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The Postgraduate Journal of Women, Ageing and Media (ISSN: 2055-7361) is a rigorous, peer-reviewed journal which welcomes submissions from postgraduate students and early career researchers working in the fields of ageing studies, media studies, cultural gerontology, and other related disciplines. Run by postgraduates with support from more experienced academics, the journal aims to make 'thinking with age' a key lens from which to approach research focussed on women, ageing and the media (film, television, screen media, popular music, advertising radio and the press).

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WAM SUMMER SCHOOL 2016: COLLECTED ABSTRACTS

The 2016 International Women, Ageing and Media (WAM) Research Summer School took place at the Park campus Cheltenham on 20th and 21st July. Partially supported by a third year of [ACT](#) funding, it attracted researchers from Canada, Germany, Ireland, Spain and the UK. The two-day event was comprised of research presentations, an interactive workshop on ‘Doing Boundary Work’, and opportunities for participants to think intergenerationally together about the ethics, approaches and aspirations of doing research focused on women, ageing and media.

WAM’s long-term project ‘[Keep Dancing](#)’ was again extended for a further year by hosting another WAM dance party where the music consisted of a playlist of Summer School participant generated dance tracks. This year’s keynote speaker was Professor Barbara Crow (York University, Canada). Professor Crow is the Dean and AVP Graduate in the Faculty of Graduate Studies at York University, Canada. In addition to feminism and women’s studies, her research interests are in the social, cultural, political and economic implications of digital technologies.

Abstracts

Annabelle Arbogast (Miami University, Oxford, OH)

Engendering Desire in the Age of “Pink Viagra”: A Queer-Feminist Critique

As Pfizer’s Erectile Dysfunction drug Viagra gained profitability and cultural prominence at the turn of the twenty-first century, pharmaceutical companies trained their sights on developing comparable treatments for Female Sexual Dysfunction. Whereas pharmaceutical interventions for sexual dysfunction in men have targeted performance and function, desire has emerged as the defining problem for female sexuality, with a controversial new drug for Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) entering the market in 2015. This paper examines the boundary work performed by medical, psychiatric, and digital media discourses to distinguish healthy from pathological desire in the age of “pink Viagra.” I explore how gender and age inflect these discourses and critique the differential positioning of older women and older men within popular and biomedical accounts of sexual dysfunction. The second

half of this paper considers the role of feminist and postfeminist thought in shaping the conversation around HSDD and outlines a queer-feminist approach to depathologizing aging women's desires and pleasures.

Emily Baker (University of Liverpool, UK)

Age in the age of Autotune: the (re)construction of Aretha Franklin

Aretha Franklin's cover of Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep' in late 2014 met a baffled hum. On the one hand, Executive Producer Clive Davis defiantly declared Franklin had proved that '...all contemporary music needs right now is the voice. *What a voice!*' (Davis in *Billboard* 2014) while the music press asked why such an important voice should be subject to such flagrant use of the controversial practice of autotune (*Washington Post*, *Time Magazine*).

Age is problematic when heard in the recorded voice. I am interested in the technologies of power that are at work in the painstaking construction and mediation of the voice, arguing that ageing singing voices hold potential to transgress the culturally ascribed boundaries of gender, sexuality and biological sex (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1999). Increasingly, music producers are less facilitators of musical expression and more cosmetic surgeons of vocal flaw. Evoking notions of Foucault's panopticon (1977), postproduction processes rely on producers responding to standardised market strategies to meet perceived expectations of what constitutes the perfect artist. A surgical intervention of sorts, the ageing voice is subject to a different kind of nip and tuck when autotune is applied; an operation which is ostensibly more *reconstructive than cosmetic*.

Ultimately, patriarchal music industry practices actively punish voices; disciplining those timbres which embody and express age. I argue that unstitching the practices which audibly frame Aretha Franklin's (at)tuned voice reveals that the 'correction' is a *specifically gendered* sequence of processes. In this case, Franklin's iconic melisma not only highlights that the *flaw* is in the shame of ageing but also opens up discourse in how ageing voices are potentially transgressive.

Lisa-Nike Bühring (University of Gloucestershire, UK)

On the Making of a German Feminist or Why Reflecting on Retired German Men Has Changed My View of the World

Reflecting on the challenges involved in reaching the current stage of my dissertation is hoped to encourage early female researchers when facing similar problems.

Being a German, middle-aged female and working in a German business university of applied sciences has inspired my topic choice while simultaneously restricting my research perspective. Only when I was able to transcend what is considered to be the truth in my socio-cultural setting, was I able to move from a post-positivistic research position to a constructionist research philosophy informed by feminism.

This helped me to understand that by exploring the interface between the cultural narratives of ageing males conveyed in U.S. action films and the experience of older German men and the socio-cultural context they operate in, I will be able to explore for the powerful influence cultural narratives have on our self-perception regardless of gender and particularly in older age. Ideally my research will contribute to a relationship between older men and women in which we understand each other as accomplices in the ambitious task of going beyond the powerful hegemonic cultural narratives affecting our self-perception at older age. This could facilitate the construction of meaningful, positive and progressive life-course narratives in later life.

Caroline Coyle & Nicole McKenna (Athlone Institute of Technology, Ireland)

The Bog Queen Video Project: Transformation through contemplative immersion

This extract, prepared for the 2016 International Women, Ageing and Media (WAM) Research Summer School shall examine the authenticity of representation and presentation of this site specific original Bog Queen Immersion work through its video documentation. It seeks to question the validity of temporal reconstruction and the conveyance of contextual and social meaning and relations through secondary and mixed transmission.

The Bog Queen Immersion Project is site specific art project that seeks to actively contemplate the social construction of older women in society through immersion in bog pools and contemplative poetry. In reference to poet Seamus Heaney's *Bog Queen*, this transformative project seeks to explore questions surrounding older women in society, specifically, their social construction; in how they see themselves; and in how they are viewed. The Bog Queen Video Project is the documentation of the original Bog Queen Immersion Project.

In the Bog Queen Immersion Project woman is seen to immerse herself in therapeutic mineral rich peaty bog waters and to experience the *catharsis* of poetry and peat. The ancient Greeks used the term *catharsis* for the cleansing of both the body by medicine and the soul by art. Poetry by its very nature is a metamorphosis and an agent of change, as is peat and bog matter. The act of immersion is accompanied by poetry including a poem written by Caroline Coyle entitled *Paying Homage to the Bog Queen*. This poem speaks of rebirth and the spiritual transformation that occurs in tandem with the physical experience.

Mita Lad (Edge Hill University, UK)

Television from Mother India: Watching Hindi serials with women from the Gujarati-speaking Indian Hindu Diaspora in Preston

Audience studies have largely neglected to explore the television viewing habits and practices of the South Asian diaspora here in the United Kingdom. Marie Gillespie's (1995) studies of South Asian youths in Southall, west London gave a brief glimpse into familial television viewing, while Rajinder Dudrah's study (2002) gives us insights into the diasporas' consumption of transnational television. Neither study focuses on women and their viewing habits particularly as in recent years as there has been a rise in content being made available from India on transnational digital channels.

This paper is a presentation of the findings from ethnographic observations that have been conducted as part of an on-going research project. The research hopes to highlight the viewing position of women as they watch daily Hindi serials on channels like Star Plus and Zee TV. Focussing on women over the age of 50 from the Gujarati-speaking Indian Hindu diasporic community in Preston, Lancashire. The observations

will help to establish their viewing practices and habits. Particular attention will be drawn to the participant's use of technology, the way in which the participants talked about the serials and the overall space in which they watch television.

Constance Lafontaine (Concordia University, Canada)

Older women and animalized bodies

Animal figures and animal terms are frequently taken up in our lexicon of human bodies, and they are disproportionately used in reference to women's bodies (Adams, 2001). This practice includes older women, for whom animal references are often used as part of a language of ridicule and dismissal (e.g., older women as cougars or old bats). In this paper, I draw from ageing studies, eco-feminism and animal studies to provide a critical engagement with these tropological animalizations of older women's bodies and argue that they reify (hetero)normative and ageist social orders. To do this, I more specifically examine the place of the figure of the "cat-lady" in contemporary cultural texts. The figure of the cat-lady is often understood to connote an uncoupled, recluse older woman who shares her life with a multiplicity of cats, and as a protagonist she is often a marginalized character whose abnormality works to emphasize the relative normalcy of others. I argue that understanding the figure of "cat-lady" is less about emphasizing an attachment to one or more companion animal, but rather, and crucially, about a woman's rejection of the heteronormative expectations of later life and a deviant/defiant (a)sexuality.

Katie Newstead (University of Exeter, UK)

Archetypes of Ageing Femininity in the Contemporary Cinematic Fairy Tale Reboot

The function of an archetype is, principally, to allow for communication between a series of texts and their reader, providing a sense of accord and understanding. Archetypes exist in the background, beyond the current viewing or reading experience, and offer a universally recognisable reference point from which a viewer can make sense of what they are seeing at that moment. Such archetypes as the fairy godmother, wicked stepmother and crone have traditionally long appeared in fairy tales, which themselves have provided a space for women to communicate with each

other, when other areas of society have not been accessible. The cinematic fairy tale reboot uses the star body, via the global conglomeration of Hollywood, to portray contemporary versions of these archetypes in order to communicate aspects of the female experience, i.e. ageing, the life cycle, consumption and (re)production. I will argue that the individualised star body, such as that of Angelina Jolie, appears within the cinematic fairy tale reboot as an archetype coded with broader socio-cultural values as a means of reifying what it is to be a woman in the twenty-first century. I will demonstrate that Jolie's star body, imbued with specific connotations of maternity, fertility and sexuality, communicates wider issues of femininity that can be understood across cultures and spaces, due to the archetypal intelligibility of the fairy tale crone.

Katie Newstead and Sabine Starmanns (University of Exeter, UK)

"Deconstructing the 'Crone': Meryl Streep, Ageing and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema"

We will examine the figure of the 'crone', which is represented in contemporary cinema in various controversial ways: as ugly and malevolent witch or the overlooked, often dismissed and silenced old woman. In order to escape these negative stereotypes, the majority of older female stars attempt to defy their bodies' natural decline by maintaining the illusion of youth, for instance, through the use of various age-defying treatments, such as cosmetics or surgery. This enables such stars as Sharon Stone and Julianne Moore to select roles that may not fit with their chronological age.

On the other hand, Meryl Streep, who will be our case study, seems to have embraced the ageing process by refusing to submit to the pressures placed upon women to appear youthful. Streep seems to have chosen roles that do not rely on her looking young or glamorous; instead, some of her characters have qualities that are traditionally associated with wisdom and life experience. In this youth-obsessed culture, the assumption is that there is no place for the older woman, yet Meryl Streep appears to demonstrate that this may not be the case. Does Streep allow for a more visible and multi-faceted representation of the 'crone' in contemporary Hollywood cinema?

Magdalena Olszanowski (Concordia University, Canada)

Resistance of the Gaze: Women's Self-Im/Aging

Our ostensibly ubiquitous image-based technology culture is an affront to the aging population. Its image/inary of aging women depends on a lack of access to technologies for these women as well as their hyper-invisibility in various media (Meagher, 2014).

What tactics are women using to resist this ageist culture? For this multimedia presentation, I will foreground the multiplicity and incoherence of the gaze by asking how aging women challenge conventional patterns of looking and subsequently demonstrate pleasure in being looked at via image-based technologies. I will use two examples (with a focus on the latter): 1) the feminist resistance of aging self-imaging artists (Suzy Lake, Martha Wilson); 2) the feminist activist imaging work I do with elders in Montreal. The two streams are starting points to attempt to shift and re-organize the boundaries of the image, the gaze, and the creative lived experience of aging women.

This research and activism is an expansion of my ethnographic work of women artists and their boundary pushing work on the internet and image-based mobile social networks in spite of modes of censorship (Olszanowski, 2014). To which I ask: How can ageing women re-shape our knowledge of image-based technologies and their use?

Maricel Oró Piquerás (University of Lleida, Catalunya, Spain)

Dora Parramon and Mercè Riera: the Role of the Older Woman in Contemporary Soap Operas

The first Catalan soap opera, *Poblenou*, was aired in 1994. Its organization and planning was inspired by British soap operas, mainly *Eastenders*, which had had immense popularity amongst Catalan audiences in the late 1980s. The playwright Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, the main script-writer of *Poblenou* and of other soap operas that were also produced by the Catalan public TV and that followed its success, and who, for this reason, is often referred to as “the father of Catalan soap operas,”

explained in many interviews that his main aim in working on this genre for TV was to “introduce new values and make the [Catalan] audience more tolerant”.

In her work on women and the soap opera, Christine Geraghty argues that precisely the extended form of this TV genre, both in time and consequent plots, has contributed to a wider representation of women in terms of their age, personality traits and social background, as well as personal and professional interests and concerns. This partly applies to Catalan soap operas, insofar as shows like *Poblenou* and most of the TV series that followed it between the 1990s and 2000, namely, *Secrets de família*, *Nissaga de Poder* and *El cor de la ciutat*, had prominent older female figures in their fictional worlds. However, the role of mature and older women within these first Catalan soap operas was quite restricted. In the examples aforementioned, it mainly fell within the stereotype of the matriarch, which was especially manifested in the depiction of caring mothers and grandmothers who, if needed, were ready to surpass moral and legal boundaries in order to protect their families at all costs.

Two more recent soaps, *Ventdelplà* (2005-10) and *La Riera* (2010—) have started to broaden this restriction by expanding the dramatic possibilities of their older female protagonists. These two shows present important women characters in their mid-sixties –Dora Parramon in the case of *Ventdelplà*, and Mercè Riera, the central figure of *La Riera*– who own their own business (the only supermarket in a small village, and an upper-class restaurant in a coastal town, respectively), and who are also mothers of grown-up children. Initially based on the cultural stereotypes of the narrow-minded older woman of rural background and the sexist and ageist cliché of the manipulative and even monstrous mother, Dora and Mercè’s characterizations evolve towards more positive representations of the older woman as the two soap operas unfold. An important part of their evolution, however, emerges from the cognitive illnesses they both suffer in the last or advanced seasons of the series, which destabilize and highly condition the narrative of female ageing they construct.

In this presentation, a textual analysis of the evolution of these two characters and their respective subplots aims to show to what extent “new values” which have to do with a new understanding of age and femininity are reflected in recent Catalan soap operas. At the same time, the gradually pathologizing depiction of the older woman in both of them, together with the persistence of the “monstrous” older-woman figure

through the most recent example, indicates to what extent Catalan soap operas are still far from contributing to the creation of a “more tolerant” audience in Catalunya, and, especially, from reflecting the experience of female ageing in any modern society like the Catalan one from a more diverse and authentic perspective.

