

**Review Article***Copyright © All rights are reserved by Christoph Wulf*

On the Anthropology of Age

Christoph Wulf**Department of Anthropology, Free University of Berlin, Germany*

***Corresponding author:** Christoph Wulf, Department of Anthropology, Free University of Berlin, Germany.

Received Date: April 10, 2021

Published Date: October 27, 2021

Abstract

Time is the medium in which life is designed, experienced, and modified. In time, the de-traditionalization and individualization take place. The non-identity of life must prove itself against the constraints of time. The linking of people through the general time order involves a compulsion that is increasingly becoming self-coercion. The external compulsion through the social time institution is replaced by a kind of individual gain of time. Since early childhood, self-regulation is learned through the internalization of chronoc racy and an individual consciousness of time is developed. Maximum time gain through optimal time utilization is the maxim. The connection between time and money, between the laws of the bourgeois social order and the economy of time is obvious. The time order is the economic order par excellence. Ageing is a synonym for life that emphasizes its temporality and transience. Age is not only the result of a physical process but also of a cultural construction process. Age and ageing therefore mean different things in different cultures and historical epochs. The temporality of life is experienced primarily in the growing older of one's own body. Old age has become a part of life in a way that was previously unknown, a review and change of attitudes towards old people and life in old age is necessary.

Keywords: Anthropology of age; Lifetime; Repetition; Mimetic relationship; Chronoc racy; Generation; Aging

Lifetime

In our societies, time is the central condition of life. In the experience of time, one's own life is made possible and at the same time limited. The laws of time determine the structures of life. Time is the medium in which life is designed, experienced, and modified. In time, de-traditionalization and individualization take place. The non-identity of life must prove itself against the constraints of time. The experience of time enables and relativizes the claim to lead a life of one's own, whose worldliness and transience are inescapable.

Never before has human life lasted as long as it does today. But despite the extension of life, the lack of time, which is lamented everywhere, becomes conspicuous. This experience points to a changed relationship of man to time, to death and thus to life. Whereas in the past life was enclosed in a transcendent "before" and "after" that relativized the significance of the length of life, after the disappearance of transcendence, life span becomes the decisive content of life. Under these conditions, life span can never be sufficient; time is becoming increasingly scarce and precious and, precisely for this reason, is gaining a significance that permeates

all areas of life. From a historical point of view, the lack of lifetime can be seen in two further events: the discovery of the heliocentric worldview by Copernicus and the development of the theory of evolution by Darwin.

Thus, one of the defining characteristics of the modern era is the realization of the temporality of the universe, of nature, of man in his culture, whereby the time horizons applicable to the history of the universe and of nature already leave the time boundaries of human history and individual life. In this context, the time limit of individual life seems particularly narrow in view of the time horizons of the universe and nature. The lack of time in all areas of human life is the consequence. This experience is reinforced by the indifference of cosmic time to the duration of individual life [1-3].

The divisiveness of individual and cosmic time and the associated lack of time lead to an acceleration of life in modern times. The duration of individual life is no longer sufficient to meet the demand for time. Speed appears to be the only way out. Already in the modern guiding idea of progress, the lack of time is to be

compensated for with the help of progress. The faster humanity moves forward, the more it hopes to cope with the greatly increased demand for time [4].

This new understanding of time presupposes a new understanding of history, which consists in the fact that it no longer has to be subordinated to a subject or object but is understood as a "genuine quantity." The prerequisite is the reflexive interpretation of historical events, which thereby gain their own time structure. Herder saw this very clearly: "Actually, every changeable thing has the measure of its time in itself; no two things in the world have the same measure of time. There are therefore (one can actually and boldly say it) in the universe at one time innumerable many times". This insight of Herder's is highly topical and can already be seen as an expression of contemporary understanding of time. While Herder formulated this conception of time primarily in relation to human history, today it also claims validity in the natural sciences. Prigogine, for example, distinguishes three concepts of time, each of which contains a different view of time but without these different concepts of time being mutually exclusive: Time as movement (in classical physics) time as an irreversible process and time as history in biology and sociology.

What is decisive is the insight into the irreversibility of time that goes hand in hand with the discovery of the complexity of the microscopic. This is as real as the processes that led to the formation of time-reversible laws. It underlies all coherent processes; it begins where the basic concepts of classical mechanics are no longer observable, which, due to complexity reduction, can rather be considered "special cases" of the irreversibility of time. The discovery of time linked to motion was only the first step. Today, we no longer see in time just a parameter but an "operator" "to describe the unexpected complexity of the microscopic level" [5]. As was the case for human history as early as the second half of the 18th century, has not time here too become a quality of its own, more than just the medium for processes taking place within it, and does not speed in both cases have a constitutive function in this. A long side metabolic speed, the inherent speed of the living, a speed produced with the help of technology and electronics has emerged, for which the railway in the 19th century and the computer in the 20th century are the signs. With these produced speeds, the measure of time is transformed. Speed becomes one of the central conditions of life in the present. Even in the case of war, it would no longer be a matter of conquering the enemy's territory, as it was in the Second World War, but of being faster than the enemy with nuclear weapons of destruction. But speed is also one of the central conditions of life in everyday society. Telecommunication, which spans continents with the help of satellites and almost completely eliminates the time difference between an event and its perceptibility on another continent, is about the acceleration of time. Simultaneity between events and the images and words that report on them is striven for. The abolition of time difference through speed is the goal, with the result that more and more events are perceived as if in a film. Film, with its choice of perspectives,

its cuts, its accelerations and decelerations, its montages, offers a substitute for immediate experiences that are often much slower to gain. A new time and factual logic is practiced. New codes of perception characterized by acceleration emerge. Especially with the leisure consumption of television, these acceleration and time codes are internalized to an ever-greater extent. New intensities emerge. The meaning of life is sought in the ever-increasing number of experiences strung together by the acceleration of life. The addiction to this form of intensity becomes a compensation for levelling, an attempt to step out of isolation, to escape the power of time, and to gain sovereignty over time [6].

