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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Guest Editorial	
Aging, narrative, and performance: essays from the humanities <i>Aagje Swinnen & Cynthia Port</i>	9
Articles	
A public secret: assisted living, caregivers, globalization <i>Kathleen Woodward</i>	17
Reimagining care: images of aging and creativity in <i>House Calls</i> and <i>A Year at Sherbrooke</i> <i>Sally Chivers</i>	53
An insider's view of Alzheimer: cinematic portrayals of the struggle for personhood <i>Amir Cohen-Shalev & Esther-Lee Marcus</i>	73
<i>No Country for Old Men</i> : a search for masculinity in later life <i>Benjamin Saxton & Thomas R. Cole</i>	97
"The play's the thing": theatre as a scholarly meeting ground in age studies <i>Valerie Barnes Lipscomb</i>	117
Critical turns of aging, narrative and time <i>Jan Baars</i>	143

Book Reviews

- J. Gordon Harris (2008). *Biblical Perspectives on Ageing: God and the Elderly* (second edition). New York: Harworth Press, 199 pp.
ISBN 978 0 78903 538 7 (hardbound)
- Peter G. Coleman (2011). *Belief and Ageing: Spiritual Pathways in Later Life*.
Padstow: Policy Press, 181 pp. ISBN 978 1 84742 459 4 (paperback)
Reviewed by Simon Biggs I
- Christine Ceci, Kristín Björnsdóttir & Mary Ellen Purkis (eds.) (2011).
Perspectives on Care at Home for Older People. New York: Routledge,
194 pp. ISBN 978 0 415 89590 3 (hardback)
Reviewed by Marvin Formosa VII
- Bennett, A. & Hodkinson, P. (eds.) (2012). *Ageing and Youth Cultures. Music, Style and Identity*. London & New York: Berg, 208 pp.
ISBN 978 1 84788 835 8 (paperback)
Reviewed by Yves Laberge XI

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Aging, narrative, and performance: essays from the humanities

By AAGJE SWINNEN¹ & CYNTHIA PORT²

Challenging the Disciplines

Scholars and politicians agree that demographic trends resulting in increasing proportions of older people in Europe and North America pose major societal challenges, which will become more pressing over time. There is also shared recognition that addressing these challenges will require significant advances in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. Advocates for such interventions can be found not only among individual academics and local research groups, but also on the level of structural international collaboration, such as the expert team that recently brought together 23 partners from across Europe to participate in the *FUTURAGE Road Map for European Aging Research*, which was ordered by the European Commission in the 7th Framework Program to set priorities for future aging and health research.

There is less agreement, however, about what inter- and multidisciplinary should entail, and efforts to move beyond disciplinary boundaries often remain rather limited. On the one hand, scholars from social sciences often neglect to include the humanities—research in literary criticism and visual and performance studies as well as in history and philosophy

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(beyond the area of medical ethics)—in their considerations of approaches to aging. On the other hand, humanities scholars often fail to make their contributions accessible and relevant to social scientists. As a result, although the need for inter- and multidisciplinary research is commonly acknowledged, social studies of aging and later life and humanities' approaches seem to be developing along two different academic circuits.

Several problems emerge from this division. First, it risks leaving out of the scholarly conversation significant domains of research. It also puts scholars at the risk of rereading ground that has been effectively addressed in other fields. It discourages opportunities for productive collaboration among scholars in different fields on related topics. In addition, it risks limiting the potential for innovation through interdisciplinary cross-fertilization. The work of both social scientists and humanities scholars would be enriched by greater familiarity with the valuable work on aging being done in other fields.

Why, then, is it so difficult to build bridges between social sciences and humanities approaches to aging and later life? What are the challenges that scholars who seek to engage in inter- and multidisciplinary dialogues encounter? The answers lie in the conventions with which each discipline undertakes its inquiries. Different types of research questions; different methodological choices in attempting to answer those questions; different interpretations of research results and their implications; and different sets of concepts and terminologies—or, even more disruptively, different interpretations of the same concepts and terminologies—all contribute to the difficulties scholars face in trying to work across disciplinary boundaries. These differences emerge from the long history of science and the construction of the respective disciplines. Moreover, the conditions for inter- and multidisciplinary work are not always available; resources are still predominantly distributed within institutional frameworks that discourage work across disciplines, and limited time and resources hinder commitment and endurance for cross-disciplinary projects.

The benefits that each field seeks to gain from greater interdisciplinary engagement, however, outweigh these acknowledged challenges. By integrating social science research into their work, for example, humanities scholars can benefit from engagement with living people—in addition to texts and ideas—in the diverse contexts that affect them, which could

improve interpretive practices across fields in the humanities. Familiarity with scholarship undertaken in the sciences can also help humanities researchers translate their own ideas and findings in a way that would clarify their implications and help tailor academic knowledge and skills for use by society at large, enabling more people to benefit from them. Humanities scholars can also learn from social scientists how to more effectively organize in order to exert influence over policy making, including the formulation of research priorities.

Attending to aging-focused scholarship in the humanities would similarly benefit social scientists. For example, engagement with humanities research would encourage scholars to reflect systematically on the presumptions of research priorities and designs as well as on the position of the researcher himself or herself. It could also help put the desire for objective truth into perspective and call attention to the complexities and multiformity of lived realities. Enhanced recognition that texts (both verbal and in print) are never simply reflections of the reality of inner or outer lives might also result from greater exposure to humanities research.

Theorizing Age

On October 6–9, 2011, the conference “Theorizing Age: Challenging the Disciplines,” took place in Maastricht, The Netherlands, with the aim of building bridges across the circuits of sciences and humanities, on the model of the *Cultural Gerontology Symposia*, the first of which was convened in 1997. To implement this process, participant groups across Europe together founded the European Network in Aging Studies (ENAS). In January 2013, ENAS was joined by a North-American counterpart, NANAS.

In the framework for the conference in Maastricht, the organizers identified four different conceptualizations of age that inform research practices in both the social sciences and the humanities. The idea was that adopting a meta-reflective position towards one’s research—making explicit the conceptualizations of age beneath research designs—would make it easier to connect with a larger community of scholars from a variety of disciplines who work—perhaps unexpectedly—from the same

angle. In other words, these conceptualizations served as tools to build bridges between the circuits.

The conference's call for papers identified three approaches to aging, but the panels were eventually organized around the following four conceptualizations:

Cultural age: This category understands age not only as a biological function nor simply as a calendar mark, but also as an accumulation of all the meanings various cultural contexts ascribe to categories of age across different historical periods. This intellectual perspective entails focusing on the ways knowledge about old age is constructed in the field of gerontology and its sub-disciplines. It also calls attention to the diverse realities of aging by considering how age intersects with other identity markers, such as disability, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, class, etc., and how power and values are distributed in meaning-making processes. Discourse analysis is a prominent example of a methodological tool that reveals the underlying mechanisms through which meaning is constructed and helps in identifying the relevant stakeholders.

Age as a narrative: A narrative approach to age starts from the metaphor of life as story and refers to the way age identities are constituted in and through narratives. *Narrative*, as a travelling concept, helps to define aging as a development through time, negotiating between personal circumstances and aspirations, and the expectations of the master narratives in which we are inscribed. Narratives of age range from the autobiographical to the fictional and include oral accounts as well as representations in literature and other art forms.

The performativity of age: The notion of performativity defines age not only as a state of *being* but through acts of *doing*. Theories of performativity claim that age identities are formed and perpetuated through the repetition of behavioral scripts connected to chronological ages and life stages. Since a repetition can never be identical to its original script, there is always the possibility of subversion and change. The concept of performativity has particular significance in performance studies, as actors both enact age upon the stage and negotiate behavioral norms associated with their own chronological ages. But it also offers an illuminating conceptual approach to understanding the actions and behaviors of individuals and groups across the life span.

The materiality of age: Focusing on materiality emphasizes the conceptualization of age as an embodied experience, drawing attention to the physical changes that undeniably come with age and to the way people manage these changes in their daily lives. This includes research varying from the study of how bodies are disciplined to people's body images, the management of disabilities, and (post)phenomenological approaches to bodily aging. Attention to the economic conditions of aging and its material effects may also be considered from this perspective.

Of course, these conceptualizations of age are not fixed categories. The boundaries between them are fluid and most scholars practice several approaches to age at the same time. However, this division into different theoretical lines of inquiry offers a direction through which scholars on either side of the science/humanities divide can find common ground and a shared language through which to build productive bridges across the too-often separated intellectual circuits.

Essays from the Humanities

The six essays included in this special issue, which have been developed from papers presented at the Maastricht conference, offer examples of humanities approaches to aging. We are glad that *IJAL*, an interdisciplinary journal with a social science focus, has, for the first time, agreed to cluster humanities essays resulting from a conference in a special issue. This effort links to other initiatives aiming to highlight humanities approaches to research on aging, such as:

- *Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging* (and the previous *Handbook of Humanities and Aging*), edited by Thomas Cole, David Van Tassel, Ruth Ray and Robert Kastenbaum (1992, 2000, 2010)
- *Journal of Aging, Humanities, and the Arts*, edited by Dana Bradley and Anne Wyatt-Brown (2007–2010)
- The *Aging Studies* book series, series editors Ulla Kriebner, Heike Hartung, Roberta Maierhofer (initiated in 2008)
- The “Humanities and Arts” section of *The Gerontologist*, edited by Helen Kivnick (initiated in 2011)
- “Age Studies,” a special issue of *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, edited by Heike Hartung and Rüdiger Kunow (2012)
- “Aging, Old Age, Memory, Aesthetics,” a special issue of *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, edited by Marlene Goldman, Andrea Charise, Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon (2012)
- *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, edited by Cynthia Port and Aagje Swinnen (forthcoming, January 2014)

We trust that the work included here furthers the communal project of encouraging the sharing of knowledge and approaches across disciplines,

and helps to illuminate the many meanings of aging and their implications for some of the societal challenges that lie ahead. The texts considered in many of these articles happen to be films (documentaries and features) and plays, but the insights they offer, which are drawn from approaches to cultural age and age as narrative as well as the performativity of age, model the ways in which these categories can help highlight the interdisciplinary relevance of humanities research on aging.

In “A public secret: Assisted living, caregivers, globalization,” Kathleen Woodward draws a parallel between the invisibility of frail Caucasian elders and that of the female-gendered caregivers from diverse backgrounds who operate in globalized chains of care, in the public sphere and representational circuits alike. She argues that (auto)biographical stories such as the magazine feature story “The Last Best Friends Money Can Buy” and the documentary film *Paper Dolls*, which address the experiences of older people and caregivers *together*, are needed to increase popular understanding of the cultural and material conditions of aging and of caring. While this essay draws to some degree on all four conceptualizations of age identified at the conference, its attention to storytelling situates Woodward’s contribution as an example of the narrative turn in gerontological studies.

“Reimagining care: Images of ageing and creativity in *House Calls* and *A Year at Sherbrooke*,” by Sally Chivers, also frames her analysis from the perspective of narrative approaches to aging. Examining how two National Film Board of Canada documentaries—*House Calls* and *A Year at Sherbrooke*—reimagine care for older people and move beyond narratives of decline, she explicitly addresses the potential and limits of the aesthetics of documentary and photography as two distinct media. Chivers illustrates how these texts can potentially help to change the cultural imaginary of aging and care in Canada.

Amir Cohen-Shalev and Esther-Lee Marcus’s contribution, “An insider’s view of Alzheimer: Cinematic portrayals of the struggle for personhood,” aims to bring the relatively unknown films *Cortex*, *Pandora’s Box* and *Old Cats*—which, in their reading, departs from mainstream stereotypical dementia representations in film—to the attention of scholars of gerontology. The authors consider how these films open a window into the inner

lives and ongoing personhood of people with dementia through cinematographic means.

In “*No country for old men: A search for masculinity in later life*,” Benjamin Saxton and Thomas Cole offer an analysis of the film *No Country for Old Men*, an adaptation by the Coen brothers of the novel by Cormac McCarthy. Rather than focusing on the many changes the narrative undergoes by shifting from one medium to another, they analyze and contextualize how the experience of Sheriff Bell at the end of his career is performed at the intersection of age and gender in the film. The article’s analysis of Bell’s age performances draws attention to the prospect of multiple late-life masculinity scripts.

Valerie Lipscomb’s article, “‘The play’s the thing’: Theatre as a scholarly meeting ground in age studies,” identifies avenues for theatre research in aging studies and vice versa. She focuses on the performativity of age both on and off stage, and the potential of theatre staging and role playing to question implicit norms for age appropriate behavior and ageist assumptions. Drawing on both professional theatre and community performances, Lipscomb draws attention to the interaction of those experiencing the aging process—actors, audience members, playwrights—with master narratives of age as they are actualized on stage.

Finally, in “Critical turns of aging, narrative and time,” Jan Baars builds on his archive of scholarship on the conceptualization of (lived) time, its interdependence with narrative, and its implications for aging studies. Baars argues that the disciplinary organization of social sciences and humanities tends to reproduce the dichotomy of systemic versus life worlds, as theorized by Paul Ricoeur, and calls for research focusing on the intermediary level, i.e., connecting aging experiences with socio-political macro narratives of aging.

These essays present only a glimpse of the contributions that were shared at the conference. We thank all of the participants for their papers and for their lively engagement in the event. Also, we would like to thank the authors of articles that could not be included in this issue for sending us their papers for consideration. We look forward to future opportunities to highlight the exciting research on aging being pursued in the humanities and to help facilitate the exchange of ideas and scholarship across disciplinary circuits.