AGE IN THE AGE OF AUTOTUNE: THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF ARETHA FRANKLIN

Emily Baker
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ABSTRACT

With comparisons drawn to cosmetic surgery, the article argues that Autotune technologies do not rectify or erase Franklin's aging voice, but rather, it establishes a quartet in which natural, original, iconic and automated voices are variously heard. In this way, I argue that ageing singing voices hold potential to transgress the culturally ascribed boundaries of gender, sexuality and biological sex (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1999; Foucault 1988).

Ultimately, patriarchal music industry practices actively punish voices; disciplining those timbres which embody and express age. I argue that unstitching the practices which audibly frame Aretha Franklin's (at)tuned voice reveals that the 'correction' is a specifically gendered sequence of processes. In this case, Franklin's iconic melisma not only highlights that the flaw is in the shame of ageing but also opens up discourse in how ageing voices are potentially transgressive.

KEYWORDS

Voice, Ageing, Popular Music, Autotune, Aesthetics

When Aretha Franklin released her version of Adele Adkins' 'Rolling in the deep' in 2014, she did so as part of a collection of songs for her 38th studio album, 'Aretha Franklin sings the great diva classics' (Franklin 2014). At once, the premise for the release caught the eyes and ears of fans and of the worlds' press who asked, could 'Rolling in the deep' really be considered a pop classic after its first release was only in 2011? But most pressingly was the question of just what Franklin's 72-year-old voice would sound like singing Adkins' hit single from her age-consciously titled sophomore album, 21. Comparison of the two voices was inevitable and yet, when the reviews began to roll in, speculations about of the use of pitch correction technology on Franklin's voice dominated critical concerns.

My aim is not to resolve such speculations. Rather, I look to critically debate the anxieties in such practices being applied to Franklin's vocal performance. By asking why the use of this technology raises concerns in the critical legacy attached to Franklin's 21st century performance, I explore contemporary cultural unease with the active bodies and voices of the ageing, female singer. I use the analogy of

reconstructive surgery to argue that the nuances of this type of audio processor act as a renovation tool of *what once was*, rather than as a glamourising mode of sonic cosmetic surgery. While Melvin Shiffman contends that there is often overlap between surgeries being defined as either reconstructive or cosmetic. He attempts distinction by (not unproblematically) suggesting that the former be defined as a means of beautifying that which appears irregular or disfigured, while the latter is only concerned with prettifying the subject (Shiffman 2003).

I am interested in how reconstruction infers the requirement to regain what once was, in the perceived shared history of Aretha Franklin's long career. In particular, I explore how the practice of retrospection elicits a sense of loss through nostalgia; generating effects which purport to correct, revert and perfect. As such, this paper explores the internal and external technologies which produce, control, discipline, manage and mediate the voice, specifically in this evolving space where the music industry attempts to broker the terms of Age via. These are technologies of power which function in the way that Foucault (1988) considered institutional power as a technology which controls, and then punishes, that which is on the cultural 'outside'. I argue that Franklin's performance of 'Rolling in the deep' is adjudicated through four voices, internally and externally disciplined voices - the natural, the iconic, the original and the automated – that are produced at the intersection of Franklin's internal vocal experience and control and external expectations of that voice, and which phase in and out of 'focus' and vie for attention as we listen to her sing.

'Natural' voice

In May 1985, Aretha Franklin's voice was declared a 'natural resource' of the State of Michigan, joining the ranks of the Great Lakes and 49,000 miles of rivers and wetlands (Bego 1989). This might easily be written off as a light-hearted acknowledgement of Franklin's commercial and cultural successes; little more than a mutually beneficial marketing between State and singer. But labelling a voice as 'natural' is problematic in that it effaces years of practice and experience. It also positions Franklin as the static and unchanging culmination of the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, biological sex and of course, voice.

When we add Age to these other intersections, two things happen. First, practice and experience is made evident in a way that undermines both the quality and the

idea of the ‘natural voice’, Second, its fixedness is challenged because, as Kathleen Woodward notes, the ageing body is understood as being ‘inscribed with symptoms’ [whereas] the objective of the...youthful body is to speak *nothing*’ (Woodward in Sobchack 2004, p.45, my emphasis). So, once age is inserted into the matrix, the body becomes something, rather than nothing. The formulation of the body as nothingness is particularly interesting as we examine the relationship between age and the voice in the context of a pop music industry which hinges on the invisible fixity of these intersectional categories. These are the cogs in a machine which perpetuate profit through the codes of genre and easy-to-recognise performance styles through the youthful *nothing* bodies and *nothing* voices. Framed in this way, the so-called symptoms of age identified by Woodward reveal the inner workings of experienced identity, the components in the machine which were always there, yet rendered invisible by their perceived ‘naturalness’.

This is made evident by the entrance of Franklin’s voice on the recording (Franklin 2014: 6secs) and her noticeably husky tone can be understood as a symptom of age, sonically revealing the years of gospel choir vocal training and disciplined practise which her earlier years ‘spoke nothing’ of. The vocal performance exposes the workings of a vocal history; the brushed timbre of experience coding the ageing voice as a broken voice. But we need to question if the voice coded ‘aged’ is actually broken. As Martin Heidegger notes, a tool’s meaning is ordinarily masked and that it is only when the tool is broken that the tool’s being is revealed. Harman neatly sums this up, saying that ‘the broken hammer is indeed no longer effective, but we can see from its failure that it once worked ‘as’ a hammer, as an entity with special hammer-effects’ (Harman 2002, p.46). To follow the analogy, Franklin’s aged voice may well be ‘broken,’ but it still carries all the signs of its special voice effects.

Writing in the UK’s Daily Telegraph, Neil McCormick’s review of ‘Diva Classics’ is ferocious in his condemnation of Franklin’s aged and ‘broken’ voice. Whilst acknowledging that her lower range demonstrated nimbleness and a rich tone, he lambastes the higher register, complaining that she was;

...a cats’ whisker away from caterwauling, a hoarse screech that peaks into mousy squeaks or breaks into growls when overstretched... [and that] from the digitally tampered cover photo to the suspicion of digitally tampered vocals, this attempt to turn back the clock reeks of fakery and self-delusion.

McCormick (2014: online).

For McCormick at least, Franklin's 'natural' voice is a broken tool. The critique links a series of animalistic verbs, where the singers' 'screeching', 'squeaking' and 'growling' support normative assumptions on the best-before date of a singing star. More still, McCormick's critique is gendered in its claim for brokenness that alludes to an unfeminine and therefore, an unruly timbre. By way of comparison, Johnny Cash's 'broken' ageing voice was acknowledged as being 'both rich with authority and fragile with old age, inject[ing] a kind of intimate dignity...' (Nettleton 2003: online). While certainly different in performance style, genre and technological 'framing', it is interesting how Cash's voice is celebrated for the experience it reveals. Analysing cinematic sci-fi and horror genres, Vivian Sobchack reflects on 'the 'unnatural' connection of middle-aged flesh and still-youthful female desire...' (Sobchack 2004, p.42). For the septuagenarian singer performing in the context of an ageist society, the implicit sensuality of the voice produces a similar 'unnatural connection' Barthes (1977) contends that we seek out *jouissance* when attempting to decipher the beauty in the grain of the voice and so perhaps this is part of the reason our ageist ears reach back towards the voice of another time, the time when the voice was established as 'iconic'. If the broken voice has 'lost it' then we try to detect the voice when it 'had it', remembering the voice at its iconic prime.

'Iconic' voice

In her exploration of iconic African-American singers Emily Lordi defines Franklin as having 'a signature voice; a 'singular, authoritative voice that pay[s] tribute and call[s] out toward others' (Lordi 2013, p.173). The signature voice insists upon a unique space within a larger constellation of stars, so while Franklin has acknowledged that she 'pays tribute' to Dinah Washington, Clara Ward and Judy Garland in her vocal performance, we also hear how she 'calls out' to the next generation of stars like Adkins. Franklins' signature voice has been a mainstay since the post-war boom of recorded music and consequently, it has gathered and carries, a nostalgic residue in its contemporary performance. It is a voice we conjure up from our Western cultural jukebox, onto which we map our own life events. In this sense, the second voice we hear is an iconic voice. Once established as a signature sound, Lordi notes that Franklin sought to replicate her mid-60s successes by intentionally, 'Aretha-izing'

(and that's Franklin's own term!) a songs' narrative and vocal style to carve and maintain a unique space for a black female performer. To Aretha-ize is not just to make use of the breadth, depth and power of a four octave, gospel trained, mezzo-soprano but, as Lordi explains it's also about 'revising a song's storyline, "speechifying" and otherwise vocally manipulating the song text' (Lordi 2013, p.175). The techniques of Aretha-izing' help transform a signature voice into a recognisably iconic voice. In her now iconic reworking of Otis Redding's 'Respect', Franklins' voice demonstrates extremes in power, dexterity and control. An unusual structure places the songs' only chorus in the closing 37 seconds of the song (Franklin 2014 :1min 50secs). Franklin's solo voice quakes with passion as she spells out the songs' title between Bb4 and C5. This intensity ramps up in the repeat as she concludes the chorus with a defiant blues roar, still trembling with sorrow, somewhere between D5 and Eb5 on the second 'E' of 'respect'. Demonstrating a confidence in her technical control, this steady ascent peaks with an agile leap, twice landing a G5 to punctuate a sequence of improvised flourishes which neatly exchange with the percussive semiquaver, 'sock it to me', backing vocal.

While vocal technique is demonstrated by the singer processing a set of internal, learnt tools, it is equally important to note that the recording studio functions as an external technology of power to frame the voice. In the mid-20th century, producers and engineers would place musicians and singers in a large recording room in order to capture a full performance of the song, the studio is basically set to capture all the instruments and voices in a specific moment in time. This is important as we consider the different ways in which voices are mediated, how they are understood in their mass consumption and the effects they produce. This mode of music production is used less frequently in the 21st century, with instruments and voices tending to be recorded individually from each other to award more control to the producer during the mixing process. This shift of power from performer to producer, from internal technology to external framing technology is significant in the perception of naturalness and originality attributed to both Franklin and Adkins' famed vocal styles.

'Original' voice

While Adkins' attributes Wanda Jackson as an inspiration for both her songwriting

and performance of ‘Rolling in the deep’ we can also detect the same overdriven, combative vocal tone from Franklin’s interpretation of ‘Respect’. Lordi’s notion of the signature voice certainly resonates, with similar timbral effects, generated through the similar internal technologies of vocal production. Simultaneously functioning as personal demand and public call-to-arms to the sisterhood, these are voices which burst from the chest, then plead in the upper register, in such a way that resonates with Dolar’s notion of the voice being excessive to the source, or *plus de corps* (Dolar 2006, p.71). In her appraisal of various models of voice classification, Freya Jarman suggests that when singers ‘belt’, the effect is that the voice ‘sounds like it could break, like the vocal mechanisms need to give way to a less strained mode of production’ (Jarman 2016, in press). Indeed, if signature voices ‘call toward others’ as Lordi notes, then in a way, the third voice we hear is that of Adkins’ from the original recording. However, this is experienced by a sense that Franklin and Adkins ‘belt’ at each other in waves which trouble the boundary between head and chest, creating a ‘voix mixte’ or ‘passaggio’ sound, an in-between space that is neither head nor chest.

This is the first of a series of in-between spaces that Adkins’ voice inhabits during the performance of ‘Rolling in the deep’. This is clearly evidenced in the first chorus of Adkins’ version of the song with the word ‘deep’ swinging between a C5 and D5 in that mixed tone, whilst the rest of the chorus is belted out with that same confidence that we heard in Franklin’s version of ‘Respect’ (Adkins 2011: 1mins). In the spirit of blues and gospel singing, the melody is characterised by repeated descending pattern; a C minor pentatonic phrase which does not quite adhere to the mathematics of the tempered scale and therefore reveals another in-between space and an important characteristic of the songs’ claim for authenticity and originality. Indeed, Adele Adkins’ USP is wholly preoccupied by enacting a narrative which positions her as ‘the real deal’. Bolstered by an off-stage, Eliza Doolittle-styled persona, Adkins’ global success is marketed as an ‘original’, a once-in-a-lifetime melancholic, earthquaking ‘natural’ voice, communicating a universally understood inner-world.

Adkins ‘rags to riches’ fairytale chimes with the individualistic, profit seeking neoliberal economy. It is reliant on a dominant heteronormative culture articulated in terms where female success equates to emotional punishment. Melissa Bradshaw

explains this as the inevitable drama of the diva;

[...] a relatively straightforward narrative trajectory, one that allows few deviations: underdog with big talent and/ or hunger for fame overcomes hardships of impoverished beginnings to make it big: along the way makes a choice to sacrifice normative womanhood for artistic and/or commercial success; with stardom comes the crisis of maintaining stardom; star inevitably dims, either through tragedy or ageing; diva dies alone. (Bradshaw 2008, p.71).

In curating a project like 'Diva classics', which ostensibly celebrates singers who in one way or another exchange normativity for a place in a specific vocal canon; Aretha Franklin positions herself as the 'Diva of divas', with such authority to enthrone Adkins as part of the extra-ordinary clan. Stars and their audiences work together to perpetuate the illusion of the perfect pop star. And it is the impossible task of fulfilling a notion of perfection which marks out the fourth voice we hear in Franklin's version of 'Rolling in the deep', the voice which shows evidence of digital calibration.

'Automated' voice

Pitch correction technologies like Autotune and Melodyne are commonly understood as tools which calibrate in one of two ways; either to 'correct' the perceived imperfections of a vocal performance or it is applied as a vocal effect in its own right. There is of course often an overlap between those two effects and the historical and cultural contexts of the automated voice is certainly a paper for another day. But, it is important to note that existing scholarship is limited by insufficient differentiation between those processes which are considered to ameliorate vocal flaw, and those which code the performer as cyborgian Other. This dichotomy provides an interesting spectrum for exploring the body/voice relationship in contemporary pop music and certainly resonates with Steven Connor's suggestion that as we listen to voice, we hear an implied 'vocalic body'. In other words, that while it is clear that bodies produce voices, in turn, voices insinuate and create the body they have come from.