As human beings, we are now more connected than ever to a general order of time. A conspicuous sign of this is the increase in clock production to over 200 million units per year. The connection to the valid time order forces people to divide up their lifetime, to fragment it and to put its parts in relation to each other. A sign of this way of dealing with time is the "appointment calendar," in which events of different kinds occupy the same place. As time items worth noting, they are equal to each other, regardless of their qualitative differences. They are expressions of valuations through which other events are excluded.

Social norm and power structures are enforced through the organization of time, its Taylorization and new composition at the time of a person's life. With the help of chronocracy, they are inscribed in people's bodies. The goal is the creation of time hierarchies, with the help of which "important" is separated from "unimportant" time, "working time" from "free time." Although time is rationalized in all areas of life, hardly anything is as scarce today as time.

The linking of people through the general time order involves a compulsion that is increasingly becoming self-coercion. The external compulsion through the "social time institution" is replaced by a "kind of individual gain of time" (Elias [7]). Since early childhood, self-regulation is learned through the internalization of chronocracy and an individual consciousness of time is developed. Time must be measured and thus better evaluated. Maximum time gain through optimal time utilization is the maximum. Loss of time, especially during the most organized and disciplined working hours, must be avoided. Punctuality and precision are therefore particularly valued qualities. They make it possible to homogenize, synchronize, and functionalize the lifetime of different people from the point of view of rationality and effectiveness. The connection between time and money, between the laws of the bourgeois social order and the economy of time is obvious. Neither time nor money can be lost. The time order is the economic order par excellence.

The lack of lifetime leads to the fact that man has to save time. Relief from the vivid examination of things contributes to this. The more the lack of time is felt, the more man is urged to use sign systems of various kinds that abstract from things and are available faster than them. Heidegger saw this tendency clearly and spoke in its context of the "time of world images," which is not determined

by man making “an image of the world” but by “the world being grasped as an image.” The world is grasped only insofar as it is “posited by the imagining-creating human being.” It is grasped as imagined, as an image. “To imagine here means: to bring what is present before oneself as something opposed, to relate it to oneself, the imaginer, and to force it back into this relation to oneself as the authoritative realm” Heidegger [8]. In this reduction of the world to its pictorial character lies a characteristic of the modern age connected with the acceleration of time. The world is conquered as an image. The consequence: man, only encounters himself in the world, since the images are the results of his “imaginative production.” Since he no longer understands things as themselves but only as images, he saves time. However, this gain in time is bought at a high price: The loss of the foreign and the annihilation of the other are the price.

With regard to the inner organization of the human being, time is the decisive medium. The meaning of life is found in this dimension. This is true in all phases of life, however much they differ in their biological-social conditions. Perhaps even the division of life into phases is already a form of determining meaning, insofar as it subjects the flow of time, which is indifferent to human beings, to a system of order and meaning and thereby reduces the fear of being at the mercy of the cosmic dimensions of time. The self-image of a subject depends on the reflection on the time dimension of life and the memory performance through which experiences of life are related to each other. But it is also dependent on the time structure of the perceptible movements, the changes of a respective same, that is, on the time structure of perception, which is conditioned by the experiences that are determined by the duration of the time moment of a perception.

The human sense of time is bound to the time dimension of the body and its perceptions. A decisive time variable here is the moment corresponding to the pulse beat. However, not it, but the time span that a perception needs to become a sensation and as such come into consciousness, is the smallest time unit of the body. Our time consciousness overlaps the different units of time and puts them into an order of “earlier” or “later” and thus allows time to come into being. Every consciousness is subject to time because it creates its own time. This created time is at the same time bound to the lifetime of the subject, in which it is confronted with certain historical conditions that constitute the external world necessary for the formation of time consciousness.

For individual time consciousness, the present is of crucial importance van Faasen [9]. Since antiquity, the question of the possibilities of “fulfilled time” in the moment (*kairos*) has preoccupied people. Does the possibility of resisting chronocracy lie in its conscious experience? This question refers to a “subjective” time that can be distinguished from an “objective” time, although the question of whether and under what conditions an objective time can be assumed is quite controversial, since the corresponding scientific research into time has shown that there is no absolute

time in the sense of Newton and time is always dependent on the observer. Bergson already emphasized the importance of human consciousness for the experience of time with his well-known distinction between “duration” (*durée*) and “time” (*temps*). The human experience of time is based on a different time than that of abstract, visualized time. Husserl also saw this clearly (Husserl 1986). For him, the key to understanding the subjective experience of time lies in the present. For human consciousness, the “now” has special significance. For the past and the future can only be grasped in the present; the past and the future are given as memory and expectation in the present. They are “brought to mind.” What was “yesterday” is a past “today,” what will be “soon” is an imminent “now.” Thus, present consciousness is the original consciousness of time. However, it is not reduced to a moment. Depending on the experiential situation, it has a variable extension. For example, we experience listening to a piece of music as the present, as an extended present in which the tones we have just heard and the tones we are about to hear are also present. The present therefore has a “courtyard” of what has just passed and what is about to arrive. The expansion of the present into the past can be understood as a “comet’s tail of retentions.” It makes it possible to find the past again and bring it to mind. In this memory, the past is brought into the present and the inner time horizon is constituted, which is the pre-objective formal prerequisite of all representational objectivity, but which at the same time also forms the pre-objective self-consciousness. Insofar as I repeatedly slip away into the past but at the same time am always relationally aware of myself, I experience how the “living present,” the center of human life, is interwoven with the past and the future. In the experience of a “living present,” the constraints of chronocracy can give way to a plurality of times and lifetime can be transformed into time to live.