A public secret: assisted living, caregivers, globalization

By KATHLEEN WOODWARD*

Abstract

Frail elderly and their caregivers are virtually invisible in representational circuits (film, the novel, photography, television, the web, newspapers), with the elderly habitually dismissed as non-citizens and their caregivers often literally not citizens of the nation-states in which they work. How can we bring what is a scandalous public secret of everyday life into visibility as care of the elderly increasingly becomes a matter of the global market in our neoliberal economies? This essay explores the representation of caregivers and elders, together, in photographs, the memoir, news and feature stories, and documentary film, suggesting that one of the most effective modes of advocating for changes in public policy is engaging people's understanding through stories and images. In this study, I consider stories of assisted living, which involve elders, who are white, and paid caregivers, who are people of color, gendered female, and part of global care chains; these stories include American writer Ted Conover's *New York Times Magazine* feature story "The Last Best Friends Money Can Buy" (1997) and Israeli Tomer Heymann's documentary film "Paper Dolls" (2006). Of key importance is a feeling of kinship as new forms of the family take shape.

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Keywords: Caregivers, frail elderly, gender, race, global care chains, representation, memoir, documentary, advocacy.

I

Consider three photographs. First, a black-and-white photograph of an old woman sitting alone, head bowed, body enclosed by a walker. Has she been shopping? It would not seem so. Is she waiting for a bus? It seems unlikely. Is she just waiting, with nothing to occupy her and no expectation that someone will come to retrieve her? That would seem to resonate with the bleak mood conveyed by this gray environment of concrete and crumbling brick, an imposing trash can to the left, no traces of life in sight, not even a Beckettian tree, nothing other than the frail old woman to the right who herself seems devoid of life.

The psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott has astutely observed that there is no such thing as a baby, by which he meant that an infant cannot survive except in relation to his mother; together they form an inseparable



pair, one dependent upon the other, each in thrall to the other. As this dispiriting photograph attests, there is such a thing as a solitary old person in need of care, concern, and connection to a vital intimate world. For this woman, there is no home in sight to provide a trusted shelter for care. She does not seem to belong—anywhere.

Not behind closed doors where we would expect to find her, she is outside, although there are no eyes to see her other than ours as spectators of the photograph. The photograph thus reveals what media artist and activist Sharon Daniel calls a public secret (2007). “There are secrets that are kept from the public and then there are ‘public secrets’—secrets that the public chooses to keep safe from itself,” she explains. “The public secret is an irresolvable internal contradiction between inside and outside, power and knowledge.” The denial of the scandalous isolation of old people in our societies is a public secret, one the public chooses to keep from itself. As this photograph suggests, old people, particularly those who are frail, are habitually imagined as non-citizens, if not embodiments of bare life.¹

Next, consider the black-and-white photograph “Mature and Young Hands” by Lars Klove. The laying on of hands is an iconic gesture of comfort and healing, and the mood of this photograph is calm, suggesting a world in which people in need of affection, as are we all, receive it, and in which intimacy is eloquent in its wordlessness. I see two women at rest, sitting together on a couch, inside.

Does racial or ethnic difference figure in what is ostensibly the small world of these two women? It is difficult to tell, but it does not seem so. The two could easily be mother and daughter—and in fact to me their hands do resemble each other. The younger woman might be a paid caregiver. That we can discern little about these women and their environment seems to imply that fundamentally there is not so much difference between them. But this interpretation obscures the all-important relationship between power and knowledge that Sharon Daniel identifies

¹ I found this photograph in 2011 on the homepage of “Oecumene: Citizenship after Orientalism,” a research project at the Open University exploring how the concept of citizenship is being refigured in the face of large-scale political change around the globe, in particular across the boundaries of nation-states.



Lars Klove, "Mature and Young Hands," Getty Images

as constitutive of a public secret. If the photograph of the old woman alone on a bench testifies to the need to integrate people in old age as full citizens in a society based on mutually interdependent generations, this photograph suggests that a solution is simple—the warmth of care. But the situation of frail older people across communities and nation-states is anything but simple, and there is no uncomplicated solution to propose as a response. Moreover, their caregivers, many of whom have crossed national borders in order to find work, are in many cases literally not citizens of the nation-states where they offer care, and there is no social contract to speak of worthy of the name.

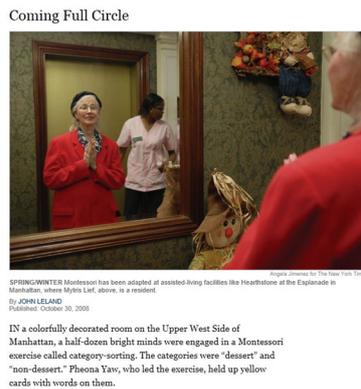
In 2008, at a conference on women, ageing, and the media at the University of Gloucestershire, I gave a talk on assisted living, focusing on American narratives (fictional and documentary) about women of the

fourth age and invoking feminist philosopher Eva Kittay's (1999) influential work on dependency and care.² Kittay argues that corporeal dependency—embodied in infancy and childhood, frail old age, severe disability, and sickness—is an elemental condition of all of our lives; she insists that as a fundamental relationship between people, dependency should be the foundation for theorizing and shaping our social institutions, not the autonomous individual on which the liberal theory of the state is based. Kittay calls attention to the appalling lack of social justice in the American health-care system, with many families as well as individuals in extreme jeopardy. Acutely aware of the physically exhausting and psychically painful work of caring for those who are seriously sick, she underlines the fact that this labor—what she calls dependency work—is largely invisible to us and shamefully unacknowledged by our society.³

I agree with Kittay's basic argument. But in retrospect, I realize that in concentrating in Gloucestershire on frail older women in need of care, I gave no attention to the *giver* of care, thereby repeating the mistake of focusing on the frail elder and ignoring the experience of the caregiver. This egregious oversight is encapsulated in a 2008 *New York Times* story about the use of Montessori methods with those who have Alzheimer's disease (Leland). The lead image—this is my third photograph—exposes a public secret not pursued in the story itself, one involving race, gender, and class as well as age:

² For a companion piece to "Public Secrets" from that conference, see Woodward 2012. Referring to the work of caring for others, Kittay 1999 insists, "The labor, when well done, is aptly characterized by Jane Martin's three 'Cs': care, concern, and connection. It is the work of tending to others in their state of vulnerability—*care*. The labor either sustains ties among intimates or itself creates intimacy and trust—*connection*. And affectional ties—*concern*—generally sustain the connection, even when the work involves an economic exchange. For the dependency worker, the well-being and thriving of the charge is the primary focus of the work" (31). See Whitney 2011 who, engaging Kittay, argues that in order to strengthen the idea of dependency as grounding personhood we must disentangle it from the dichotomy of vulnerability and power.

³ The academic literature on care across disciplines has grown enormously in recent years. Three studies I have found especially helpful from geography and anthropology are England 2010; Lawson 2007; Mol et al. 2010).



An attractive elderly white woman is smiling into the mirror at her own image, which is reflected back to us as spectators. She is being aided by a black woman who appears in the background, her face turned away from the camera eye. The unequal structural relationship between white women and women of color, in terms of elder care, is a public secret. Subject to the mutually reinforcing prejudices of ageism and sexism, and suffering from chronic conditions, frail elderly women are virtually unrepresentable in mainstream visual media which thrive on dramatic—not to say, melodramatic—narration. What attracts public attention in terms of our biological futures are not chronic conditions, which are generally understood as mundane by those who do not suffer them, but the specter of epidemics of infectious disease and narratives of mutated bodies.⁴ If frail elderly women are invisible, it is even more unlikely that we will find caregivers of the elderly represented, especially so given, as in this photograph, the differentials of race.

Considered in turn and taken together, these three photographs serve to introduce the impulse animating my essay on assisted living for the frail elderly as well as the approach I take. As the first photograph suggests, that the frail elderly, often tragically isolated, require care should be a matter of public concern, not a public secret. As the second photograph implies, we need to consider care in terms of comfort and intimacy, not just

⁴ See Cohen 2011; Wald 2008.

in terms of so-called practical matters. And as the third photograph intimates, we need to widen the scope of the picture, beyond a close-up of hands, to include the social context of the relationship between people requiring care and those offering it; so many things matter, in this case, especially race. How can we bring what is a scandalous public secret of everyday life into visibility as care of the elderly increasingly becomes a matter of the global market in our neoliberal economies? This essay explores the representation of caregivers and elders together, not separately, suggesting that one of the most effective ways of creating moral communities and advocating for change in public policy is by telling stories that draw us into the affective worlds of other people. My focus is first and foremost on the caregivers.

Stories constitute essential equipment for living.⁵ Where do we find stories of those who take care of the elderly? Stories are being told in America by mid-life feminists who find themselves providing care—or often more accurately, coordinating care—for their elderly parents.⁶ Stories are being told by wives whose older husbands have suffered from debilitating illnesses—a devastating fall, stroke, cancer.⁷ In these cases, care is underwritten by an obligation typically understood to rest with those who occupy a certain status—daughters and wives—and thus vanishes into the “natural” rhythm and organization of social life.

My concern, however, is not with wives and daughters, but with the paid caregiver of the frail elderly, a figure even less visible in representational circuits than the frail elderly themselves. More specifically, I’m interested in caregivers of the elderly who form global care chains, a phenomenon born of the intersection of population aging and globalization.⁸ How do cultural texts give voice to the experience of these caregivers? How are relationships

⁵ I am alluding to a 2007 book-length collection of essays by U.S. anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff beloved for her work with elderly communities.

⁶ See Fuchs 2005; Barnes 2010; Miller 1996; medical anthropologist Margolies 2004, Margolies 2010; Geist 2009; Maierhofer 2010; Simmons 1996; and Kane & West 2005. See also the memoir by the British writer Gillies 2009. Memoirs, both long and short, are also being written by sons about taking care of the elderly fathers; see Roth 1991; Rauch 2010.

⁷ See Shulman 2008; Ackerman 2011; Sheehy 2010.

⁸ On global care chains see Hochschild 2000.

between caregivers and elders portrayed? What strategies of storytelling draw us into the worlds of caregivers and elders?

In what follows, I turn to four stories of assisted living. They appeared between 1997 and 2009 and represent four distinct genres. The first three—a book-length memoir, a news story that takes on national policy significance in America, and long-form feature-story journalism—were published in the United States. The fourth is a documentary film made in Israel that has a global reach. All involve caregivers who are people of color and are gendered female, elders who are white. In all of them, care is part of the market economy—it is paid care—but the relationship between caregivers and elders is not necessarily polluted by being mediated by the market. For the caregivers, the discourse of family—or more generally an ethic of care—is central. They represent themselves as caring people, and in three of the stories the *feeling of family* between caregiver and elder is palpable (in two stories, the agency brokering the relationship between caregiver and the frail elder is indicted as uncaring by the caregivers themselves, but in another story, the agency is presented as a force for good). If the site of care in three stories is the home, the global geography of care takes us from the United States to Israel, with caregivers coming from America, Jamaica, and the Philippines. But these are generalizations. They do not account for the particularity of these stories—the texture of experience and the force of the narrative. All of them, albeit differently, have power to engage us.

The first story—*A Place Called Canterbury*, the book that revealed my blind spot to me—introduces the figure of the caregiver, a woman of color who, taking care of a white woman, is easily overlooked; *Canterbury* implicitly asks us to follow *her* life beyond its pages and into the future. The second story follows Jamaican-born Evelyn Coke into a grim period in her own difficult old age, also distinguished by her remarkable resolve to fight for social justice for herself and for others. The third and fourth stories—a long piece in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled “The Last Best Friends Money Can Buy” and the film *Paper Dolls*—provide more ample portraits of the lives of caregivers, who are predominantly in their thirties. In these two stories we are drawn more fully into their worlds caring for elders and, importantly, learn about other dimensions of their lives as well. The film is the most complex of the texts I consider and I devote the most space to it.

II

“We is family.”

At the conference in Gloucestershire I discussed Dudley Clendinen’s *A Place Called Canterbury: Tales of the New Old Age in America* (2008), an absorbing book-length account of his mother’s decade-long decline in Canterbury Tower’s Health Center, the nursing wing of a non-profit, continuing-care facility in Tampa, Florida. Clendinen provides two major frames for his mother’s story: the stories of other Canterbury residents who captured his interest and the story of his relation to his mother throughout this long ordeal. His mother, unable to speak or feed herself after two strokes in rapid succession, suffered from arthritis, scoliosis, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis, and was confined to a wheelchair and then to bed for over nine years.

Embedded in *A Place Called Canterbury* is an important back story, one that I did not consider then and bring into focus here. Louise Edwards, his mother’s long-time maid (they had been together for some 20 years), is introduced early in the first chapter, before his mother had suffered her two incapacitating strokes. In 1998 Clendinen flies from Baltimore down to Tampa, arriving to find that Louise is with his mother, who had fractured her spine:

I flew down and found Mother in a room in the nursing wing, tucked and propped between pillows in bed, hair coiffed and make-up perfect, looking lovely. There was lunch on a tray. Louise Edwards, her maid, had brought china and silver down from the apartment and was sitting on a chair next to the bed. On a rolling table, between them, was Mother’s silver ice bucket, with a silver spoon beside it.

“Louise, dahlin,” Mother said, with a sign, “feed me summah that crushed ice withah spoon.”

Louise opened the lid of the bucket, spooned up a shiny little mound of ice, and held it, dripping. Mother smiled at her and opened her mouth, and Louise slid the spoon in. Munch, munch. Mother looked content.

Louise came every day. (19–20)

After his mother’s second stroke, Clendinen and his sister ask Louise to come back to help, and she continues to care for his mother, along with nurses and certified nursing assistants, with love and grace, coming to

Canterbury Tower three times a week, keeping her company, fussing over her, singing hymns to her, brushing her hair, and applying her makeup, until she died. Clendinen stresses his mother's almost uncannily beautiful appearance, and, as the son tells the story, Louise's work was in great part devoted to preserving her mother's look of femininity. This he doesn't understand as a peculiar indulgence. Rather he is grateful that Louise, as he puts it, "paid attention to all the details of choice remaining in my mother's tiny, restricted life" (148).

