Cultural Ageing – Ageing In and Through The Arts

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“Celebrate Ageing!
As people live for longer societies need to adapt. Creativity is key to adapting.”
(Creative Ageing International, 2019)
Successful Ageing and Late-Life Creativity

• New-found interest in creativity in later life (Bernard & Rickett, 2016)

• Beneficial effects of creativity on older adults’ quality of life (Fraser et al. 2015), health (Castora-Binkley et al. 2010), social inclusion (Gutheil, 2016) and self-confidence (Cantu & Fleuriet, 2017)

• Creativity as a method to unpack the potential of older individuals (O’Neill 2011)
An Imperative of Late-Life Creativity?

- Creativity has been commodified to fit neoliberal agendas of productivity and self-realization (Florida, 2004)
- Late-life creativity as a powerful discourse used to discipline individuals to showcase their productivity and activity in later life

„In late modern times, creativity embraces a duality of the wish to be creative and the imperative to be creative, subjective desire and social expectation. We want to be creative and we ought to be creative.“ (Reckwitz, 2017)
Frequency of Cultural Participation by Age

Note. N = 1518. Significance was tested using one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni Post Hoc Tests. Standardized means (z score). All associations significant (p<0.05)
Research Project (2016-2021): Cultures of Ageing
Funded by the Austrian Ministry for Labour, Consumer Protection and Social Affairs
Doing Creativity

- Creativity as a bundle (Schatzki, 2014) of practices
- Creativity should be considered not as a human capacity, but as emergent from relations between the human and the non-human (things, ideas, social formations) (Fox, 2015)
Max, Drag Artist, 64 years

• Dancer, drag artist, (soon to be retired) salesman
• Made a name for himself as the oldest drag artist in Austria
• Pursued his creative activity his entire life, and takes pride in his artistic achievements
• Retiring means “switching“ from one line of work to another

“[Creativity] is work that one, as I hope, enjoys. And if one is too lazy just to think about how one could be creative! You stay home, in front of your TV and you wait until it turns itself off. Over and out.”
"Bundles" of creative practices

Practices of creativity

- Practicing
- Boundary making: Making time and space for creative practice
- Selling, giving away of outcomes (and estimating their value)
- Restricting diet and alcohol consumption
- Stop smoking

Overview of the codings „Practice Bundles of Creativity“
Creativity as a Productive Activity

- Creative practice as regular part of older adults‘ daily lives, referred to as „work“
- Description of disciplinary practices

“I like eating, I enjoy having a drink, I would like to let myself go, but when I know that in ten or eight days I have another show, then I can’t do that. I won’t fit into the costume anymore.” (Max, Drag Artist, 64 years)
Joseph, Musician, 73 years

• Has started a „second“ career as a cello player after retiring
• „Training creativity“: Training and preparation has been challenging for his (ageing) body
• Creativity calls for discipline, practice and determination to develop yourself further

“Among musicians, there’s a saying: If there is no aim, you can’t succeed. (...) I am always determined to develop myself further.”
Late-life Creativity and Successful Ageing

• Manifold negotiations, evaluations about what it means to grow older
• Ageing process as something that can (and needs to) be done actively
• Anti-Ageing: Working against ageing through creative activity

“No, I believe that you always (!) need to stay active, no matter what. Even more so when you’re older (…) Otherwise, I am convinced, you will deteriorate!”
(Joseph, Musician, 73 years)
“I told myself, I want to be like Dorian Gray. And I will do everything I can do to make that happen. And it will only end, when I, myself, detach emotionally from myself. I would not have to be sick for that, it is more about me saying: ‘Now, it’s enough’” (Max, Drag Artist, 64 years)
Building an Artistic Lifecourse

• Discussing the “artistic life course“ was one important (opening) narrative in all interviews
• Common topics were the display of a linear success story and “life-course productivity”
Two comparing cases

Case I: The painter Freddie (84 years)
- Freddie Lohner is an retired professional painter who lives in the outskirts of Vienna. In his retirement, he continues to paint and sell his art in Vienna. Every summer, he invites a small group of „followers“ for a week in his studio in the countryside, to teach them painting techniques.

Case II: The singer Elisabeth (76 years)
- Elisabeth Karatschik is a retired singer based in Vienna. Together with her husband, she has built a reputation as a singer of Viennese folk music. After her husbands‘ death, she occasionally sings in retirement homes and Viennese cafés for a small entrance fee.
Case I: The painter Freddie

- VG: First, I’d like to ask you to tell me about your artistic practice. What you do, how you do it....

- FL: Well I (1) paint pictures // and I have been doing that for a very long time // I always painted and the // way into arts was more or less determined for me, // because after school I wouldn’t have known what to if I had failed the acceptance test for the University of Fine Arts...
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Case II: The singer Elisabeth

EK: Where can you start when you are that (!) old? Well, as a child // I was the daughter of a folk violinist and my mother stayed at home (…) we were free children in a very rural area // (…) so after the war we had to go back to Vienna of course (…) and we were playing in the debris (…) everywhere, there were plants growing // and I have always been interested in everything green and small and I always made little gardens out of the flowers and so I motivated the other children to play creatively… I wasn’t just a wild child, I was a creative child.
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Two case studies

Case I: The painter Freddie
- Artistic life course as a linear success story
- Determination into artistic practice
- Unquestioned status as an "older artist"

Case II: The singer Elisabeth
- Artistic life course was less linear
  - Harder to find “checkpoints” in the life course
- "Artistic self" was less prominent
  - Life course evolved around parents, teachers, institutions
Challenges of Late-Life Creativity

• Especially those artists who started creative practice later in life, or did not pursue their artistic career regularly over the course of their lives, were often struggling for artistic legitimacy

• Importance of (formal) training and education in late-life creativity

• Negative images of ageing and ageism in the field of cultural production

„When I‘m at a casting, and I see a younger actress walk in, I say to myself: „Okay, well, that‘s it.“ (Actress, 63 years)
Concluding thoughts and discussion: Creativity and Successful Ageing
Discussion

- Late-life creativity has been situated as a method to develop, explore and advertise positive images of ageing.

- Overwhelming evidence demonstrates the positive effects of creative activity in later life on older adults’ quality of life, health, wellbeing, and self-confidence.

- However, there is also evidence suggesting that older adults experience barriers in their access to the arts and culture, as well as critical voices that raise concerns about imperatives of creative ageing.
Discussion

• For older artists, **creativity is situated as a piece of work**, that called for the careful orchestration of everyday life to make it 'fit' with creative activity. In some cases, this was a challenging process.

• **Images of ageing** related to creative experiences often drew upon images of successful ageing and at times also anti-ageing. This focus on anti-ageing practices of creativity is in line with existing research on the topic (Swinnen, 2016), but is problematic, as it aims to hide or delay ageing, instead of re-defining it.

• **Building an identity as an 'older artist'** was an important part of creative activity in later life. This was, however, challenging for those who started their creative activities later in life.
Thank you!

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