The Experience of Time and Ageing

Ageing is like time. We know what it is, but if we are asked to explain it, we get into trouble [10]. Ageing is a synonym for life that emphasizes its temporality and transience. In the narrower sense of the word, ageing refers to specific processes of change in the later phases of human life. Only in terms such as adolescence and childhood are we still reminded of the closeness of meaning between age and life. Ageing and old age are not very precise terms. They remain blurred. Their vagueness points to their complexity and their constructive character. Ageing and old age do not designate fixed facts. Their different meanings are the result of different values, ideas, and definitions.

Ageing and old age encompass biological and medical, psychological and social, philosophical and literary-aesthetic, historical and ethnological aspects. Like life in general, ageing and old age are mysterious and can neither be adequately understood by the human sciences and philosophy nor by art and literature. In order to avoid premature certainties about ageing and old age, it is important to remain aware of their mysteriousness. Ageing is an inescapable fateful process that happens to everyone and is linked to the temporal character of life [11-18].

Human life begins with conception and ends with death. In between is the time of life or ageing. Life and lifetime are understood in different ways. Even the finiteness of human life can be disputed. Christianity is convinced of the resurrection of man and his body. Life ends only temporarily and finds a continuation after death. Hinduism and Buddhism assume rebirth in a changed form. If people do not believe in a continuity of life beyond death, finitude and temporality acquire a threatening inevitability.

In the course of our century, we have gained two decades of life. But how does this gain help us in view of the fact that we have lost our belief in life after death and thus in “eternity”? The loss of “eternity” as a result of the death of God, so succinctly articulated by Nietzsche, has serious consequences. From now on there is an irrevocable radical finitude of life. This situation leads to the desire to increase its intensity. Life is to be lived and enjoyed as sustainably as possible. The awareness of the uniqueness of each moment becomes the determining insight. What does this insight mean for the individual, our society, our culture? Everyone is called upon to draw their own conclusions from this situation.

If the Christian idea of paradise is characterized by timelessness and fullness of life, then with the loss of paradise comes death and with it the lack of lifetime. Probably the experience of the lack of lifetime was not yet as determining in antiquity and the Middle Ages as it is today. In modern times, it becomes the center of the attitude to life. The lack of time grows with the demise of the “old world,” with which the earth-centered world view of Ptolemy is replaced by the heliocentric one of Copernicus. The imaginable time horizons dissolve, individual life with its smalltime span falls into insignificance. A time dimension expanded into the unimaginable and an individual life limited to 80 years are irreconcilably opposed. The cyclical change of the seasons, so firmly anchored in people’s consciousness in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times, loses its meaning as a measure of ageing processes in the face of cosmic time spans. The loss of the world as a place of human home seems inevitable.

In order to compensate for the lack of time caused by the loss of eternity, in order to reduce the gap between narrowly limited individual lifetime and world time [19], the acceleration of time leads to the acceleration of life. The acceleration of life makes use of technical means: since the 19th century the railway, since the 20th century the airplane and electronic media. The latter allow the simultaneous ubiquity of all information. Speed becomes the message. It levels out the differences in content or even makes them disappear altogether. Acceleration destroys space, the sense of being at home in it, and turns reality into images and image worlds that circle the world as electronic signs.

In old age, there is a greater awareness of the gap between lifetime and world time, between the socially anchored concept of accelerated time and the metabolic proper time of the much slower body. Often this insight is experienced as a difference from sociality and society. Thus, the end of the individual lifetime, which

has almost made us forget the acceleration of time, becomes topical in a new way in old age. The questionability of the attempt to use the acceleration of time as a strategy against the temporality of life and against ageing becomes irrefutable. There is an escape from the socially accepted time relationship with feelings of helplessness, loneliness, and fear.

Ageing: Historical Relativity and Cultural Differences

With regard to the anthropology of ageing, as in anthropology in general, it does not make sense to speak of the human being. Nor is it convincing to speak of old age or the anthropology of old age. Talk of the human being is time-bound. It emerged with the bourgeoisie of the modern era and developed via the bourgeois anthropology of the 18th century (Rousseau, Kant, Hegel) and the philosophical anthropology of the first half of the 20th century (Scheler, Plessner, Gehlen) to the efforts towards a “new anthropology” of the 1960s and 1970s (Landmann, Gadamer/Vogel). In contrast to these approaches, anthropology today must be understood and practiced as historical anthropology. Historical anthropology involves skepticism towards the discourse of the human being and leads to a historical relativization of anthropological discourse, which includes the critique of anthropology. Anthropological statements are made in a specific historical and cultural situation that limits their claim to adequacy [20].

For my reflections on old age and the process of ageing, this means: Statements about age with a universal claim to validity are hardly possible. The differences in ageing are too great from culture to culture, from one historical epoch to the next, from individual to individual. Age is not only the result of a physical process but also of a cultural construction process. Age and ageing therefore mean different things in different cultures and historical epochs. What is experienced as old age varies from culture to culture, from epoch to epoch, from generation to generation, and even from individual to individual. Assuming a general concept of age does not seem sensible. Rather, it requires a historical and cultural relativization of our conception of age and ageing. Only by dispensing with general statements can we experience the diversity of this phase of life and develop a plural concept of old age that does justice to its plasticity. Old age in industrialized countries is characterized by a strong de-differentiation: There are increasingly diverse and differentiated forms of old age. The spectrum of possibilities appears almost as colorful as in other phases of life. The differences between old people are as great as the variability between young people and adults. The view that makes old age a homogeneous phase of life is simplistic and needs correction. If one does not take the differences into account, one runs the risk of not grasping the specifics of ageing, which—in relation to our time and our society—is what is at stake in the following.