Louise comforted his mother the way his mother had comforted her own children when they were sick. If Clendinen understands his mother's care and comfort not as an extravagance but as an instance of reciprocity (although displaced), he is keenly aware that he is not the one providing bodily care and continuing emotional support. Structurally there is an asymmetry here. Louise Edwards is the third term which does not, in the Freudian sense, separate mother and son; rather she brings them together.

Although Clendinen doesn't devote much space to Louise, her presence permeates the entire book. We learn very little about her, however. We don't know where she was born, how old she is, or if she has a family. We do learn that she is, as Clendinen puts it, *dark*. But in terms of the connection between these two women, we are told what is essential:

She reacted happily to my sister, Melissa, when she visited, and to me when I came down from Baltimore or New York, but increasingly, I thought, it was to her maid and companion, Louise Edwards, who attended her, fed her, and kept her company three days a week, that Mother was most responsive.

"Louise loves you, Mama," Louise said, looking into my mother's eyes, holding her hand. "Louise loves you." The look in my mother's eyes—the feeling she gave back—was unmistakable. (75)

"The most important, the most caring and intimate relationship in my mother's life," Clendinen writes, was "with Louise" during this long period (149). It was Louise who knew his mother's moods and who bought her clothes and watched his mother for signs of decline. And Louise? Clendinen asks her if she would prefer the term "housekeeper" to "maid." This is her vociferous response:

"No!" Louise said, flaring. She gave me a scowl of displeasure, as if I'd said something offensive. She turned to my mother, then back to me, still holding Mother's hand.

“Ah is yo’ mothuh’s maid!” she said. “This is puss-onal.” She stared at me, unblinking. “We is family.” (pp. 149–50)

What is the familial structure as imagined by Louise? Louise thought of her, she told Clendinen, as her own mother. And Clendinen himself? “It’s what I feel . . . it all just feels like family. We’re all together, until the end” (150).⁹

At the end of the book, after his mother’s death, Clendinen names the members of his mother’s small circle of family who are left behind. There are six of them, one of whom is Louise. I wonder, what has happened to her? I wonder, was he in touch with her before he died in 2012? Clendinen’s mother received superb care, her long last years accompanied by kindness and love. His mother had the material means to sustain that care. What does the future hold for Louise Edwards? *Who will care for her?*

“I hope they try to help me because I need help bad.”

In August 2009, a story by Douglas Martin in the *New York Times* reported the death of Jamaican-born Evelyn Coke at the age of 74. I excerpt below a little over a quarter of this long news story:

Year in and year out, Evelyn Coke left her Queens house early to go to the homes of elderly, sick, often dying people. She bathed them, cooked for them, helped them dress and monitored their medications. She sometimes worked three consecutive 24-hour shifts.

She loved the work, but she earned only around \$7 an hour and got no overtime pay. For years Ms. Coke, a single mother of five, quietly grumbled, and then, quite uncharacteristically, rebelled. In a case that reached the Supreme Court in April 2007, Ms. Coke sued to reverse federal labor regulations that exempt home care agencies from having to pay overtime.

⁹ I am well aware that the rhetoric of family—especially when invoked in someone’s home that is simultaneously a site of paid care—can mask an asymmetrical, exploitative relationship between caregivers and their employers. Here, however, I emphasize the testimony of caregivers who take pride in their commitment to care and who value the intimacy that nevertheless can emerge from sites of paid care. See Stacey 2011. I also emphasize the vulnerability of both caregiver and elder, a condition that may work to mitigate the destructive effects of differentials in power and enhance closeness.

"I hope they try to help me because I need help bad," she said in April 2007 after listening to oral arguments. She had stopped working after being hurt in a car accident six years earlier, and by then used a wheelchair.

The court unanimously rejected her claims . . .

Her health deteriorated until she died of heart failure on July 9 . . .

As a symbol, Evelyn Coke remains alive as both Congress and the Obama administration review regulations that carry out amendments to a 1938 law on wages. In June, 15 senators and 37 house members wrote to Hilda L. Solis, secretary of labor, urging her to eliminate the exemption for home attendants.

"Evelyn Coke, who took a case all the way to the Supreme Court, spent two decades working more than 40 hours a week caring for others," the senators wrote. "Yet, when she suffered from kidney failure, she could not afford a health care worker to take care of her."

In the United States, as a result of federal legislation and regulations dating from the 1930s and the 1970s, there is no requirement at the national level that home care workers be paid either minimum wage or overtime (ironically, one of the reasons why home health care workers were excluded from these labor laws and regulations was to protect the home as a site of privacy). As an employee of Long Island Care at Home, Evelyn Coke, since immigrating to the United States from Jamaica in the 1970s, had taken care of the elderly; she received no overtime pay, and in a cruel irony, no health benefits. In the last years of her life Coke needed dialysis three times a week and, as the news story underscores, was *unable to afford a health care worker to take care of her*, her physical suffering exacerbated by her vulnerable position as a poor, old, black woman from Jamaica. A woman who cared for others and who, in her own old age, could not secure such help for herself, she sued for redress.

Notwithstanding the failure of her lawsuit, which was ultimately tried by the Supreme Court, Evelyn Coke, both in late life and in death, has become a heroic tragic figure, her dignity and determination in the face of ironic social injustice touching people across the United States and inspiring calls for change. Her story has circulated widely in the national news across media (print, radio, and broadcast television) and in social media as well (there is a tribute to her on YouTube on the first anniversary of her death). It has generated outrage and helped shape a major effort to change national policy, with President Obama and the Secretary of Labor evoking her experience in advocating for change under the banner of

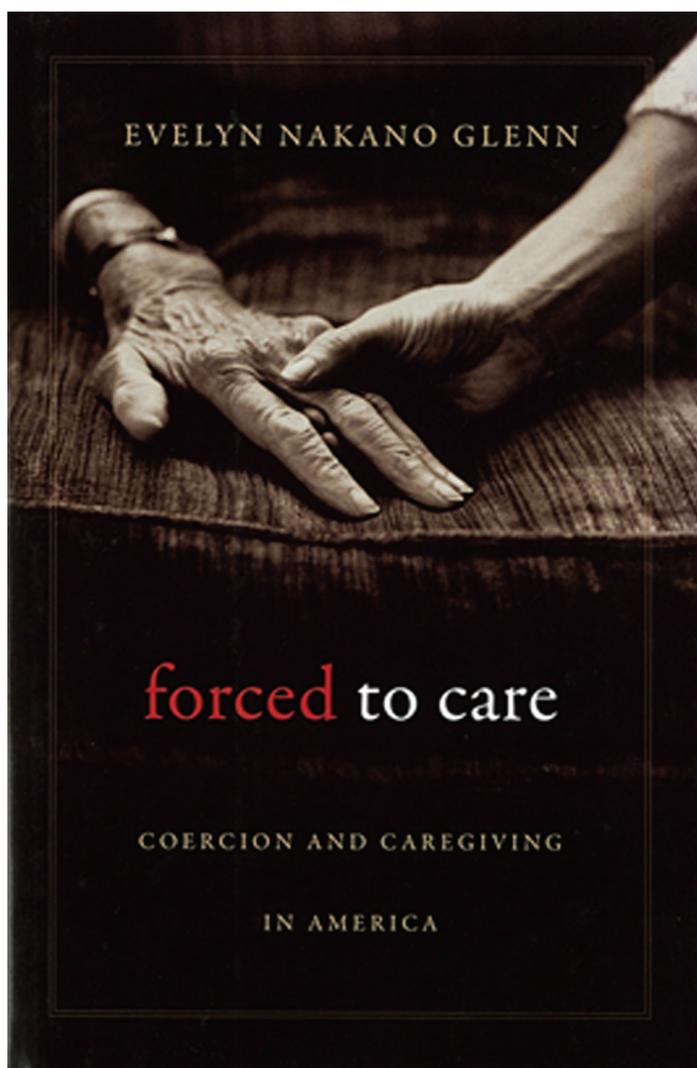
“Taking Care of Those Who Take Care of Us.” Evelyn Coke has, in short, become a potent symbol of the failure of our society to support workers who care for our most vulnerable people in old age. “I loved my work, but the money was not good at all,” she was quoted as saying in the *New York Times* in March 2007, a month before the Supreme Court heard oral arguments (Greenhouse 2007). In the same story, the president of Long Island Care is reported to have insisted that providing overtime for homecare aides would cost too much and put her company at risk, adding it would be “horrendous for the entire industry.” (What is missing from this story? I would have liked to have learned about the experience of those who had been helped by Evelyn Coke.)

Coke’s story has also been taken up by scholars. In *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (2010), Evelyn Nakano Glenn returns to the story of Evelyn Coke several times.¹⁰ Glenn’s purpose is to call attention to the crisis of care we are facing in the United States and to trace over the course of American history the systematic underlying and interlocking forms of coercion that subtend what she refers to as “the social organization of caring,” the features of which include reliance on the private sphere of the family, the feminization and racialization of care, the low status of care work and care workers themselves, and, since the 1970s and the turn to neo-liberal economic and political policies, the increasing disavowal of the state of responsibility for such care (5).¹¹

What image do we find on the cover of Glenn’s book? It is in fact Lars Klove’s photograph, rendered in tones of brown that subtly racialize the black-and-white image; the word “forced” is in red, draining the simple sentimentality from the scene. In the context of the book cover, we are asked to read the photograph “Mature and Young Hands” as ambiguous and ambivalent, the touching hands symbolic of the intertwined relationship between the person cared for and the caregiver, a complicated relationship that can be affective in a positive sense, but is also complexly mediated by cultural beliefs, public policy, and social institutions (including most prominently, the family and the market). *Forced to care*: this was

¹⁰ For other scholars who refer to Evelyn Coke, see Stacey 2011; Boris 2011.

¹¹ See Hoff, Feldman, & Vidovicova 2010 on migrant home care workers and older people.



Book cover from FORCED TO CARE by Evelyn Nakano Glenn appears courtesy of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 2010 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

the situation of Evelyn Coke, whose experience speaks to that of so many women of color in the United States.

I will not rehearse Glenn's persuasive argument here. But I do want to note that she opens her book by identifying the rapidly growing elderly population in the United States as the key index of our intensifying crisis of care. Similarly, Kittay, in introducing the concept of dependency work, begins her influential book *Love's Labor* with a reference to care of the elderly, citing a story of a poor 95-year-old black woman, frail and growing blind, who took care of others for most of her life and now has only her own family to count on to care for her. The focus of both Glenn and Kittay on caregivers and the elderly is as rare as it is urgent. For decades feminists have been concerned with issues of reproductive rights and child care, equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work, and sexuality and gender identity. *But not with aging.*¹² In the United States the notion of work-life balance, for example, has been associated predominantly with the care of children. But today, as Glenn insists, the "new frontier" of work-life balance is that of care of the old and of disabled relatives (3).¹³ Race is a significant part of the equation. Indeed this public secret has been the case for years, as writer Ted Conover's remarkable piece in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1997 attests and to which I now turn. As he writes, "Nursing is one of the few careers traditionally open to women in Jamaica—a fact that dovetails nicely with Americans' growing needs" (127).

¹² According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, it is estimated that 59–75% of caregivers in the U.S. are women (qtd in Geist 2009: 163).

¹³ The afflictions of aging and of disability often converge, although Glenn does not discuss it. Social scientific research in other countries calls attention to the effect that population aging is having on the growth of care employment in the context of the shrinking public role of the state. See Peng 2010 on careworkers in Korea, and Doyle & Timonen 2010 on migrant caregivers of the elderly in Ireland; in the latter study it was found that caregivers preferred working with the elderly to working with children.

“In the countryside, we always take care of old people ourselves.”

The expository point of Conover’s magazine-long feature story “The Last Best Friends Money Can Buy” is the “dilemma” of care for the elderly in the United States (132). Conover cites statistics about aging and the costs of different kinds of care. But at the core of “Last Best Friends” is the story he tells of the two women of color (both are Jamaican immigrants in their thirties) who cared for a 90-year-old New York woman (she is white) during the last months of her life. Testimony to Conover’s sensitivity and skill as a writer, “Last Best Friends” conveys the complex worlds of these women, charged with difficulty and with meaning.

A superb example of the genre of a magazine feature story, “Last Best Friends” departs sharply from a formulaic news story that opens with a brief anecdote (so-and-so, age such-and-such) and then moves rapidly to the generalization it serves; I call this news genre an “information-story” (Woodward 2009). Designed to alert us to predicaments and problems, an information-story does not open up a space for thinking and feeling; an information-story precludes the possibility of representing subjectivity at the level of the individual. Striving for generalization, an information-story tends to instrumentalize norms without regard for particularity. In contrast, with “Last Best Friends,” which is much longer than a feature story in a daily newspaper, the story of the people involved is the heart of the piece, not metrics of health care. And the story features the *caregivers*.

Conover introduces us first to Lorna Kingston who, wearing a pale yellow suit, is interviewing for a position as a home health worker at Rose Enselman’s New York Central Park West apartment. Lorna is hired and, after taking daily care of Rose grows harrowing, indeed impossible for one person, she is joined by Claudia Piper. The last paragraph of Conover’s piece—it is now several months after Rose’s death and the small funeral attended by both of them—returns us to Lorna and Claudia, who have grown as close to each other as they had become attached to Rose. If Lorna does not use the language of family, she does express her attachment to Rose after her death: “You hurt, you feel it, to know that she’s gone, because we really got close to her” (150). Like Clendinen writing of Louise Edwards, Rose’s nephew acknowledges at the funeral the role that Lorna Kingston and Claudia Piper (and three other people) played in his aunt’s

last days: “I think in the last days these were the most important people. And I think Rose would want me to thank them” (152).

