

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Aging, Old Age, Memory, and Aesthetics

*University of Toronto, March 2011*

The organizers of this conference, Andrea Charise (English), Linda Hutcheon (English & Comparative Literature), Marlene Goldman (English), and Michael Hutcheon (Faculty of Medicine), welcome 300-word proposals from interested colleagues. Please send your proposal to [andrea.charise@utoronto.ca](mailto:andrea.charise@utoronto.ca) by **Friday October 1, 2010**.

(Please note that this event is supported by the Graduate Department of English and the Institute for Life Course and Aging, Faculty of Medicine at The University of Toronto)

---

This interdisciplinary symposium aims to stimulate scholarly discussions of the construction of identity beyond the familiar triptych of gender, race, and class, to include what Simone de Beauvoir saw as the unspoken (and thus untheorized) form of “difference.” A consideration of aging and old age and their relation to memory and aesthetics is particularly timely given current understandings of the modern and postmodern self as a melding of memory and will—understandings that have led to profound emphases on disorders of consciousness such as multiple or split personality and traumatic memory loss. Viewed in this light, the lack of critical attention paid to the complex cultural meanings of aging, old age, and memory loss associated with getting older is a surprising oversight.

There is, of course, a long history of thinking about the meaning of old age and the aging artist in particular. In using the term aesthetics, we are drawing attention to the arts, aesthetic practices, theories of art, and modes of representation as they pertain to aging and memory. Do aging and memory loss—benevolent or pathological—signal the individual’s and the artist’s inevitable decline or do they, on the contrary, offer spaces for reinvention and transformation? What do we mean exactly when we speak of an artist’s “late style”? What are the prevailing representations of and theories about old age, memory, and aesthetics, ranging as they do from classical and religious models to contemporary research on neuroplasticity? How have these portrayals and theories changed in the light of contemporary research and technologies relating to anatomy and brain functioning? Since we are aging from the moment we are born, what can we learn from the varied use of the term at specific cultural moments? We look forward to presentations that analyze a variety of theoretical, thematic, and disciplinary approaches that remain linked by the consistent placement of old age and aging at the centre of concentrated investigation.

We are particularly interested in theorizations and analyses of literature and the arts that consider how aging is portrayed and experienced in light of social, political, scientific and cultural contexts that support diverse speculations about old age, aging, memory and aesthetics. Contributions that address aging/old age in light of the key themes of this symposium are warmly invited. Papers on the following topics are also especially welcome:

**\*Aging and Genre.** Deleuze and Guattari write, “The question *what is philosophy?* can perhaps be posed only late in life, with the arrival of old age and the time for speaking concretely.” What

is the relationship between genre and old age? How are genres (and/or their readers) assessed or characterized in terms of age? Other subtopics could include: the Vollendungs- or Reifungsroman; the memoir; old age and oral history; lateness and style.

**\*Age-related Pathologies of Memory and Aesthetics.** Does age-related memory loss irrevocably threaten personhood and the possibility of a “good” long life? Or is it possible to associate recuperative value(s) with cognitive impairment? Subtopics might include: portraits of the dementing artist/author (e.g. William Utermohlen, Agatha Christie, Ralph Waldo Emerson); trauma and dementia; plaques, tangles, and the aesthetics of Alzheimer’s; the aging “process” and concepts of the normal/natural; discourses of care and care-giving.

**\*Aging and Irony.** In light of the difficulties posed by old age to traditional notions of personhood, how might distanced or ironic perspectives assist with the elaboration of aging identities? Papers might discuss: the function of irony and the creation of meaning in older age; semantic complexities of the language associated with old age/aging/age studies/life-course and their role(s) in knowledge formation; humour and aging; trans-generational irony.

**\*Aging and Affect.** Affective responses associated with old age and aging range widely, from the dubiously positive to expressions of outright horror. Possible subtopics might include: old age and affects such as shame, anger, disgust, rage, fear, surprise, or joy; affective stereotypes (e.g. grumpy old men, nice old ladies); constructions of affective capacity in old age; kairosis; affect and staging aging (e.g. *King Lear*, Beckett’s *Rockaby*).

**\*Aging and Place.** “That is no country for old men.” After Yeats we might ask: what is the significance of the temporal and geographic (dis)placement that so often attends old age and aging? Papers on this topic could address: utopia and old age; “aging in place”; notions of home and residency; aging and/as spatial accumulation (e.g. Diogenes/senile squalor syndrome); institutionalization and the elderly; homelessness and displacement; retirement and community; intergenerational spaces.

**\*Anti-aging Discourses.** Longstanding Western anxieties about aging are reflected in the history of strategies aimed at evading senescence. Papers on this topic might discuss: representations of immortality and/or the fountain of youth; life extension movements (e.g. Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence (SENS)); honey-mummies and sugar-daddies; manthers and cougars; cosmetics and rejuvenation technologies; youth culture.

**\*Aging and Technology.** Contemporary biomedical technologies associated with aging have the potential to significantly complicate modern and even postmodern concepts of personhood. Discussions of this topic could include: representations of age-related disability and assistive devices; pharmaceutical discourses of old age; nanomedicine; the aging brain and brain-mapping technologies (e.g. MRI); old age and the posthuman.