In industrial societies today we are confronted with a situation that is new for mankind. In recent decades, life expectancy for each of us has increased by almost 20 years. It is currently 70.5 years for

men and 78.5 years for women in the USA. In just a few decades, the proportion of people over 60 in the population has almost doubled and that of people over 80 has almost quadrupled. In Germany, the over-65s make up almost 21 percent of the population at the end of 2013. By 2035, their share is expected to rise to 25 to 30 percent. In Western Europe, there are more old people than children. For every 50 million people who are less than 15 years old, there are 70 million who are over 60.

What does that mean for us? How can we deal with these extra years in relation to previous generations? Can we make sense of them? Or do these years become an empty time in which we live, cut off from the majority of life's references and beset by the diseases of old age? In contrast to other phases of life, for which there are historically and culturally predetermined ways of living, old age is an age without a model. We often do not know how old age is lived and what possibilities and limits there are for ageing today. Only gradually is our society developing forms of life for old age that make it a stage of life "on an equal footing" with other phases of life. In order to make progress here, a lot of social imagination, political decisiveness, and social commitment is needed.

Although life has become longer, at the same time we have lost the immortality that Christianity granted us. The loss of religious confidence leads many people to a radical attitude towards their own temporality and transience. This becomes the prerequisite for an increased self-organization of life. With it, the scope for individual decisions increases considerably. In principle, everyone should decide which forms of life they want to adopt or can live. With age, the experience of the limits of the ability to shape one's life grows. Old people often experience events without being able to actively shape them. This limitation arises especially in old age, when the physical, mental, and spiritual situation limits the possibilities of self-determination and freedom of decision, and experiences of being at the mercy of others and of powerlessness become unavoidable.

Ageing is genetically and culturally determined. In all industrialized countries, we are witnessing a considerable extension of life span, a "demographic ageing." The central reasons for this development are changes in fertility, mortality, and migration rates. Among these factors, the change in fertility rates is the most significant. At the time of the founding of the "German Reich" almost 150 years ago, only about 6.5 percent of men and 7.5 percent of women were 65 years old or older. In 1986/88, this was already 15 percent of men and 20 percent of women. The proportion of men aged 85 increased even more, by a factor of 8, and the proportion of women by a factor of 14.

The excess mortality of men is still a mystery. It starts at birth and accounts for a difference of five to seven years in most countries. Despite the assumption of multifactorial reasons, gender differences in mortality rates are still poorly understood. The avoidance of risk factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and certain dietary components plays a major role in

increasing life expectancy and in shortening the morbidity phases. According to current knowledge, adequate nutrition and sufficient exercise contribute not only to prolonging but also to increasing the quality of life in old age. Mortality and morbidity are thus closely interrelated.

Just as the handling of time itself is subject to historical and cultural conditions, ageing is also an individual process, but one that is determined by a number of physical, social, and societal processes [21, 22]. What counts as ageing and "old age" varies from culture to culture. In pre-industrial societies, the definition and safeguarding of old age is taken over by numerous institutions. An assignment of social status to time counted by years seems to be largely absent in these cultures. The dominance of the linear experience of time and the institutionalization of the life course with the help of linear time is characteristic of the industrial societies of the modern era, which place the majority of the life's fulfilment under the dictates of time, under chronocracy, even if the generations are subjected to it in different ways. In pre-industrial societies and in tribal cultures, linear time, in the framework of which every event, regardless of its qualitative nature, becomes an equal time item in the diary, does not seem to have the same significance. In these societies, cyclical forms of time, such as those given by the course of the year with its seasons, play a much stronger role than in modern industrial nations. In these cultures, time is often not perceived as a separate variable that determines the life of the tribe and the individual. Rather, time appears more in connection with magical ideas about the origins of the world, the tribe, and life. In these pre-industrial societies, four types of the social and cultural construction of age can be distinguished Elwert [23]: a physical-functional differentiation: for example, women are considered old when menopause occurs, men when their procreative capacity diminishes, and they can no longer cope with the physical exertions of hunting. An age and generation class system: Here, every person belongs to a certain age class in which and with which he or she ages, regardless of his or her individual state of health. Thus, for example, those who are considered to be "of the same age" move into the respective higher age group in ritually determined annual cycles. A differentiation according to positions in the reproductive cycle: In some societies, marriage status determines age, especially for women. Thus, a distinction is made between marriageable, married, divorced, and widowed women. In these societies, unmarried or widowed people cannot be given the status of old people at all. A seniority system: advancement in age is accompanied by an increase in power. Age is determined with reference to the next generation. Age corresponds with power and prestige, with property and wealth. However, those who grow old without attaining a corresponding social position as an "elder" can also be excluded and marginalized.

In many cultures, the ageing processes of women and men differ. Often, a retreat of men from power and an increase of women's power take place in old age. In societies where women age mainly with their children, they have a high social position. Especially mothers of sons can achieve a strong position of power.

Childless women, on the other hand, are often marginalized.

Thus, ageing is not only a physical process but essentially a social construction based on physical processes. Insofar as everyone is old in relation to other people, for example parents in relation to their children, age is a relational concept, for the determination of which different factors are used. In industrial societies, age is primarily determined with reference to the number of years of life, the relationship to other people, and the subjective state of mind of the individual. In non-industrial societies, time does not seem to have the same power of definition as in industrial societies. In some non-industrial societies, for example, unmarried people are considered younger than married people, even if they are older. Age in the sense of authority is also created by positions of power. In some cultures, the eldest of each sex in a kinship line is assigned a special position of age. In still others, younger people who wield social power are ascribed the authority of old age and old people. In such social constructions, elements of the reproductive cycle mix with those of a seniority system.