If Lorna Kingston and Claudia Piper as caregivers open and close the story, the superb photographs, taken by Scott Thode, that accompany the piece inside the *Magazine* also tell us that this is first and foremost their story. The first photograph, filling a full page of the magazine and spreading over the fold, is of Lorna and Claudia. Throughout the story, the photographs that focus on the two of them are large and in color, while the three photographs of Rose Enselman are small and in black and white.

One of the underlying contrasts of “Last Best Friends” is that of two systems of value regarding care, one neoliberal (although Conover doesn’t



use the word), one I am tempted to term traditional, relying upon members of a family to care for each other, even though Lorna had to leave behind her two children when she came to the United States. But the contrast seems to rise organically out of the story of these women rather than being an idea—or a debate—that structures the article. In the course of “Last Best Friends” we also learn that Lorna is sending money back to her sister in Jamaica. Her mother, her aunt, and her stepmother have all immigrated to New York where they are care workers. They are proud of what they do and are baffled if not appalled by the way American families do not care for their old ones themselves. Yet there is a contradiction here. We also learn that Lorna can’t imagine returning to Jamaica when she is old herself. Conover visits Lorna’s grandmother in Jamaica and reports these conversations:

A hundred feet down the road from Lorna’s childhood home lives her grandmother, Claribel Brown, age eighty-three. She serves visitors a plate of small, sweet bananas and says that when she’s too weak to care of herself, there are many, many relatives nearby who will step in. “All my life I took care of children,” she says. “Now they carry me.”

I report this to Lorna and ask who will take care of her when she’s an old lady. Would she never consider Jamaica? She shakes her head. “I talk to Junior about it [her son who lives with her in New York]. He already says he won’t put me into a nursing home. He say, ‘Mama, I’m going to get you the best care there is. And I’m going to check on it all the time to make sure you get it.’”

Then she voices a very American sentiment: “And I sure hope he don’t forget.” (pp. 147–148)

Who will care for the caregiver?

As the experience of Lorna Kingston suggests, it does not seem remotely possible that the practices of care these women bring with them from Jamaica will transform care for the elderly in the United States, effecting transnational social change from below. I expect instead that as demand for care grows in our increasingly aging society, so too will the global flow of caregivers to the United States, with one generation replacing another.¹⁴

¹⁴ Important work has been done on the effects of migration on caretaking in the country of origin. See anthropologist Parrenas who, studying Filipina domestic workers, names what I see as a domino effect, the “international transfer of caretaking” (2000: 561).

How can we best draw attention to this public secret? How can we engender concern so that people will come to care for and care about the frail elderly and their caregivers? Ted Conover's piece suggests one important way to tell these stories: that we focus not on the elderly person in isolation, as does the photograph I referenced at the opening of this essay, and perhaps not even on the older frail woman in the foreground, but rather in relation to those who care in both senses of the word, so that we become witnesses to the experience of everyone involved in the scene of care. Consider, for example, the photograph on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* featuring Conover's piece. A beautiful chiaroscuro image of Lorna Kingston and Rose Enselman, its religious overtones convey the strength of compassion in the face of imminent mortality, and the comfort that comes from intimate and enfolding care. It should not go unnoticed that the clasping of hands, both black and white, is central to the image and is unambiguous in its tone of soothing care. That tone is undermined on the cover, however, by the colloquial and infantilizing nature of the article's title—"The Last Nanny"—as well as by the ominous teaser, designed to elicit panic and then quell it, spelling danger of a melodramatic kind: "Living longer often means being left with a stranger. The boom in elder care creates new relationships, fraught with fear, guilt and even love."

Conover's piece itself is not guilty of black-and-white melodrama. I have been stressing his emphasis on the two devoted women who cared for Rose Enselman. What is also exceptional about "Last Best Friends" is the extent to which Conover draws so many other people into the scene of care, giving us their perspectives. All have crucial roles to play, almost all are named. There is Enselman's nephew, her closest relative. Enselman's friend (she is generations younger) who lives in the same apartment building. The housekeeper who comes once a week (she has been coming for years). Rose's geriatrician. Her care manager. The social worker who checks on her every week. The accountant. Together they form an assemblage of many moving parts in a neoliberal global economy, *managing* Rose's care, yes, but caring in many different affective ways, performing different functions. For Rose Enselman, for Lorna Kingston, and for Claudia Piper, the scene of care, although photographed predominantly in terms of two people in an intimate relationship, is founded on a complex foundation of many relationships. The very number of people involved may lead us to suspect

that Rose Enselman was wealthy. But this was not at all the case. Conover tells us that she had a yearly income of some \$19,000.

"I worry about all old people. It's out of love."

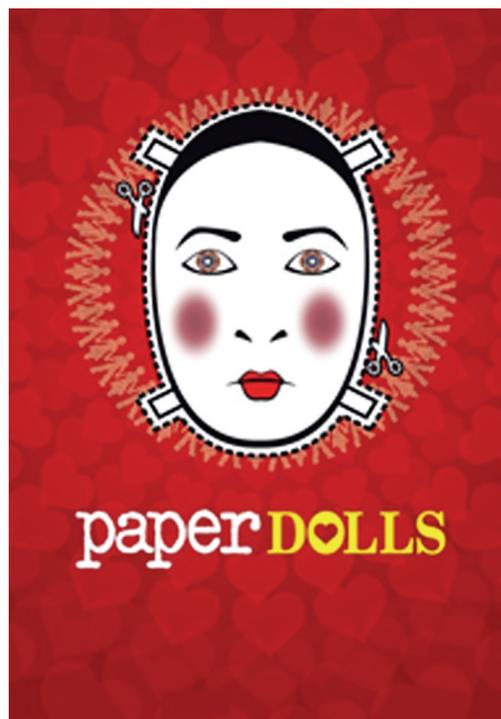
Conover's story is an example of a magazine-long feature story by a single author. Israeli Tomer Heymann's film *Paper Dolls*, first undertaken as a six-part television series, is an example of collaboration in a visual medium with the primary subject that of a diasporic subculture.¹⁵ If Conover's story focuses our affective attention in roughly equal measure on both the caregivers and the elder who needs care, Tomer Heymann's documentary film, released in 2006, shifts the dominant measure of attention to the caregivers of the elderly.¹⁶ If the story of Lorna Kingston and Rose Enselman speaks to the way in which caregiving in the United States by members of the family is rapidly being replaced with a service economy that is part of a globalized market, *Paper Dolls* depicts the phenomenon of global care chains more dramatically—both in terms of geographical reach and in terms of national policy far more unforgiving than that of the United States, one that renders the lives of migrant caregivers politically perilous.

Paper Dolls challenges our expectations regarding caregiving in terms of gender roles, although it ultimately confirms them in an unexpected way. The film does not focus exclusively on caregiving and the frail elderly, thus capturing the attention of people who might otherwise turn away from

¹⁵ See communications scholar Ashuri 2010 on the strategies used by the filmmaker to negotiate with the television industry in order to make the series, which turns on the representation of the foreign and the familiar.

¹⁶ Some viewers may regard the occupation of these migrant workers as incidental or tangential to the main themes of the film. As Heymann himself has said, "For me the movie is . . . about being an outsider, especially in this story there are many levels of being [an] outsider. These people came from the Philippines to Tel-Aviv so [that] first of all they are outsiders here in Israel. Second because the government changed the [law], they became illegal workers here. They can be checked by the immigration police. Even in the Philippine community they are quite outsiders because they are not 'classic gays', they are transsexuals and they work with old Jewish orthodox—which [means they are outsiders] in other outsiders, because even these Jewish people are kind of outsiders here in Israel." Qtd. in Ashuri 116.

the subject of elder care. It attracts our interest in spectacular terms and with stakes that are dangerously high, framing the portrayal of the mundane daily demands required of the caregivers not only by their weekly late-night performances in fabulous drag as the cabaret dance group Paper Dolls, but also in terms of escalating political animus directed at migrants. In Busby Berkeley musical-film fashion, the opening credits feature choreographed cartoon-like images of lipsticks and combs, high-heeled shoes and microphones, hairdryers and scissors, with the high-spirited dimension of the film captured in the publicity still below. Ominously, the opening credits also feature fighter planes and handcuffs. The work of caregiving is only part of the complex story, told with the informal close-up aesthetic of home movies and first person plural documentaries. As spectators of the film, we witness a full spectrum of emotion on the part of these caregivers ranging



from resignation and grief to high spirits and joy. Central are the emotions of love and longing nourished by the Christian religion and strong family traditions, as well as the political feelings of anger and depression provoked by the repressive measures of the state.

Paper Dolls follows a small group of Filipino transsexuals, men identifying as women ranging in age from 27 to 40 who have left the Philippines to escape severe constraints surrounding sexual identity and practices, coming to Israel to work as caregivers of elderly Jews in an ultra-orthodox suburb of Tel Aviv. Consider the engaging 36-year-old Sally (named Salvador at birth), who has been in Israel for seven years. Open and expressive, she has been caring for three years for Haim Amir, the 80-something-year-old man she calls Papa. Speaking of her sexual identity, she tells the filmmaker she feels “free” in Israel. Speaking of her life in general, she says she is “happy.” What is hardest is missing her mother, especially not being able to take care of her, which is also central to her identity. “I worry about all old people,” she says, “It’s out of love . . . If I were in the Philippines I would do this for my mother.”¹⁷ Sally identifies as Haim’s “only daughter,” which is all the more striking because in fact he *has* a daughter, as well as a son. Having returned to the Philippines to visit her mother (Sally hasn’t seen her for six years), Sally longs to come back to Israel, drawn by Haim and by her community of the Paper Dolls—and she does. Notwithstanding their extreme differences, over time, and in the space of daily care both intimate and mundane, she and Haim form affectionate bonds of kinship modeled on the nuclear family.

In what for me is one of the most remarkable moments in the documentary—it comes toward the end—Haim is asked by the filmmaker for his response to Sally’s identity as simultaneously being both a man and a woman. Portrayed as a sweet man intent on teaching Sally to read Hebrew aloud properly, he answers, “I got used to it. That’s life.” While this may sound flat when read in this essay, in the documentary his answer combines a matter-of-factness with a knowledge of acceptance won over a long period of time, an attitude we might be tempted—appropriately so—to call wise. How does he express his acceptance, which is a sign of

¹⁷ This is what Leeson & Hoff 2006 call, in analogy to the “brain drain,” a “care drain.”



affection? There are many ways, but one of them in particular makes me smile: he offers her a matching skirt and blouse as a gift. Within the world of the documentary, we could say that a moral relationship between Sally and Haim has been created by engendering understanding and creating ties of reciprocity, including emotional reciprocity.

Sally and Haim are both extremely vulnerable when considered in isolation as individuals; together they form a resilient couple attached by strong emotional bonds—by concern, care, and connection, by a *feeling of security*. They are together to catch each other if and when they fall. As the film follows Sally to Haim’s funeral, we see how in the ritual of grieving for him she claims kinship publically, expressing her indebtedness and the meaning their relationship had to her. Should we discount their attachment to each other as merely a superficially sentimental portrayal on the part of the filmmaker of a single relationship? Should we be skeptical of Sally’s articulation of what is presented as traditional Filipino values? Is the rhetoric of love empty?

The documentary suggests otherwise—and not only for Sally. Cheska (born Francisco), 38, depicted predominantly as depressed in the film (she has lost her job), says, “We have love, we are very devoted . . . We respect old people.” Consider also the 27-year-old Jan (born Troan Jacob). Less openly expressive than Sally, tentative, somber, perhaps pensive, Jan is

fired from her job after six years (a younger Filipino is hired in her place). As she tells the filmmaker, she was as attached to the family she cared for as if they were her mother and father.¹⁸ At the end of the film we see Jan, easy and friendly and smiling, taking care of an old woman at a Jewish Care Center in London. We see Giorgio (born Eduardo) there as well, reassuring an old woman in a soothing voice.¹⁹ We are meant to understand that the Paper Dolls do not regard this dimension of their work as exploitative but rather as meaningful. While we may be skeptical of the discourse of family as concealing the oppressive nature of paid carework, we need also to attend seriously to what caregivers say in such situations and not dismiss their descriptions out of hand. For Louise Edwards, the faithful caregiver of Dudley Clendinen's mother, "family" described the relationship between his mother and herself perfectly.²⁰

Are these men who are women forced to care? This is a difficult question, and the answer must be yes as well as no. It is clear that few jobs are available to them in a global economy. It is also clear that for any particular culture we would want to undertake a historically specific analysis of

¹⁸ See Manalansan 2010 on "the emotional undercurrents of Filipino flexible labor" (215). While I find fascinating his point that the figure of Jan provides an instance of disaffection, "a counter-example of negative feelings that showcases the ambiguity of affective regimes of care and labor" (221) and of "managed alienation and a tempered hostility to the regimes of power and nurturance" (222), I do not think the film taken as a whole supports this reading.

¹⁹ At the risk of being misunderstood as essentializing the capacity for caregiving on the part of Filipinos, I refer to ethnographer Degiuli 2007 who has studied migrant domestic careworkers of the elderly in Italy. She quotes a 40-year-old Filipina woman who reported she did this difficult work for three reasons: "because I hate the cold and I don't want to be running all over town from one job to another, because I was a nurse obstetrician in the Philippines and I know what it means to take care of people. For us in the Philippines the elders are like precious artifacts in a museum. We need to take good care of them. I was used to taking care of my grandmother and I grew up valuing elders. And, finally, because I like it, I call it a vocation. I can do this job even with my eyes closed" (204).

