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Nick Hubble and Philip Tew, *Ageing, Narrative and Identity: New Qualitative Social Research*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2013, 232 pp., hbk £55.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 230 39093 5.

Given the centrality of the ‘demographic time bomb’ to the policy agendas of the current UK government (as well as internationally), a book adding to current debates that challenge social stereotypes of citizens in later life is welcomed. The book’s main purpose is to outline the methodology and results of the Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project (FCMAP) and ‘in investigating how older people resist stereotypical cultural representations of ageing, the study demonstrates the importance of narrative understandings to social agency’ (p. 4).

The authors offer a framework for a new narrative studies, through the concept of narrative identity (as dialogue), building on the premise that an individual’s (written) narrative also reflects the social identities within contemporary society as ‘narrative is a process that is less individualistic than it appears to many people because of their mix of social and visceral patterning’ (p. 25). The authors’ reflective findings, while interesting and exceptionally thoughtful, do not read as groundbreaking; and as such, this book adds to an existing body of work, by offering perspectives from within literary studies to challenge current stereotypes of ageing.

The project builds on two separate ‘longitudinal’ data sources. Firstly, the Mass Observation (MO) project, set up in 1937 to offer a glimpse into the everyday lives of ‘ordinary people’, through participants responding to annual ‘directives’ in the form of diaries, and made famous by Victoria Wood’s award-winning screenplay *Housewife*, 49. The authors consider MO to be essential in the study of ageing as it has ‘a unique capacity to document the intersubjectivity nature of everyday social experiences . . . and to bridge the gap between policy makers and other such activators and “ordinary people”’ (p. 57). The second data source is participants’ diaries from a series of book groups, over ten months, attended by 80 volunteers from the University of the Third Age (U3A).

The book is structured into three parts. Part I (Contexts and Methodologies), Part II (Mass Observation and Ageing) and Part III (Readers, Writers and Ageing). Chapter 1, ‘The Fiction and Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project – FCMAP’, introduces Part I and outlines the nuts and bolts of the project. Chapter 2, ‘Everyday Life, Self-narration and Identity’, presents their ‘bricolage’ theoretical framework, interwoven with excerpts from participants’ diaries. Discussions around narrative identity as dialogue and intersubjectivity are clear and concise, although the authors seem to offer a naissiance form of dynamic hybrid identity theory with little

input from the extensive field of identity politics. The field of everyday studies is an enjoyable read but sketchy and, for me, too tightly woven with discussions on intersubjectivity and narrative identity, with a knee-jerk rejection of the eminent French historian Paul Ricoeur.

Chapter 3, 'Mass Observation and the University of the Third Age', begins Part II and through prose, quotes and poems, introduces the reader to the interlinking histories of the MO study and U3A in the 1940s, highlighting their roles in challenging the demarcation between third and fourth age. The authors offer a light critique of the U3A that contrasts with commentators who argue that the U3A perpetuates social divisions of age, class and gender (*cf.* Formosa 2012). Chapter 4, 'Understanding Third and Fourth Age Subjectivity from Mass Observation Responses', moves into a more critical form of writing as the authors unpack the disjuncture between the third and fourth age and, focusing on one participant's diaries, conclude: 'B1654's writing for MOs can be seen to disrupt and complicate the notion of "successful ageing" or "productive ageing" or "active ageing"' (p. 79). Chapter 5, 'Responses to the Mass Observation Ageing Directives: Five Case Studies', presents the researchers' analysis of five participants' written responses to the 1992 and 2006 directives on 'ageing' and the FCMAP-commissioned 2009 directive, 'books and you'. The excerpts highlight issues raised by other critical social gerontologists, including a lack of media depictions of older people engaging in (and enjoying) sex, and that declining physical health does not inevitably equate with declining quality of life.

Chapter 6, 'Representations of Ageing in Postwar British Fiction', introduces Part III by outlining the rationale behind the reading list chosen by the research team for the book groups, based on Hepworth's category of 'stories of ageing'. Chapter 7, 'The Reading Diaries, Four Case Studies', presents a detailed analysis of four (out of 80) participants' diaries, and highlights issues including a sense of increasing invisibility of citizens in later life. The chapter closes with an important, though unreferenced, epistemological point, well established in educational philosophy: 'the group discussion . . . enabled the novels to be considered more widely as the basis for generalizing and theorizing' (p. 160).

The two remaining chapters 'demonstrate in more detail how narrative exchange shapes and interacts with the experience of ageing' (p. 160). Chapter 8, 'The Role of Narrative Representation and Exchange in How Older People Understand Ageing', adopts a critical and reflective approach and discusses the role of the book, as imaginary spaces that allow the reader to explore concepts of the 'other' and allows 'new thinking and original responses to emerge' (p. 8). Chapter 9, 'The Specific Attitude of Writers to Ageing', is the most interesting and innovative aspect of the study and 'examines how the authors of books on the reading list represent ageing, and how on further critical reflections they consider issues of age and ageing in their own books' (p. 181). The conclusions continue the theme running throughout the book of revisiting the relationship between the third and fourth age and the authors make a case for the importance of the novel

(the silent *raison d'être* driving the project) as a space in which to explore ageing and life itself, with the U3A being the space within which an extended MO could be co-ordinated.

The book offers detailed descriptions of the project's aims, frameworks and findings, aided by clear, concise and engaging prose, as to be expected from two established literary scholars. The book adds to the ongoing debate that challenges the concept of the homogeneous 'kindly, bemused and vulnerable pensioner' (p. 199). Participants' excerpts offer interesting material for discussion, for both researcher and student, although at times I wasn't entirely convinced by the researchers' interpretations. In addition, the detailed reflections also highlight a tendency to merge theoretical and methodological findings together and to place (over-)importance on written diaries in understanding participants' everyday worlds.

Notably, how each reader responds to the authors' frameworks and findings will depend upon their views on, for example, the suitability of mass observation studies for rigorous social research, where and how a researcher locates and accesses participants' meanings of their everyday worlds, and whether the (written) narratives from participants within the MO and U3A reflect the diverse population of citizens over 55 years of age.

Reference

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Anne Leonora Blaakilde and Gabriella Nilsson (eds), *Nordic Seniors on the Move: Mobility and Migration in Later Life*, Lund Studies in Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University, Lund, Sweden, 2013, 228 pp., pbk 220 SEK including sales tax, ISBN 13: 978 91 981458 0 9.

This edited book sets out to 'comprehend the phenomenon' (p. 9) of Nordic seniors who migrate, seasonally or permanently, to leisure-oriented destinations in their own country or abroad. In nine chapters, Swedish, Finnish and Danish academics discuss issues based on their ethnographic research, including: retirement migration and its potential for both adventure and security; eating habits and adjustments in a bi-cultural context; the role of religion and associated institutions in maintaining transnational social inclusion; permanent migrants and their support role with recent arrivals; public policy at home and its influence on foreign health provision for older migrants; and the impact of retirement migration on architecture and urban design. The eclectic nature of the accounts is welcome,