In our society, we assume that caring for older people is something natural. However, this is not necessarily the case. In some societies there has been the killing of the elderly, often, but not exclusively, for economic reasons. Common forms of senicide included burying alive, starving to death, strangling, and beating to death. In other societies, one is more likely to find forms of neglect and persecution or unsupportive treatment of the elderly. Neglect of the elderly is also found in societies where this attitude is contrary to the social norm. In general, old people cost society more than they bring in. In our society, the justification of these expenses is made with reference to the intergenerational contract and the insight contained in it that the elderly has made their contribution to the rearing of today's socially powerful generation. Nevertheless, this point of view does not prevent the discussion of an appropriate distributive justice between the generation of the old, the adult generation, and the generation of the young.

The social institutions for securing old age cover a broad spectrum. In pre-industrial societies, the elderly is often attributed magical powers that distinguish them from other age groups and secure their social and societal status. In industrial societies, it is above all property, prestige, and knowledge that reinforce the social status of the elderly. In Germany, the immediate change from the working world to the non-working world of old age has become established within a few years and has become the norm for demarcating old age. Structurally, this immediate change determines the peculiarity of old age. Thus, the farewell or retirement ceremony can be understood as a rite of passage in which the social appreciation of the person now released into old age and the loss of power in the transition into the old age phase are simultaneously scenically arranged.

In a working society, old age is largely determined by the permanent absence of work after a long working life. Most people regard this social order with its permanent exemption of the elderly

from work as "natural." Yet it is hardly more than a few decades old. It has only been established in a few industrialized nations and is gradually being called into question again. This also makes it clear: human ages are to a considerable extent the result of a social construction that is closely linked to questions of power and violence. Thus, it is more than questionable whether the functional losses given with retirement can be compensated by taking on other tasks and roles. How old people are dealt with is not only a problem for them but also for society as a whole. The modernization of society, in the course of excluding old people from the world of work, also causes their growing isolation and devaluation. A negative attitude towards old age is the consequence; its significance for the emergence of the normative "reality of old age" (Kohli) is considerable. Economic development, the expansion of health care, urbanization, and the development of education also contribute to the formation of this tacitly accepted normative reality.

With the trend towards early retirement, the post-work phase is becoming more extended and important. Today, the age of 65 is slowly losing weight as the borderline year between the world of work and retirement. "The labor force participation of men over 65 declined from 68 per cent (USA 1900), 66 per cent (France 1901), 62 per cent (Sweden 1910), 57 per cent (Britain 1911) and 47 per cent (Germany 1925) to between 17 and 29 per cent in 1970" Kohli [24] Retirement becomes a normal part of biography, following active employment and preparation for employment as the third phase. The inequalities that exist in working life continue to grow in old age. Especially in younger age, some people still have power and influence; others, on the other hand, are then already marginalized.

All in all, previously unknown scope for action and demands for action arise for society and for the individual. More than ever, ageing takes place without predefined ways of life in a new situation in which there are no role models and in which each individual must find and develop his or her own way.

Old age today is characterized by de-professionalization, rejuvenation, feminization, singularization, and extreme old age. De-professionalization. The state's attempts to raise the retirement age are opposed by the wishes of many people and many companies for early retirement. Early retirement has gained unprecedented attractiveness, so that today it hardly seems financially viable. In most cases, there is currently only a choice between full employment or complete retirement. Alternatives to the de-occupationalization of old age are rightly called for. They call for: Adaptation of the world of work to the requirements of older people; preventive occupational health and safety; more flexible working hours; lifelong learning, further education and training.

Rejuvenation. The fact that so many people are reaching an advanced age creates a socially new or "young" situation. Moreover, in view of the changes in the world of work, the improvements in health care, and the increase in life expectancy by almost two decades, many workers are still full of vigor and efficiency many years after their retirement and appear much more "youthful" than

their parents or grandparents at the same age.

Feminization. Due to the earlier mortality of men by seven to eight years, which has been evident in all industrial nations for several decades, the generation of the elderly and especially the very old consists of many more women. In addition, in old age many skills traditionally considered masculine are less in demand and the space for skills traditionally considered feminine is growing, so that men have more opportunities to develop their feminine sides. Relatedness and empathy become more important than performance and power. Finally, the social role of older men is also aligning with the traditional role of women in that older men often no longer receive the attention and social consideration they are accustomed to in their professional lives.

Singularization. In old age, there is an increase in living alone. In high old age, the number of women living alone continues to rise as a result of the death of their life partners. Although old people are generally no less satisfied with their lives than younger people, forms of isolation and loneliness often increase as a result of singularization. The tendency towards increasing individualization of lifestyles clearly shows their ambivalence.

Extreme old age. While the proportion of very old men has increased eightfold in recent decades, the proportion of women has increased fourteenfold. As a result, many more women than men live in this age phase. Diseases are on the rise among the very old. Overall, chronic diseases are on the increase. Also, several diseases often show up at the same time and become chronic in this connection ("multimorbidity"). While functional disorders such as anxiety and depression are decreasing, diseases caused by generative brain changes are increasing. One of the most common diseases of these years is dementia, which starts at a rate of one percent in the early 60s, doubles about every five years, and affects one third of all people over 90.

The temporality of life is experienced primarily in the growing older of one's own body. The old body loses its attractiveness. At the same time, it presents itself with inadequacies and limitations. Fear of ageing is largely fear of the old body, of its decay, the suffering associated with it, and the dependence and powerlessness it implies.

Thus, ageing also means learning to live with illness to a greater extent. About two thirds of patients in internal medicine belong to the over-65s. Dealing with illness in old age is often characterized by the impossibility of a complete cure. It is then important to improve the health situation of old people in such a way that they can live in a situation that is optimal for them. Thus, it is important to absorb destructive changes in the ageing organism and to support it in maintaining its ability to function. Age-related changes in the organism include changes in organ functions, such as vascular walls, cardiovascular function, or muscle and bone metabolism due to changes in mineral balance, as well as ageing of the skeleton. Characteristic is the increased occurrence of certain

diseases such as diabetes, prostate carcinoma, arthrosis, fractures, loss of function of certain organs.