²⁰ In her now classic work on emotional labor in a service economy, the sociologist Arlie Hochschild argues that performing such work results in people being alienated from themselves; these stories tell a different story. See Stacey 2009 on the reward of caring (85–136).

the role of caregiving and domestic work, as does Glenn in *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*.²¹ These five Paper Dolls—Giorgio, Jan, Sally, Chiqui, and Cheska—are part and parcel of a distinct subculture and take obvious pride in their work. I would speculate that the very fact caregiving is associated with women is appealing to them. They also plainly declare that honoring old people through giving care is a basic value of Filipino culture; we should have no reason to second-guess them. This is a value I wish we all shared around the globe. Instead, global labor markets move love as surplus value, as a commodity, and as an export from one country to another—in the process commercializing intimacy. As we have seen in *Paper Dolls*, in the best of cases what is created is a feeling of kinship as new forms of family take shape, even as the ideology of the individual bearing the burden of risk intensifies around the globe. Indeed it is all the more important for that because, it must be stressed, *both the caregivers and the elders are vulnerable*. As Nancy Folbre (2001) has memorably said, “the invisible hand of markets depends upon the invisible heart of care” (vii). *Paper Dolls* renders visible this public secret.

Why has the scene shifted to London? If in the United States there is no requirement at a national level that home care workers be paid either minimum wage or overtime, in Israel “the situation” for these caregivers is far, far worse. At the beginning of the film, simulated headlines of a newspaper sketch the historical context for us:

In 2001, With the Rise of the Second Intifada,
Israel Closed Its Doors to Palestinian Workers.
To Replace Them,
the Israeli Government Opened the Doors to More than 300,000 Workers.

²¹ See Ray & Qayum 2009 whose study (Kolkata is their focus) of what they call a “culture of servitude” concludes that the “*site* in which domestic labor is performed and the labor relation itself entail a culture of servitude, in both the North and South, in which domination/subordination, dependency, and inequality are articulated and *rearticulated*” (187). My point is that their model does not account for a relationship such as that between Sally and Haim, one not based on such clear-cut divisions of domination/subordination, dependency, and inequality.

After 2001, the situation of migrant workers became particularly precarious, because if they were fired, their visas were instantly revoked, rendering them illegal in the country. In the course of the film the mood grows dark. Bombs and sirens puncture the night and reports of foreign workers being deported are broadcast on the news. In the course of time the unemployed Cheska is caught by the police, jailed, and sent back to the Philippines. At the end of the film, Jan, Giorgio, and Chiqui all leave Israel for England where there is at least a possible path to citizenship for them (Chiqui becomes a head nurse, and Jan, after an entire year, finds work as a caregiver to an elderly Jewish man). Sally, after the death of Haim, returns to the Philippines.

The film thus documents the restless global flows of caregivers, or global care chains. But the metaphor of the chain, which implies strength and fixity, is inapt. If these are commodity chains, from the point of view of the workers there is nothing strong about them. They break easily. These care workers are right to blame the agencies that consider them disposable. But more generally it is the state of Israel that is responsible, relying as it does upon migrant workers to care for its citizens even as its citizens are contemptuous of these Filipinos. As transsexuals in particular and as Filipinos in general, they are despised by many and considered curiosities by others. The filmmaker quotes an Israeli taxi driver (he has just dropped two of them off at a nightspot) who rails, "Two disgusting creatures, I don't know what to call them. They disgust me as men and as fake sleazy women . . . That place" (he is referring to the Philippines) "is the devil's cradle, the origin of all evil. Here they pretend to 'take care of old people'." The climate is poisonous—racist and violent. Jan, Giorgio, and Chiqui must start over in another city in another country. But if the three of them begin over as caregivers, they also resume performing as Paper Dolls, albeit in reduced number. As the film moves toward the closing credits, we see all three on a London stage. They are exotic showgirls—they are the Paper Dolls from Israel after all!—dancing with elan, their long earrings dangling, their paper dresses swaying. We are reminded that if this is a documentary, one that was in the making for five years and bears the signature of reality, it is one that has been artfully shaped.



*Who will take care of these caregivers? We do not know. The film cannot follow them into the far future. But the prognosis cannot be good, both at this moment in their lives and in a distant old age to come. If urbanization, globalization, and population aging are the three decisive trends of our time, there would seem to be a perfect storm in the making. Jobs—new *good* jobs—need to be created worldwide if we are not to experience waves of conflict and violence and long periods of economic recession, if not depression in the future. Given that many of our nation-states are divesting themselves of responsibility for vulnerable populations, brutally slashing social programs, how do we and how will we care for the frail elderly? Care for the caregivers? As age studies theorist Rudiger Kunow (2010) insists, “age” is “a critical horizon against which processes of ‘globalization’ have to be analyzed and questioned” (295).*

III

The intersection of globalization and population aging of nation-states entails flows of migrant workers to care for the elderly, flows I have no

doubt will increase as populations continue to age, with workers at serious risk as *Paper Dolls* illustrates. At a conference entitled "Does Europe Care," held in Amsterdam in April 2011, the phenomenon of migrant workers, who are undertaking elder home care across Europe, was a special focus. As the conference Web site acknowledges, "The self-evident assumption that there will (always) be a government system that will take responsibility for the care of one's next-of-kin is crumbling." (Such a system has never been in place in the United States.) The photograph with which I opened this essay—an old woman alone on an unwelcoming bench—speaks to this state of affairs. Just as there is no such thing as a baby, as Winnicott famously said, there should be no such thing as a solitary old person. Belonging is a requirement of our blood and bones. The problematic "solution" in the making is migrant careworkers—in Europe, in the United States, in Israel, and in other places around the globe. As anthropologist Francesca Degiuli (2007) has reported in an ethnographic study on elder caregivers in an Italian town, "In recent years, it has become more and more common to encounter in parks, crowded street markets and grocery stores, odd looking couples who were, until a few years ago, unfamiliar to Italian eyes. They most often comprise migrant women, often of color, and frail Italian elders, sometimes self-sufficient, sometimes confined to wheelchairs" (193).

Supplanting traditional forms of care, these market-regulated forms of "service" are woefully inadequate in many places in building mutual respect and solidarity (Baars 2006: 33). Cases may prove the exception to this generalization, as we have seen in *Paper Dolls*, "Last Best Friends," and Clendinen's *A Place Called Canterbury*. In these three instances, strong ties were forged notwithstanding the callousness of the state and the low pay of the caregivers. But as we know, and the experience of the late Evelyn Coke exemplifies, the situation of caregivers of the frail elderly is both precarious and grossly unjust. One of the key points of "Does Europe Care" is that "informal carers" (understood, as opposed to the United States, to mean workers who provide care in a private home) should be recognized as entitled to better training, to protection by government regulation, and to support for greater inclusion in the society in which they work. We need this as well in the United States. Yes, we should advocate for better working conditions. But in a perverse contradiction that is

characteristic of globalization, better working conditions will in turn render the system of global care chains—a system that through the domino effect perpetuates the precariousness of care at local levels in the nations which export caregivers—*stronger*.

At stake is the fundamental human need to belong to meaningful social spheres—to experience *the feeling of security that is, hopefully, the feeling of family*—and, in contemporary democratic societies, to exercise the rights of citizenship. I agree with Glenn that care should be a key feature of the rights and entitlements of citizens and that this would necessarily entail recognizing the important work done by caregivers as an essential contribution to the public good; this she calls social citizenship (190–91).

How can we heighten concern and move people, governments, and other institutions to care? As I have been suggesting, one way to press for changes in social policy is by *telling stories of caregivers and elders together*. Morally and theoretically, this is the right thing to do. It might also be more palatable and persuasive to more people. Telling stories: this is a practice that exemplifies the narrative turn in gerontological studies, one that pushes beyond the framework of gerontology itself to embrace the question of caregiving across generations and in the context of globalization. In what form might these stories take hold and make a difference?

The pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, in an essay published almost 20 years ago, referred to the decisive influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the abolitionist effort in the United States in the 19th century.²² I am skeptical that a mass-market novel would have such an effect today. I remember vividly a leader of the embryonic Palestine Liberation Organization in New York telling me in the early 1960s how incalculable was the damage done to their cause by Otto Preminger's 1960 influential film *Exodus*. I doubt a fiction film could have the same

²² Rorty has argued that we have made significant progress since the Enlightenment in terms of the sentiments, having increased our capacities "to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences" (15).

force today. Today I suspect that stories with a documentary and auto/biographical impulse that are drawn from everyday life, as are the four I have considered, will serve us better; it is as though these modes, rather than fiction, draw us closer to what is real, bringing what is generally understood as private into the public domain. Moreover, stories that embrace a broad spectrum of feeling, stretching beyond sympathy, have more power to engage us. The story of Evelyn Coke inspires both admiration and sympathy. The stories told by Ted Conover and Tomer Heymann lift caregivers and elders out the one-dimensional frame of victimhood. Isolated and separate, caregivers and elders are vulnerable. Together, caregivers and elders are strong.

We need to create a capacious archive of feelings, a storehouse of stories that will have a cascading effect on individuals, families, communities, and policymakers.²³ I have grown attached to these stories—to the people in these stories. But an archive implies something out of the public eye. How can we as scholars insert ourselves into the circuitry of debate and help influence the values that guide policy? How can we make our research and scholarship live in larger publics? The American anthropologist Luisa Margolies (2010), after writing a book about taking care of her mother, found that in order to circulate her story she needed to seek out her local radio stations to carry her message to other publics, translating her experience so that others could hear her. As scholars and researchers in age studies, we need to move beyond the closed professional circles of academic knowledge.²⁴ We need to make clear the intersection between the fresh work being done in our fields and the public interest and the public good. We have doctors without borders. We need scholars without borders in age studies, scholars who understand that it is important not just to think globally and act locally but also to think locally and act globally—and who will call attention to the public secret of the caregivers of frail elders.

²³ See Cvetovitch's *An Archive of Feelings* for an important discussion of the subgenre of lesbian AIDS memoirs which focus on caregiving and "resist any firm distinction between caretaking and activism" (2003: 212).

²⁴ See Basting 2009; Gullette 2011.

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Reimagining care: images of aging and creativity in *House Calls* and *A Year at Sherbrooke*

By SALLY CHIVERS*

Abstract

This article looks at the relationship between the esthetic and documentary commentaries offered by two National Film Board of Canada (NFB) productions, chosen because they use the documentary form to interpret aging and care in Canada for Canadians, offering a Canadian example of an issue that is of international importance. The first film, *House Calls* (Ian McLeod 2004), follows the work of Mark Nowaczynski, a physician who photographs his elderly patients to illustrate their dignity amidst what he perceives to be their fragility and vulnerability. The second, *A Year at Sherbrooke* (Thomas Hale 2009), follows artists Thelma Pepper and Jeff Nachtigall who work with residents of a Saskatoon long-term care facility – Pepper continues her longer term practice of photographing the residents and Nachtigall takes on a new role of artist-in-residence in which he mentors them in their own creative development. Analyzing the role of photography in each film, the article shows that, together, the films demonstrate that images of aging beyond mere decline may play a role in reimagining how care for older adults takes place.

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Keywords: documentary film, photography, aging, care, creativity, Canada, Canadian healthcare.

As per the National Film Act of 1950, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) has the mandate “to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations”, which it has long attempted to fulfill by means of social documentary following founder John Grierson’s plea to “[make] poetry where no poet has gone before” (1985: s. 9 a; 1979: 41). Statistics Canada predicts that the number of seniors (aged 65 and above) in Canada is likely to double between 2005 and 2056 (Turcotte & Schellenberg 2006: 12). Not surprisingly, then, the aging of the population is increasingly of social, political, and cultural interest to Canadians. Older adults have long been important to NFB productions, not only as the interviewed witnesses of historical events featured in the social documentaries but also as a central topic in films, particular a number of films that focus on institutional and home care for seniors.¹ Thus, it is in keeping with their tradition that two recent NFB documentary films about care deeply value older adults and/or residents of long-term care facilities and convey arguments about the current state of the Canadian care system. One portrays a doctor determined to make his services available to patients via house calls to extend their ability to live at home comfortably as long as possible. The other portrays an innovative long-term care residence that functions according to Eden Alternative principles to transform an institutional setting into a viable and desirable human habitat.² Together, the films

¹ Examples include: *Le Beau Derangement*, 1967; *Au bout de mon age*, 1975; *Priory: The Only Home I’ve Got*, 1978; *The Last Days of Living*, 1980; *The Business of Aging*, 1981; *The Forbes Home*, 1982; *The Last Right*, 1984; *Don’t Take My Sunshine Away*, 1991; *When the Day Comes*, 1991; *Nurses Care: The Old Folks Down Home*, 1992; *You Won’t Need Running Shoes Darling*, 1996; *Caregivers: Episodes one–four*, 1997, and *Labour of Love*, 1998.

² The Eden Alternative is a registered approach to care that considers long-term care residences to be habitats in which forming community is the central goal. According to its principles, deinstitutionalization is possible and desirable even within what are commonly considered to be institutional settings. More information is available at edenalt.org

indicate that the NFB continues to view care, and particularly care for seniors, as a valuable site both esthetically and in terms of social documentary. While Canadians take heightened interest in threats to their own socially funded health care system due to increasing economic pressures toward privatization, this article offers a Canadian example of an issue that is of international importance: how to care for older adults as the global population ages.

Intriguingly, while showcasing different models of care, both films also tell the stories of portrait photographers who have the explicit goal of capturing the experience of the patients/residents for a wider audience. Thus, these “creative treatments of actuality” also highlight spaces for creative production within care systems (Grierson 1932: 8). *House Calls* (Ian McLeod 2004) follows the work of Mark Nowaczynski, a physician who follows the tradition of social documentarian Lewis Hine who, in the early 20th century, used photographs of child workers to challenge existing labor law. Nowaczynski photographs his elderly patients to support his arguments about funding for home care, aiming to illustrate dignity amid what he also perceives as fragility and vulnerability. *A Year at Sherbrooke* (Thomas Hale 2009) follows artists Thelma Pepper and Jeff Nachtigall who work with residents of a Saskatoon long-term care facility – Pepper photographs the residents and Nachtigall helps some of the residents to become visual artists themselves. In this article, I draw on the critical gerontological perspective that the stories told about aging play a significant role in transforming ways of approaching late life.³ I look at the relationship between the esthetic and the documentary commentaries offered by the two films in terms of that relationship’s importance for the current Canadian care landscape.

