderscapes (Kao & Albert 2020; Meinert 2021), even in conditions of precarity.

The contributions

Three overall themes run through the contributions in this volume: multiple manifestations of time; destabilizing dogma about age and time; and affording plural temporalities. We introduce each theme below with reference to individual contributions.

Multiple manifestations of time

The essays explore a plethora of diverse ways of living in time, creating and measuring time, institutional time regimes, and (a)typical experiences of time when growing older in situations of uncertainty and precarity. In the article 'The perplexity of Christmas trees: ageing, errantry, and intersectional time', Cheryl Mattingly explores ways of growing old in an African American multi-generation household in Los Angeles while raising children with disabilities. The Christmas trees point to multiple intersectional time horizons: American Dream Time; Chronic Crisis Time; God's Time – A time of Rupture and Natality; and Errant (or Fugitive) Time. These time horizons are cultivated

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through forms of everyday creativity and as (often unnoticed) everyday forms of responses to oppression.

Moving from Los Angeles to Kyoto in Japan and from family life to prison life, in 'Doing time in old age: unsettling ethics in carceral circuits', Jason Danely explores temporal circuits of recidivism for elderly men who move in and out of prison. Carceral time and recidivism emerge as 'non-times' of disbelonging from normative temporal regimes of kinship and labour and from possibilities to build viable futures, and as temporalities of circulation between prison and *shaba* (which both signifies the world outside prison, but also the Buddhist notion of *samsara*, i.e., repetitious worlds and cycles of suffering).

In 'Ghosts of a different present: spectres of possibility in the lives of older Kyrgyz Muslims', Maria Louw continues the exploration of isolation and loneliness by bringing us into the lives of older Kyrgyz Muslims. They age in the absence of younger relatives but in the company of multiple spectral presences of ancestors, those who have passed on, thus revealing the past as an open horizon of possibility, of co-existence, and lives that 'could-have-been'.

Taking us to Northern Uganda in 'Time poetics and ageing in the Ik mountains: seeing time disappear', Lotte Meinert describes multiple ways of measuring and creating time and age that co-exist among elderly Ik as layers of temporality engendering different time poetics. Sundials, calendars, phone time, and ID cards are measuring technologies that elders have accumulated over lifetimes of historical change and embody in a 'carrier bag' of temporalities and ages.

Continuing the investigation of time-measuring technologies, and bringing us back to the United States, in 'The clock-drawing test: reading temporalities of dementia from clinical chart notes', Janelle S. Taylor investigates the clock-drawing test (an instrument widely used clinically to screen for possible dementia). In a close reading of clinical chart notes from the medical records of older adults in the Seattle area who went on to be diagnosed with dementia, Taylor teases apart multiple layers and forms of temporality at play in clinical encounters. The analysis shows how time figures as both a key problem of living with dementia and a primary solution offered by clinicians: one person's temporal crisis is the other's temporal work routine.

Taking us from the clinical encounter to a residential dementia ward in Denmark, in 'Presents in dementia: groundless temporalities and ethics in a Danish dementia ward', Lone Grøn demonstrates how present moments at the ward emerge in multiple and intersecting formations: as institutional time, intersubjective potentially frictional time, still time, resonant time, and ritual-event time. Grøn concludes that carving out these multiplicities of time is deceiving; in the experience of institutional everyday life, temporal formations dissolve, shapeshift, and coalesce, bringing to the fore the groundlessness and openness of time.

Continuing on the theme of multiple shapeshifting manifestations of time, old age, and death, in 'Enemies: uneasy accompaniments in late life', Lawrence Cohen explores experiences of fear, enmity, claustrophobia, and complaint in late life in four ethnographic vignettes from Montreal, Varanasi, and San Francisco. Drawing on the Hindu figures of the hunter *Jara* ('old age'), Cohen discloses the appearance of old age and death in late life as multiple and shapeshifting experiences of the enemy.

Finally, in the article 'Still here: age and generational time', Susan Reynolds Whyte points to the multiple temporal ways that older people in Eastern Uganda are 'still

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here' as part of generational time. Drawing upon Alfred Schutz (Schutz & Luckmann 1973), Whyte discusses three kinds of time and generational presence: time together as consociates; time of finality; and time of generativity, when the memory of a deceased continues to the next generation.

In the afterword, Joel Robbins takes up the multiplicity of time models across the contributions of this volume, asking: Do values change over the life-course, or do models of their realization change? Whose models of the good should take priority in decisions about what constitutes successful ageing? He considers how changes in time horizons as people age shape the prospective component of models of the good, thereby bringing temporality into the centre of broader discussions of values, ethics, and ageing.