Basically, diseases in old age are similarly varied as in other phases of life. However, the courses of disease are different. Chronic diseases are on the increase. Often, several diseases occur at the same time and become chronic in this combination. Age-related mental disorders and diseases are also on the increase, such as the dementia mentioned above. The majority of dementia patients in need of care are cared for at home. The resulting impairments to the lives of their relatives, both physically and psychologically, are considerable.

Although there are somatic and psychological processes of change in old age that are increasingly beyond one's control and management, the majority of these processes can be influenced individually and socially. In any case, there is a high variability in the possibilities of ageing. For all the differences between individuals, memory and intelligence change and new forms of processing age-related phenomena and deficits emerge with simultaneous continuity of individual problem-solving patterns. In relation to mental age changes, a number of elements can be stated Weinert [25].

These include: the reduction of physical and mental performance capabilities; age phenomena resulting from the concurrence of cultural, historical, and social-structural conditions of life; the great differences between people; the acquisition of new competencies and individually diverse compensation possibilities; the subjective interpretations of one's own situation.

As in other phases of human life, there are desirable and undesirable changes in old age. However, in old age, the undesirable losses of function often outweigh the desirable gains in competence. As long as older people are able to largely determine their own life processes, they often seem rather content. Only considerable impairments of the physical and mental sphere lead to drastic negative changes in the attitude towards life. In this context, the self-perception of older people is generally determined by their social situation and by their actual capacity. Many of the mental, social, and spiritual competences acquired in the course of life are retained and continue to develop. In the process, differences already acquired in life history are reinforced.

To what extent are competences developed in old age that younger people do not have to the same extent? It is true that the basic structure of a personality does not change in general; rather, there seems to be a relatively stable self-image and a pronounced ability to compensate for the limitations of old age that occur. The forms of processing chosen for this purpose are anchored in the biography of the individual and differ individually in extent and plasticity. The individual forms of processing ageing come up against limits where socially predetermined time marker's structure and determine the individual biography. In every society, normal life courses can be constructed as ideal-typical, from which there are

positively and negatively evaluated deviations. These differences result from the length and quality of life. Economic, social, and physical-psychological factors and the systematic reduction of risk factors play a decisive role in this.

Life experience is at the center of old age. It is formed by experiencing events and reflecting on and classifying them in retrospect. It is formed through memories and through the reflective handling of them. Life in old age is narrative. With the help of narratives related to the earlier life, the older person tinkers with his or her biography, tries to make its "radical non-identity" identical, and thereby come to terms with the temporality and thisness of his or her life. The older person tries to give his life a quality of life. He strives to develop a "culture of old age" in which the abilities he no longer has are given less weight and within which he emphasizes new abilities and competences, such as: being able to relinquish control, serenity, empathy, and wisdom.

Life experience is constituted in the course of a lifetime and is related to the basic conditions of human life such as emotionality, sexuality, illness, and mortality. It is formed in the confrontation with life problems and their overcoming. It arises from attempts to create meaning in life with the help of mimetic processes. Mimetic here means to visualize the past life in memory, to live it again by imitating it and thus to make it possible for oneself and others to experience it again. The person who remembers relates to the central images of his life, tries to express himself in them and to make sure of them in his narration. This process of resembling past life and the associated intensification of the past is mimesis of past life. As such, it is a reconstruction and creative re-creation of the past. Mimetic behavior directed at one's own life can lead the individual to a new view of his or her life and future possibilities. Mimetic processes bring about a revival, an attitude of acceptance and correction of the life lived, which is formed in the re-examination of past experiences and allows them to become experiences. Experiences are formed in the awareness of the uniqueness, temporality, and transience of every human life. The richness of individual life is not without its temporality and death. From the beginning, death is given as a condition of life. Therein lie the dignity and scandal of human life Wulf [26,27].

The Exchange Between the Generations

If the passing of time shows itself to the individual in his growing older, it shows itself to humanity in the succession of generations. With the help of reproduction, the emergence and succession of generations, it is not individual life that is secured but the survival and development of the species. Time works in the ageing of individuals and in the exchange relations of generations. Its effects are lasting and unavoidable. In different cultures and historical epochs, they are perceived and interpreted differently. As a result, very different forms of experiencing time, age, and generation emerge. The generational structure today is essentially determined by the fact that three or even four generations live at the same time. The reason for this is the strong increase in life

expectancy mentioned above. The exchange processes between the generations, organized by means of giving, taking, and reciprocating, are the subject of the following concluding considerations.

Time is one of the central conditions through which the different generations are connected and separated. Each generation is characterized by a specific historical simultaneity. Old people are old together with other old people and thus differ from the members of other generations with whom they live in the same historical epoch. Each generation is determined by the contemporaneity of its contemporaries. And all generations, with their generation-specific differences, are strung together with each other in a historical time. For one generation, this historical time represents childhood and adolescence; for the next, adulthood with children of their own; for the third generation, adulthood with adult children; for the fourth, it is the time of old age with its corresponding restrictions and dependencies. "Everyone lives with people of the same age and different ages in an abundance of simultaneous possibilities. For each, the same time is a different time, namely a different age of himself, which he shares only with his peers" Pinder [28]. In any case, "time" is one of the dimensions constituting a "generation." How time is experienced in the generations varies. However, one can assume that the relationship currently determines the relationships between the generations. It is reasonable to assume that the solidarity between the generations often invoked in public discourses also depends on whether young people and adults can allow experiences of their own temporality and transience. When they expose themselves to the flow of time, they experience themselves in a similar situation as the elderly, for whom such experiences are unavoidable. If such experiences of time and transience also arise in young people and adults, some of the constraints of insisting on youth, rejecting ageing, and marginalizing the old will subside and new possibilities for the coexistence of generations will begin to emerge.

