

Creative Ageing and the Arts of Care

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Creative Ageing and the Arts of Care: Reframing Active Ageing

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my mother Olga, whose joy in creative enlivenment in late life
inspired this book.

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About the Author



Elizabeth Brooke is based in the School of Population and Global Health, Melbourne University, Australia. Her interests span work, retirement, innovative models of social inclusion and extending creativity at later stages of the life course. She holds a PhD in Social Gerontology, is a Fulbright recipient and a past Associate Editor of the *Australasian Journal on Ageing*.

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Preface

When I first started writing this book, it was about ‘other’ older people. Then with my own ageing I began to really experience what I was writing about. Attributing a back-ache to ageing does not help lift spirits; in fact, conversations with other ‘ageing’ people become more and more about exchanging views about the health conditions of oneself and others, retreating into the biological nature of living, and less and less about challenging and realising the self in the outside world.

I had worked as an academic gerontologist for several decades researching older workers and age discrimination. Yet a firewall existed between concepts of attainment and social connection gained through paid work and continuing to develop creative potentialities after leaving the paid workforce. The literature is increasingly distinguishing the permeability of the boundaries between workforce exits and re-entries as forms of ‘unretirement’. Yet the value proposition to keep on developing skills and growing imaginatively, conceptually and artistically after formal ‘retirement’ was not on the table.

A new stage of the life course has been unveiled and opened up due to increasing longevity and healthier life spans. The paradigms of creative engagement have shifted, yet have not shifted enough to encompass creative activities in everyday life. There is a residual perception that creative ageing benefits advantaged elite groups rather than extending and benefiting diverse groups of older people living in their communities. Why aren’t there commonly accessible local arts venues in diverse neighbourhoods where older adults can come to make different forms of art with other like-minded people? Ageing well in communities somehow falls beyond the scope of artistic, imaginative enhancement. Everyday cultural participation requires a newly designed architecture to become an ordinary rather than an extraordinary thing to do.

Dance, visual arts, theatre and music are researched in this book as forms of art-making by older adults. A multiplicity of options that stem from individual choices can evoke inventiveness and enchantment. There will be people who are not interested in or are not able for many reasons to participate. For others, it will be the beginning of a journey of inward inspiration and outward aspiration to show their artwork in communities. For others, just sharing a space to make arts and crafts with others is enough.

The book sub-title of *active ageing* mandates supporting the quality of life of older people. It demands that *who* people are, that is their identities are not ignored and neglected either in the community or in care settings. Quality of life which attends to the potentiality of continual growth of the self is an integral element of quality of care. In this COVID-19 pandemic, and the recurrent imperatives of lockdown, the ‘arts of care’ require creative *self-care* and inward attention to how people can best care for their growing selves.

The arts evoke beauty, a fundamental concept, and beauty pursued with others collectively is transformative. How beauty can be written about requires words which can acutely transpose experiences through language. Sharing a sense of beauty with others is an uplifting and profound experience. The experiences and voices of respondents were real and ‘alive’, qualities that I did not want to sacrifice. The challenge was to find the balance between communicating what people experienced and conceptual frames interpreting these experiences.

A wellspring of this book is my experience with my mother, who had suffered from dementia for over a decade. While experiencing dementia she lived in the community for almost four years and then in a nursing home until she was almost 101. A dance and movement class was taken by Fran Ostrobrurski, an experienced dance movement therapist. I sat in the class with my mother and six older women, some of whom were non-verbal, listening to a variety of selected music.

A sense of wonder and enchantment illuminated their eyes as they reached out to touch and wave coloured silk streamers, in rhythm with the changing music. The internal esprit, vitality and intuition revealed through moving to music outshone the normalised conventional boundaries of expression for these older women. Transformations through art-making can reach the inner creative self, the root of the tree, that has persisted from childhood.

I want to take the reader along the pathway I took in coming to conclusions about the contribution of creative ageing to the quality of life of older adults. Many personal stories are told in the chapters on the art forms which I hope readers can be carried along by. The academic literature of social gerontology in which this book mainly sits, as an Emerald academic publication, provided interpretative frameworks augmenting the scope and integration of explanations. Primarily, I wanted what people said, ‘to live’, and did not want to go down theoretical rabbit holes, never to surface again with what I found important to say. The concluding chapters synthesise process elements extracted from the case studies of arts, which are integrated as multilevel recommendations. This final intent is to open the door at the policy and practical end of this enquiry.

So, this book sits at multipurpose cross-currents, perhaps rapids, through which I hope to contribute to the ‘social movement’ of creative ageing.

