

Intersubjectivity And The (Good) Old Life: Phenomenological Engagements With Anthropology, Philosophy And Art.

PANEL ABSTRACT (Discussants Doug Hollan, Bernhard Leistle)

What can we learn about intersubjectivity and aging as universal human conditions through ethnographic, philosophical and artistic projects that take seriously the diversity of ways in which old age is lived and experienced? What roles do kin, friend and care relations play in achieving good old lives, when people are aging under challenging and uncertain life conditions? And how may a philosophical attention to intersubjectivity and old age give ethnographic and artistic studies more phenomenological depth and theoretical insight?

These are key questions that frame an on-going comparative research project from which the panel papers have emerged. While there is already burgeoning research on the good life in old age framed as successful and healthy aging, as well as critical gerontological and anthropological work on inequality and the social construction of old age, the papers in this panel depart, theoretically, from a rather different direction. Phenomenology provides a conceptual framework for exploring old age from an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective in a wide range of local settings characterized by large diversities in available cultural, social and material resources. This panel also exhibits the interdisciplinary nature of this project, which puts anthropology, philosophy, and art in dialogue.

The ethnographic presentations explore the intersubjective ambiguities of care surrounding aging in multiple settings: among demented and institutionalized elderly in Denmark, Banyole elderly in Uganda who are highly dependent on the care of kin, and Kirgisz elderly left behind by their migrating children. The art presentation explores how to express old age and its intimate other imagistically within the wordless and non-linear space of a drawing, asking if drawings of inconclusive figures might be able to feature simultaneously strength and vulnerability, isolation and community, self and other? Finally, the philosophical paper presents a phenomenological perspective that privileges the 'inter' in intersubjectivity in a theoretical exploration of care relationships in old age. By bringing the voices of ethnographic interlocutors in conversation with art and philosophy, the panel is intended to explore the good old life in the presence of intimate others as 'not yet settled,' and as an ongoing striving in the face of - and beyond - death.