Agamben comes close to Connor's suggestion, exploring the beautifying practice of Autotune as 'aurally airbrushing any vestige of singularity out of the voice of the

performer so that the sonic performance becomes...a ‘whatever vox’ (Agamben in Pettman 2011, p.151). For Agamben then, the process of vocal calibration does not reshape the body per se, rather it cosmetically produces the effect of yet another anonymous pop music body, constructed from the pop music production line. Such contempt typifies discourse around Autotune and I am interested in how disdain for the practice lies in that age-old requirement for musical authenticit, because while there are age-old requirements, the demands for old-age performers (or performers who are coded as being so at least!) to meet them are impossible to meet. As David Hesmondalgh notes, ‘pop is still discursively centred around the young’ (in Forman 2012, p.246) and as such we are reminded that it is because youth is a key requirement for vocal performance that the ageing vocalic body is an anomaly in pop music. When Age is detected in the automated voice, it draws our ears back to those bodily symptoms of Age and seems to offer a technical fix. In this way, Autotune appears to operate as an aligning device which reorganises the material realities of Franklins’ ageing vocalic body in the moment of performance, by generating and perpetuating a rose-tinted nostalgia on the voice of the past. A series of musical decisions on the part of Franklin and her collaborators are interesting in this regard; while insisting upon the same key as Adkins, Franklin rejects the insisting repetition which marked out the original. She also alters the melody by extending the range of the song upwards, again hitting a G5 (as she did in ‘Respect’) which serves to demonstrate the maintenance of her mezzo-soprano.

But it is of course these ‘Autotune technologies’ which enable the illusion of the preservation of range, thereby functioning as a prosthetic and its effects resonating with discourses of posthumanism. Rosi Braidotti (2013) suggests that the posthuman is inherently playful in its experimentations and pursuit of the perfect body. However, I am unconvinced of Franklins’ playfulness here in that that we are left with an uncanny effect, where the heartache and cold revenge peddled by Adkins is exchanged for a digitally facilitated melisma.

(Dis)orientating effects

Singer-Songwriter Tracey Thorn is philosophical about the uncanny effects of pitch correction; since perfection is ‘impossible to achieve naturally and so it renders the sound superhuman, and as a consequence, less than human...[but] in the right,

judicious hands, it is simply another piece of convenient studio gadgetry' (2015, p.95). We would do well to remember that all music making is reliant on some kind of technology; that recorded voices are by their very nature, altered and mediated; coloured by the technologies that capture a performance and in some cases, suggesting the body of the singer.

At the time of writing, 2016, Chess records marked the 60th anniversary of releasing the first Aretha Franklin album. This started a public engagement with her voice which has moved into and out of popularity ever since. The point of return has always been her 'iconic' voice, *the* voice, which in the case of 'Rolling in the deep' phases in and out of 'focus with the 'natural', 'original' and 'automated' voices outlined here. The resulting aesthetic facilitates an orientation feedback loop of sorts whereby we orientate ourselves, preparing to receive the iconic voice of 'Aretha Franklin' only to sense confusion in detecting the doctoring of Age in the voice and become disorientated when the iconic voice fails to arrive. It is in this way that the use of pitch correction technologies, function as so much more than a mode of sonic photoshopping. Rather, that we hear composite of historical and cultural voices; a quartet of natural, original, iconic and automated voices held in place by those internal and external technologies of power which generated them in the first place.

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TWO YEARS IN PHD LAND – RESEARCH ON CULTURAL NARRATIVES, AGEING MEN, AND U.S. ACTION FILMS: CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the different stages that have led to the current stage of my PhD. and offers a presentation of the first results of my research. Overall, this paper is intended to illustrate how closely understanding one's own ontological and epistemological position is tied to the research one does and how much it affects the aims one intends to reach. This is hoped to support and encourage early researchers when they are faced with similar problems. Reflecting on my socio-cultural embeddedness was a crucial prerequisite for transcending what is considered to be the truth in my socio-cultural setting. This paper argues that this reflection enabled me to move from a post-positivistic research position to a constructionist research philosophy informed by feminism. As this paper will demonstrate, adapting my research position was essential in identifying a feasible research aim which I believe to be of scientific and social value. This paper offers an overview of my early exploration of the interface between the cultural narratives of ageing males conveyed in U.S. action films, the experience of older German men and the socio-cultural context they operate in. This paper, as with the larger PhD project, looks to create an awareness of the powerful influence cultural narratives have on our self-perception regardless of gender and particularly in older age.

KEY WORDS: Research Position, Cultural Narratives, Ageing, Men, Life-Course, U.S. Action Films

Introduction

When I enrolled in the PhD programme, I knew that obtaining a doctorate would be a major challenge. Little did I know, however, how challenging it would really become. Although I had expected to find it difficult to balance my PhD studies with the rest of my life, dreaded all the research ahead of me and was afraid of not adhering to the academic standards, I had not imagined that the initial stages of my doctorate would rock my understanding of myself and the socio-cultural environment I am part of.

Developing an awareness about the way I learn and its underlying assumptions constituted a major part of the past months since it was and is essential for my progress. Indeed, lacking an understanding of my personal epistemology and its foundation had inhibited my learning during the early phase of my doctorate. Only

when I developed an awareness of my epistemological foundation was I able to modify and adapt it to handle the difficulties I encountered (Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985). I grew up in a western culture majorly dominated by a positivistic or post-positivistic philosophical position of technical rationality (Schön, 1983). I live in a society based on the understanding that the truth can be found in statistics and numerical dimensions and if that is not possible than it is not scientifically valuable. This had instilled a belief in me that there is only one correct way of doing things and that it was only a matter of working hard enough to find this way (Chang & Aldred, 2014; Wals & Jickling, 2002). On the other hand, there have always been people in my life who questioned what I believed to be true. Moreover, spending time in a different cultural environment and with people from different cultural and social settings has increased my awareness of the existence of different perspectives on life, values and truth. This has furthered my ability of self-reflection and strongly influenced my epistemological bases.

In the following paper I will first illustrate how my socio-cultural and personal background have influenced my topic choice. Subsequently, I will outline why researching ageing masculinities is an essential part of feminist research, why ageing is not a gender specific phenomenon and how these realisations have helped me in identifying my research position and aim. Presenting the first results of my analysis of the cultural narratives of male ageing revealed in *The Expendables* (Stallone, 2010), *The Expendables 2* (West, 2012) and the *Expendables 3* (Hughes, 2014) is lastly intended to illustrate how closely the media portrayal of male ageing is intertwined with the depiction of female ageing. It should therefore facilitate my argument that the analysis of cultural narratives of male ageing is a prerequisite for a holistic understanding of the public perception of ageing in western cultures and, thus, a crucial part of feminist research.

Elucidating the different stages that have led to the current stage of my PhD and presenting first results of my research is intended to illustrate how closely understanding one's own ontological and epistemological position is tied to the research one does and how much it affects the aims one intends to reach. The experiential reflection on questions of ontology and epistemology presented here are hoped to support and encourage early researchers when they are faced with similar problems at the initial stages of their research.

A Middle-Aged German Female & Ageing Masculinities

My topic choice was essentially driven by my socio-cultural environment and my biographical background. Having lived for most part of my life in a purely female household - my mother and I – having studied subjects selected predominantly by women – German Philology, Philosophy and Media - and working in a female-dominated profession - teaching - might offer a first explanation for my fascination with the male gender. I always got on very well with men, had a majority of male friends and consequently became more and more familiar with the male perspective.

Moreover, I have lived seven years in Malta, a country dominated by a strong patriarchal system and populated by men who very explicitly voiced their conviction that men are the superior gender (Darmanin, 2006). This understanding of gender relations is embedded in a socio-cultural and political system essentially based on gender inequality (European Commission, 2012) and visible in the behaviour, attitudes and actions of both men and women.

When I was in Malta, it was generally accepted that women work as long as they worked in ‘female’ professions, did not earn more or have a more prestigious job than men and also fulfilled their other female duties, namely doing the housework, bringing up the children, taking care of the elderly, to name but a few. Although I have seldomly met more competent, head-strong and independent women than in Malta, most accepted this unfair division of duties. They complained about their workload and their men but overall seemed to see it as part of the natural order of things. This was undoubtedly also based on the strong religious inclination of the Maltese (Darmanin, 2006) since people in Malta are practicing Roman Catholics (European Commission, 2012) - a religion known to support a rather conservative view of gender roles (Glick, Lameiras & Castro, 2002). One would expect Maltese men to be more than happy with the division of gender roles in Malta. However, it was in Malta that I actually became fascinated by the question of what it means to be a man for men since male friends of mine frequently voiced how hard they found it to always fulfil what was expected of them as men and that they were longing to sometimes just be weak, show their feelings and ‘be themselves’.

My experiences in Malta cured me from my rather naïve conviction that, after all, we are all human beings and that gender did not really matter. I became much more sensitive towards the dominant cultural narratives disseminated in the respective socio-cultural environment and their impact on our self-perception (McAdams, 2001). Back in Germany I was employed as a lecturer in one of the many private Business universities in Cologne. Although the skills and language departments were mostly run by women, the business subjects were mainly taught by men. I found it easy to work with my male colleagues and once again made mostly male friends. Their socio-cultural views as well as the epistemological orientation of the institution I worked in essentially influenced me which I, however, only realised much later.

At the same time the topic of ageing slowly became an issue in my life as I was approaching forty but even more so since both my parents were in their late sixties. Both dealt with their age very differently. While my Mom struggled with her bodily decline and the feeling of social invisibility, my Dad's biggest fear was and is being dependent on others and losing his mobility. My parents' struggle with finding a way of dealing with their aged selves prompted me to wonder why my parents felt that they needed to fight age and its signs and where this negative connotation of age came from. Simultaneously I caught myself feeling overly pleased when somebody had thought I was younger than I actually was and age became the topic of half-serious discussions more and more often in my circle of friends.

It therefore seemed quite natural to choose ageing as a topic for my dissertation. Focussing on masculine ageing was a result of the interest I had developed in the socio-cultural frames through which masculinities were shaped as well as the fact that male ageing had been the topic of academic discussion considerably less than female ageing (Saxton & Cole, 2013; Spector-Mersel, 2006). As I am convinced that media play an essential role in communicating socio-cultural values and norms considered acceptable in a particular culture (Chivers, 2011), I decided to analyse the portrayal of older males in US mainstream films. Since I started with the dissertation, I have not changed this focus. I have, however, found it extremely difficult to identify my research position and methodological approach. As a result of several assignments as well as feedback from my supervisory team, I slowly realised how strongly the socio-cultural environment had affected my research position.

A German Female Torn Between Subjectivity & Objectivity

As I started my doctorate, my epistemological basis was characterised by the understanding that to gain scientifically valuable insights there is only one way of approaching research - namely the quantitative approach - and that only research with commercial and therefore practical value is worth doing. This perspective was, without a doubt, majorly based on my cultural and social environment. My friends are nearly all specialized in economics and work at business universities in Germany. My father earned his doctorate in economics and was an entrepreneur, and even my mother kept asking me what exactly the value of my research is and how I want to prove it. In short, everyone around me was influenced by a rather positivistic world view characteristic for the research landscape of management science in Germany (Matzler & Renzl, 2005) and, to a certain degree, for the German culture in general (Schön, 1983). The Prussian ideal of order and discipline still shapes German mentality. We believe in the possibility of objectivity and strive for control, structure and regularity which can be generalized into manageable patterns (Levsen, 2008) while subjectivity is looked at as susceptible and non-scientific (Matzler & Renzl, 2005).

Much of my first year of the doctorate was determined by a battle of two souls dwelling in my breast. On the one hand, my friends and family advocated a more quantitative direction of research aimed at generalizable results. On the other hand, my tutors made very clear that qualitative work is academically as valid as working quantitatively, depth as desirable as generalisability and subjectivity often the only suitable way to approach phenomena. I increasingly realised that my struggle was a result of my socio-cultural environment. The ambiguity between the core of my research which is essentially subjective and clearly located within the broader field of feminist research and my socio-cultural setting which upholds objectivity and generalisability has led to an intense and continuous examination of my research position.

Up until recently I strongly related to most of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions constituting the basis for critical realism. On the other hand, I felt affiliated to many of the assumptions and methodological choices critical theory is based on. The focus of critical realism for examining the mechanisms which determine social reality resonated with me. So did the understanding that although an objective

reality exists, it can only be approximated by the researcher as our mental capacities are not able to apprehend all mechanisms and conditions involved in observed phenomena. Therefore the aim of research is not finding one, undisputable truth but rather to combine methodologically different examinations of a phenomenon from different academic disciplines and subjects to advance the understanding of it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Modell, 2007; Sobh & Perry, 2006). This combination of ontological realism and epistemological relativism (Danermark, Ekstrom & Jakobsen, 2005) captured my own perspective on the nature of reality and knowledge. More importantly, however, the methodological stringency of critical realism with clear guidelines of how to achieve validity and reliability attracted me as a German longing for order and structure.

Nonetheless, the further I proceeded in my studies, the more I realised that the focus of my research was shifting. Uncovering social-cultural mechanisms was rather a prerequisite for understanding and exploring subjective perspectives and not in the core of my investigation anymore. My research now uses the identification of cultural narratives communicated in the portrayal of older male characters in Hollywood action films to aid an understanding of how these specific cultural narratives contribute to “the context within which contemporary older men struggle to build acceptable identities” (Spector-Mersel, 2006, p. 68).

When looking at my research aims it becomes clear that my research was increasingly informed by critical theory which also happens to be the epistemological basis of much feminist research (Mills, 1994). Critical theory aims at “enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation,” (Fay, 1987, p. 29) of social groups of people identified as socially segregated. Providing a framework to support socially under-privileged groups in order to understand how socio-cultural structures influence their self-perception is an approach I can subscribe to fully. At the same time, I find problematic the understanding of emancipation and empowerment and the resulting axiology in critical theory as a pronounced call for action and change regardless of the consequences this might have for the individual (Fay, 1987). In my view, this perspective contains a utilitarian danger of justifying disrespect for the well-being and the autonomy of individuals by facilitating a greater good, namely freedom, and resulting happiness, for all.

As a result, I have somehow without realising it, adopted a clearly feminist research approach. My interest lies in capturing subjective viewpoints as holistically as possible and on exploring how cultural narratives have shaped the individual self-perception of some German men. I have embraced the feminist understanding that objectivity is not possible when investigating a phenomenon as nobody can free oneself of his or her social and cultural embeddedness (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). I have accepted that therefore no scientific account can claim more truth than another (Harding, 1992) and that the validity of research is majorly determined by the researcher's continuous reflection on his or her own position, power relations in the relationship to the interviewees as well as others involved in the research process and the cogency of the findings generated (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006). An essential basis for the identification of my feminist research position was the realisation that the topic I had chosen to investigate constitutes, despite its focus on men, an important part of feminist research.