Julia Twigg (2004) points out, “narratives of decline have replaced all other forms of meaning and interpretation of the body in later years,

³ In particular, I refer here to the ways in which critical gerontologists, such as Hannah Zeilig (2011), Stephen Katz (1996), and Ruth Ray (2008), explain the “need to radically rethink the ways in which age and ageing have been culturally configured” (Zeilig 2011: 16), “rescue from obscurity the productive and transformative potential of the various cultural institutions that are populated by the elderly” (Katz 1996: 4), and “[cast] a critical eye on society and the field of gerontology itself” (Ray 2008: 97).

so that other more humanistic or plural readings become impossible" (61). This article proposes that these documentary films merit close analysis because they offer contradictory readings of the aging body that are not reductive and that, to differing degrees, embrace narratives of decline. Hannah Zeilig (2011) argues, "considering narratives of age (whether as teaching tools, to critique social policy and cultural norms or to explore biographical stories) represents one of the most interesting ways of provoking critical thought about ageing" (19). Similarly, Simon Biggs (2001) points out that "a narrative approach makes it much easier to sidestep social determinacy and take a stance toward positions that might otherwise present themselves as the only possible reality" (314). However, he is also clear about the limits set by a narrative approach: "the question becomes how far a narrative allows a stand to be taken and how convincing is the narrative in inviting a new terrain for struggle" (Biggs 2001: 314). In fusing commentary on photography with commentary on care practices, these films provoke critical questions about both, showing late life to be a misunderstood and underrepresented stage.

In putting forward views on aging and care within contemporary Canada, the films also reveal their own limits. *House Calls* determinedly shows an effective campaign to improve the medical care that isolated seniors received at home, showcasing the situation of individuals who otherwise would be at best invisible. However, *House Calls* does so at the expense of viewing the nursing home as a failure of the system, a desperate measure, or a last port of call. *A Year at Sherbrooke* embraces the possibilities within a habitat model of long-term residential care and goes further than offering images of its residents by offering them the opportunity to become visual artists themselves. However, the main interview subjects in *A Year at Sherbrooke* tend to be younger residents of the facility, so that the voices of older adults are not as prominent as they are in *House Calls*. Taken together, these two NFB productions offer an exciting view of how growing older within an institutional setting might be reconceived, for example, if Nowaczynski's passion for policy change and focus on isolated older adults were to meet Nachtigall's passion for seeing long-term care receivers as creative agents.

Because both films were produced within a national institutional context that has departed from, but is still influenced by, Griersonian documentary

traditions, they bear clear traces of “the ‘classic’ documentary style” which “depends on the photographic basis of the film image as evidence of the actual existence of what it shows” (Leach & Sloniowski 2003: 5). In his influential essay “What is an image?” W. J. T. Mitchell (1984) explains that “images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency concealing an opaque distorting and arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification” (504). This description applies especially to the myth of photographic truth that infuses both the documentary form and the portrait photographs discussed in this article. Both *House Calls* and *A Year at Sherbrooke* showcase the constructed nature of the photographic image by situating photographers as central characters (and social actors). Nonetheless, even in their commentary on still photography, they depend on the notion that the portrait photographer is capturing a form of reality and they, for the most part, offer viewers a means by which to observe that process. Also, while these films do to some extent highlight the artistry of photography, or at least show the processes that produce photographs, they do not highlight the artistry of the documentary camera that is behind the film, even though a similar set of choices about film stock, lighting, positioning, and choreography have gone into both. This similarity invites this article’s investigation of what Mitchell calls “ideological mystification”⁴ offered by each film’s images that appear natural but are highly staged.

House Calls

In *House Calls*, Nowaczynski describes the photographic portraits he takes of his patients as central to his tireless advocacy for an increase in Ontario’s allowed billing ratio of home visits to office care. At the time of filming,

⁴ In referring to “ideological mystification”, I follow W.J.T. Mitchell (1984) (quoted earlier in the paragraph) who is talking about the ways in which images are read as not “transparent windows” but rather somewhat “deceptive” in appearing to be natural while in fact hiding the ways in which they are representations. This article offers context, through the documentary films, that gets at the ways in which the photographs of seniors within each film are careful creative constructions and not mere snapshots in time.

physicians could bill OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance Program) approximately twice as much for a house call compared to an office visit, but the time required for a house call was far more than double. Thus, doctors faced disincentives to adopt a mode of health care delivery that Nowaczynski finds necessary for some patients. To make this argument, Nowaczynski photographs what he describes as his patients' "plight", demonstrating that they are suffering at home due to a lack of adequate access to medical care and that without house calls they may not ever receive the medical attention they need. Since filming, Nowaczynski's photographs have been featured in exhibitions in such venues as the Royal Ontario Museum and Edmonton's Shaw Conference Centre. In 2012, *Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care* advocates for an expansion of doctors' house calls as part of a Seniors Care Strategy that supports home care initiatives. The lead physician for developing that strategy, Dr. Samir Sinha, works closely with Nowaczynski, and it appears that Nowaczynski's photographic advocacy was at least one key factor in changing both policy and funding. However, the initiative is part of the Liberal Party of Ontario's election promise to allocate more funding to support house calls by physicians and does not reflect a change to how much they can bill for that form of work, nor yet has it been transformed into legislated policy. Joining this incentive, the adoption of interdisciplinary family health teams could greatly increase the house calls practice. Nowaczynski formed such a fully funded care team (including a social worker, an occupational therapist, and a nurse practitioner) in 2009. However, he is still in the position of having to argue for the program's cost effectiveness and to convince other physicians to form teams, so that his advocacy continues in new directions.

House Calls presents three interwoven vignettes of isolated seniors whom Nowaczynski perceives to be dangerously frail. In this article, I draw attention to how director Ian McLeod frames Nowaczynski's portraiture and medical care within the broader context of the patients' homes, more overtly making a connection between the two practices of photography and medicine. Each opening segment begins with footage of a film negative and ends with Nowaczynski choreographing and taking a shot of the interview subject, followed by his return to the darkroom to transform the negatives into prints. Throughout, invisible interviewers prompt

Nowaczynski's three patients to describe their living situations, their physical states, their pasts, their thoughts on death, and their thoughts on being old. Meanwhile, the interviewees are being treated medically and then photographed by Nowaczynski as well as filmed by the documentary camera operators, Michael Grippo and Mark Ellam.

The motion picture camera focuses on the surroundings, with close-ups of cobwebs, low angle shots of steep flights of stairs, and long takes of labored daily tasks. McLeod situates Nowaczynski's photographic and medical objects, his patients, as engaged in a range of modestly creative acts on a day-to-day basis – such as going through a surprisingly intricate adapted method of making coffee, carrying clothes down a daunting staircase, and figuring out how to pick up a beloved if obese cat. These acts all show the older adults adapting their surroundings and their activities to accommodate physical disabilities, though those adaptations are not the focus of the narration. Almost at odds with Nowaczynski's suggestion (that these seniors should remain living at home), these graphic details hint that another living situation might offer some clear advantages. That is, the inadequacy and difficulties of the various home spaces portrayed, framed differently, could be taken as an argument in favor of institutional care, if that care could provide opportunities to make one's own coffee and have pets. However, both Nowaczynski and McLeod honor their photographic subjects' expressed desire to remain living at home while presenting portraits of the frailty that must be addressed to make this a continuing viable option.

Dr. Mark (Nowaczynski)

McLeod's film concisely but clearly illustrates Nowaczynski's medical approach, explaining that Nowaczynski chooses to make home visits to his most frail patients because, as the doctor puts it, "If I didn't come see them, they wouldn't come and see me and so they wouldn't get any medical care". The audience witnesses him insistently coaching patient Connie to tell social services that she needs help bathing (though he realizes that she doesn't) because saying so will make her eligible for some funded home care supports. Similarly, he tries to alter patient Joe's prescription regimen while Joe talks about various other medical issues and blames the pills for

his dangerous dizziness. After the filmmakers devote an entire scene to demonstrating how arduous and physically painful it would have been for patient Ria to have continued visiting Nowaczynski at his office, the doctor is nonetheless forced to refer her to a specialist who does not make house calls, revealing the limits of his practice.

Such nuances are absent from the exhibits of still photographs mounted by Nowaczynski since those lack much of the context provided by the documentary film approach and are limited to Nowaczynski's purposeful view of his patients' frailty. The textual frames of the ROM exhibit, for example, include a media release that offers biographical descriptions of four "at risk" patients as well as careful interpretive lenses for reading the photographs. In one section, viewers are told, "In a portrait taken on a Sunday morning six weeks after [her husband's] death, you see Barbara sick with pneumonia and congestive heart failure. She was sitting in Ross's chair" (ROM 2010). The low light image shows Barbara seated in one of two matching armchairs in what appears to be a cluttered living room. There is no visual indication of her illness, besides a box of tissues, and no visual sign that it is her deceased husband's chair she has chosen to sit in over her own. The textual frame pushes a particular interpretation by offering biographical context. Nowaczynski's photographs, and ancillary materials, tend to convey an element of pathos without necessarily showing the active engagement the seniors have in contesting that view and their positioning, as conveyed by McLeod. Both the system and resistance to it are more present in the film than in the photographs, including their exhibition, even though shortcomings of the funding system are the primary motivation for the photographic exhibitions.

Throughout the film, Nowaczynski draws on the medical usage of the term "frailty" as shorthand for patients who require care and whose care will cost money. His usage comes from a biomedical perspective, though there are ongoing disputes about the usage of the term "frailty" even within the lexicon of geriatric medicine (Gilleard & Higgs 2011).⁵

⁵ Gilleard & Higgs (2011) explain that the term "frailty", although it has become prominent within geriatric medicine, faces "definitional difficulties" because it resists measurement. However, they also note that there is "broad consensus" about a group of patients who can be labeled "frail" (476).

Nowaczynski describes Connie as a “frail old lady with heart disease and partly blind” and explains Ria’s agreement to have him visit her at home as “acceptance that she was frailer and less mobile than she thought she was”. Dr. Mark, as Nowaczynski is affectionately called, speculates that Joe’s reluctance to use a scooter has

to do with exposing his frailty to the people around him. Maybe he thinks he projects a certain strength. But by going down the street in a scooter he’s projecting that he’s a frail old man, and he doesn’t want to project that.

Not surprisingly, neither Ria, Connie, nor Joe describe themselves as frail, despite their references to continual excruciating pain. Joe might say, “I should chop my fuckin’ legs off”, but in saying this, he is not expressing vulnerability but rather distaste for his own physical state. Intriguingly, Nowaczynski’s patients are most assertive when the doctor encourages or interprets an admission of frailty on their part.

The first and most obvious instance of a clash between an official story and an interview subject’s alternate story occurs when Nowaczynski instructs Connie on how to handle an interview about her eligibility for home care. Speaking loudly and slowly, Nowaczynski asks her to tell him “the most important thing that she will have to accept in order to get home care”. He refutes her initial answers, “money” and “dishes”, with an insistence that she must accept help with bathing, despite the fact that, as she tells Nowaczynski, she has just bathed herself. Her stance appears to match what Amanda Grenier and Jill Hanley (2007) explain when they state, “Older women with limited resources are . . . caught between the expectation of compliance (e.g. grateful receipt of limited services) and the implications of such classification and compliance” (218). In an attempt to negotiate bearable conditions, Connie learns that wearing her bathing suit during the process of being washed would not be an option. She momentarily proposes a version of what Nowaczynski needs her to say, “I guess you . . . put up with it”. But when Nowaczynski quizzes her one last time, Connie describes his requested answer as “a kick in the pants . . . not quite”. Nowaczynski does not acknowledge her joke but, rather, responds by repeating his instructions. In capturing this exchange, the filmmakers convey both Nowaczynski’s perspective, wherein Connie is a deserving frail old lady who needs to live with her cat and so cannot

be moved into institutional care, as well as Connie's jests concerning acquiescence and resistance. Later, viewers learn that Connie is not able (or perhaps willing) to do as Nowaczynski has advised: she turns away the home care attendants from her door, insisting that she can do it alone, rejecting the implications of her compliance.

Nowaczynski's Lens

House Calls is as succinct about Nowaczynski's photographic practices as it is about his medical approach, focusing on the doctor's professional (medical) goals via photography rather than on technical matters or even esthetic goals. After McLeod presents an opening shot of negatives being processed in a darkroom, Nowaczynski cites the solitary lives of his patients explaining that "you" should "document what you see. This is a whole hidden world. These people live like hermits. Nobody knows they're there". He suggests that his photographs simply record what is "there". But the stark contrasts between McLeod's filmic portraits and Nowaczynski's static black and white images reveal that claim to be too limited. In the opening moments of the documentary, McLeod portrays Nowaczynski evaluating film negatives with a magnifying lens. McLeod offers a close-up of Nowaczynski's eye, which he follows to an extreme close-up of patient Joe's eye, glowing with negative light, which becomes the backdrop for the film title credit. In this way, McLeod emphasizes the way in which Nowaczynski portrays pathos. It is a fairly obvious point that photographs record a constructed static moment in time whereas documentary cinema, though similarly limited, can provide more context (Beattie 2004; Ellis & McLane 2005; Nichols 1991). But this documentary film about Nowaczynski's photographs does not merely reveal their artifice. More significant, the film exposes and plays upon Nowaczynski's deliberate (perhaps admirable) attempt to situate otherwise dignified older adults as inviting pathos to make an argument for increased resources. As Bill Nichols (1991) says (speaking of dying bodies in documentary), "At stake is representing the indignities and hazards flesh is heir to with sufficient magnitude to escape the security of comfortable responses of charity or sympathy to martyrs and victims" (237). However, as Lucy Burke (2007) points out in a discussion of representing those with late-stage

Alzheimer's disease, "one must ask what it would mean not to represent those with the disease, to shy away from the 'representation' of those at the limits of life" (62). While Burke is referring specifically to issues of consent, her point, taken with Nichols's, is also helpful in thinking about Nowaczynski's challenge of balancing the views of the public and of his patients.