I wish to thank the many people I interviewed for their rich accounts of their experiences and contexts, explaining why they participate in the art forms and what they get out of it. This is the real substance of this book upon which its conceptualisations rest.

Elizabeth Brooke
Melbourne, January 2022

Note: The terminology of this book employs the term ‘older adults’ to stress the continuation of adulthood. The terminology for older people living in the community independently does not have a common descriptor. The term ‘ageing sector’ is ambiguous, while the ‘aged care sector’, in general, refers to provision of care. So ‘community-based’ older adults may be the closest descriptor of this sector.

Acknowledgements

The journey started from a session on older workers and retirement at the International Sociology Association World Congress of Sociology Toronto in 2018, sharing musical interests with Sarah Vickerstaff, Áine Ní Léime and Clary Krekula. The idea for this book had been brewing for some time and I decided to set off. Once on the road, Victoria Hume, of Creative Health and Wellbeing Alliance UK, referred me to Dominic Campbell, of Creative Aging International. Dominic provided an early chart which was greatly appreciated, which branched into maps orienteering the way to significant creative ageing projects. Thank you to Tara Byrne and Mary Harkin from Age & Opportunity for guiding me to projects within Bealtaine festival and even taking me there. In New York, Christine Leahy, of New York State Council on the Arts, led me towards new projects. Thanks to Jane Sims for being the first eye to look at this book. And heartfelt thanks to Julie Faulkner for her support with editing and being a literary, skilled and gentle voice.

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Chapter 1

Active Ageing and Cultural Participation

Introduction

This book is a call for expanding the opportunities for older adults to explore their creativity in order to ignite new self-realisations fulfilment and self-care through cultural participation. It aims to develop a vision of how older adults can engage in art-making that positively transforms their lives. The foundation of this book is based on a commitment to adult developmental growth across the life course which situates creative ageing at its centre.

Global ageing and the potential for an active life course

In the twenty-first century, people are living in an era of biotechnology which is extending longevity. Healthier and longer lifespans are revisioning how ageing is navigated and pioneered, as conventional markers of chronological age are being surpassed by new paradigms of active engagement. Moen proposes the concept of ‘encore adulthood’, asking: ‘Is a true encore to adulthood, with new prospects and potentials, possible?’ She replies,

The answer depends on widespread adoption of imaginative and sustainable innovations opening up opportunities for learning, working, caring, growing, and giving back at all stages of adult life ... and ... reliable social protections. (Moen, 2016, p. 2)

Cultural participation is a keystone of ‘encore adulthood’ which reframes the possibilities for ‘active ageing’. The concept of ‘active ageing’ promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) is ‘the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age’ (p. 12).

The word ‘active’ refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force. (WHO, 2002, p. 12)

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The WHO ‘active ageing framework’ contains determinants of active ageing: economic, social, personal and behavioural determinants, physical environment, health and social services (p. 19). The lack of inclusion of cultural participation as a major determinant may be attributable both to the productivity focus on supply-side ‘productive’ ageing, whether in the workforce, or as unpaid volunteers, and to demand-side pressures that focus on the sustainability of aged care.

As Cann (2017) observed

It is debatable, however, as to how far the policy of active ageing has been made a mainstream element in care and health policies which are continually driven by the imperatives of the urgent and by crises in care provision. (p. 93)

Cultural participation has been a latent, underdeveloped domain, subsumed by other determinants of active ageing. Professor Michael Marmot, Chair of the WHO’s Social Determinants of Health Commission, recommends that creativity and the arts should form a cultural dimension of the social determinants of health:

The mind is the gateway through which the social determinants impact upon health [...] the arts, enriching the mind through creative and cultural activity, can mitigate the negative effects of social disadvantage. (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry, 2017a, p. 4)

Due to the rapid rate of population ageing, the global demography of ageing will exponentially amplify over the next half century. In countries of the North, such as Europe and North America, people aged 65 and over are projected to increase by 48% (2019–2050). Australian and New Zealand projections show an average increase by 84% for those aged 65 and over (2019–2050) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019, p. 5). Women in OECD countries have greatly exacerbated vulnerabilities, as those over 80 are almost twice as likely than men in that age group to live alone and consequently are more likely to experience social isolation (OECD, 2017, p. 218).

Ageing populations in countries of the South have even more greatly accelerated rates of ageing. In northern Africa and western Asia, those aged 65 and over are projected to increase by 226% (2019–2050) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019, p. 5). The connection between arts, culture, and ageing has comparatively greater significance in the South, by linking the cultural richness of traditional lives with the means of production that are vital for economic sustainability.