Feminist Research & Masculinity

In current approaches masculinity is viewed as the result of an interplay between the respective culture, the individual personality as expressed in actions and of positioning oneself in opposition to the female gender. "Masculinity [...] is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture," (Connell, 2005, p. 71). As much as men define their gender by setting it against the female gender so do we construct our female identity in relation to men. Men's perspective, self-perception and actions influence our position in society as well as our understanding of who we are in a variety of ways. Men therefore play an essential role in gender relations. Consequently a critical examination of masculinities is of core importance in gender studies (Connell, 2005). However, men have not been in the centre of critical public and academic discussions of gender as much as women. Women researchers rarely focussed on men since they were naturally more inclined to their own gender and aim at supporting the empowerment of women by giving them a voice (Harding, 1992). Men, on the other hand, have long seen little need to investigate themselves since they did not view their own social construction as

problematic. As Kimmel notes, “The processes that confer privilege to one group and not another group are often invisible to those upon whom that privilege is conferred. Thus, not having to think [...] about gender is one of the ‘patriarchal dividends’ of gender inequality,” (Kimmel, 2001, p. 22).

The world has, however, slowly changed. Despite the fact that the current neo-liberalist economic system enforces patriarchy (Greig, Kimmel & Lang, 2000), the conventional understanding of gender relations as a God given unchangeable factum has, predominantly as a result of feminist activism and research, been challenged. The women’s liberation movement in the seventies and the resulting intense elaboration of the underprivileged status of women in society as well as related political and social changes in the past nearly five decades have increasingly triggered a discussion of the concept of masculinity (Kimmel, 2012; Powrie, Davies & Babington, 2004).

Currently, viewing masculinity as either entirely biologically or socially determined is progressively replaced by the understanding that there is a multitude of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized masculinities throughout history as well as within the individual life-course inherently defined by its relational character (Baur & Luedtke, 2008; Connell, 2005). Consequently, not all men are equally advantaged by public and private patriarchy. In fact, hegemonic masculinities are largely sustained and defined not only in relation to women but also in relation to complicit, marginalized and subordinate masculinities (Connell, 2005).

The current western hegemonic masculinity ideal is white, heterosexual and muscular and does not usually display emotions publicly. Complicit men often live a life which in many aspects of their identity and physicality do not comply with the hegemonic understanding of masculinity. Often, however, they do not challenge the socio-cultural view of being a man but rather admire men fulfilling these standards. Subordination, on the other hand, characterises the status of men who cannot and/or do not want to accept the current view of masculinity such as homosexuals or effeminate men but clearly also the new breed of housemen. The ‘wrong’ race, low economic status and a low educational level determine the marginalisation of men (Connell, 2005).

Several studies in different countries have researched and documented varieties of masculinities (Law, Campbell & Dolan, 1999; Roberson & Suzuki, 2005). Among them exists one of the very few examinations of German men (Volz & Zulehner, 1998). The authors present an empirical report aimed at demonstrating what the constituents of German men's life are, how they see themselves and how they are viewed by women. The study is based on dividing the group of German men into traditional men, pragmatic men, insecure men and new men (Volz & Zulehner, 1998).

This study, as well as similar studies in other countries, are valuable since they contribute to a more differentiated understanding of the multi-dimensional construction of masculinity. Most research on the varieties of masculinity, however, are rather descriptive and rarely aim at critically examining the basis of the varieties found in masculine expressions (Baur & Luedtke, 2008; Connell, 2005). Within this context strikingly little attention is paid to older men or to the fact that age might contribute to a change in masculine status (Calasanti & King, 2005). In other words, not only race, economic status or educational level might determine marginalisation but, given the public perception of age, also their chronological age might play a crucial role in the perception of men by others and themselves (Calasanti & King, 2005; Chivers, 2011).

Men, Women & Ageing

Although age becomes an issue, for women as much as for men, latest when we turn 40 (Cruikshank, 2013), in western industrialised countries one is generally considered old when approaching retirement at ages from 60 to 65 (WHO, 2011). In 2011 over 20% of the population in Germany was 65 or older and this share is predicted to reach 30% in 2060 (Hoffmann, Gordo, Nowossadeck, Simonson & Tesch-Römer, 2015). The percentage of old age poverty in Germany is relatively low and percentages of consumption power as well as life satisfaction are comparably high when compared to other EU countries (Haustein & Mischke, 2011; Hoffmann, et al., 2015; OECD, 2015). Despite this, in Germany, like in many other countries, old age is frequently linked to notions of dependency, fragility and decline (Wilson, 2000).

Representations of old age are often analysed within the realm of stereotype research conducted in social psychology. Investigations are characterised by a focus on

stereotypes of decline (Bennett & Gaines, 2010), based on mostly quantitative measures and frequently come the conclusion that the stereotypes linked to female ageing are much less advantageous than the ones related to older men (Bennett & Gaines, 2010; Kite, Deaux & Miele, 1991; Levy, 2009; Robinson, Gustafson & Popovich, 2008; Steele, 1997). A majority of studies in stereotype research are predominantly interested in the processes involved in the development of age-based stereotypes and the psychological impact unfavourable views of age have on older people (Levy, 2009; Pinquart, 2002). What age stereotypes are informed by and how they might be changed is analysed sparingly.

In cultural gerontology the examination of ageing is commonly characterised by a critical reflection on the predominantly negative attitude towards ageing in society and on the current socio-economic and political status of older people in western countries (Blaikie, 1999; Cruikshank, 2013; Wilson, 2000). Subsequently, cases of older individuals or groups of older people are examined to support a better understanding of ageing. This is on the one hand aimed at instigating changes in the socio-economic and political treatment of elderly people and, on the other hand, at aiding a positive self-perception of older people (Arber, Davidson & Ginn, 2003; Wilson, 2000). Within this context most discussions are either general and thus ungendered or explicitly focus on the challenges involved in female ageing (Arber, et al., 2003). They also predominantly follow a more traditional line of argumentation based on chronological age and the dichotomy of young versus old or successful/productive ageing versus unsuccessful/unproductive ageing (Baars, 2013; Jennings & Krainitzki, 2015).

Recent approaches in cultural gerontology question the division of the life course by chronological stages such as young, middle-aged and old (Cruikshank, 2013) or by age cohorts such as X-ers or Baby Boomers (Gullette, 2004) since it neither captures common self-perception nor the multitude of individual concepts of later life sufficiently (Baars, 2013; Moglen, 2008). Our many different selves are often contradictory and seldom synchronous with our chronological age (Moglen, 2008). They are expressed in the personal life-course narratives we construct for ourselves and share with others (McAdams, 2001) and are strongly influenced by the hegemonic narratives of the culture we live in (McAdams, 2001). The cultural narratives linked to ageing are based on chronological age and relate progress to young age while middle age and old age

typically associated with decline (Gullette, 2004). Understanding these cultural narratives in more depth and exploring how they influence our self-perception is thus imperative to “feel at home in the life course at every age,” (Gullette, 2004, p. 20) and regardless of gender, I would like to add.

My research is therefore aimed at contributing a new perspective to the academic discourse in cultural gerontology and men’s studies by examining hegemonic cultural narratives related to male ageing. Since most hegemonic narratives of ageing are linked to decline, they can offer neither men nor women sufficiently differentiated cultural frames through which the construction of an older self in personal ‘progress’ narratives is possible (Spector-Mersel, 2006). Being ‘aged by culture’, as Cruikshank (2013) phrases it, is a challenge we all have to face earlier or later and which, given the cultural narratives available for ageing, is, in my view, challenging regardless of gender.

Drawing on key findings in cultural gerontology and men’s studies will enable me to critically examine the cultural narratives revealed in the portrayals of older male characters in the U.S. mainstream action films *The Expendables*, *The Expendables 2* and *The Expendables 3* and to subsequently explore the experiential understandings and receptions of these action films by some retired German men. This is hoped to enable a more informed and less negatively connoted and fear-laden view of older age. At the same time, highlighting the challenges linked to male ageing is aimed at facilitating a relationship of women and men in which they understand each other as partners in the ambitious task of going beyond the powerful hegemonic cultural narratives affecting self-perception at older age. Since “awareness of this infiltrated consciousness is the first necessary step towards changing the situation,” (Laceulle & Baars, 2014, p. 37), this could aid women and men in the construction of meaningful, positive and progressive life-course narratives across the entire life-span.

Screen Culture & Older Men

TV and film play a major role in communicating the current norms acceptable in a respective culture (Chivers, 2011; Connell, 2005). Within cultural gerontology and men’s studies the role media play in the formation and preservation of our cultural

understanding of age and masculinity are frequently discussed particularly within the context the portrayal of older women and the depiction of young and middle-aged men in the Anglo-American cultural setting (Chivers, 2011; Dolan & Tincknell, 2012; Krainitzki, 2014; Swinnen & Stotesbury, 2012). These discussions, however, rarely focus on the socio-cultural narratives revealed in the media portrayal of older males (Spector-Mersel, 2006). At the same time the relatively current issue of casting older characters in action films has frequently been discussed in popular media particularly in relation to their age untypical muscularity (Tucker, 2014). While this is an indication for the increasing interest in the portrayal of older males in the media, to date, these films have received comparably little academic attention (Boyle & Brayton, 2012).

The phenomenon of the revival of tough guy action films in the 21st century has been attributed to a variety of reasons such as a culture rattled by fear and insecurity after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre or a crisis of white collar male employees after the financial collapse in 2008. Overall, however, researchers agree that the reappearance of conventional action films is a reaction to changes in the social construction of masculinity provoked by socio-historical events (Boyle & Brayton, 2012; Lennard, 2014; Saxton & Cole, 2013).

On the surface, these films are no surprise at all. Hyper-muscular men with no mysterious or problematic family ties fight injustice in a disadvantaged position against a massively superior opponent. They are armed with male camaraderie, true loyalty, authentic values and outstanding physical and mental strength and agility. As a result, but against all odds, they conquer all challenges and triumphantly defeat their enemies. Since the eighties, however, the stars of these films have become older and that cannot be ignored entirely. Consequently, in addition to communicating hegemonic narratives of what it means to be a ‘true’ man these films also reveal powerful cultural understandings of what it means to be a ‘true’ man who has aged (Boyle & Brayton, 2012; Lennard, 2014).

The Hollywood mainstream action films *The Expendables*, *The Expendables 2* and *The Expendables 3* are suitable for the analysis as they are produced for the commercial mass movie market and therefore rely strongly on formulaic narration and characterisation (Tasker, 2004). Since the majority of the main characters in both films

are between their mid-forties and mid-sixties (Tucker, 2014), it can be assumed that their depiction reflects dominant cultural narratives associated with older men. In addition, the high domestic and foreign gross earnings of the selected films (Mojo Box Office, 2010; Mojo Box Office, 2012; Mojo Box Office, 2014), justify the belief that they successfully capture contemporary cultural narratives (Schatz & Perren, 2004).

The protagonists in *The Expendables* trilogy show an exceptionally high level of psychological and physical health. In all films precisely this age-atypical fitness and muscularity is explicitly presented in opposition to the age of the actors/main characters and linked to their ability of performing the given professional tasks to the highest level possible. Similarly to the hegemonic socio-cultural narratives of older females, the dominant narratives of older men transmitted in the films are therefore based on the understanding that to age successfully one has to remain young both mentally and physically (Gullette, 2004).

In the media the portrayal of successful female ageing is socio-culturally frequently linked to youthful looks and characterised by an absence of bodily and facial signs of age (Addison, 2010; Woodward, 2006). On the other hand, facial signs of ageing seem to be acceptable in men as long as their bodies and minds are in outstanding shape (Chivers, 2011). The muscular and mental power untypical for most people regardless of their age but surely not typical for anyone beyond mid-forties enables a contradiction of the hegemonic narrative of being professionally ‘expendable’ when reaching old age (Cruikshank, 2013). The films consequently support a view of ageing which is deeply rooted in the western socio-cultural and political system of neo-liberalism and which can be summarised as follows: as long as one is productive one is valuable to society. Successful ageing in *The Expendables*, *The Expendables 2* and *The Expendables 3* is consequently defined as an individual and controllable fight against ageing aimed at staying fit and self-reliant so as to stay young as long as possible (Chivers, 2011; Cruikshank, 2013; Gullette, 2004).

Successful or productive ageing in the three films is skilfully interwoven and contrasted with hegemonic narratives of decline. In accordance with genre customs Barney, the main character of the films, is portrayed as an ambiguous and flawed character (Bordwell, 1985; Tasker, 1993). However, his depiction of being wise and mellow while

at the same time being cynical, disillusioned and resigned are also typical attributes assigned to old age (Chivers, 2011). So is the characterisation of many of the characters as ‘lone wolves’ who, however, have taken it on themselves to do no less than save the world despite, or perhaps because of, their age since they are more expendable than younger men and women. The narrative of the three films therefore communicates that older age and related attributes in men are acceptable and indeed successful as long as they are productive, active and, above all, no burden to society (Gullette, 2004; Woodward, 2006). *The Expendables* trilogy therefore fits well within the long line of films with older male and female protagonists that seem to signal “a greater social concern about old people ” but “in fact the films reflect an ongoing pathologization of changes associated with age,” (Chivers, 2011, p. 148). The films, thus, contribute to the social segregation and marginalisation of older people.

Notwithstanding this, the films also allow for alternative readings by explicitly portraying neoliberal financial capitalism as inhumane and unjust and by mocking the cultural narratives of ageing and masculinity upon which the depiction of the characters are based. This socio-cultural criticism might be a result of the films being directed and written by men in the last third of their lives who surely are not only aware of the challenges involved in ageing but also have realised that being old has an effect on one’s social status and treatment. It could also, however, very well be based on trying to ‘pimp up’ the quite conventional pattern of action films so as to appeal to younger audiences. It is therefore hard to tell if and to what extent *The Expendables*, *The Expendables 2* and *The Expendables 3* really aim to challenging hegemonic narratives of ageing and to facilitating a more differentiated and realistic understanding of the processes of ageing.

Regardless of the ambiguities found in my initial film analysis, I believe that selected scenes from *The Expendables*, *The Expendables 2* and *The Expendables 3* explored in my research project will constitute an effective basis for framing the interviews with my six participants. Confronting six retired German men with film scenes from the three films informed by the cultural narratives discussed above and reflecting on their reactions and comments will allow me to explore a deeper understanding of the interface between the cultural narratives conveyed in the chosen films, the experience of the older German participants and the socio-cultural context that they operate in.

The insights gained into how six retired German men construct their older identity in and around cultural narratives of ageing will support a more differentiated view of male ageing whilst also creating a general awareness for dominant cultural narratives of ageing. Only an awareness of these dominant cultural narratives of ageing will enable changes in the often negatively connoted way older men and women view themselves and on how younger people view age and older people.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my topic, research position and research aim has enabled me to realise how strongly my socio-cultural environment influences my research. This realisation was the prerequisite for proceeding with my dissertation project. Only when I became aware of the powerful impact of hegemonic cultural narratives in my social environment on my understanding of the world and my view of scientific research and its aims, was I able to develop my research topic.

