Introduction

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In her well-known book *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation* (1996), bell hooks acknowledges the critical analysis of popular culture as a "powerful way to share knowledge, in and outside the academy, across differences, in an oppositional and subversive way" (4–5). She demands to study and write about popular culture seriously as it is a terrain that is often conceptualized as "the culture of the masses" (Williams 1983, 237; Storey 2009, 10), and hence has great impact on societies. Following bell hooks' demand, this book has chosen popular culture as the context to engage with questions of representations with regard to gender, aging, and their intersectional identity markers.

Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, the analysis of popular culture became of great interest due to political and social movements across the globe paired with the development of mass media and technological advancements. In the humanities and the social sciences, influenced by Marxist scholars, the interest was particularly sparked by the growing awareness of the role popular culture plays in political mobilization. Additionally, new interpretive techniques emerged to make sense of forms of popular culture (Mukerji and Schudson 1989, 47). While all this was happening, scholars across disciplines wrestled, and still do so, with how to define popular culture. What does it encompass and where are its limits?

Raymond Williams (1983), who became famous as a pioneer of a 'broad' definition of culture, suggests four meanings of popular culture: "inferior kinds of works; works deliberately setting out to win favor; well-liked by many people; and culture actually made by the people for

themselves" (237). Other scholars such as Harmon (1983) contributed to this definition by stating that it consists of "arts, rituals and events, myths and beliefs, and artifacts widely shared by a significant portion of group of people at a specific time" (4), whilst Mukerji and Schudson (1989) declared that "objects taken to be part of popular culture are readable objects, written or visual materials for which there are available traditions of interpretation and criticism" (48).

The definition of popular culture as an opposite of 'high-brow culture' stimulated postmodern ideas that no longer acknowledge a distinction between the two and soon popular culture was viewed as a "terrain marked by resistance and incorporation" (Storey 2009, 10). Linked to this development was the proposal of the concept of hegemony by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1949) with regard to the establishment of a political consensus where the dominant class's worldview is perceived as common sense. Within Gramsci's theoretical framework, popular culture is viewed as a distinct location for imagining radical change. Noteworthy here is also the ambivalent nature of popular culture. As a potential site for radical change, there is also always the remaining possibility to ultimately reestablish the status-quo which is temporarily challenged (Moody 2006, 173). Thus, when Stuart Hall (1986) remarked that "breaks, discontinuities, transformations, and asymmetry" (363) of popular culture are important for understanding its history, it is apparent that conceptualizing popular culture is a challenging task due to its nature as "a melting pot of confused and contradictory meanings" (Bennett 1980, 18).

As a theoretically contested area, popular culture encompasses numerous things and may be regarded as a vague contextual framework for analysis. However, our endeavor with this book aims at following a feminist analysis of popular culture that accepts the ambivalences of the terrain and regards them as a possibility to investigate its potential, as bell hooks would say, "as a powerful site for intervention, challenge, and change" (5). Following feminist popular culture scholarship, this book understands popular culture as a range of cultural texts which render meaning through images, words, and practices and thus include music, film, literature, and social media practices (hooks 1996; Moody 2006;

Milestone and Meyer 2011). We acknowledge popular culture as "a space of exchange between dominant and subordinate cultures" and aim at contributing to the wider debate over whether popular culture and its products "merely reflect society or act as part of the process of mediation in social life" (Moody 2006, 172).

Based on these premises, it is evident that popular culture plays a significant role in (re)producing social norms. This book focuses particular on representations of gender and ageing within popular culture. Similar to the distinction between sex and gender, age can be seen as biological, as well as socially constructed (Kontos 1999, 677; Maierhofer 2003, 26–27; Calasanti 2005, 9). The interconnectedness between gender and age has been evident since the 1990s, where recognizing age as a social construct would not have been possible without the introduction of race, class, and gender as categories of analysis in the decades before. Specifically, feminist theory determined the theoretical and methodological tools that led to the establishment of Age/Aging Studies as a field (Maierhofer 2019). In this context, Susan Sontag was among the first ones to address the particular intersection of gender and age at a conference of the Institute of Gerontology in 1973, when she identified the "Double Standard of Aging" as applied to men and women differently. In a feminist tradition, Sontag (1972) early on acknowledged aging as "a social judgement" of women rather "than a biological eventuality" (32).

Imbedded now in an intersectional feminist theoretical framework, highlighting the intersections of age and gender is merely a point of departure to pinpoint this particular cultural and societal interrelatedness while recognizing other intersecting identity markers, such as race, class, disabilities, sexual orientation, ethnicities, and origin, as well. With the establishment of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her legal discussion of Black women workers in the United States in 1989 and its introduction into different fields, a feminist framework has been established that is also useful for Age and Aging Studies to see identity categories as inherently relational. Hence, this publication aims at following Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), who argue that intersectionality was introduced as a "heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of differences and the solidarities of sameness" to

expose how "single-axis thinking" (787) determines knowledge production and political and social systems. Since its origins, intersectionality has been used in various forms, which nevertheless all aimed at problematizing and considering multiple dimensions of identity, including race, class, gender(s), sexual orientation, dis/abilities, age, ethnicities, religions, educational status, and geographical location.