In OECD countries, the demography of longevity has evoked hyperbolic policy responses to combat the fear of economic unsustainability. Calasanti (2020) articulates that the apocalyptic demography of economic ‘burden’ is based in the rhetoric of older people as undeserving dependents. The suite of OECD

recommended policy responses to the ‘tsunami’ of ageing, and the perceived threat of economic unsustainability is primarily economic: extending the age of eligibility for age pensions and encouraging lengthened working lives. The promotion of economic solutions by the OECD has overshadowed that of cultural participation, subsumed under the rubric of social participation.

Integrated, holistic and multifocal strategies are required to activate older adults’ independence by supporting mentally and physically healthier and longer lives. What are people who have retired going to do for an extra 30 years of their projected longevity dividend? What strategies are most going to increase their chances of well-being during their extended lifespans? How will large numbers of older women living alone stay connected, fulfilled and healthy? Breaking into a new life course stage of ‘*encore adulthood*’ upends preconceptions of conventional transitions from work to retirement, which may form an arc over a third of the lifespan.

Cultural participation makes for a richer and independent life in the community, by keeping people out of care, and for those in a residential care home, an enlivened life in care. Given accelerating population longevity, a major social policy challenge is to design holistic sources of health and well-being over the lifespan. Cultural participation is an underdeveloped policy component of ‘active ageing’ and an imperative policy response to the ‘precipitous’ cliff of global population ageing.

Latent ageism and creative ageing

Nevertheless, latent, unarticulated forms of ageism impede opportunities for older adults’ cultural participation. Ageism perpetuates the biomedical model of ageing by inscribing conceptions of decline and decrement through age stereotypes that limit conceptions of human development. ‘Discourses of health and appearance naturalize ageism, as they suggest that old age inheres in bodies that “naturally” decline and thus should be excluded’ (Calasanti, 2003). Subtle and covert forms of unconscious ageism are socially acceptable to the point of being ‘ingrained in our culture’ (Palmore, 2015). Nuanced and concealed ‘everyday’ discrimination is ubiquitous, and as Gullette (2004) observes, ‘age is everywhere’, maintaining, ‘At any age, this has a totalizing effect from which subordinated and disadvantaged identities particularly suffer’ (p. 112). Gullette defines dominant perceptions of ageing as ‘the cultural ideology of decline’ (p. 130). Ageing conceptualised as a trajectory of bodily decline constitutes an immanent and essentialist position. Implicit and unconscious age-stereotypic assumptions based on notions of decline with ageing and consequent impaired capacity suppress opportunities for creative expression. What is not articulated is not measured, thus rendering the limitation of creative participation an uncounted form of age discrimination.

Theoretical and normative explanations of successful ageing have been sequentially revised in the literature. The gerontological theory of disengagement which had currency in the 1960s, conceptualised old age as a stage of passivity and withdrawal from active social roles and relationships (Calasanti & King, 2020; Phillipson, 2013; Rowe & Kahn, 2015). Rowe and Kahn’s (2015) concept of

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'Successful Aging' set normative expectations of successful ageing by stressing the importance of maintaining health, mental functioning, and active engagement in life; a model that has been criticised for imposing expectations of well-being on older adults which are disconnected from prevailing structural inequalities (see Calasanti & King, 2020).

The turning point towards a normative model of activation was established by Gene D. Cohen, a foundational theorist of 'creative ageing'. He critiqued Rowe and Kahn's Successful Aging model which

presents the goal as minimizing decline rather than recognizing the huge potential for positive growth in later life ... [however] they don't present the possibilities for improving these areas with age. (Cohen, 2005, p. 207)

Chrono-normative assumptions continue to define the ageing self, forecasting deterioration and degeneration of capacities. Grounded in adult developmental psychology, the model of creative ageing counters discourses of both intrinsic decline and the binary valorisation of youth over older age. Understanding that ageism restricts potential creative development of human identity across the life course requires alertness to its ingrained processes.

Ageism is embedded in conventions which mark older people as eccentric if their behaviour is unaligned with chronological age codes and stigmatise them if they transgress chrono-normative life course representations of age-appropriate behaviour. For instance, in dance, older women's bodily movements can be perceived as transgressive and even outrageous according to age and gender norms. Age-coded regimes governing habituated gendered markers of ageing can restrict performativity and expressiveness. 'Rather, they contribute to maintaining normative assumptions about age and hierarchical age relations' (Krekula, 2009, p. 25).