In our culture, as in other phases of life, the claim to lead a "life of one's own" also applies to old age [29]. At least in early life, there is the challenge of developing one's own forms of ageing and life in old age. Life in old age is increasingly de-traditionalized, individual, and experimental. The call for self-determination, self-design, and self-responsibility is unavoidable. However, since there are few role models for this so far, the choice of the "right life" in this phase of life faces particular difficulties. Wrong decisions are blamed on the individual. Serious illnesses are often seen as an expression of individual failure.

Preventive, general, and targeted rehabilitation are strategies for dealing with the diseases of old age. Medical and nursing services, psychotherapy, massages and baths, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and social services are important aids to caring for the elderly. In talking about the solidarity of generations, it is important to distinguish between the public solidarity of the state and its institutions and family solidarity. Relations between the generations are regulated by both complementary forms of

solidarity. These relationships can be understood as relations of exchange. In them, giving, taking, and reciprocating determine the relations between the generations [30]. Only a few years ago, the generation of the old of today formed the generation of adults between the old of yesteryear and the generation of children and youth of that time. As the intermediate generation, it was responsible for providing the material and immaterial goods of the next and previous generations that the other two generations needed to live. By helping the old to lead their lives, the members of the intermediate generation give back to this generation something of what they received as children and young people from the members of this generation. In addition, the adult generation gives material and immaterial goods to the next generation, so that this generation may one day return the gifts it has received. Insofar as people pass through the generational sequence from childhood to old age in the course of their lives, they have different opportunities and duties to give, to receive, and to reciprocate according to their respective generational affiliation.

The generational structure is secured through the material exchange processes between the generations. This happens all the more sustainably because with the exchange of material goods, immaterial, i.e., symbolic, social, and affective “goods” are also exchanged, through which a close network of relationships is established between the generations. The generation that is particularly able to give compared to the other two generations does not only receive something back later through the reciprocation of the goods. The very possibility of being able to give is an expression of influence and prestige. Being able to give and giving presuppose material possessions and social power. The social position of the middle generation is characterized by the fact that the generation of children and young people and the generation of the elderly show it respect and gratitude for the granting of goods and gifts. For the more receiving two other generations, there is a moral call to move out of the position of the takers and to reciprocate the gifts received. The legacy that the old generation leaves to the middle generation can be understood as an attempt to reciprocate the gifts received. By bequeathing something to the middle generation, the generation of the old gives something back to the intermediate generation for the things they have received as material and immaterial help. In doing so, it obliges the adult generation once again to return its gift to the deceased, for example by honoring their memory. The same applies to the relationship between the middle generation and the generation of children and young people. The intermediate generation also gains its special social position vis-à-vis this generation by giving the younger generation material and immaterial goods, for which it initially receives only a symbolic gain as a direct counter-gift. In this generational relationship, too, a moral call arises to reciprocate what is owed.

Mimetic structures probably underlie the exchange processes between the generations and their relatives [31,27]. In the cycle of giving, taking and reciprocating, there is not a reproduction of the same but a reciprocation of the act of giving. Since the historical

situation with its material and social conditions changes, the same forms and contents of giving are not appropriate as a reciprocation [32]. Rather, in a mimetic reference to the act of giving material and immaterial goods that each generation has received from the one before it, a new determination of what is considered an equivalent reciprocation is needed. If the relationship between giving, receiving, and reciprocating is mimetic, this refers to the establishment of a “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein) between the gifts and the acts of giving. With the help of a mimetic attention, each generation refers to previous actions of other generations and tries to perform appropriate actions of its own through this reference. A mimetic spiral is created in the exchange processes between the generations, with which the solidarity between them is controlled. If one accepts the mimetic character of the exchange processes between the generations, it becomes clear that each generation gives, takes, and reciprocates and that the period between the various actions is of central importance for the success of the exchange processes between the generations. For this period of time makes it necessary that the reciprocation of gifts in each case becomes a new act of giving with reference to the goods once received.

The mimetic character of the exchange between generations is more tangible in the realm of the family and familial solidarity than at the level of the state and state solidarity. The mimetic character is clearly seen in the diverse kinship relations of individuals belonging to different generations, only a small part of which is actively lived, but which shows an amazing vitality and high functional and affective solidarity in crisis situations. The mimetic character of generational relations involves a reciprocal relationship between members of different generations. There are two components to this relationship. One aims at treating the members of other generations as similarly as one has been treated and wants to be treated, in exchange of material and immaterial goods. The goal is to resemble or imitate the other. The other component results from the desire to distinguish oneself and to be different from the persons to whom one refers in the intergenerational exchange. This desire results in intergenerational rivalry and the struggle for recognition that the younger generation wages against the older generation in order to obtain the same rights.

For solidarity in intergenerational relations, the relationship between mother and daughter seems to have a special function. Empirical studies show that daughters take special care of their mothers, who belong to the older generation, and that care and concern for the fathers is also realized through this bond. However, if there are no daughters in the generation of adult children but only sons, they and their wives take over the care for mother and father to a similar extent as the daughters would otherwise. If there are sons and daughters among the adult children, daughters are more likely to care for their parents. Accordingly, the intensity of the mother-daughter relationship seems to constitute a focal point in the personal exchange relations between the generations. Perhaps surprising is the fact that in the case of a second or third marriage

of daughters, their attachment to their parents and their family of origin decreases significantly [33].