The multiple manifestations of time intersect with different kinds and layers of precarity across the studies, including racism, poverty, hunger, loneliness, cognitive decline, and fear, which seem to accumulate with age and expand the multiplicity of temporal experiences and formations. What also seems to increase are the sometimes stark clashes between the temporalities of those who live in precarious situations and those of the surrounding societies, who tend to categorize precarious experiences of time as nostalgic, paranoid, or even pathological. We contend, however, that the multiple manifestations of time we see across the essays demonstrate a general feature of the malleability and openness of time, which escape us when normative temporalities can be upheld: in Merleau-Ponty's words: 'time that comes into being' and 'time that at all time underlies the notion of time' (1992 [1945]: 415). This openness or groundless ontology of time opens a space for critical thinking – for what Arendt describes as 'defrosting' (1958) of common-sense ideas, such as frozen ideas about structures and practices of time.

Critiquing dogma about age and time

Across the essays, a central argument is that attention to connections between large-scale history, collective temporal registers and small-scale singularities of the experience of time can reveal and destabilize common representations of age and time and thereby expand our knowledge about humans as time beings.

Some contributions refer to this destabilizing and revealing as a *defrosting* of common-sense, taken-for-granted notions of time, of age, and of the good through careful attention to perplexing particulars in our ethnographic fieldworks (Mattingly 2019). Mattingly explores the poetics of Christmas trees and 'paintings within paintings', which challenge and defrost both dominant American models of successful ageing as well as 'suffering subject' (J. Robbins 2013) typifications of black Americans that disguise the creative ways time is lived, even under harsh circumstances (Mattingly, this volume). Similarly, through a careful listening to the term *bas* (stop, enough), Meinert explores Ik elders' refusal of nostalgia in the face of the disappearance of the sundial, a time-measuring technology, thereby challenging stereotypes of elders as 'lost in the past' and emphasizing their pragmatic natality and value pluralism (Meinert, this volume). Through a careful uncovering of what it means to be 'still here' in generational time, Whyte challenges implicit stereotypes and perceptions of the elderly as people who are 'phasing out', irrelevant, no longer really here. They are present and still here in multiple ways, even after death (Whyte, this volume). In a somewhat darker reading of generational time, Cohen explores crowd scenes of agonistic intergenerational experiences, both internal and external to the home setting

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(Cohen, this volume). Through a reading of the figure of the enemy in late life, Cohen denaturalizes the view of ageing as a path or a journey and old age as a uniform nearness to death, whether in the four-fold *ashramadharma* life course or the twenty-first-century notion of 'successful ageing'.

Other authors achieve the destabilizing through methods or concepts that are more directly temporal in themselves. Taylor seeks to destabilize the apparent objectivity and universality of a medical technology, the clock-drawing test, used to diagnose Alzheimer's disease, through critical historical investigation and archival research (Taylor, this volume). Through the concept of hesitation (Al-Saji 2018), Louw destabilizes notions of Kyrgyz elders as living in a fixed and nostalgic past (Louw, this volume). In a description of elderly Japanese reoffenders, Danely defrosts the idea of recidivism as moral failure and suggests that we think of it as a way of re-temporalizing the experience of ageing in conditions of deprivation (Danely, this volume). Finally, drawing inspiration from world philosophies, specifically the Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka tradition, Grøn approaches a Danish dementia ward as an ethnographic epoché (Throop 2012) or anarchic interruption (Dyring 2022), which affords the uncovering of a diversity of temporal experiences that are ontologically groundless, i.e., they are 'empty' of solid existence, yet still appear (Grøn, this volume).

Affording plural temporalities

Across the essays, we point to various ethical potentials of embracing more generous and pluralistic repertoires of temporal experiences in old age. Seeing that time does not exist per se, but comes into being through experience, in relations, practices, memories, and anticipations, we suggest that we can learn from alternative and atypical ways of experiencing time. These are some of the affordances of plural temporalities.

