

# Editor's Introduction to the Issue: the Aging Body

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“The body” has long been a fertile topic for anthropological exploration, grounding the ways we consider everything from the molecular and genetic evolution of the human species, to the sense-mediated experience of culture, gender, sexuality and power. Aging too is an embodied process, though the body may also be used to contest and refashion aging in ways that dissociate from ageist stereotypes and the stigma of bodily dependence. As a site of these contestations, it becomes a window into ourselves and our social life. How does old age and aging contribute to anthropological conversations on embodiment, bodily aesthetics, health, biopolitics, and longevity?

Aging presents itself first through the body, but it is a body woven into the fabric of cultural and social life. The temporality marked by the aging body may be linked to changes in attitudes and self-perceptions, as in James Hillman's vivid description from his bestseller *The Force of Character and the Lasting Life* (1999):

In later years, the pull of gravity takes over. Ambitious, upwardly mobile social climbing, career and class, no longer offer glamour. You no longer need to be among the beautiful people or stand on the top deck shouting orders. Instead, the Great Sag: eye pouches, double chins, jowls, pendent breasts, hanging skin on your upper arms, droopy belly, butt, scrotum, labia; even the earlobes grow long toward the floor.

If we listen closely, Hillman's description is full of freedoms granted by the aging body; a kind of relief presented somatically by the graceful “Great Sag.” This month's cover art and Portfolio feature visualizes Hillman's words. Takacs' work not only demonstrates the potential aesthetic beauty of the

older subject, but it also expresses the joy found in working with those subjects, providing a space for recognition and engagement that extends far beyond the canvas.

As anthropologists, we are keenly aware of how presentations and practices of the aging body can bring about new reflections on the embodied self, bodily-mediated relationships, and cultural values. Since the topic of the body has already been examined from numerous angles within anthropology, we thought it appropriate to begin this issue with a theoretical commentary by PhD student, Ender Ricart. Ricart brings a critical perspective to some of the fundamental paradigms of the body in anthropology, and suggests ways in which chronotopes of aging might help us to expand and develop the field even more. Ricart's provocative commentary is followed by short response by Katrina Moore, whose work on aging and the body has also been based in Japan.

AAQ received many inquires and submissions for this issue, and is happy to publish five full articles ranging from an a biological evolutionary perspective on menopause and women's health (Froehle) to a phenomenological perspective on Filipina caregivers and their Israeli patients (Mazuz). They reveal the centrality of the aging body as located in social and political spaces of demography and home care (Penney, Crampton) as well as in biosocial communities of leisure (Steadman).

We hope that this broad range of content is a useful resource for teaching and research, encouraging and inspiring even more discussions in this field.

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Editor-in-Chief

