

Ageing, Dementia and Time in Film: Temporal Performances,
by MaoHui Deng. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023.
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Reviewed by Roya Liu, Stony Brook University (ya.liu.1@stonybrook.edu)

Drawing from film studies, cultural gerontology, and dementia studies, MaoHui Deng conducts interdisciplinary research on films about aging and dementia through a temporal framework—an approach that recognizes time as fluid and individually experienced. His monograph, *Ageing, Dementia and Time in Film: Temporal Performances*, explores how people living with dementia navigate their unique perceptions of time and how these diverse temporal experiences are depicted and understood in films. Deng encourages a “temporally relational worldview” (5) to challenge the linear, homogeneous clock time that *Others* people living with dementia under the medical gaze. Situating his work in conversation with the growing attention to the aging population and the scholarly call to imagine different “ageing futures” by Linn J. Sandberg and Barbara L. Marshall (qtd. in Deng 13), Deng offers new insights into relationality, dementia care, and the construction of age-based difference. By examining eleven contemporary films primarily from Asia, he complements existing research done on films about dementia across Europe, North America, and South America.

I would first like to highlight the study’s major contributions to the fields of film studies, cultural gerontology, and dementia studies, namely: 1) Rather than viewing film as representing reality, Deng analyzes cinematic temporalities as integral to the time of the material world, building on Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema and time. Focusing on filmic form, Deng closely analyzes audio-visual details to elaborate on “temporal performances” (13), a term he uses to show how subjects perform and are performed by time, i.e., the various ways people experience, perceive, and enact time. In doing so, he highlights the multifaceted, interconnected, and dynamic temporal negotiations of people living with dementia. 2) The book centers around relationality, engaging with the relational approach advocated within dementia studies and cultural gerontology, which views aging not as an isolated or individual experience but as deeply interconnected and shaped by

relationships with others and broader contexts. Deng reaffirms the personhood of people with dementia by arguing for their specific experience of time and by proposing an ethical stance of “hesitant encounter” (15) when the temporalities of people with and without dementia intersect. 3) Deng advocates a perception of time through the prism of performance to foster a rhizomatic understanding according to which places can be both center and periphery, in effect, decentering a Western-centric worldview.

Deng organizes each chapter to build on the previous ones while ensuring each maintains its own focus and central questions. Chapter One analyzes films depicting middle-aged or younger people living with Early-Onset-Alzheimer’s Disease, namely *U Me Aur Hum* (2008) and *A Moment to Remember* (2004). These films, Deng concludes, challenge the common association of Alzheimer’s with adults over sixty-five. Deng develops “temporal identification” (14) as an analytic framework to understand the agency of characters living with dementia, emphasizing their embodied and performative negotiation with multiple temporalities in a constant state of change and creation. The second chapter explores the dementia narratives in *Memories of Tomorrow* (2006) and *Memoir of Murderer* (2017), where the resurfacing of the virtual past opens possibilities for future invention and change. In *Memories of Tomorrow*, the protagonist Masayuki’s experiences of dementia bring memories and sensations into the present in creative ways, helping him navigate his current situation and maintain a sense of self. This suggests how reinterpreting and integrating past experiences can shape the future, in effect, challenging the decline model that frames life stories as closed and predetermined. Through a framework of difference and change, Deng reveals the multifarious temporal performances of characters living with dementia within a broader web of relations. In the third chapter, Deng suggests how films like *Happiness* (2016) and *The Mourning Forest* (2007) draw viewers’ attention to empathetic engagement with individuals with dementia by foregrounding their unique temporalities—distinct ways of experiencing the world. These films illustrate what Matthew Ratcliffe describes as “radical empathy” (qtd. in Deng 14), which celebrates difference rather than sameness. Deng’s analysis of these films introduces an aesthetic of care that critiques the dominant neuropsychiatric approach toward dementia. The fourth chapter

expands human relationality to include the non-human by examining *Pandora's Box* (2008) and *Happy End* (2017), through which Deng advocates for a relational rhizomatic worldview that questions human-centered, Cartesian views of nature. It argues that people with dementia interact reciprocally with their material environments, which actively shape their experiences and identities. It is therefore important to consider the material environments in the care and support of individuals with dementia. Chapter five examines two archived footage horror films, *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (2014) and *The Visit* (2015), suggesting that the temporalities indexed by the person living with dementia—where the past co-exists and negotiates with the present—surface through a “hesitant encounter” with those without dementia. This hesitation prompts thoughts on the interconnectedness of multiple temporalities and challenges the portrayal of people with dementia as “zombies.” In chapter six, Deng’s case study of the Singapore film *Parting* (2015) shows how the trope of a person with dementia wandering creates the potential to remember forgotten pasts censored by the nation’s historical discourses.

Deng’s work presents an important contribution to dementia scholarship through its interdisciplinary focus, expertise in film studies, and a novel temporally relational worldview. Compared to Raquel Medina’s *Cinematic Representations of Alzheimer’s Disease*, Deng’s study also takes a cross-cultural approach and offers a positive, life-affirming view of dementia. His book complements sociological and cultural approaches to challenging dementia stereotypes with a phenomenological exploration of how individuals with dementia experience time in films. Unlike previous research, Deng focuses on how cinematic form depicts the temporal experiences of people living with dementia. By specifically referring to forms of visual representation, the study lays the foundation for research on the unique affordances of visual storytelling forms, such as graphic memoirs and comics, in opposing the stigmatizing view of dementia. Through its emphasis on relational aspects, his temporally relational worldview helps foster ethical encounters in dementia care.

In conclusion, Deng’s research inspires readers in age/aging studies, dementia care, and cultural studies to address real-world issues. For example, in the coda, Deng reflects on his interactions with grandparents with dementia,

encouraging readers to connect their reflections on intergenerational encounters with the collective project of improving elder care worldwide. His anecdotes also suggest how caregivers' perceptions of time are reshaped by their interactions with people living with dementia. However, his work does not explicitly discuss how audiences can ethically explore nuanced, intersubjective care relationships with people living with dementia. Future research can build on his study to offer concrete means to bridge academic insights and public perceptions of dementia.

WORKS CITED

Medina, Raquel. *Cinematic Representations of Alzheimer's Disease*. London: Palgrave, 2018.