The authors point to various ethical implications of approaching experiences of time through old age, diversity, and inequality – implications that need to be addressed carefully especially when ageing lives are precarious. Across the contributions, the authors demonstrate that, by taking seriously different kinds of ageing times that may be neurodiverse, spectral, and 'otherwise', we may understand forms of 'critique from within' that challenge standard notions of clock time, time regimes, and institutional times if and when these are problematic. Yet, we cannot take for granted that all standard notions of time are regarded as problematic. Elders may enjoy the potentiality of new subject positions as 'elderly citizens' of the state and point to the overall value in being able to hold temporal diversity as well as several ages simultaneously (Meinert, this issue). As pointed out by Grøn, time as experienced in the dementia ward, manifold yet ontologically groundless, may offer an ethical insight; through a recognition of altered and neurodiverse ways of being in the present, we may uncover a present (as gift) that we can give to each other: an affordance of temporal generosity (Grøn, this issue). By attending to old people's narrations of what 'could-have-been', Louw points to ideas about the past as open-ended. Understanding the existential importance of the 'might-have-been' opens up for seeing the past not as frozen and inert but as an affordance, as possible co-existence (Louw, this issue). And, finally, Danely points to the temporal work of Japanese activists with ex-offenders who employ an 'ethics of immediacy' that is focused on listening to old ex-offenders rather than reducing recidivism. This creates possibilities for thinking about endurance and a 'good old life' in and out of prison even though it also paradoxically risks life itself (Danely, this issue).

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The essays are all characterized by paying close attention to scale, to the span between small moments and larger histories and structures. Writing styles that attend to singularities and moments are not only a matter of aesthetic preference or genre; rather, this style of writing brings to the forefront the central arguments of this volume: the poetics of the groundless ontology of time as it manifests in ageing, and of temporal ways of being singular plural (Nancy 2000) through careful attention to the perplexing particulars (Mattingly 2019).

Thus, we introduce singular plural ageing perspectives and perplexing particulars in time worlds. The reader is going to meet Komol and time poetics from the Ik mountains, Mama Summer and intersecting time horizons from Los Angeles, Nurbek and times-that-could-have-been in Kyrgyzstan, as well as other ageing time beings and time worlds. The writing style also allows for a close attention to particular moments of time worlds: situations where clinical time worlds in dementia wards in Denmark and Canada meet personal and home time worlds; moments when old Japanese reoffenders show that going back to prison can constitute a time world in itself; moments of feeling haunted by 'enemies' in ageing worlds in India and the United States; moments of encounters with elderly persons in Uganda, who joke about surprises of being 'still here'. Through close-up descriptions of singular plural ageing time beings – and attention to particular moments in time worlds and historicities – we invite the reader on a tour of what we might term 'world travelling' (Lugones 2003), travelling in and out of different aspects of ageing worlds, and in particular into ageing 'time-world travelling' to see glimpses of other ways of perceiving, living in, doing, and experiencing time and history while ageing.

Like Ozeki's novel (2013*a*), this Special Issue is 'A tale for the time being'. It is 'for the time being' in the sense that it is temporary, as close as it gets for us 'for now', in anticipation of changes and insights of the future. It is also 'a tale' for someone (a reader who is 'a time being') about other and ageing time beings.

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NOTE

[1] It is noteworthy, however, that while time in relation to being and death has received comprehensive attention in philosophy, including the classical works of Husserl (1991 [1905]), Heidegger (1962 [1927]), Ricoeur (1990), and others, much less attention has been paid in philosophy to time in relation to ageing (De Beauvoir 1972; see Dyring 2024*a*; 2024*b* for an amendment of this lack).

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Introduction. Des êtres temporels vieillissants : temporalité et éthique du grand âge

Résumé

S'agissant de la temporalité, que nous enseigne l'étude de différentes manières de mesurer le temps, de différents régimes de temps institutionnel et d'expériences et créations (a)typiques du temps au fil du vieillissement ? L'introduction de ce numéro spécial explore cette question sous l'angle de l'anthropologie du vieillissement, de l'éthique et de la temporalité. En appréhendant les humains comme des êtres temporels, les autrices avancent que l'attention portée aux liens entre histoire à grande échelle, registres temporels collectifs et singularités à petite échelle de la perception du temps peut révéler et ébranler les représentations communes du vieillissement et du temps. L'axe d'analyse que nous proposons reconnaît et examine des situations d'incertitude et de souffrance tout en mettant en avant les questions sur « le bien » ; une attention particulière est accordée non seulement à des valeurs culturelles telles que « vieillir en forme », « piété filiale » ou « dépendance souhaitée » (et leurs critiques), mais aussi à des valeurs à plus petite échelle, oppositionnelles et atypiques, et à des poétiques de la vieillesse et du temps. Les contributions à ce numéro spécial s'ouvrent sur des ethnographies en gros plan ramenées du Canada, du Danemark, des États-Unis, d'Inde, du Japon, du Kirghizistan et d'Ouganda, liées par un argument central selon lequel le temps se manifeste de multiples manières mais est ontologiquement sans fondement. Cette approche jette les bases d'une critique de différents dogmes concernant l'âge et le temps et ouvre la possibilité de prendre en considération des temporalités plurielles dans la vie sociale.

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