Where I had always felt that we are all a product of the culture we live in, I had not entirely realised how powerful cultural narratives really are and how hard it is to free oneself from them. My personal experience with the impact of cultural narratives and my difficulties in going beyond them have had a major influence on the development of my research project. As a result of my realisations I aim to link my interest in understanding socio-cultural western frames of ageing and masculinity with investigating hegemonic cultural narratives in films and their reception by particular viewers. Having an awareness of my own cultural embeddedness allowed me to view my research from different perspectives and to embrace a research approach untypical for my socio-cultural environment. This was not only essential for adapting the aims of my research project so as to reflect my epistemological basis, but also for developing a research project of personal, social and scientific relevance and for subsequently devising a coherent research design.

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THE BOG QUEEN IMMERSION PROJECT: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE IMMERSION

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A collaborative art project by "Phenomenal Women"

ABSTRACT

With reference to Heaney's Earth Goddess and the reclamation of woman, the Bog Queen video (which is a performance precursor of The Bog Queen Immersion Project), authenticates the spiritual transformation that occurs collectively with the physical experience of immersion. Connection between landscape and poetry is integral to the purification. From a spatial humanities perspective, the exploration of older woman immersed in bog and poetry, offers us a schema to make meaning of the social construction of older women in Irish society.

KEY WORDS: women, ageing, transformation, bogs, poetry, Heaney, mother earth. Heidegger.

The Bog Queen Immersion Project is site specific art project that seeks to actively contemplate the social construction of older women in society through immersion in bog pools and poetry. The Bog Queen Immersion Project references and takes as a point of departure, poet Seamus Heaney's, *Bog Queen* (Heaney 1975) in which he establishes the figure of an Earth Goddess that works as metaphor for the reclamation of woman / Mother Ireland who is buried beneath layers of social conditioning / troubled histories. In reclaiming Heaney's metaphor; the female voice and narrative, this transformative project seeks to explore questions surrounding older women in society, specifically, how the older woman is defined; in how they see themselves; and in how they are viewed.

The Bog Queen Immersion Project is a two phase project. Phase one, The Bog Queen Video is a call to action to participate in phase two, the Bog Queen Immersion Project.

The Bog Queen video is a filmed representation of the Bog Queen Immersion Project through video and poetry. While the Immersion Project is primarily an immersive, discursive, participatory, interactive action-based art project, the video is a performance and in that it is culture bound (Pagnes 2010). In the Bog Queen

video, we are invited to look and to listen to the video performance, and in doing so, to relate to the specificity of its particular context, situations and circumstances.

Shot through the filter of Irish mists and soft focus black and white photography, the Bog Queen video opens with ‘woman’ immersing herself in therapeutic mineral rich peaty bog waters and is seen to experience the *catharsis* of both poetry and peat. The ancient Greeks used the term *catharsis* for the cleansing of the body by medicine, and the soul by art (Szczeklik 2005). The art of poetry and the organic transformations of peat and bog matter are, by their very natures, metamorphic agents of change. The act of immersion represented in this video performance is accompanied by a poem, written by Caroline Coyle and entitled *Paying Homage to the Bog Queen* (see end of essay). This poem speaks of the spiritual transformation that occurs in tandem with the physical experience of immersion, whilst the homage paid in Coyle’s poem is to the Bog Queen of Heaney’s poetic imaginings

Heaney’s Bog Queen poem is written as a first-person narrative that presents a powerful, organic feminine being – a mother earth / a *magna mater* that we are invited to experience through the literary imagination. In depicting the Bog Queen as the Great Mother – the giver of life and death, Heaney presents a queen who is closely associated with the body of the earth, the turning of the seasons, the unconscious, intuition, and the emotions (Hoff Kraemer 2003).

In his poem, the queen’s body lies dead, yet sleeping, at the interface between nature and man. Her repeated “*I lay waiting*” stresses that, though dead, there is some form of sentience still at work. She remains conscious to all the processes of decay, even as she undergoes them: the “seeps of winter / digested me’. Her brain is seen as “darkening”, and compared to a “jar of spawn” which is “fermenting underground”. The gradual rotting of her body through soakage sees “Phoenician stitchwork / retted on my breasts” // soft moraines”. Her almost complete transformation from human to natural object sees her totally subsumed by the land: the seeps of winter / digested me,’ (O’Brien 2006).

The Bog Queen video echoes these metamorphosised states. The female body appears naked, stripped of the social signifiers of feminine culture, she enacts a series of cleansing rituals, symbolic of the bog’s metamorphic and transformative quality. Here, the body takes on added significance because of its centrality to

feminist discourse. While we see woman naked, there is no exchange of looks to establish a male gaze through the cinematic apparatus (Mulvey 1975), the voyeuristic technology of the camera is effectively undermined. The moments of performed immersion are private and personal, and yet the detached viewer is central to the witness of metamorphosis, and essential to the formation of boundaries, on and off screen, private and public, self and other.

Feminist writer Hilary Weaver (2010) argues that Heaney's poem depicts a society heavily dependent on women as objects of sexual desire, whilst his motifs of decay and frigidness are an extension of the idea that women are no longer valuable to society after their sexual desire ceases to exist. Setting the video in bogs scarred by machine and man echo these sentiments. In a similar vein, critic Patricia Coughlan (1997) accuses Heaney of portraying the feminine not as an autonomous and independent Other, but merely as the ground against which the male self is defined, a viewpoint not at odds with third wave feminist or androcentric cultural theories. Coughlan's feminist critique also notes an "erotic disrobing narrative" in Heaney's Bog Queen (190). A view point not shared by many, but a suitably agreeable reference point for a Bog Queen Contemplative Immersion Project.

Heaney's closing stanza in Bog Queen sees the imagery of decomposition inverted and death becomes metamorphosised into a rebirth: 'The plait of my hair, A slimy birth-chord of bog, had been cut'. (Heaney 1974). The video's second phase "Transformation" sees the queen cleansed of the worldly constructs that had subsumed her. To rise again, or to raise from the depth is the story of Heaney's poem and this is the transformation that occurs in the video. In accepting and seeing what has decayed there is still hope to wake up.

This layering of meaning and representation in the video works is contextual. The siting of this work and the context of place from which this very project is born is integral to its understanding and interpretation. The siting of this project in the bog makes use of the bogs' peculiar ability to re-order and disturb the seeming naturalness of linear time through the many stories of fully preserved ancient bodies and artefacts discovered in bogs and which defy the linear logic of decline and decay. The bog is simultaneously natural and man-made and the layers of its

conjoined sedimentary and manufactured histories are recorded in its material substance.

The video is thus a recording in which ancient, multiple layered histories are made visible. When ‘woman’ enters this space, this non-linear site, the ancient and contemporary and personal histories of her body are also revealed, and represented through video technologies. Through the use of reflective pools and vapours, these representations mirror, distort and emphasise the histories of ‘woman’: the cultural interpretation of social positioning of the older woman in society.

The Bog Queen video is a prequel, an invitation or a call to action to participate in The Bog Queen Immersion Project. In the Immersion Project individuals are invited to immerse themselves in poetry and bog pools and to participate in this interactive participatory and discursive action project. The term action comes from the Latin word *actionem* – the state or process of doing or praxis. This arts project or praxis moves along the interface that exists between an action that just refers to itself and a live art work intended not just as a mere ‘corpus of actions’, but as possible instrument of expression, communication and reflection. Heidegger who related art and language in an unusual way considered art as a tool for a profound reflection on to reality. “At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary.” In seeking the origin of a work of art, Heidegger also proposes that “the work of art is a happening of truth” (Heidegger 1971, p.53).

Heidegger suggests in his Origin of Art essay “that all art is essentially poetry. Art, as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry. Not only the creation of the work is poetic, but equally poetic, though in its own way, is the preserving of the work; for a work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our commonplace routine and move into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own nature itself to take a stand in the truth of what is. (Heidegger 1971, p.38).

Heidegger thinking is relative to the Immersion Project on many levels and not least because it is the praxis of the project that will affect the experience. As Heidegger says “The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this disconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the art work, the truth of what is has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work,” (Heidegger 1971, p.38).

Heidegger's phenomenological methodologies and inquiry into the "being that we ourselves are" or "Dasein," as he termed it – a German word for existence, as well as his connectedness with Greek philosophies, are interesting in their connectedness to Heaney's own methodology and writings. As a writer of prose and poetic thinkings, Heaney's essays give us an insight into his views on ideological and aesthetic issues in the context of the European intellectual tradition (O'Brien 2016). His fascination with Greek classics and the referencing of such against Irish Mythology, particularly in his creation of an earth goddess and the Bog Queen will no doubt be reflected in the staging and enactment of the Bog Queen Immersion Project.

Whether the Bog Queen Immersion project will shape experience or simply express is subject to the here and now, or the being and time of this future project. As "an experience" as defined by Dewey (1939) in that if every part flows freely into what follows, carrying with it what preceded without sacrificing its identity. The parts are phases of an enduring whole. Nor are there any holes or mechanical dead spots in *an* experience. Rather, there are pauses that define its quality and sum up what has been undergone.

The Bog Queen Immersion Project is under development. It has had a brief awakening and will rise from its slumber. At the very least it will be a happening – and there will be pauses and summing ups. After all, this is an immersive and discursive project. And we are in the course of making it happen.

Paying Homage to the Bog Queen © Caroline Coyle

Slink down the boggy layers, Bog Queen
A million tree times over
Immerse yourself Between the folded sheet memories of oaken secrets
Let the fettle dewdrops lick your legs
Shoots of pea grass warm your toes
Encase your feet in black peat brogues
Your breasts bogcottoned
Your hair minnowlike
Crowned with umbilical waterweeds

Bathe yourself in Moons and Moss
Murked humus of pain, drought, famine and sacrificial fruit
Wet peat roots shoots

Banked up frogged canals
Your belly swollen with humic and tannic
Hymning acidic secrets of a million stars
Pay homage to the Bog Queen
Listen for the soul poems
She whispers from the peloid seepage of life.

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(ARCHE)TYPE CASTING: EXTRAORDINARY STARDOM AS ORDINARY EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY FAIRY TALE FILM

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ABSTRACT

The function of an archetype is, principally, to allow for communication between a series of texts and their reader, providing a sense of accord and understanding. Archetypes exist in the background, beyond the current viewing or reading experience, and offer a universally recognisable reference point from which a viewer can make sense of what they are seeing at that moment. Such archetypes as the fairy godmother, wicked stepmother and crone have traditionally long appeared in fairy tales, which themselves have provided a space for women to communicate with each other, when other areas of society have not been accessible. The cinematic fairy tale reboot uses the star body, via the global conglomeration of Hollywood, to portray contemporary versions of these archetypes in order to communicate aspects of the female experience, i.e. ageing, the life cycle, consumption and (re)production. Arguing that the individualised star body, such as that of Angelina Jolie, appears within the cinematic fairy tale reboot as an archetype coded with broader socio-cultural values as a means of reifying what it is to be a woman in the twenty-first century, this article demonstrates that Jolie's star body, imbued with specific connotations of maternity, fertility and sexuality, communicates wider issues of femininity that can be understood across cultures and spaces, due to the archetypal intelligibility of the fairy tale crone.

Keywords

Ageing, archetypes, cinema, women, feminism, stars

Maleficent (Stromberg, 2014) continues Disney's long standing series of films that reproduce or rework traditional fairy tales. Taking Disney's 1959 animated adaptation of Charles Perrault's story of 'The Sleeping Beauty' as its starting point, *Maleficent* gives a 'back story' offering an explanation for the behaviour of the eponymous 'wicked fairy godmother', here played by Angelina Jolie, with young and teen versions of the character played by Isobelle Molloy and Ella Purnell. Scholars from both Children's Literature and Film Studies (see Zipes, Dolan) identify the wicked god or step mother as an archetypal figure, which whilst bearing characteristics that are recognisably similar across generations, they are nonetheless available for the inscription of

culturally and historically specific significations. This article aims to explore what meanings are mobilised by Jolie's version of the 'wicked godmother'.

A useful starting point for this examination of the relationship between stars and archetypes would be Northrop Frye's 1957 polemic, which determines that archetypes are a mass of complicated and sometimes opposing connotations, much like the structured polysemic nature of a star, as defined by Richard Dyer (1998), which individuals have acquired an innate and, often, unconscious knowledge of over time.

While Dyer does not specifically use the term 'archetype' in his analysis of film stars, he does discuss the idea of *types*, and how a star is able to shift between being a distinguishable individual, as well as represent an identifiable type. In 2009, Dyer states that:

In our society, it is the novelistic character that is privileged over the type, for the obvious reason that our society privileges [...] the individual over the collective or the mass. For this reason, the majority of fictions that address themselves to general social issues tend nevertheless to end up telling the story of a particular individual, hence returning social issues to purely personal and psychological ones. (2009, p.3)

Dyer suggests here that the individual, represented by the star, will always be valorised above a type, and films that focus on one character enable any larger social issues to be affixed to this figure; allowing for a deeper and more recognisable reading of these concerns.

This coincides with Josephine Dolan's (2015a) idea that stars bring embodied verisimilitude to the fantasy of the fairy tale, and that female stars reify such social anxieties as the decaying body, fertility and maintaining a successful career. Stars thus, according to Dyer and Dolan, are not only physically recognisable as individuals, but as the embodiment of societal and cultural values, denoting and promoting the modern ideals of individualism and capitalism, which themselves have been accelerated by neo-liberalism.

The individualised female star simultaneously reflects the post-feminist discourse of shifting the focus from the feminist, collective action against gender oppression to the individualised, goal-oriented post-feminist polemic of women 'doing it for themselves'.

However, stars also need to be recognisable as types, so as to retain a far-reaching appeal. Stars are imbued with a cultural realism and intelligibility that allows audiences to identify with the female roles they perform, such as: mothers, grandmothers, wives and daughters. If a star does not fit into a type at some point during their career, remaining completely individualised, they will begin to lose credibility, and lack any semblance of meaning or identification.

In a post-feminist society fixated on youth and looks, ageing is constituted as something to be feared or avoided. Ageing, and the fears and anxieties surrounding it, is made visible in the fairy tale, personified by the vibrant and globally recognisable archetypes of the wicked stepmother, fairy godmother and crone or witch. Dolan (2015b) contends that the fairy tale film allows the ageing female body to become visible, with stars imbuing the archetypes they portray with such relevant and contemporary issues as consumerism, beauty, youth and (re)production, positioning these women as ideal examples of 'successful ageing' (2015, p.345).