Therefore, the chapters in this book address gender and aging in different spheres of popular culture, from film to music, literature, and social media. Problematizing the political dimension of popular culture and its role in representing gender and aging is on the forefront of this publication, where some articles address is explicitly and others subversively.

Raquel Medina, in her chapter "Cinema and Glory: Almodóvar's Aging Journey Through Space, Time, Pain, and Loss" convincingly sketches Pedro Almodóvar's 2019 film *Pain and Glory* as both, a story of male ageing and representation of late creativity. In her analysis of the film, Medina focuses on the metaphorical journey of the ageing self of the main protagonist who tries to create self-understanding by integrating contradictory biographical experiences into a narrative.

Also, **Leonor Acosta Bustamante**, in her contribution "Introspective Conflict in the Middle of a Moveable Feast: The Tragedy of Ageing Masculinity in Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* (2013)", explores cinematic representations and negotiations of ageing masculinities. Closely examining Paolo Sorrentino's major hit, she traces how shots of the eternal city of Rome and ruins of Roman Empire relate to and even represent the film's protagonists own ageing. As Acosta Bustamante shows, the film successfully links two opposing sets of sequences in narrating ambivalent experiences of male ageing: disengagement in terms of introspection and nostalgia of the main protagonist and images of constant social engagement symbolized through intense partying.

Moving from powerful symbolic representations of intersections of age and gender to illuminating lived experiences, **Shlomit Aharoni Lir and Liat Ayalon** in their chapter examine power dynamics in the Israeli film industry and how they relate to women film directors' positioning in

personal and historical time. For "The Celluloid Hurdles: Israeli Women Film Directors in the Prism of Gender and Time", Lir and Ayalon conducted a thematic analysis of 26 interviews with women film directors, as seen in the film "In the Director's Chair Sits a Woman" (2020) directed by Smadar Zamir. As the authors show, women in the Israeli film industry still face multi-faceted obstacles hindering their career development. As a result of their thorough analysis, Lir and Ayalon propose multiple powerful metaphors for understanding women directors' relationship to time in personal, professional, and historical contexts.

For her chapter, "'Be the Captain they remember' – Fandom Responses to Ageing Star Trek Protagonists", **Isabella Hesse** engaged in a virtual ethnography, conducting a qualitative analysis of posts in a Facebook fan group of the SF series *Star Trek: Picard*. In doing so, she explored fans' attitudes towards the ageing cast of the series. In addition to noteworthy differences in how male and female actors' ageing bodies were discussed online, she discovered that the notion of "ageing well" was central to fans' sense-making of the series. This was defined as actively embracing and integrating ageing into the performance, rather than denying it.

In addition to film and TV, contributors to this volume also explore how intersections of age and gender are represented in music. **Karen Fournier** analyses negotiations of female ageing in singer-songwriter Alanis Morisette's recent single "Reasons I Drink". Taking Helene Moglen's feminist concept of "transaging" as a starting point, she explores the idea of ageing as becoming, despite dysphoric experiences. As a chapter, "Gender, Rage, and Age in Alanis Morisette's 'Reasons I Drink'", critically examines gendered notions of youth and middle age and positions popular culture as a resource for alternative imaginaries of women's ageing.

In "On Being Silenced and Breaking Cycles – Deliberating Patters of Violence in Tori Amos' Works", **Melinda Niehus-Kettler** discusses personal and political negotiations of power, violence, and gender-based discrimination. Examining singer-songwriter Tori Amos' oeuvre, she explores processes of reclaiming power and voice, particularly of those who are more often silenced than others, including women and

old people. In doing so, Niehus-Kettler positions music as a powerful tool of empowerment and community building.

Turning to the analysis of literary representations of gendered aging, **Nicole Haring** takes up Maierhofer's approach of "Anocriticism" in her reading of the contemporary novel *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernadine Evaristo. In doing so, she thoroughly investigates and deconstructs cultural narratives of gender and age to highlight their socially constructed nature through an intersectional feminist lens.

Finally, **Marina Castelli Rosa** and **Mariana Lins** analyse the stereotype and meme of "tia do zap" ("WhatsApp aunt") prevalent in Brazil, which refers to older supporters of right-wing politicians. As they show, this gendered trope is used both by the left and the right for political agitation. In their contribution "'WhatsApp Aunts': Ageism, Sexism, and the Marginalisation of Older People in Brazilian Politics", Castelli and Lins highlight how this stereotype and meme is both ageist and sexist and hinders more reasonable debates across the political spectrum.

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