

**Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment.** Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs.  
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“In second modernity, the body has re-emerged as a once forgotten site of distinction and a continuing source of desire” (20). In *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment*, Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs engage the “somatic turn,” a recent interest within the social sciences and humanities in the body as an active site for meaning-making. Their most recent collaborative effort argues that the body plays a crucial role not only in the “new” way we age, but also in how we pursue the study of aging. They claim that the “new ageing” should be considered as both an extension of and a necessary challenge to the embodied identities and alternative lifestyles arising from second modernity. After explaining the “somatic turn” in the social sciences, *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* devotes a chapter to each of these contested identities—gender, race, disability—while explaining their histories and potential intersections with aging. The book’s second half examines associated bodily practices, including chapters on sexuality, sex, appearance, fitness, and rejuvenative medicine. The focus on embodiment thus differentiates the “new” aging from earlier, outdated models based on chronology and corporeality, which tend to view late life as a period of increasing frailty and decline. Like recent works exploring the phenomenon of the Third Age, *Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* focuses on aging instead of (old) age.<sup>1</sup> Even as it introduces the body as a new focal point for aging studies, this work remains tied to the tradition of social gerontology and is a recognizable extension of the authors’ previous book, *Cultures of Ageing* (2000).

*Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment*’s most significant contribution is to show how embodied identities are unmasking our default image of age, specifically, “the older masculine, heterosexual white narratives of age, decline and neutralisation” (115). For instance, even while feminist movements and allied gender theories exploded our notions of traditional gender identity, the “cultural scripts defining gender, what it means to be ‘a man’ or ‘a woman,’ privilege younger adulthood and the reproductive years” (45). Growing older thus threatens to negate gender performance. The “new ageing” finds ways to reverse this “de-gendering,” through the sometimes ambivalent adoption of anti-aging practices such as exercise or cosmetics, to re-feminize the aging body. Gilleard and Higgs stress that the aging body is also realized through lifestyle, leisure activities, consumption habits, and routines of “self-care.” Examples of these embodied practices include the recent rise in research on skin care targeting older African Americans and Asian Americans, pharmacological developments affecting sexual performance, and the increasing prominence of veteran or “master athletes” in sports.

Gilleard and Higgs locate the origins of the “new ageing” in 1960s counter-cultures, and more generally in post-industrial, consumer- and consumption-driven “second modernity.” Together with the social movements of the era—including feminist, civil rights, and disability activism—these counter-cultures played a crucial role in the establishment of identity politics and the “somatic society.” However, these movements were primarily oriented toward the young; for example, gay identity was implicitly imagined as *young* gay identity. There was no place for “aging” among these contested identities until fairly recently, when the 1960s cohorts themselves began to age. The “new ageing” must therefore reconcile with the formerly “age-less” identity, but without losing either. “Staying gay while growing grey” (93) represents one version of this challenge.

More problematic, however, is the book’s omission of a critical category in its otherwise impressive intersectional analysis: class. This omission is particularly surprising given the authors’ emphasis on the democratic impulses of consumption-driven lifestyle cultures. Though plastic surgery, for instance, may have admirably “achieved a new kind of legitimation for its rejuvenative practices” (155), it seems odd not to consider those who, either because of life-long systematic inequalities, or loss of pension income due to the economic recession, can and cannot afford such self-care practices. While Gilleard and Higgs use the vocabulary of autonomy, choice, desire, and self-expression in describing the “new ageing” lifestyles, they rarely consider their costs.

The book is most successful when it considers the ambiguities between corporeality and embodiment, as it does in its chapter on disability. The authors recognize that their “new ageing” model occasionally leaves them vulnerable to the critiques frequently leveled against the Third Age or successful aging models, namely that such ideologies displace onto individuals a moral imperative to “age well” (Holstein and Minkler 793). The “Disability, Ageing and Identity” chapter withstands such criticism by showing the mixed models of able-bodiedness within disability studies itself. In parallel with other social movements, disability communities in the 1970s began to reject biomedical models of impairment in favor of “an alternative position that emphasised the agency of disabled people” (74). Complicating this “social model” of disability, however, is a recent shift toward re-claiming the impaired body, “making salient its fears, hopes and desires” (77), and re-affirming its corporeality. This may be expressed in “abject art” in which people with impairments “perform” their disability, for example, or autobiographical narratives that acknowledge the “‘crude reality’ of life, illness and suffering” (79). Gilleard and Higgs recognize that this complexity within disabled identity may ameliorate the stigma of moral failure from those who are not “‘able’ disabled” (80) in a recognizably “successful” way. Importantly, they also argue that aging studies can benefit from a similar acceptance of ambiguity about the body, “[p]romoting a positive model of corporeal difference without marginalising corporeal limitations and personal suffering” (80). Though

the chapter frequently mentions the ongoing difficulty in uniting the disability movement with late life advocacy groups, this recognition of “corporeal limitations” as a reflection of difference might provide the basis for some common ground.

*Ageing, Corporeality and Embodiment* views the body in late life as productively destabilizing, a “site for the expression of identities and lifestyles that are other than aged, other than old” (31). It signals an important shift in thinking about the body in aging: not as its “limiting condition,” but instead as a platform for staging a renewed battle for recognizing difference, even perhaps considering the body’s more radical materialism.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Carr and Komp for a recent analysis of the *Third Age*.

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**Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear. Christopher Martin. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. Pp. 240. \$80.00 (hardcover) \$27.95 (paperback).**

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In her important 2007 account of aging in literature, *The Long Life*, Helen Small remarks that “Old age in literature is rarely if ever only about itself, but as far as criticism has been concerned, it has oddly rarely been much about itself at all” (6). In recent years, scholarship on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature has made a concerted effort to correct this deficiency. Studies by scholars such as Nina Taunton, Anthony Ellis, and Maurice Charney have focused on the various depictions of older people in early modern literature and, especially, drama. Simultaneously, however, books such as Gordon McMullan’s *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* have moved beyond representation to consider the ways in which alternative narratives about aging have inflected the study of Shakespeare and other early modern writers.

Christopher Martin’s *Constituting Old Age* might look at first glance to belong to the developing “representations” tradition. His stated interest is in the forms and content of