The ageing female star reifies what it is to be a successful older woman, as she signifies the whole package of female worthiness, privilege, productivity and visibility: she has a career, wealth, family, and beauty. The most obvious and observable example of successful ageing is certainly that of the star body as, through their ability to bring together such contradictory ideas as the individual and collective selves, stars can make the concept of growing old gracefully seem the most natural and expected option.

Paradoxically, making these archetypes of ageing femininity *more* visible, via the fact that they are played by such highly recognisable and sexually desirable Hollywood actors as Angelina Jolie, Charlize Theron and Cate Blanchett, serves to *disguise* their bodies' markers of ageing. The fairy tale film's casting of these beautiful women as characters traditionally perceived as grotesque, who have failed to age successfully, coincides with the post-feminist contradiction of valorising youth, yet judging a woman's worthiness largely on her ability to achieve prescribed life stages, i.e. motherhood, which she can only do by growing *old*. The specific appearance of the ageing female star in the fairy tale film is significant, as this fantastical, temporally and spatially dislocated space allows for real social concerns surrounding ageing, and its effects on the body, to be dramatically and graphically visualised, particularly as the

narratives of these films are so fixated on ideas of rejuvenation, youth, and transformation.

As Dyer (2013) posits, stars demonstrate the capitalist ideal of financial independence, whilst having the power and influence to speak about difficult or emotive cultural issues. The fact that the title role of *Maleficent* (Stromberg, 2014) is played by one of the most well recognised and revered Hollywood stars, Angelina Jolie, is a hugely significant and distinctive feature of this version of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale. Jolie's star image brings glamour, beauty and sex appeal to this role, while her highly publicised support and dedication to humanitarian aid locates her body as a site of devotion, kindness and charity. Maleficent is archetypal villain, protagonist and saviour of this film and, undoubtedly, Jolie's negotiation between the contradictory modes of Earth Mother and sex goddess serves to facilitate and overcome the contradictions within this character.

Indeed, there is a somewhat disturbing scene in *Maleficent*, which should be read as rape, and is certainly intended to stand as the motivation for this archetype's cruel cursing of a newborn baby. During the night, a cloaked Stefan (Sharlto Copley), who had been Maleficent's childhood human friend but is now under order from the King (Kenneth Cranham) to murder her, appears out of the mist calling for Maleficent, who enters the frame from above, emphasising her ability to fly, and rendering the event that is about to take place even more tragic and disturbing. Stefan and Jolie's Maleficent are then framed in medium shot, sitting side-by-side, allowing the audience to clearly see that they hold hands; their closeness connoting intimacy and romantic privacy. Stefan gives Maleficent a bottle to drink from which can be read as a phallic symbol and, indeed, after Maleficent has taken a drink she strokes her lips, and gives a small, knowing smile. This moment hints of a sexual relationship between Maleficent and Stefan, while connoting the pleasure and satisfaction that the fairy particularly gains from it.

In the next shot, as the contents from the bottle take effect, Maleficent falls asleep and trustingly rests her head on Stefan's shoulder, a gesture that signifies a physical closeness between the two. Stefan tenderly strokes Maleficent's face as she sleeps, perhaps to check that she is definitely asleep, or this may be a genuine moment of affection.

Then, the camera cuts to a close up of the still sleeping Maleficent with her body across the frame, and her head to the left of the screen. This shot is spatially matched by the next, when the glass vial that had contained the intoxicating amber liquid also lies horizontally across the screen, with its open end directed towards the bottom right-hand corner of the frame, dripping the last of its contents onto the ground. This mirroring of shots forces the point that Maleficent is drugged and in danger from the man sent to kill her. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the dripping vial and the drugged fairy also points to the potential for blood and semen to be spilled.

The fact that this all occurs while Maleficent is asleep, at her most vulnerable, situates the fairy as victim of a brutal and painful attack by Stefan; a man ultimately putting his desire for power and control over his alleged love for this woman. This also works to subvert the traditional *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale, as it is the future wicked fairy godmother who is first seen to fall victim to the curse of sleep. Yet, as this paper will go on to demonstrate, Aurora's (Elle Fanning) subsequent sleep is perhaps not necessarily the punishment of the original version, but can be seen as Maleficent's way of preventing a similar violation.

Rape is confirmed by Jolie's performance of Maleficent's awakening after the attack. Maleficent experiences great pain and trauma, and the combination of her facial features, presented in close up to the audience, the blood and torn dress where her wings used to be, and her screams of agony and anguish make this sequence extremely harrowing to watch. Maleficent's reaction is silent at first, as if she is too stunned, or in too much pain, to make a sound. Instead, Maleficent sits on the forest floor, bathed in a cold blue light, with her mouth open in a silent scream, before descending into soundless racking sobs.

The camera then moves away from Maleficent, framing her in a much wider, longer shot that situates her in the centre of the frame, yet the *mise-en-scène* here means that the dull brown colour of her dress renders her barely distinguishable from the forest surroundings. This distance from the camera, as well as the fact she is sitting in a hunched, kneeling stance, makes Maleficent appear physically small and vulnerable; visually enhancing her fragile and emotional state.

After once again focusing on Maleficent's face in close up, the camera takes a high-angled shot from above her, as she lies back down on the forest floor, with her head

resting on her arm. This is an almost childlike pose, and the camera's position above her as it zooms out and away from her further reduces her body, suggesting that the violent removal of her wings has not only caused her physical damage, but has had an emotional and psychological impact too; causing her to literally shrink in stature.

The last shot of this sequence, where the camera zooms out from its focus on Maleficent, leaving her as a tiny speck on the forest floor, and then tilts upwards to concentrate on the King's castle in the distance, serves as a final reminder to the viewer as to what the fairy has lost, and for what purpose. The phallic, sharp spires and turrets signify the cruel patriarchal power that has caused Maleficent's suffering, while the fact that the camera ends this sequence by focusing on the shadowy, oppressive castle in the distance denotes that its presence will continue to be felt throughout the narrative; Maleficent is not yet free of man's patriarchy's brutal rule.

In her capacity of UN Special Envoy in a *BBC Radio 4* interview from the Global Summit on Sexual Violence and Conflict, Jolie stated the following:

In essence the question was asked; what could make a woman become so dark and lose all sense of her maternity and her womanhood and her [...] softness, and something would have to be so violent, so aggressive and so of course [...] we were very conscious, the writer and I, that it was a metaphor for rape. And that this would be the thing that would make her lose sight of that and then at a certain point the question of the story is what could possibly bring her back [...]. And it is an extreme Disney fun version [of *Sleeping Beauty*], but at the core it is abuse and how the abused then have a choice of abusing others, or overcoming and remaining loving, open people, (2014).

Jolie is bringing her privileged role as spokeswoman for the very real, traumatic subject of sexual violence to the fictional character of Maleficent, not as a means of dismissing or belittling such an attack, but of examining the motivations behind this woman's subsequent actions. As Jolie maintains, the rape not only physically damages Maleficent, but harms her desire to protect and nurture those weaker than her, whereas once she was seen as the matriarchal protector of the fairy folk. As well as the rape providing motivation for Maleficent's actions, Jolie's statement suggests that it was intended as a means of allowing this character the space to become either wholly evil and attack everyone around her, or to gradually rebuild herself, and reclaim

the maternal, loving and respected woman that she once was. Arguably, Maleficent's relationship with Aurora is what 'brings her back', yet it also seems to be the case that this rape of Maleficent is cited as the ideal motivation for her to re-establish herself as a woman of authority and power

This echoes the polemic of 'resilience' discussed by Robin James (2015), where the burdens placed upon women by patriarchal values and expectations lead to damage. Women able to work through this damage, successfully moulding their bodies into normalised and acceptable sites of femininity, are upheld as worthy and "good" models of womanhood. In this formulation, a good woman is one committed to consistently maintain her body, despite the pressures and damage placed upon her. James adds that the damage patriarchy causes needs to be embraced, before utilising it in the creation of a stronger, more productive and valuable self. As she summarises:

[...] this encumbrance is now the very *medium for* transcendence – it does not prevent you from doing, but provides you the very materials with which you can *do* something. You have to be damaged and/or have damage in order to have something to overcome, (Online, 2015).

Maleficent begins as a healthy, able-bodied, powerful and attractive woman, until she is damaged by Stefan (as a symbol of patriarchy); her wings, symbolic of her independent power, are ripped away, and she is the victim of rape, leaving her emotionally and physically fragile. If one is to apply the discourse of resilience, we can argue that overcoming the physical and emotional aftermath of Stefan's attack in the way Maleficent does, by adopting Aurora, recoups her as a "good" example of womanhood. Maleficent does not allow herself to fall under the weight of patriarchy's damage, by becoming wholly evil, and takes on the highly venerated and expected role of 'mother' to Aurora, thus ensuring that she once again becomes a "good" (productive, attractive, resilient) woman. Maleficent has not overcome *despite* her damage, but *because of* it; it is this damage that has made her the person that she is. Meanwhile, Jolie has demonstrated her privilege as a star by resiliently overcoming the threat of cancer, and its physical effects on her highly sexualised body, by speaking openly and informatively about undergoing a double-mastectomy, which is further echoed in the removal of her wings in the aforementioned scene, which are coded throughout the film as symbols of power, maternity, nurture and protection.

The fact that stars contain numerous and contradictory meanings situates them as ideal locations for holding together such social inconsistencies as needing to remain young, yet achieving each designated life stage. These archetypes of femininity embody realistic concerns about successful ageing, the female life cycle, having it all, and being financially and emotionally independent whilst caring for a family, which they do because they are played by the paradoxical and everlasting figure of the star. To echo Dyer's polemic of stars as simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary (1998), stars function as realistic sites of the societal concerns of growing old, body image and maintaining a productive work/life balance, yet they also become models of aspiration, with their sparkling onscreen personas fulfilling viewer fantasies and wishes. The privileged body of the star is able to demonstrate resilience via the economic and emotional maintenance of their idealised selves, which is further facilitated by the numerous resources available exclusively to them, such as beauty treatments, fitness regimes, glamorous clothing and cosmetic surgery.

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DECONSTRUCTING THE ‘CRONE’: MERYL STREEP, AGEING AND CONTEMPORARY HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the figure of the ‘crone’, which is represented in contemporary cinema in various and controversial ways: as the ugly and malevolent witch or the overlooked, often dismissed and silenced old woman. It has been argued that, in order to escape these negative stereotypes, the majority of older female stars attempt to defy their bodies’ natural decline by maintaining the illusion of youth, for instance, through the use of various age-defying treatments, such as cosmetics or surgery. This enables such stars as Sharon Stone to select roles that may not fit with their chronological age. On the other hand, Meryl Streep, who forms the case study for this paper, seems to have embraced the ageing process by refusing to submit to the pressures placed upon women to appear youthful. Streep seems to have chosen roles that do not rely on her looking young or glamorous; instead, some of her characters have qualities that are traditionally associated with wisdom and life experience. In this youth-obsessed culture, the assumption is that there is no place for the older woman, yet Meryl Streep appears to demonstrate that this may not be the case. Does Streep allow for a more visible and multi-faceted representation of the ‘crone’ in contemporary Hollywood cinema?

KEY WORDS

Ageing, women, Meryl Streep, crone, successful

Introduction: The Crone and ‘Successful Ageing’ in Popular Culture

When we hear the word 'crone', we think of a woman past her prime, with unruly grey hair, wrinkly skin, claw-like fingers and, probably, the odd cat or two. We may even hear the echo of a witch's cackle, as we imagine her flying her broomstick across the sky. It is this negative, and potentially harmful, portrayal of the crone that is not only how many of us innately see her, but that infiltrates Hollywood representations of this figure. As Barbara Walker writes in *The Crone: Women of Age, Wisdom and Power* (2013), however, these abject images derive from the archetype of the Crone Mother, who was a matriarchal presence. The word 'crone' derives from 'crown', and the crone stood as a tribe's authority for every moral and legal decision. The potential for a woman to take life as well as create it, and her dominant rule over man, fuelled his fear of losing power to her, leading to the patriarchal repression of the crone, who became a symbol of mortality, human decay, and discipline.

The crone, however, is an inevitable stage of the female life cycle that, because it reflects the shifting nature of womanhood - virgin becomes mother becomes crone - means that she does not only complete the life cycle, but includes all of the other phases of womanhood within her. As Ruth Ray states, "The crone, then, is the culmination of all that has gone before, as well as the generative expression of new images and meanings that can occur only in old age" (2004, p.111).

Ray's perception of the female life cycle corresponds with Lynne Segal's concept of 'temporal vertigo' (2013), which she discusses in her book on ageing femininities, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing*. Instead of viewing ageing as a problem, Segal suggests that it should be seen as an inevitable part of the female life cycle, one that should be embraced and celebrated rather than feared. In order to achieve this, she argues that one must acknowledge each life stage that one has passed through, celebrating accomplishments and milestones that have occurred in the past, and revering old age as the ultimate goal.

Segal defines 'temporal vertigo' as the idea that a woman will always preserve elements of her past selves as she moves from one stage of her life to another, and that this 'baggage' accrues to create the final, finished product of the ageing woman:

As we age, changing year on year, we also retain, in one manifestation or another, traces of all the selves we have been, creating a type of temporal vertigo and rendering us psychically, in one sense, all ages and no age. (2013 [online]).

Despite these constructive images of older women, the fear of ageing still pervades Western culture, where symptoms of old age: grey hair, wrinkles, frailty, memory loss, for example, are medicalised, hidden or 'reversed' with cosmetics and invasive treatments (see Fairclough, 2012; Jermyn, 2012). While there is a growing visibility of ageing women in popular culture, this visibility comes at a price: older women are only celebrated if they correspond with certain cultural norms surrounding ageing and beauty, requiring them to hide their physical signs of decay to comply with the notion of 'successful ageing' (Dolan, 2015, p.345).

Josephine Dolan's model of successful ageing, found in Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner and Lisa McLaughlin's *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender* (2015), offers a more positive outlook, in which older film stars allow us to address our anxieties by demonstrating that it is possible to remain popular, glamorous, and economically and emotionally independent when you reach old age. Conversely, 'successful' ageing in Western culture requires women to spend a lot of time, energy and money in order to achieve anything near a body that will be deemed socially acceptable: i.e. attractive and productive, which of course is more accessible to these privileged stars.

Within this culture, how can an ageing female star such as Meryl Streep evade these norms of youth and beauty in order to fashion the image of a naturally ageing older woman, a 'modern crone', through her star image and performances?

Meryl Streep as the Modern Crone

[...] The first time she speaks during the press conference, everyone grows a little more quiet, and the shutter noise from cameras taking photos occurs at a greater frequency. She is, after all, Meryl Streep. When she takes a role, people take notice (The Weinstein Company: *The Giver* Preliminary Production notes, no date).

