changes and recent economic developments have had a profound impact on the traditional family culture, and recounts the challenges she met and how they were overcome when teaching gerontology to health-care professionals in China. This slim book has both breadth and depth, ranging from health-care practice and service delivery to international partnerships and institutional curriculum development. It provides a rare insight into how globalisation has changed the way people of all generations interact and express themselves – with an ever increasing emphasis on individualism. Two chapters on gerontology education in Japan and Kenya confirm the global scope that the title rightly claims. This book would be a valuable addition to anyone's library that contains texts in gerontology essential to the teacher.

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Pam Schweitzer, *Reminiscence Theatre: Making Theatre from Memories*, Jessica Kingsley, London, 2006, 320 pp., pbk £19.99 or US$34.95, ISBN 978 1 8431 0430 8.

Pam Schweitzer was artistic director of the *Age Exchange Theatre Trust* from 1983 until 2005. Her book has three sections, covering 'fully scripted pieces of reminiscence theatre', 'participatory and inter-generational reminiscences', and 'the direct, creative involvement of older people'. The priority given to 'the value of creative engagement between the actors and the older people during the whole dramatising process' (p. 38) is identified from the beginning. Schweitzer describes a woman who, on watching an early play-back of scenes based on her contributions, 'added many details she had not recollected for over 50 years. As she recalled, she repeatedly brushed her hand in front of her face, almost as if she were brushing aside the cobwebs which had obscured the sharp detail' (pp. 31–2).

Working with strong collaborators, Schweitzer demonstrates an uncanny ability to adapt and invent genres and techniques. Chapters 4 to 6 cover the vanishing world of London's dockers, minority communities' experience of racism and migration, the Age Exchange Reminiscence Centre's cleaner's account of her life (which poignantly came to an end shortly after the production opened), and the reminiscences of an entire neighbourhood. The second and third sections of the book enter different fields. The Reminiscence Centre at Blackheath, in southeast London, with its interactive historical environments, begins to play a generative role, and the work starts to develop in an international context.

A project for schools that examined the experience of wartime evacuation impresses in its complexity. A group of Chinese women confound the author's expectations, with one going on to produce an astonishingly rich 'memory-box' for a European touring project. An ethnically-diverse group of women produce

a play about their first sexual experiences. There are several examples of emotionally difficult themes being invoked and skilfully treated: divorce in the Britain of the 1950s; Asian parents' disappointment in their children; the uncertain welcome in Ireland for migrants who tried to return. Schweitzer's concentration flags only in recounting the dementia projects, where one senses that the rather programmatic approach is not her own.

I would have welcomed more discussion of theoretical issues, particularly the function of 'memories' within ethnically- or nationally-distinct communities. As the historian Tony Judt (2005: 835) has put it, 'memory is inherently contentious and partisan: one man's acknowledgement is another's omission. And it is a poor guide to the past'. Widespread disaffection under the Conservative government during the 1980s produced a consensus of resistance, within which the reconstruction of community morale played a vital role in the maintenance of identity. The break-up of this consensus must raise some doubts as to whether 'fully scripted pieces of reminiscence theatre', and the compromises on which it was based, are still viable or appropriate.

Issues in the scripting of memories arise several times in the first section of the book. For example, in a discussion of the requirements for reminiscence acting, several performers describe the experience of representing as a stage character an individual sitting in front of them, whose exact words they must reproduce. There is an obligation to ensure that the audience focus on the 'voice' of the original speaker – a 'memory' is not just a piece of information but a ring-fenced artefact to be preserved as direct evidence of the original act of remembering (thereby conferring authenticity on what has been remembered). A tendency to make a fetish of memory becomes less contentious in relation to the intergenerational projects, or in the work developed directly by older people. Here the educational and self-actualising aspects of reminiscence-theatre break free of the commemorative and are captured in the enactment itself.

Schweitzer provides compelling accounts of workshop exercises during which older participants described their experiences of scarcity and constraint and challenged their younger partners to recognise and grapple with the limitations on personal freedom and control that these entailed. She says of the *Good Companions*, with whom she worked for 12 years, 'they did not have the physical skills and powers of projection of professional actors, but they gave very natural, rather understated performances. They came across as people who had lived ordinary lives but were now doing an extraordinary thing by performing these lives. There was something about their integrity on stage and the fact that what they were showing had genuinely happened to them that audiences of all ages found startling and often very moving' (p. 215).

Will reminiscence be as central to future applications of drama and performance as it was at the *Age Exchange Theatre Trust*? Will theatrical performance be as significant in the engagement of older participants as Pam Schweitzer shows it to have been? The answer in both cases is probably not, but this is a book that has enhanced the case for cultural and artistic engagement within both clinical practice and community renewal, and which should command wide attention among policy makers, service managers and practitioners.

Reference

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Pat Thane (ed.), *The Long History of Old Age*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2005, 320 pp., hbk £25.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 500 25126 3.

In 1998, Pat Thane co-edited *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*. Five of the seven chapters in the present volume are by the same authors, and both theme and format are similar. But there is one significant difference: an extraordinarily rich resource of 231 visual images. These should be understood not simply as illustrations but as records in their own right. Although organised as a chronological history, with each contributor taking a different period, the value of this collection of essays lies less in the generalities that may be gleaned and more in the wealth of examples and quotations. Two requirements follow, first to recognise that good history presents theorists with a problem, for while it may be fruitless to seek master-narratives in the social and cultural history of old age, it is equally unsatisfactory to claim infinite variety. The second is to interrogate visual and other sources and explain their links to old age as a history of ideas.

Once there was a 'golden age' of ageing, then a transition from veneration to degradation. No sooner have we waved goodbye to that Aunt Sally, than we find ourselves dithering with indeterminacy. Thus, while concluding that 'received ideas of old age have changed dramatically', from the 'unmitigated tragedy' of ancient times to today's 'stage of life that (with luck, health and freedom) can be enjoyed on its own terms' (p. 299), Thane, along with most contemporary scholars of ageing, resorts to the D-word: 'in the past as in the present the most striking feature of old age is *diversity*' (p. 14). Itself a convention of late modernity, this emphasis amounts to acknowledging that age has never been a determinant variable. Differences of class, geography, economics, religious doctrine, medicine and not least gender have seen to that. Dynastic principles explain why popes were old but kings were young in the middle ages. Medical progress defines the shift from the struggle to keeping old age at bay during the 17th century to the capability to restore elements of youth during the 20th. The nuclear households of northwest Europe and the extended ones of the Mediterranean had varying implications for elderly relatives' independence. Yet European *ideas* about ageing (North America and, fleetingly, the USSR are only mentioned in the 19th and 20th century chapters) have conditioned both its representation and interpretation. The enduring convention of symbolising the Ages of Man as 'blueprints for the good life' (p. 74) has been underpinned by different codes at different times. During the 17th century, the four humours were linked to Aristotle's four elements and the four seasons and combined in the four ages of man. The supposed inner dryness and external moisture of the aged saw them as wasting away