Forewords

Bringing design research into gerontology

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Environmental gerontology is a burgeoning field within the ageing discourse, contributing to an understanding of the spatial and material aspects of later life and manifest through concepts such as age-friendly cities, global ageing and housing and identity (Peace et al 2006; Buffel et al 2018). In recent years the demographic imperative has awoken interest from a multitude of other disciplines and practices, such as architecture, to come to the party with different perspectives and lenses through which to view an ageing society. This book captures that new excitement of discovering a fresh area of study blending gerontology and architecture together to explore a particular environment – that of retirement housing. *Inside Retirement Housing* is a timely and much-needed book. The critical importance of an interdisciplinary view in the spatial aspects of ageing comes across strongly in the book, not only from a 'macro' (age-friendly city) approach but also the 'micro' approach of how to design the housing in which we live.

This is not your usual gerontological textbook or monograph. *Inside Retirement Housing* is an apt title for a work that gets under the skin of later life living. It provides an understanding of the issues through a different stakeholder lens – Clark's 'cast of actors' (architect, developer, planner and so on) – reflecting different paradigms and approaches (including creative practice research) and conveying an intricate mix of values one might associate with co-design. The book takes us into the lived experience of various actors as they tell their story and concludes with reflections from the researcher himself. This is its appeal – challenging our conceptualisation of ageing (of what it means to age in place) by introducing gerontologists to novel methods and reflections on design. It is original in that it approaches later life housing from a design perspective, while bringing forth user or 'actor' views expressed through storytelling and autobiographical reflection, including previously unheard voices of one commercial company's staff and their side(s) of the story, to help navigate the retirement-living landscape.

Design is an increasingly key feature in gerontology. The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded Healthy Ageing Challenge programme of research has design as central (UKRI, 2022); recognition that it can help address some of the complex social care and housing issues that exist and contribute to improving the lives of older people. Yet as gerontologists we are only now

grappling with the implications of design. This book is an attempt to address this situation, bringing together key gerontological methods and evidence, blending narratives, vignettes and voices from the retirement housing sector with other types of social science data, while foregrounding design thinking.

Yet one of the most crucial issues of social and economic importance is where to live in later life. The debate on whether integrated or segregated housing for older people is most appropriate poses a conundrum for policy makers and planners. Understanding where people want to live, how diverse experiences and choices are accommodated has been a long-standing area of interest not just for practice but policy. By the end of the book, you may feel that there aren't any right or wrong answers in this – ageing in the 'right' place at the 'right' time requires reflections across the life course, and an appreciation of the importance of design in all its manifestations.

This is a 'must-read' for architects and gerontologists alike and can be placed alongside key texts in this area such as Sheila Peace's 2022 book *The Environments of Ageing: Space, Place and Materiality*, also by Policy Press.

Architectural intelligence, for older people

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Sam Clark's excellent book opens up questions about what design briefing for architects should be like. It demonstrates how architectural intelligence – in this case serving older people – can be discerned, collected and interpreted for the benefit of future design.

For over half a century, since the widespread institution of university-based architecture schools, the academic field of architecture has been concerned with how to reconcile long-standing architectural ways of knowing, on the one hand, with academic ideas about what constitutes research on the other (Megahed, 2017). It is widely recognised now that creative practice can be research: that architecture itself can articulate new knowledge; and that the incremental, instinctual practices of design can yield insights just as valid as any reached through conventional scientific or historical methods (Mason and Sharr, 2022).[1]

I contend that it is possible to identify a scale of design guidance, in relation to how that guidance operates. At one end of this scale are books like *Neufert Architect's Data*, the *Metric Handbook* or the *Architect's Pocket*

[1] This is illustrated by the popularity of design thinking in business schools, for example (Brown, 2019).

Book. These handy volumes provide diagrams, tables and charts – digesting ergonomic sizing, ideal plans and typological schemata – straightforwardly setting out actionable design direction for an architect sat at their screen. Somewhere in the middle of the scale are the insights of post-occupancy evaluation, and the analysis of buildings in use, which report back on the successes and failures of projects. And at the other end of the scale is the suggestion that readily digestible information – like that of *Neufert* – can only ever be reductive, instrumental and deeply uncritical. In this view, the best way to help designers enrich their work is not to prescribe a product but instead to inform an architect's design intelligence, equipping them with complex conceptual frameworks that are ripe for continual re-interpretation through practice. Here, the philosopher's term 'immanence' is relevant to design: working through, as Clark puts it, 'the qualities or conditions that anticipate or frame an architectural response'.

Unusually, *Inside Retirement Housing* operates across much of my proposed scale. Thus, it makes an important contribution to the available models of architectural intelligence as well as – more obviously – to the field of environmental gerontology. Clark's text is rooted in storytelling practices. In the professionalised world of the contemporary construction industry, other professions have the benefit of quantifiable data. An engineer can show that a beam is 54 per cent more efficient, for example, or a quantity surveyor can demonstrate how certain changes could make a project 36 per cent cheaper. The practice of design, however – being both ethical and practical, artistic and functional – seldom lends itself to quantitative metrics alone, and architects usually find themselves seeking to persuade clients and co-consultants through stories about the values and priorities of their work.[2] Storytelling is thus an architect's habitual *milieu* (Sharr, 2020). Set against this cultural backdrop, Clark's book is organised around stories: those of key protagonists in the design of retirement housing including 'developer director', 'resident owner', 'vulnerable friend', 'villa manager', 'town planner' and 'company architect'. More than that, however, architectural storytelling becomes Clark's approach to the values, habits, hopes and concerns of the stakeholders involved. It has been his way of working with the characters concerned, drawing out their priorities. On this basis, the final part of the book reflects on how storytelling can home in on architecturally immanent knowledge, and interpret and narrate its insights for others. Ultimately, this approach asks important questions about where, and with whom, design agency is located. It recognises that the architect is only one among many designers, each of whose standpoints – and stories – produces the

[2] There is a burgeoning literature on social value in architecture. See, for example, Hatleskog and Samuel (2020) and Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) (2020).

details, specifications and 'tweaks' which impact the health and wellbeing of inhabitants.

As I have argued, architectural intelligence operates in two directions in this book. Firstly, architectural ways of knowing and seeing have been brought to bear – through the conduct of creative practice inquiry – in pursuing architecturally immanent knowledge concerning retirement housing. Secondly, that knowledge is made available through architectural stories to the intellectual commonwealth: to practitioners and academics across the fields of gerontology, sociology, ethnography and, indeed, architecture. For architects in particular, the book contains straightforwardly actionable knowledge towards design – presented in Clark's 'vignettes' for example – as well as post-occupancy evaluation, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks ripe for informing a designer's intelligence. This book deserves to be widely read, not only for its potential to make retirement housing more age-appropriate, social and kind, but also as a model for design-relevant research – conducted by an architect, for an inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary audience.