Underlying ageist precepts can be resisted by *doing* artistic activities, thereby demonstrating the possibilities for older adults to enhance creative potentialities in order to live the fullest lives possible. Artistic performances can expose, satirise and overturn ageism and binary conceptions of age. They can surpass conventional codes of what older people 'should' be comfortable with. For example, Weaver and Shaw's 'Unexploded Ordnances' project which enacts a 'Situation Room' performance based on Stanley Kubrick's celebrated 1964 film, '*Dr. Strangelove*'. The performance included older audiences in a War Cabinet sparking a discussion about present-day crises. In their production, which focused on personal meanings of global nuclear war, Weaver and Shaw empowered participants to embrace their own potential for growth and change with age and rebel against fixed stereotypes of ageing:

Indeed, the production's metanarrative suggests that it is more valuable to view the life course not through the hierarchy of peak-and-decline ideology, which reinforces a false binary between youth and age, but rather to imagine age on a continuum of

experiences to better represent the performativity of age identity as it necessarily shifts across and through time. (Gillespie, 2019, pp. 90–91)

Latent age-based constraints on expressiveness lead to the suppression of creative engagement in older age. Cultural participation contesting age stereotypes is the subterranean mammoth in the room, mandating revival and revitalisation through the promotion of policies of active ageing.

Everyday and egalitarian creativity

Distinctions between ‘high-art’ performed in galleries, stages and studios and ‘low’ everyday art can obfuscate the political role of participatory arts in the community. Howard Gardner’s distinction of big ‘C’ artists applies to recognised ‘high art’ displayed in ‘gatekeeper’ institutions, such as government-supported public art galleries. Late life visual artists include Picasso, who generated one third of his many types of craft and art forms in his 60s; Matisse, whose originality in painting perspective continued in his 90s; Goya, who was deaf and bedridden, and continuing to paint illustrative historic scenes in his 80s; and Beethoven, who suffered absolute loss of hearing while composing his greatest works. Gardner’s distinction of little ‘c’ art occurs in everyday community-based art groups, choirs, gardening clubs, dance, and storytelling.

Gene D. Cohen, a conceptual founder of creative ageing, advocated for situated forms and interpretations of everyday creativity which depend on individual choice:

When I use the term ‘creativity’ I don’t mean talents such as writing, painting, sculpture and music composition. I think we can all be creative in our own ways, whether we’re artists or assembly-line workers, pianists or plumbers. Creativity can emerge in any realm, from the most abstract fields of science to the most intimate circles of human relations. The point is that creativity is the process of bringing something new into existence – and novelty is everywhere you look. (Cohen, 2005, p. 169)

Successive UK government enquiries and reports have investigated the notion of everyday creativity. In 2016, *64 Million Artists* was commissioned by *Arts Council England* to produce a report reviewing Everyday Creativity across England. The report concluded that all over the country people see a division between ‘the creatives’ and the ‘non-creatives’, indicative of perceptions of elite, and professional versus non-elite and amateur categories. ‘We looked at how developing a culture of everyday creativity across the country might contribute to a more democratic, accessible and open culture for all’ (64 Million Artists, 2016, p. 5).

The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW) Inquiry aimed to improve awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring to health and well-being. During 2015–2017, the APPGAHW conducted an

Inquiry into practice and research in the arts in health and social care, with a view to making recommendations to improve policy and practice. The APPGAHW (2017a) defined ‘the arts’ as ‘shorthand for everyday human creativity, rather than referring to a lofty activity which requires some sort of superior cultural intelligence to access’ (p. 19). In October 2017, At the APPGAHW Meeting on Everyday Creativity, Robin Simpson, Chief Executive of Voluntary Arts, included self-initiated forms of creativity.

Across UK and Ireland, we think there are 63,000 amateur arts groups: orchestras, choirs, amateur theatre groups, Morris dancers, brass bands, recorder players, knitters Most are self-funding. It’s quite hard to stop people doing artistic activities, they’ll find a way. (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Meeting on Everyday Creativity, 2017)

This interpretation of cultural participation as everyday creativity is grounded in the perspective of self-generated, organic art forms blossoming in communities.

Cultural participation, empowerment and human rights

Another fundamental aspect of cultural participation lies in the concept of creative expressiveness through art-making as a human right. Cultural participation realises both individual and collective human rights by resisting discriminatory versions of the self and by proposing equality of access. As Matarasso, a pioneer in the field of creative ageing stated: ‘It is in the act of creativity that empowerment lies, and through sharing creativity that understanding and social inclusiveness are promoted’ (Matarasso, 1997, p. 10).