The photo shoots interspersed among the interview segments starkly show the clash between the faces Nowaczynski needs to show the public and the individual subject's desired view. For example, Nowaczynski describes Mrs. Reynolds as a "vivacious, obstinate, strong-willed character". He tells viewers, "she's a whole person", accompanied by the footage of her crawling up an intimidating staircase while she explains that she is a "stubborn mule . . . I don't want a fuss made about me, I just don't want it". This phrase elsewhere expresses her need to die in her house, but in this instance she is referring to Nowaczynski's photographs of her. She instructs him, "When you show it on the pictures, I don't want poor old Mrs. Reynolds, this that and the other". But as the film follows her back down the stairs, with clothes draped over her shoulders so that she can grip each bannister, and then on a painful journey to Nowaczynski's office, her fears of being portrayed as a figure of pity, but for her own subtle and obvious interventions, seem justified. When she is shown her portrait, Mrs. Reynolds is unimpressed, declaring, "You see, that's a bitchy face".

The other two interview subjects also express skepticism about being chosen as an esthetic object. Connie asks, "Who in the wide world want to see a bunch of pictures for me, of me . . . junk". Joe demands, "What are you gonna do with these pictures, then? Make it a scrapbook and call it *The Living Dead*?" As Nowaczynski explains to the camera,

When you have no voice, you don't exist . . . I think the photographs give them a voice and bring attention to their hidden plight and stimulate change. The photographs will open doors, open people's eyes and hopefully open people's hearts.

The photographs are not framed for the people they portray but for a wider uninitiated viewership. Nowaczynski publicly declares his goal of documenting a "hidden world" to make changes to policy on health care funding. In doing so, he casts the choice of institutional care as a failure.

Based on various untenable long-term residential care scenarios, he even goes so far as to imply that his patients die as the result of an undesired move to such a place. Thus, his goal in creating a scrapbook of the "Living Dead" is not solely esthetic but primarily aimed at preserving his patients' right and capacity to receive medical care at home.

A Year at Sherbrooke

A Year at Sherbrooke showcases a different model of care that imagines a long-term care facility as having the potential to be a viable and desirable setting. Thomas Hale, the director, makes insightful connections among the Eden Alternative Care Philosophy of the Sherbrooke Community Centre in Saskatoon, the photographic practices of Thelma Pepper, and the transformations experienced by residents who participate in artist-in-residence Jeff Nachtigall's drop-in art studio. The film showcases the collaboration between Nachtigall and Pepper, a photographer who has worked extensively with Sherbrooke residents, and between both of the artists and selected residents. The final scene of the film portrays the opening gala of a show of residents' work at the Mendel Art Gallery. By including the scene of this joyful event, Hale conveys that Sherbrooke residents remain part of a local community beyond their institutional home space. He also demonstrates one positive outcome of residents' engagement with visual art. It is impossible not to share resident Stewart's irrepressible elation as he realizes he can call himself an artist, publicly, for the first time.

Pepper's Lens

In *A Year at Sherbrooke*, Pepper (a visitor whose husband had resided at Sherbrooke) explains that she took up photography seriously at the age of 60, when she "needed a challenge of some kind". Inspired by witnessing her husband on the second floor, which is a locked-down secure unit primarily for dementia patients, she seeks to gain the trust of the people she photographs, so that they know, as she puts it, "I'm not using them for my own sake". Pepper's photographs show relationships, engaging expressions, and a sense of what she refers to as spirit. Describing her love

of portraits, she explains, "I want to photograph them when they're in an animated conversation, rather than just staring at you". While not all of her photographic subjects are seniors, Pepper declares that she has no interest in photographing "a 16-year-old blond, or something, because", she says, "to me they didn't have any character". Moved by her husband's experience, and confident that even during his dementia he always knew when she was there, Pepper states that one of her photographic goals is to prove that "even though these people had Alzheimer's disease, there was something there that was more important than that and there was a spirit there". As with *House Calls*, I draw attention here to how Hale, the film's director, situates Pepper's photographs within a context that values the same principles as her art, and by showing her engagement with residents next to Nachtigall's work with them, he aligns her work with creative production by emerging artist-residents. She appears in the film both as an important artist who conveys a valuable message about long-term care and as an art critic who comments on the role she sees artistic production playing in the wellbeing of the residents as they become visual artists themselves.

Like Nowaczynski's patients, Sherbrooke residents express skepticism or disappointment about themselves as esthetic objects. The film portrays a meeting between Pepper and Matt, a younger resident⁶ who is paralyzed as the result of a diving accident. Certain that she has managed to capture Matt's spirit during a prior animated conversation and photo shoot, she hands over a photograph saying "don't you think that's you?" Clearly struggling with his image, Matt feigns polite agreement but does not fool Pepper. Two subsequent moving interviews convey the distress caused by this interaction. Pepper is dismayed, not having experienced such a reaction before. She tells the interviewer, "I felt like crying myself". However, it is not so much her artistry that Matt dislikes. Rather, he expresses a discontent with his new appearance "because of the injury and stuff". While he does admire himself in a mirror toward the end of the film as he prepares for the art show, he never quite reconciles himself with

⁶ The residents' ages are not given, but based on his appearance and behavior it is fair to assume that Matt is in his twenties.

Pepper's image of him, though eventually he does consent to having the photograph hung on his wall.

The Human Habitat Model

Director Hale ensures that Matt's discomfort with a new self that has seemingly been forced upon him as the result of injury permeates the film and resonates with struggles of other residents. Throughout the film, residents have the opportunity to speak with an off-camera interviewer about the experiences that brought them to long-term care, including their deep resentments of and despair about their situation. Matt ruminates on why he continues to smoke even though his reduced lung capacity makes it certain that doing so will be fatal. He admits, "there are days when I want to die. Where I feel that hopeless. That depressed. Where it's just too unbearable to be in a wheelchair". Another resident, Jack,⁷ paralyzed due to a bicycle accident, confesses "I've never been more unhappy and miserable in my life because of my disabilities . . . I've lost everything, and my options are to grow old in this wheelchair or to go to Switzerland", where assisted suicide is legal. One reluctant participant in the art program expresses resentment of and resistance to Nachtigall, saying, "He reminds me of where I'd be if I was healthy again because it was about the age of 37 where I started to deteriorate".

The film portrays a fairly pleasant long-term care facility and showcases a unique feature: its artist-in-residence program. But it also captures the difficult emotions experienced by residents about their circumstances. Further, the film does not romanticize disability as a site of creative development nor as a state that can be overcome or overshadowed by artistic achievement. One of the most popular art works at the Mendel show portrays what is officially known as an "incontinence pad" attached to a canvas with the lettering DIAPER and an arrow painted in purple. As its creator explains, "God forbid that you call something a diaper and that's what it is. Why hush up the reality of what it is?" While the material

⁷ Again, as the residents' ages are not given, it is not possible to say how old Jack is. However, it might be useful to note that he does have gray hair and appears to be quite a bit older than Matt.

challenges of adjusting to disabled life feature prominently, an argument for home care (against life at Sherbrooke) does not appear as part of the expressed resentments. Importantly, though there are many other older residents at Sherbrooke who are not featured in the film, with one exception, the residents interviewed are much younger than the patients in *House Calls*, so they are quite different from the patients treated by Nowaczynski.

Nonetheless, both the film *A Year at Sherbrooke* and its interviewees are as resistant to the negative characteristics of institutionalization as *House Calls* and Nowaczynski are. Set up by opening shots of a dog running happily down the hallway of the institution, and a disabled man riding his bicycle indoors while grinning with delight, Suellen Beatty, Chief Executive Officer, explains that residents and workers “fight the legacy of efficient care for the masses”, “struggling to move out of that hospital model into something that we would call home”. Chaplain Ray Purdie describes “a learning community, a community that tries to keep growing” and that “the latest growth and change is [Nachtigall’s] art project”. Hale depicts workers’ continual efforts to individualize care, whether by knowing that music will motivate a depressed patient or trying to prevent at-risk residents from being able to smoke. And the staff is not unrealistic about the challenges faced in making Sherbrooke an appealing home for residents. Beatty explains that Sherbrooke’s focus on autonomy and developing residents into members of a community “creates a very real world that is pretty messy”. Purdie acknowledges the feelings of loss experienced by each of the residents and the challenge of inviting them to be “engaged again in the world”. While there is no reason to assume otherwise, the film does not demonstrate whether or not this sense of a hopeful future extends to the older residents at Sherbrooke, such as those whom Pepper is more interested in capturing in her photographs.

Creative Engagement

Nachtigall attributes the eventual success of his voluntary drop-in art program to the work that Pepper had already done at the institution. He points out that Sherbrooke displays her photographs on the walls in place of “the worst reproductions or posters or garage sale art” typical of

long-term residential care facilities. As he puts it, “by the time I came around to do this residency . . . they were already warmed to the prospect of having an artist walking through those hallways”. Nachtigall is motivated in his work at Sherbrooke by his own prior severe head injury after which he “began to see things in shapes and colours and composition where everything became a picture”. He proposes, “My brain was just working completely different from a healthy brain, a normal brain, whatever that is”. From that experience, he reasons that Alzheimer’s residents’ brains are “not broken, but just working in a different way”. Nachtigall wants to “collaborate and work with” residents with dementia because he sees them as possessing “untapped wealth”. While this perspective could become a romanticization of dementia, within Hale’s broader film it is balanced by the previously discussed views, particularly Pepper’s. Still, Nachtigall’s work with such residents is barely portrayed.

While *A Year at Sherbrooke* does not showcase people with dementia as the central subjects or artists, the film makes an argument for the benefits of creativity to improve quality of life in long-term residential care. Jack, perhaps setting aside what he calls “the Swiss option”, explains of his newfound artistic skill: “It’s given me a new lease on life”. Impressed with a painting by Stewart (another resident), Pepper exclaims, “you’re a different person. I mean, you were just kinda dragging along before and maybe getting a game of golf in, but now you’re just blooming”. Matt also seems to change through his engagement with Nachtigall’s art program, which he initially participates in by painting by mouth and then by working with an elaborate mechanism that attaches a paint brush to his wheel-chair as a sort of fifth wheel. He tells the interviewer, “When you create, you’re using another part of your mind. Just to let it all flow. Just to drive in fluid motions and . . . just to watch what I create . . . It’s another outlet for emotion maybe or spirit even. It’s pretty cool”.

Conclusion

Both *House Calls* and *A Year at Sherbrooke* rest upon the well-grounded assumption that living in institutionalized long-term care is a dreary medicalized fate more likely to cause harm than good. But, as Hale’s film suggests, long-term care facilities are open to transformation as are the

related health care systems that Nowaczynski sets out to conquer. Hale's film illuminates how a facility such as Sherbrooke works against residual traces of the nursing home without ignoring its negative force and without denying that its residents give up some independence by living there. He does not simply offer a sunny picture in which interdependence stands in for independence, but he also does not offer much insight about aging or seniors. Instead, he shows one outlet – through artistic production – that long-term care residents can find for their frustrated emotions and energies, and he shows that engagement in such creative activities is far more than merely therapeutic. Importantly, he presents it as central to a transformed sense of self, one that most likely would not have taken place in the absence of the acquired disabilities he depicts.

By offering photographic images of seniors, the two films uncover some of the different roles that capturing images of aging can play. To Nowaczynski, there is a hidden world that must be exposed to enact a specific social change. In pleading his case for increased support for home care, he has to treat the people he has photographed as objects. Pepper's question for Matt, "don't you think that's you?" is transformed by Nowaczynski into a slightly different question for a broader public, expressed strongly in the film: *Would you want this to be you?* Pepper aims to expose what she calls "spirit", an aspect of the older adults she photographs that is too easily overlooked. Her goal is to convey a richer understanding of what late life might entail. While Pepper's photographs offer more perspective on older adults as full subjects than Nowaczynski's do, Hale's film does not pick up on those perspectives to the extent that McLeod does.

I have focused on these two films because, collectively, McLeod and Hale use the documentary form to interpret aging and care in Canada for Canadians. I welcome the ways in which they suggest that the Canadian cultural imaginary might allow visions of aging beyond mere decline. In doing so, they offer insight into the social, cultural, and political values that govern care of older adults in Canada in the 21st century. McLeod showcases home care as the most desirable option whereas Hale demonstrates that a long-term residential care setting could also become something to desire. These two views need to be thought of as in dialog, so that ongoing battles between support for home care over long-term

residential care can shift to a focus on better ways to provide care across a spectrum. Hence, I support McLeod and Hale's combined views of the current care framework as flawed, in need of repair, and having the potential to be transformed, and I appreciate that they both use the medium of social documentary to showcase the role portrait photography might play in that sea change, offering what Grierson (1979) might call "inspiration, which is to say a very laborious, deep-seeing, deep sympathizing creative effort indeed" (41).