As the quote above - taken from the production notes on *The Giver* (Noyce, 2014) - demonstrates, Meryl Streep is one of the few older stars whose success as an actor, as well as her star power, has not diminished with age. We believe that part of her success can be attributed to two factors: her 'natural' and 'relatable' ageing, and her malleable star image. The star images of many actors, such as Meg Ryan and Sharon Stone, are indelibly permeated with their former youthful beauty or sexiness. Streep is more difficult to categorise and, as Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs claims in Dolan and Tincknell's *Aging Femininities: Troubling Representations*, her increasing openness towards roles that she would not have accepted in her earlier career has added to her visibility (2014, p.151). A further reason for Streep's success could be her ability to age 'gracefully' (Dolan and Tincknell, cited in Holmes and Jermyn, 2015, p.19). Graceful, or 'natural', ageing refuses the use of plastic surgery, but conforms to certain feminine beauty ideals. Streep's 'natural' physical attractiveness therefore serves to fashion her, as Fairclough-Isaacs states, into a 'relatable kind of beauty' (2014, p.149).

A further significant factor for Streep's longevity is her acting skill. With eighteen Academy Award nominations and three wins, Streep has been more than venerated for her acting talent. Her reputation as a serious actor, disdain for the gossip-obsessed world of celebrity, and dedication to protecting her family life have contributed to Streep being regarded as part of Hollywood 'royalty' (Fairclough-Isaacs, 2014, p.149), and even dubbed 'Saint Meryl' (Adewunmi, 2015). These accolades have contributed to Streep gaining a position of authority in the acting world, which she has used to speak out for women in a variety of ways. In 2016, for example, Streep used this status to give the closing speech at the Women in World Summit; fund a workshop for Women Screenwriters over 40; hold an acting masterclass; and speak out for gender equality in the film industry. These actions demonstrate Streep's matriarchal interest in passing on her wisdom and experience, which are characteristics traditionally associated with the crone, to the younger generation. However, while Streep's star image may be infused with female power and authority, it is simultaneously rendered unthreatening and relatable through being contained in a maternal, down-to-earth persona. Streep's refusal to call herself a feminist (Child, 2015), preferring the term 'humanist', further implies her reluctance to be typecast or regarded as rebellious. Nevertheless, as a woman of the second wave of Feminism, Streep's star image is infused with the rhetoric of female collectivity and sisterhood, as most evident in her role in *Suffragette* (Gavron, 2015).

We argue that Streep's combination of maternal authority, sense of generativity and sisterhood, and competence as an actor make her an ideal representation of the contemporary crone. Moreover, Streep's acting ability and experience draw respect from her colleagues. For example, during the filming of *August: Osage County* (Wells, 2013), Julia Roberts claimed that '[t]o get to watch [Meryl Streep] up close and to see her be a real-life person, working really hard to be that great, it was a privilege' (quoted in Hoby, 2016). Through this professional expertise and authority, Streep is able to lend a sense of gravitas to even small roles. If we look at Streep's minor appearances in *The Giver*, *The Homesman* (Jones, 2014) and *Suffragette* (Gavron, 2015), we see that none foreground youth or appearance; rather, age is important because it gives these characters wisdom and power via their life experience. The casting of Streep as Emmeline Pankhurst in *Suffragette* combines the status of Pankhurst with Streep's acting prowess and outspokenness regarding women's rights, thereby increasing the

impact of what is essentially a cameo. The significance of Streep's star image is further evident in her casting as 'Chief Elder' in *The Giver* which, as the source novel's author Lois Lowry claims in the film's production notes, served to change a rather 'bland' figure into an authoritarian personality with a history (The Weinstein Company: *The Giver* Preliminary Production Notes, no date). Similarly, although Streep only appears for a few minutes at the end of *The Homesman*, her portrayal serves to highlight her character's calm matriarchal warmth and authority.

Streep's star persona carries connotations of dedicated mother and of sisterhood, which represent important characteristics within the historical notion of the crone. We have chosen to specifically address her roles in the following two films, *August: Osage County* and *Into the Woods* (Marshall, 2014), because we believe that these films simultaneously contain potentially controversial representations of the crone, and deal with the idea of ageing and generational conflict. We argue that Streep's portrayal of these roles focuses our attention onto the multi-dimensional inner life of these unsympathetic characters, in order to render them *more* sympathetic. For example, Streep claims that she was reluctant to play Violet in *August: Osage County*, due to the character's shrew-like behaviour. However, Streep argues that Violet was a victim of her culture and circumstances, which contributed to her feelings of bitterness (Streep, 2013). As well as incorporating this bitterness into her performance, Streep has imbued it with tenderness and vulnerability, lightening Violet's superficially cruel exterior (see also Levin, 2014).

Such moments are evident in a scene towards the middle of the film, in which Violet looks at old photographs with her sister, Mattie Fae (Margo Martindale), and daughter, Ivy (Julianne Nicholson). This scene is an ideal example of the crone as the culmination of all elements of the female life cycle and illustrates Segal's contention that older women are infused with their former selves. Through its *mise-en-scène* and Streep's performance, it demonstrates Violet's intergenerational relationship with the female side of her family. By consecutively placing each woman at the centre of the frame, the *mise-en-scène* serves to demonstrate their significance to each other. The scene begins with Violet seated between Mattie Fae and Ivy, claiming that when women grow old they become ugly. While her sister denies this, stating that she knows older women who are still sexy, Violet moves to the right of the frame, thereby placing Mattie Fae in the foreground. Violet then restates her argument, but lightens it by giving

her sister an affectionate kiss. Picking up a dress and parading it in front of the mirror, Violet claims that she's always known how to attract a man, thereby demonstrating her continued affinity with her younger self. When Ivy announces that she has a boyfriend, both Mattie Fae and Violet, who eagerly moves down to Ivy's level at the side of her chair, adopt the manner of young inquisitive friends who place Ivy in the centre. It could be said that they are embracing their 'inner virgin', forming a connection with both their past selves and Ivy.

Into the Woods is another important, yet highly controversial, film to discuss within the context of the crone, as Streep plays a part usually regarded as a negative depiction of this archetype: the witch. Streep has argued that, after having refused three offers to play witches since reaching her early forties, taking on the role of the witch in *Into the Woods* felt:

[...] age-appropriate. I am an *old crone*, I'm 65 and I'm thrilled I get the chance to play such a big, challenging musical part [...]. The issues that the Witch has, the idea that people do very bad things for sometimes very good reasons, felt very resonant (quoted in Hewitt, 2015).

As demonstrated at the beginning of this paper, there has long been a perception of the older woman as someone to fear, which Streep is clearly aware of, and has attempted to avoid throughout her career. The fact that Streep has chosen to play a witch as an older woman, and described doing so as 'age-appropriate' could thus be seen as hypocritical. However, via the above quote, Streep justifies her choice of this role as being more complex than that of an ordinary witch, and further implies that she took it on for her own enjoyment. It is as if Streep, at the age of 65, decided to focus on undertaking roles that she would find pleasurable rather than intensely challenging at a time of life when, due to societal prejudices, there are very few opportunities available to female film stars. It could also be suggested that, with Segal's idea of 'temporal vertigo' in mind, Streep is tapping into the idea of the crone as enabling a connection to her past selves. By alluding, for example, to the possibility that the witch, who imprisons her adopted daughter in a tower, does so out of misguided maternal love, Streep's above comment highlights the character's maternal feelings, while simultaneously explaining the reason behind her choice of role.

We believe that Streep perfectly represents the ‘modern crone’ by emphasising certain elements of the crone, such as wisdom through life experience and authority, and situating them in a modern context within her star persona and the abovementioned roles. Although we are aware that not all of Streep’s characters in her recent films can be regarded as examples of the ‘modern crone’, we believe that the combination of Streep’s star image and the films we have discussed demonstrate Streep’s position as the ‘Elder’ within the film industry: she is respected and revered for her acting wisdom, with a passion for generativity and sisterhood. Her acting abilities have enabled Streep to add nuance and an inner depth to problematic or unremarkable roles, and transform them into more sympathetic and multi-faceted personalities. Although Streep’s star image conforms to certain beauty standards, she does not seem to be afraid to age more naturally within the roles discussed; this serves to visually accentuate her representation of the modern crone’s life experience and power. Finally, the idea of the crone as the culmination of all of a woman’s lived identities corresponds to what we have argued in this paper. Streep manages to include the different stages of a woman’s life cycle within her star image and roles, thereby demonstrating the connection between ‘young’, ‘middle-aged’ and ‘old’ through her representation of the ‘modern crone’.

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"What does a woman of a certain age see when she looks at herself in time's mirror?" (Miller, 1999, p.3)

RESISTANCE OF THE GAZE: WOMEN'S SELF-IMAGING¹

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Figure 1. Jean, NDGSCC Member. © Magdalena Olszanowski (2015).

ABSTRACT

This paper expands art historian Michelle Meagher's (2014) argument that, in our Eurocentric context, the visibility of older women only occurs in the negative register or through a hyper invisibility. In doing so, it interrogates our ageist cultural imaginary to broaden our imaged and imagined understanding of ageing. Ageing women challenge invisibility and conventional patterns of looking by demonstrating a tactical pleasure in looking and being looked with image-based media. I define this work as *self-im/ageing*, which is expanded upon by the following examples: 1) the feminist resistance of ageing self-imaging artists (Suzy Lake, Dayna McLeod, Martha Wilson); 2) the feminist activist imaging work I do with elders in Montreal. The two streams are starting points to attempt to shift and re-organize the boundaries of the image, the gaze, and the creative lived experience of ageing women.

KEY WORDS

self-imaging, ageing and photography, image culture, ageist gaze, women and technology, ageing activism

¹ The first part of the title: "resistance of the gaze" is meant as a resistance to the youthful gaze and a resistance to arguments that a gaze only works unilaterally to objectify a passive (ageing) subject. It's also a recognition of the unyielding 'resistance' to old age in our cultural imaginary (Berlind, 1994).

Introduction

The intersection of women, ageing, and photography as an object of analysis burgeoned from my research and art practice focused on young women, the body and self-imaging. In the process of recognizing ageism in my work, I discovered that ageing is an overlooked and under-theorized topic within contemporary image culture (Meagher, 2015, p.85-87). Thus began this trajectory. The following is an expansion of my presentation at WAM Summer School 2016. It aims to expand art historian Michelle Meagher's (2014, p.105) argument that, in our Eurocentric context, the visibility of older women only occurs in the negative register or through a hyper invisibility. To do so, I foreground the multiplicity of the gaze by asking how ageing women challenge invisibility and conventional patterns of looking, to subsequently demonstrate pleasure in being looked at via image-based technologies and performance. I define this work as *self-im/ageing*. *Self-im/ageing* is the work of putting one's self in the frame (whether through performance, photography, painting, writing, and so on) to refuse to be a fetish object and to recuperate the representation of ageing with one's own subjectivities and lived experience.² *Self-im/ageing* also foregrounds ageing as a performance that must be maintained and continually worked, akin to Judith Butler's (1993) feminist re-conceptualization of gender. While I believe our ostensibly ubiquitous image-based culture is an affront to the ageing population, rather than present a direct critique I aim to challenge this cultural imaginary with two key questions that frame the paper—what tactics are women using to resist ageist culture? How can ageing women break barriers to and re-shape our knowledge of image-based technologies?

I will use two examples: 1) the feminist resistance of artists that put themselves in the frame (Suzy Lake, Dayna McLeod, Martha Wilson); 2) the activist imaging work I do with elders in Montreal. The two streams serve as axes to shift and re-organize the boundaries of the image, the gaze, and the creative lived experience of ageing women; boundaries that shape and identify our bodies. Whiteness plays a large role in the shape, identity and communication of ageing and bodies (Afshar et al, 2006). As feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2007) argues, whiteness lives as a background to

² This is also in line with cultural gerontology that places “the subjectivity of older people [...] at the forefront of analysis” (Twigg, 2015, p.2).

experience, and it does so here too. In much of the literature on ageing, bodies and women, whiteness, and by virtue, white skin, is assumed as, what Ahmed (2007, p.150) calls an ‘ontological given’. It is rarely problematized. I look forward to any feedback in expanding this exploratory research as it is inflected by race, class, ability, sexuality, to present a more comprehensive analysis in future work that problematizes ontological assumptions.

Part I — How feminist artists im/age

Since Laura Mulvey (1975) defined *the gaze* as we know it in the 1970s, tomes have been written to expand, promote and refute her ideas. This paper illustrates the complexity of multiple gazes, and the possibility of pleasure and discontent with/in the gaze simultaneously, both for the viewer, and the one being looked at. Artists Suzy Lake, Dayna McLeod and Martha Wilson focus on how women use their own selves and their bodies to respond, critique, and make sense of visibility and invisibility.³ That is to say, their self-imaging⁴ is a praxis of the aforementioned, which Mulvey (1975) defines as *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Their works demonstrate that women are not subject to the gaze in the same ways, especially over time. The gaze is commonly directed towards the young, white, able-bodied woman. As such, it is predicated on ageism—a *youthful structure of the look* (Woodward, 1999, p.166). These artists counter the *youthful structure of the look* through their performance of ageing by occupying “a position of cultural refuse” (Brooks, 1999, p.233).

I chose these artists because of their large body of work related to ageing and looking. These artists’ self-imaging is anything but invisible, it is resolutely situated within the “arena of visibility” (Woodward, 1999 p.ix).⁵ They play with concepts of shame to resist ‘aging successfully’ and ‘aging gracefully’⁶ by *self im/aging*. The images interrogate the rhetoric of beauty—that being beautiful means looking young and smooth (Bordo, 2013). As Susan Sontag (1972) decries: “The single standard of beauty for women dictates that they must go on having clear skin. Every wrinkle, every line, every gray

³ For a more detailed analysis of how other artists conceptualize invisibility see Meagher (2015, p.89).

⁴ For a more detailed correlation between ageing and photography see Cristofovici (2009).

⁵ See Marna Clarke, Alice Neel, Jo Spence, Joan Semmel, among others, who in different ways occupy “positions of cultural refuse” countering ageism with their work.

⁶ See Ylänne (2015).

hair, is a defeat." The close up self-portraits of Suzy Lake in *Beauty at a Proper Distance* mimic glossy make up advertisements, but upon a closer look that gloss reveals a break from advertising signifiers. The close up forces us to bear witness to abjection—(not a face but) the wrinkles that cause her red lipstick to bleed outside the lip lines and to her maturing moustache (an aesthetic trope of ageing). From her chin, Lake tweezes "post-menopausal hair [...] something Britney Spears cannot do yet."⁷ Inside the frame, we see Lake's chin, lips, nostrils and a lock of hair. She is fractured, like most women in advertising. However, she is also abject because the beauty signifiers do not follow through with their glossy promise.