The articulation of cultural participation as a human right lies in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948: ‘everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts ...’. In 2013, a United Nations report on cultural participation pronounced that:

All persons enjoy the right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity, which includes the right to freely experience and contribute to artistic expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice. (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2020)

In a United Nations paper, Zaidi (2014) connected active ageing and human rights within a capabilities framework inspired by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum; this included brain equity within its global human development agenda:

Thus, active ageing discourse falls in line with the idea of empowering people to contribute to their own development and that of the society around them – the principles underlying the

human development agenda, and the enhancement of internal and combined capabilities and a human rights approach to brain equity. (p. 2)

Inter-relating well-being and cultural participation

A research study ‘operationalising’ well-being published by the UK Royal Society for Public Health explored understandings of well-being in the delivery of a public health programme (Dooris, Farrier, & Froggett, 2018). The analysis concluded that, ‘This study supported wider literature, highlighting that wellbeing is a contested, multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon’. There was consensus that ‘wellbeing’ is ‘more than health’ and is a ‘broader-based concept comprising multiple facets of human experience’, and represented ‘more than happiness’, with ‘stakeholders emphasising eudaemonic perspectives and ideas relating to human flourishing’ (p. 98).

Socially constructed ill-health and threats to well-being are embedded within aged care policy and the structural mismanagement of the aged care system. Magda Kaczmarek, a dance teaching artist interviewed in a case study in this book, articulated the iatrogenic relationship between well-being and the underpinning architecture structuring aged care:

We know we have a crisis. Our current way of dealing with the older population is sequestering them away into different elements of society, isolating them, keeping them from other generations, keeping them from moving and from physical activities. This increases risk of falls, increases their risk of psychological isolation, and depression that kills Isolation shortens your life as much as 15 cigarettes a day. (M. Kaczmarek, personal communication, October 23, 2019)

The Cultural Value Project undertaken by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) rigorously assessed evidence and methodologies linking cultural participation to well-being (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). The Cultural Value Project report stresses that only by gathering qualitative and personal evidence can the more pervasive benefits of cultural participation for health and well-being be fully grasped (p. 7). The Project situates individual experience at the crux of enquiry:

The project has sought to put the *experience of individuals* back at the heart of ideas about cultural value, arguing that it is only once we have started with individual experience that we can then work outwards, and understand the kinds of benefit that culture may have for society, for communities, for democracy, for public health and wellbeing, for urban life and regional growth. (Andrew Thompson Chief Executive, AHRC p. 7, my italics)

Well-being is a multidimensional concept with subjective perceptions situated at its epicentre and is situated, interactive, and multi-tiered. The Cultural Value project concludes that methodologies examining cultural participation need to commence with the individual at the hub, interconnected with multidimensional and multilevel structures:

Ecological, multi-component and multi-level models rather than one-dimensional ones are therefore needed, because of the complex nature of the effects of cultural engagement, themselves a function of the dynamic processes by which the individual, the community and the contexts affect each other. (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, p. 157)

Multilevel perspectives and framework

This model of cultural participation resonates with the multilevel framework structuring this book, containing micro-, meso-, and macro-level components (see Greenfield, Black, Buffel, & Yeh, 2019; Parr, 2017; Walker, 2019). The largest cross-disciplinary research and policy review of European Union ageing policies, *Mobilising the Potential of Active Ageing in Europe (MoPAct)*, which included more than 100 researchers across 13 countries, was undertaken between 2012 and 2017. Led by Professor Alan Walker, *MoPAct* research made a compelling case for the centrality of *active ageing* setting a roadmap for future directions:

Active ageing across the life course should be the keystone of all research in this field. The Road Map made a compelling case for this centrality of active ageing. It is a helpful umbrella term to encompass various quality of life essentials such as labour market participation, active contribution to domestic labour (caring, housework), active participation in community life and active leisure. (Walker, 2019, pp. 8–9)

A multilevel framework provides the structural components of active ageing: 'Different levels of evidence-based policy action (macro), community and neighbourhood arrangements (meso) and individual intervention (micro) must go hand in hand in order for active ageing to be realised' (Walker, 2019, p. 9). Greenfield et al. (2019) have similarly proposed a multilevel framework for community gerontology, with the meso level as the unit of analysis, providing a rich locus for connecting contiguous multilevel factors:

Community gerontology uniquely focuses on the meso-level of environmental contexts. We use the term 'macrolevel' not to refer to a definitively or objectively defined scale ... but rather to broadly orient attention to all that which exists between very immediate, or microlevel, and more distal, or macrolevel settings. (Greenfield et al., 2019, p. 2)