In the exchange between the generations, material benefits go to a greater extent from the parents to the children. On the other hand, donations of time and care tend to be balanced between the generations [34]. The extent of material contributions depends on the social class and the material possibilities given. Material help from the older generation plays a special role in the acquisition of one's own home. Sometimes it is reciprocated by the fact that the parents who have grown old are given opportunities to live together by their children. The contributions of the parents' generation are not limited to the material sphere. They also encompass social status and the area of personal development, in which processes of social mimesis have a particularly lasting effect [35].

With regard to the dynamics of the exchange of material goods between the generations, three situations can be ideally distinguished:

Parents and children are wealthy. Through inheritance and other reciprocal contributions, this situation of prosperity can be maintained and, if necessary, increased for both or even three or four generations. Parents and children have unequal material resources. When family ties are strong, there is a tendency here to compensate for intergenerational inequality. Parents and children lack material resources in the same way. In these cases, the demand for mutual exchange and solidarity encounters narrow limits and can easily become a burden on all intergenerational relationships.

For the quality of life in old age, the solidarity of the younger generations with the generation of the elderly plays a decisive role. A complementary solidarity between the public or the state and the family or family members in terms of orientation and measures is desirable. In a secure living environment, even in old age and especially in early old age, when people are usually not yet dependent on care to any great extent, there is a broad spectrum of life possibilities that does not differ much from that of other generations. Living a "life of one's own" is an ambivalent challenge for members of all generations, for which there seems to be no alternative despite considerable objections.

How old age is experienced depends on many factors. Generalizing statements are hardly possible. One's own and socially widespread attitudes at present and to the temporality of life play an important role in the experience of old age. The younger generations' views of old age are no less important. They contribute significantly to how old people experience old age. The spectrum of these experiences ranges from devaluation, exclusion, and isolation to respect, recognition, and integration into everyday life processes. In addition to material conditions, the attitudes and judgements of younger people play a decisive role in the quality of life in old age. Since many people today could reach a ripe old age, i.e., old age has become a part of life in a way that was previously unknown, a review and change of attitudes towards old people and life in old age is necessary.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

References

- Hall ET (1983) *The Dance of Life. The Other Dimension of Time*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Toulmin S, Goodfield J (1985) *Discovery of time*. Frankfurt / M: Fischer.
- Fachinelli E (1981) *The standing arrow. Three attempts to cancel the time*. Berlin: Wagenbach.
- Virilio P (1980) *Speed and politics*. Berlin: Merve.
- Prigogine I (1979) *From being to become. Time and Complexity in Science*. Munich: Piper.
- Deleuze G (1985) *Limage-temps*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.
- Elias N (1984) *Over time*.
- Heidegger M (1980) *The time of the worldview*. In Heidegger M, Holzwege Frankfurt, M Klostermann, 6th (edn). pp. 73-110.
- van Faasen WC (1985) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Time and Space*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bovenschen S (2008) *Age*.
- Meitzler M (2011) *Sociology of Impermanence. Time, aging, death and remembering in a social context*. Hamburg: Kovac.
- Pomian K (1984) *L'ordre du temps*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Baltes P, Mittelstrass J (1992) *Future of Aging and Social Development*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Veysset Puijalon B, Savier L (1991) *Etre vieux: de la négation à l'échange*. Paris: Editions Autrement.
- Husserl E (1995) *Phenomenology of the lifeworld. Selected Texts II*, ed. K. Held. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Kertzler D, Klein J (1984) *Age and Anthropological Theory*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.
- Koselleck R (1979) *Modern times. On the semantics of modern concepts of movement*. In Koselleck P (ed.): *Studies on the Beginning of the Modern World*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, pp. 264-299.
- Levinas, E (1984) *The time and the other*. Hamburg: Mine.
- Blumenberg H (1986) *Lifetime and World Time*.
- Marquard O (2013) *Philosophy of finitude. About aging*. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Rentsch T, Vollmann M (2012) *Good life in old age. The philosophical foundations*. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Graf FW (2010) *About the happiness and unhappiness of old age*. Munich: Beck.
- Elwert G (1992) *Age in an intercultural comparison*. In: P Baltes and J Mittelstraß (eds.). *Future of Aging and Social Development*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. pp. 260-282.
- Kohli M (1992) *Aging from a sociological point of view*. In P Baltes and Mittelstraß (eds.): *Future of Aging and Social Development*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 231-259.
- Weinert FE (1992) *Aging from a psychological perspective*. In: P Baltes and J Mittelstraß (eds.), *Future of Aging and Social Development*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 180-203.
- Wulf Ch (2013) *Anthropology. A Continental Perspective*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

27. Wulf Ch (2022) *Education as Human Knowledge in the Anthropocene*. London (forthcoming).
28. Pinder W (1926) *The Generation Problem in European Art History*. Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt.
29. Beck U, Vossenkühl W, Ziegler U (1995) *Own life: excursions into the unknown society in which we live*. Munich: Beck.
30. Mauss M (1978) *Sociology and Anthropology*.
31. Wulf Ch (2021) *Human Beings and Their Images. Mimesis, imagination, performativity*. London: Bloomsbury.
32. Resina JR, Wulf Ch (2019) *Repetition, recurrence, returns. How Cultural Renewal Works*. Lanham: Lexington Books / Rowman & Littlefield.
33. Kellerhals J, Coenen Huther J, V Almen M (1995) *The formes du réseau de soutien dans la Parent*. In C. Attias-Donfut (ed.): *Les solidarités entre générations*. Paris: Nathan, pp. 131-141.
34. Schaber G (1995) *Don de temps, don d'argent, don d'espace*. In C Attias Donfut (ed.): *Les solidarités entre générations*. Paris: Nathan, pp. 97-115.
35. Kress G, Selander S, Saljö R, Wulf C (2021) *Learning as Social Practice. Beyond Education as an Individual Enterprise*. London et al.: Routledge.