Highlighting abjection by interrogating the ageist rhetoric of beauty in addition to the explicit depiction of the passing of time is also present in Martha Wilson's work—the work of *self-im/ageing*. One example is a pair of black and white close-up profiles, one from 1974 and the other from 2009. The diptych positions each face to be turned towards the other. The younger and older self are subject to each other's gaze. Some of the features of this same face seem unchanged over time, but there are also mannered and unnerving differences. While Meagher (2014, p.140) points out that the most unnerving difference is the title, *Beauty + Beastly*, I argue that the title plays into the self-deprecating humour that Wilson is known for as she contends with the ageist rhetoric of our cultural imaginary. Another diptych in Wilson's *Beauty + Beastly* series is composed of two faces of the same woman staring at the viewer; one from 1974 with the copy: "I make up the image of my perfection" and one from 2009: "I make up the image of my deformity".⁸ Each image plays into conventional patterns of age. The younger conventional self has clean hair, a closed mouth smile, and makeup applied to make it look like she's not wearing any. The aged abject self stares at us intently with her greasy hair parted in the middle, double chin, lipstick that doesn't fit the lips, and over tweezed eyebrows that give a startled look. Make up is used to enhance bags under her eyes, splotchy skin, and a 'post-menopausal hair' moustache. Make up is used to visibly mark the body with time. The dichotomy of the diptych draws attention to the patterns of looking at older women while exposing the inner narratives

⁷ <http://www.suzylake.ca/beauty-at-a-proper-distance#1>

⁸ We only know that the second image is from 2009 through the project's description unlike 1974 that is written on the frame. Why is 1974 relevant and the aged 'beastly' face does not need a calendared temporality?

of women as we age and/or imagine ourselves aging (an argument that Professor Ros Jennings put forward in her inaugural professorship lecture 23 June 2016). Wilson is acutely aware of the cultural signifiers of representation when she self-images her body's transformations over time (Meagher, 2014). The work aligns with art historian Griselda Pollock's (quoted in Meagher) assertion that there is a "a radical lack in our repertoire of cultural representation" with "representations of bodies that register time through their skin" (Meagher, 2014, p.75)—that is to say, bodies that are marked visibly with time.⁹ Film scholar Jodi Brooks evokes Walter Benjamin to argue that to "enlist time on your side" is to "grasp the temporal structuring of experience—to make it communicable and to use it as the basis of a form of transmissibility" (Brooks, 1999, p.244). This synthetic manoeuvre underpins all the work I discuss in the paper.

Suzy Lake communicates back to us our (internalized) assumptions of ageing. Her work exposes the labour that goes into "doing" age correctly. For example, her performative self-portraits, aptly self-identified as 'Suzy Spice' in the triptych "Forever Young" present the trope of the spinster aunt you're supposed to be ashamed of in public.¹⁰ Lake is clad in a leopard print tank top that reveals her taut abdomen and leopard print leggings with wedged black and brown suede ankle boots; a stereotypical cougar uniform.¹¹ Her mouth is open in each image—in one, she holds the guitar in a typical rock star pose, leaning over it as it points out like a phallus; in the second, she imitates the rock star pose of satisfaction by lifting up her arm with a peace sign and a big grin; in the third, she stretches out her behind and sings into a microphone. Her make up is caustic and her hair sticks out like a large curly mop. The costume makes hyper visible her ageing body. There is a signature in the middle image, "Forever Young—Suzy". It reads like an autographed aphorism that a rock star would sign for a fan, promoting the cultural desire to stay young.

⁹ See Ahmed (2014) for a detailed analysis of skin's affective function as part of lived experience.

¹⁰ See <http://www.suzylake.ca/suzy-spice#3>

¹¹ The term 'cougar' denoting an older woman seeking younger male sexual partners has a murky origin story but is commonly accepted as originating in Canada in the early 2000s. For a more detailed history, see Montemurro & Siefken (2013).



Figure 2. "Cougar For a Year, Winter" © Vincent Dilio (2012). Courtesy of Dayna McLeod.

The resolute cougar image is what queer Montreal-based artist Dayna McLeod became for *Cougar For a Year* (2012), a yearlong durational project that includes a website detailing every day of the project with images and text. The project disrupts the public sphere and social conventions of ageing with the tactical hyper-visibility of old age; a hyper-visibility of, what is often signified as, a crisis. McLeod dressed in at least 60% animal print clothing at all times to "investigate, live, and try on stereotypes of the 'cougar';—a 'sexually aggressive' woman over-40- by wearing her uniform." (<http://daynarama.com/HTML2/CougarThis.html>)

She writes:

"I chose animal print as the cougar's uniform not only because she is often seen wearing it, but also because of its visibility, clarity, and literalization of representing the cougar, and for the sexual signification that animal print performs in western culture" (McLeod, 2014).

McLeod re-appropriates the rhetoric of ageist image culture as a way to provoke a hyper visibility and challenge conventional patterns of looking. We cannot not look at her flamboyant outfits as they confront us with their audacity and shamelessness. (See Fig. 2 and 3). In some ways, it is a performance of a crisis—a crisis of a woman's

ageing. Cinema scholar Jodi Brooks argues that a performance of age is a performance of a crisis, which Hollywood actors such as Norma Desmond, Margo Channing and others perform successfully. This (performance of a) crisis is not the final product of ageing. While a crisis can easily be read as not ageing ‘successfully’ by mainstream channels, that is erroneous.¹² Rather, the crisis opens up the temporal economy of display and spectacle; the temporal economy of ageing (Brooks, 1999, p.234-235). I, in part, read Lake and Wilson’s images and McLeod’s performance within the frame of crisis. They each use sartorial and/or commodity measures to denote the performance of age and our resistance to ageing.



Figure 3. © Christine Harrison (2012). Courtesy of Dayna McLeod.

Meagher argues that the hyper invisibility of old age should be read as a way to “come to terms with the complexity of visual encounters”, rather than an opportunity of self re-definition outside the ‘surveillant gaze’ as argued by feminist Germaine Greer (Meagher, 2014, p.142).¹³ I argue that it can be both. No one is outside the surveillant gaze. Rather, they are treated differently by it (it being the bodies that enact the surveillant gaze). However, the experience of feeling that one is outside the gaze is necessary to take into account. The activist work in Montreal I refer to below delineates that.

¹² See Katz & Calasanti (2015) for a critique of *successful ageing* rhetoric.

¹³ Greer argues that blending in is a relief from the surveillant gaze (Woodward, 1999, p.xiv). It is a way to finally be free of its pressures because performing your age takes a lot of work.

How do ageing women imagine themselves and in turn how do they and how can they image themselves? Cultural theorist Anna Cristofovici (2009, p.21) asks: "How does photography visualize aspects of aging that do not merely correspond in a documentary way to visible realities"? Or I would re-phrase—to *visibilize* realities? That is to say, how can photography make realities visible in a way that accounts for the multiplicity of lived creative experience of ageing women with the understanding that an image is never a factual truth? (Barthes, 1981)

Part II — Ageing Activism



Figure 4. Enid, RECAA member. © Sadeqa Siddiqui (2014).

For the second part of this paper, I explore the aforementioned questions with the [Ageing Activism](#) work I do in Montreal as part of ACT (Ageing, Communication and Technology), work that is in part operating in a tactical way to contest ageist visual culture while providing avenues of looking and being looked at. In some ways this is a leap from what I have described above. However, I hope to make sense of how these two streams can work together, and/or how they can be useful to each other.

In 2014, as part of ACT, I was invited to hold a photography and portrait workshop with members of RECAA (*Respecting Elders: Communities Against Abuse*). The members of RECAA vary in age, up to about 90. The workshop, which comprised of ten of the

members (all but one, women), produced some stellar portraits (and art critics!) We discussed how shooting in certain angles would make a person look sad or strong or demean them. In other words, how the camera image makes us imagine particular identities. The participants played around placing themselves in the frame and discussed its concomitant meanings. (See Fig.4) These workshops—being seen—became occasions for negotiating and “coming to terms with the complexity of visual encounters” (Meagher, 2014, p.142). Visual self/encounters among ageing populations often hinge on the sharing of images between family members. That is, family members that do not have a smart phone, and a plan that allows the viewing of images and/or easy access to a computer, cannot participate as subjects in the image culture they are familiar with, in the same capacity.¹⁴

The hope of this activist work is to unsettle our ageist cultural imaginary, and consequently broaden the experience of ageing. We are shaped by the meanings that have been inscribed onto our bodies. It is an affront to assume older people are out of touch with visual media, and even the ‘digital divide’ is narrowing in use by older groups (Jones, 2015, p.438). In art-elicitation workshops done by age scholars Warren and Richards (2012), “[p]articipants were asked about the general usefulness of images” (p.152). The answers demonstrated the totalizing force of images in people’s lives—“Image is everything”, ‘We’re visually obsessed’, ‘Everybody looks’” (Warren & Richards, 2012, p.152). As such, the appropriate technologies need to be accessible so that everyone can image on their own terms.¹⁵

One of the unintended consequences of the RECAA photography workshop was that the members became interested in appropriate technologies that would allow them to participate in image culture (i.e., buying digital cameras) while others were excited to try out their own digital cameras—cameras they felt too intimidated to use before they took the workshop. This was also the case when I worked with the NDG Senior Citizen’s Council (NDGSCC) in 2015. In 2015, as part of ACT, I made a documentary with Sherry Guppy for the NDGSCC. The documentary showcased its members aged

¹⁴ Mobile phone use in the USA in 2013 for those over 65+ was 76% according to Pew Internet but that doesn’t account for what type of phone and/or modes of use (Jones, 2015, p.440).

¹⁵ See the intersectional theorizations of Lisa Nakamura, who in *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (2002) addresses the ways technology does not free us from our bodies, and therefore the subjectivities of different, yet assumed to be similar, bodies (i.e., ageing bodies) are not “equal”.

70-95 (most of them women) and their activities. The final product became less vital than the process of creating the documentary, which I explain below. For most of the members, for the first time as elders, they had a chance to see themselves reflected back to themselves and to the public.



Figure 5. Evelyn, NDGSCC member. © Magdalena Olszanowski (2015).

While shooting the documentary, one day, on a whim, I decided to flip the viewfinder away from my eyes to the participants' eyes so they could see what I was filming. It was a simple gesture that became one of the main activities for the rest of the time I was shooting. The participants would tell me to tilt the camera or move it until they found their "good side", etc. (See Fig. 5). They would wave into the viewfinder, and perform for it while being able to see what was being filmed—doing *self-imaging*. They both, became art objects (for the documentary) and art subjects (by dictating the moves of my gaze). As such, they were doing self-imaging and subsequently became more active in wanting to be part of the documentary. In this way, I read our interaction as resisting the dominant modes of the ageist gaze, modes that depend on unilateral representations.

As part of a tactical collaborative ethos and my own research methodology (Olszanowski, 2014),¹⁶ every week Guppy would show a draft of what we had done to the participants to generate a discussion about what was included, and what they wanted to see more of or less of in the representation of their lives at the NDGSCC. Guppy reported back to me the zeal with which the elders viewed the video. The video gave them a chance to watch themselves and their peers on a screen—something that is common for younger generations and less common for the hyper invisible older generations. The participants wanted Guppy to replay the video several times during their tea time and/or lunch. They wanted to be looked at, and look at each other, because as Warren and Richards (2012) state: “we’re visually obsessed.” One woman had trouble learning at the same speed as her peers when she was younger, and was ostracized as a result. She never had anyone take interest in her image, ergo, she, herself, didn’t know she could take interest. Having little family there were no opportunities for her to break these boundaries. Indeed, she did not want to be filmed and felt uncomfortable being the recipient of a stranger’s gaze. However, once I flipped the viewfinder towards her she could not resist. When the images and videos were being played back, she would laugh and excitedly point herself out. Once a safe space was created around the use of her image, she wanted to participate, enacting modes of *self-imaging* and a pleasure of the gaze.

While I was filming (and taking stills), the participants started asking me questions about cameras and their phones—whether they could take pictures and how, and whether I could send them the photos I was taking, specifically photos of their faces. They told me stories of family members taking photos that they never saw again. One of the women asked me why she could not see photos on her phone that her daughter told her she was sending. She didn’t understand how she was able to access messages but not images. I explained it was most likely because her plan didn’t include MMS (multimedia messaging). This turned out to be true. But how do you know what kind of plan to choose? The woman knew she had a phone with a camera but could not understand how the phone could act as a camera, or a front facing camera (for selfies). Knowing there is a camera on your mobile device and using it, and then being able to send a photo are all separate tasks. How can we reduce the barriers of

¹⁶ I use a self-reflexive feminist frame to engage with the work and my role as facilitator, artist and researcher.

access to image culture? As these examples reveal, the heightened interest of elders to participate in image culture is impeded by the lack of resources to do so.



Figure 6. Ethel, RECAA member. © Magdalena Olszanowski (2015).

Conclusion

Our ageist culture (within the Eurocentric context) and its ways of imaging and imagining ageing women depends on two things: 1) a lack of digital literacy for the ageing population, which includes particular types of use (e.g., complicated-to-use cameras, smart phones) that occlude participation in social media and image networks, as well as 2) ageing women's hyper-invisibility in various media (Meagher, 2014, p.94). As Grosz (1994, p.23) makes clear: "bodies are always a product of the culture that produces them". Thus, we can say: "women are aged by culture more than their biology" (Gullette, 1997, p.6-7). Ageist culture is an environment that fosters the production of technologies that systematically and systematically obfuscate ageing women's lived experience and ways of seeing and being looked at. The artists I mentioned above (Lake, McLeod, and Wilson) were all practicing artists when they were young too—they were already enculturated into image technology. This made it easier for them to transition with and alongside its changes. How can we account for these transitions in the lives of ageing populations?

I have been trying to figure out how these two components come together—feminist self-im/aging, and my own work as a teacher and facilitator of image-based work. I don't want to assume a leap between being interested in one's own image and the desire to creatively engage with that image. Ageing women need to be part of that conversation to be given opportunities to experiment—to make their subjectivities and gaze visible. But visibility is not enough. The projects and artists mentioned do more than propagate images of ageing. They are a call to action to resist ageism and its dependence on *the youthful structure of the look*. In turn, they engender a multiplicity of the gaze that isn't static but generative and reflexive (Meagher, 2014). And while there is a lot more to do to advance my framing questions—What tactics are women using to resist ageist culture? How can ageing women break barriers to and re-shape our knowledge of image-based technologies? I hope the above has begun some of the work, which relies much more on an intersectional frame, I am continuing to do as part of ACT.

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