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An insider's view of Alzheimer: cinematic portrayals of the struggle for personhood

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Abstract

This article looks at three recent films in which a person with dementia is the principal character. These films have been chosen according to the following criteria: representing different stages of dementia (early, moderate and advanced); films where the demented is the protagonist; and films challenging the biomedical view of dementia. Two of the characters are diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease: the protagonist of *Cortex* (2008) is at a moderate stage, the one in *Pandora's Box* (2008) is diagnosed when already in advanced stage and the third, the protagonist of *Old Cats* (2010), while not officially diagnosed, is in early onset of dementia. While the number of dementia films has significantly increased during the past decade, only a few access the subjective world and acknowledge the personhood of people with dementia. Made outside the mainstream film industry, making elaborate use of cinematic image and metaphor, these films, each in its own particular cinematic idiom, succeed in conveying the psychological, social and spiritual realities of dementia as they are experienced from within the protagonist's psyche. While not denying the often bleak and painful aspects of dementia, these recent

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productions go against the grain, inspiring a complex, richly nuanced picture of dementia that centres around the protagonist's stubbornly courageous struggle to forge a meaningful existence even in the direst of circumstances. These films, we believe, offer a richer and profound understating of the human aspects embedded in the phenomena of dementia.

Keywords: Alzheimer's disease, cinema, dementia, personhood.

Introduction

"People with dementia are largely invisible in most of [the Alzheimer's] literature" – this statement, made by Karen Lyman (1989: 603), is as valid today as it was almost a quarter of a century ago. Alzheimer's discourse, both cultural and academic, has consistently shifted attention away from the individual "patient" to the plight of the caregivers (Herskovits 1995), paying little attention to the experience of living with this condition (Beard 2004). Care practices, partly as a result of pervasive medicalisation of dementia, are premised on a model that denies the person with Alzheimer's an agential role in the constitution, manifestation and maintenance of personhood (Kontos 2005).

Alzheimer's disease (AD) has received considerable attention in the popular media, where a very negative and undifferentiated view of the disease has generally been presented (Beard 2004). The media have, in general, constructed a portrait of AD that emphasises "personal losses and interpersonal ravages . . . replete with clichéd metaphors and representations in which Alzheimer's is characteristically drawn in colourfully dramatic terms that paint vividly disturbing images of a monstrous disease" (Herskovits 1995: 152, see also Behuniak 2011; Van Gorp & Vercruyse 2012).

While mainstream cinema has recently made considerable contribution to the public visibility of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia (Segers 2007; Van Gorp & Vercruyse 2012; Wedding et al. 2009), these films (i.e. *A Song for Martin* [August & Isaksson 2001], *The Savages* [Jenkins 2007] and *Away from Her* [Polley & Munro 2006]) are usually more preoccupied with the selfhood of the figures surrounding the character with dementia, rather than on those suffering from it (Chivers 2011: 62; Filley 2008).

According to Basting (2009), these films have unintentionally reinforced negative stereotypes that induce fear of dementia. Swinnen (2013: 113–114) contends that mainstream dementia films “typically render the story of a disease in progress that reaches its nadir in the time span of the narrative and use metaphors, such as darkness, to add to the story of decline. Their overall atmosphere is nostalgia for an idealized past”.

We intend to rectify this omission by considering three films made outside the mainstream film industry, the first, made in France, the second, in Turkey and the third, in Chile. We thus acknowledge at the outset the different culture perspective from mainstream popular cinema these films afford. Relatively free from commercial pressures, these films explore the narrative and psychological territories left outside the reach of popular cinema. Evidently these films, which are typically low-budget, local productions, receive comparatively little exposure and are not always brought to the attention of the gerontological community. The films have been chosen according to the following criteria: representing different stages of dementia (early, moderate and advanced); films where the demented is the protagonist; and films challenging the biomedical view of dementia. The contribution of these films to re-evaluating widespread beliefs and stereotypes in the discourse of dementia is one purpose of this article. Increasing their visibility and circulation within the professional community is another.

The Secret Agency of a Demented Mind: *Cortex*

Cortex (Boukhrief & Moreau 2008) is the story of an ex-policeman, who opts to protect himself from the pitfalls of dementia by moving into The Residence, a facility designed to provide for elderly patients with neurodegenerative disorders. The opening scene shows an ageing, yet well preserved man in the quiet privacy of his home, packing for some kind of trip, the nature of which remains at this point obscure. The quiet in the room (the soundtrack is minimalistic to the point of muteness) contributes to a sense of inner void, while at the same time alerting the audience to the man's concentration in the act of packing. The choice of objects, normally a standard routine, is anything but here, planting a sense of wonderment, possibly even discomfort as to the nature of the ride as well as the

particular condition of the rider to be: a Rubik's cube, a book of Sherlock Holmes adventures, and a revolver. The last object is lifted off a trash can after a brief search. The choice of objects is intriguing: the first suggests mental agility and abstract thought; the second – the joy in the mystery of problem-solving and curiosity as to human nature; and the third – the practicality of administering justice and self-defence, as well as potential violence, including possible suicide. These aspects of the human condition, as they specifically apply to AD, are cleverly and richly investigated in the film. In the silent, understated opening scene, we are introduced to a character in some transition, whose movements are somewhat hesitant and laboured, who performs routine activities with some difficulty and whose decisions are, to some extent, unusual. It is especially significant that our pre-interpretative perceptions as viewers remain, at this point of the narrative, necessarily unresolved: we may entertain various understandings, yet these are suggestive, the picture hardly allows certainty. The certainty arrives a few moments later: having experienced doubts and hesitations, and very likely some degree of suspense, we follow the protagonist as he meets his son in the following scene. The son has come to escort the father to his destination. In accordance with the previous scene, the meeting and the ensuing ride are patently underplayed from a histrionic point of view. This flat delivery stands in contrast with the piece of information given in the sparse dialogue between father and son: "What is this disease that I have been called", asks the father, "Alzheimer's", retorts the son tersely.

The opening scenes thus create different levels of spectatorship. They establish a tone of emotional coolness, provide space for logical consideration rather than sentimental upheaval, and in their enigmatic subtlety introduce a narrative convention of a suspense story to follow. Moreover, these scenes, in their meticulous use of the language of film, help place AD as a condition-in-progress, a problem to be negotiated, not a verdict to be contained as loss. It supports an approach to this affliction as one of life's unexpected changes that have to be confronted and coped with in a cool fashion. It is presented here as a condition, not in juxtaposition with normal life, but conjoined to it. In other words, Alzheimer's is looked upon here, a-priori, as a *state of mind*, rather than its common perception as a form of *mindlessness*.

It is an attitude that, importantly, is likely to affect viewers, and set the viewing mood in accordance with the protagonist's mission. In contrast to the majority of mainstream AD films, *Cortex* has an AD protagonist who is the dynamic (rather than passive) focus of both identification and dignity. Charles Boyer, the retired police detective, is not long in the residence before ominous events begin to occur – including a high number of deaths among the patients. Eschewing the notion that this may be inevitable given the ages and illnesses of the populace, Charles begins to investigate. Questions linger about whether his suspicions are valid or merely a product of the ex-cop's Alzheimer-driven paranoia. The viewer realises that the protagonist's AD identity is inseparable from his identity as a detective. In fact, the hero does not lose identity with the onset of AD; his identity becomes embedded in the new situation. He continues to live through his former identity even as AD gradually takes control over his consciousness. The ex-detective's decline seems to be floating in and out, leaving the viewer guessing whether he's deliberately fooling the institute's staff or simply heading swiftly towards oblivion. The institution becomes a hostile world in which the protagonist is forced to move with care, suspicion and audacity. The authorities do not mean well, and it is not clear whether staff members are working against him or simply caught up in their own petty hatreds and jealousies. Fellow travellers unexpectedly cross the protagonist's road and then mysteriously disappear. We are offered a glimpse of the world from the AD patient's point of view: pathological paranoia and normal hostile world scenarios (Shmotkin 2005) keep alternating, adding to an already fragile consciousness. At times, despair has the upper hand, for example, when Boyer becomes convinced that he is haunted by his own demented ghosts. It is easier to play up to the expectations of the "healthy" world outside. At the end, though, perseverance wins the day, and the AD-stricken ex-detective is rewarded with recognition of his intellectual achievement. The victory is temporary, no doubt, but a moment of satisfaction and pride makes all the difference between unconditional defeat and combative fulfilment. "What was my code name back in the department", he asks his son at the end; "Cortex", comes the answer. The seat of intelligence, identity and creativity has won its last battle.

There is a moral issue involved here with respect to the notion of verdict. Many of the mainstream AD films, following and reflecting a widely held

public attitude, implicitly ritualise AD as a thinly disguised metaphor for an imminent death-verdict, thus underplaying its chronic nature, while exaggerating its terminality. When Boyer, *Cortex's* protagonist-patient, leaves the privacy of his world and enters the institute, he steps into the public sphere and has to confront its beliefs and prejudices. The institute's socio-cultural universe stands as a symbolic parallel to contemporary society at large, while the narrative convention of a thriller accentuates and magnifies the dynamics of exclusion, even persecution of the demented person by a threatened establishment. When Boyer sets out to investigate the mysterious disappearance of fellow patients, he relies on unfailing professional knowledge and a stubborn sense of agency. He makes optimal use of these capacities to act in subversion of the system. His paranoia, then, rather than being conveniently stigmatised as a medical symptom characteristic of dementia, is a justified, patently sane response to an obtuse, indifferent and evil social system. Nicolas Boukhrief, the film's director, challenges well-entrenched stereotypes concerning the depiction of AD in the film. First, this film focuses exclusively on the AD patient (rather than on his relatives or caretakers, the protagonist's son is important, but only as a background support). Second, the cognitive as well as psychological intricacies involved in AD constitute the focus of inquiry, as they are magnified and treated in detail – treated as *processes*, not bypassed as *symptoms*. The medical realities of AD are fully contextualised in the sense that they are attached to feelings and rationalised in action. *Cortex* uses AD as a narrative device, cleverly blurring reality and imagination as the viewer is gradually led to believe that the whole thing may be taking place only in the confused mind of the patient/protagonist, while being positively disillusioned again at the very end. This double disillusionment lends a special significance to the film – not credence in the sense of medical or psychological credibility, but what we might call metaphorical credibility. The AD victim's desperate efforts to combat his condition, to fight what seems to be a lost battle and arrive at some success, although modest and probably short-lived, is a triumph of some consequence, and a metaphor for strength and stamina in the face of a sealed fate. It is a reminder of a famous line from Alain Resnais' *Providence* (Resnais & Mercer 1977), where Clive Langham, the dying and ailing writer, takes his leave from his family with the words "Nothing is

written", an enigmatic phrase, possibly meaning nothing is predetermined, and there is a freedom of choice even in the most constricting of circumstances.

The Horizontal Turned Vertical: *Pandora's Box*

Circumstances are certainly worse for the Alzheimer's character in the next film we discuss here. Family, rather than biology, is the battleground of the Alzheimer's protagonist in *Pandora's Box* by Turkish director Yesim Ustaoglu and Kaygusuz (2008). This film puts AD within familial contexts (Dönmez-Colin 2010). In a similar manner to *Cortex*, *Pandora's Box's* opening scene, prior to the screening of the credits, is of prime importance to the viewing experience, and, by extension, to the picture of AD it promotes. A long, very slow pan shot of a green mountain appears on the screen, basking in bright morning light, setting a mood of pensive calm and quiet natural beauty, punctuated by unobtrusive chirping of birds. The shot continues, capturing a country house, stopping at a second one. The camera at this point cuts to what seems to be the interior of this second house, where an old, stooped peasant woman, Nusret, seen from behind, is walking slowly towards the balcony. Next, the old woman is seen standing on the balcony, holding a white bag with red acorns, spreading them on a tray. Her gaze wanders for a moment, and then, with no apparent reason or purpose, her look turns into an intense stare of uncertain emotional quality, partly horror, partly determination, confused and sharp at the same time, with no apparent focus in the real world. There is a suggestion of some kind of inner turmoil in her stare, but for the viewer the reason remains opaque, immanently unclear. This gaze – focused inwards rather than outwards – is troubled to the point of panic, yet very contained all the same.

The camera cuts from the woman's gaze to the bag of what seems to be acorns, or some other kind of nuts, that now appears left open, catching the acorns spreading on the floor of the balcony, as the old woman turns abruptly away from the balcony and moves inside the house. It is left for the viewers to speculate on the nature of the old woman's behaviour and possible motive. There is no dialogue at this point to support a possible explanation, no narrative clue in the scene and no musical score to help define a certain emotion or mood. Whatever pointers are given, they are

highly suggestive, bounded by prior knowledge of rustic life. Admittedly, the prior knowledge that the film has AD for its subject may have informed our own expectations and prompted a reading of the highly evocative yet ambiguous visual details in the scene as dementia related. The acorns spilling through a torn bag, for one, can possibly, though not exclusively, be taken as a visual manifestation of a consciousness falling apart. Both themes, mental breakdown and unlocking familial troubled relations, are given their thematic due later in the film. The old woman's stare introduces an additional difficulty, in that we can only assume the gaze is directed towards the mountain, and the consecutive arrangement of the shots (mountain, then frontal close-up of the woman's gaze) suggests an intense, unspoken dialogue between a non-human object (mountain) and a human subject (the woman's face). What the viewer is left with at this point is a vague, troublesome intensity. Still, as minimal and intrinsically equivocal these pointers may be, their potential suggestiveness is quite impressive: several viewers have responded to the elusive reverse-shot juxtaposition of the mountain and the old woman's sudden turn with the idea of an intuitive anticipation of a scene towards the end of the film, where she admits to hearing voices telling her to go to the mountain.

The upsetting quality of this scene is crucial for the comprehension of the film in its entirety, preparing the audience for the inner journey into a complicated mental terrain. Within a few scenes, the disturbingly enigmatic introductory scene will be taken apart and resolved, but not before we will have been taken to very different territories. This opening scene reminded us of another one, well known to film aficionados and scholars, the dream scene in Ingmar Bergman's classic 1957 film *Wild Strawberries*, where the old protagonist, Dr. Isak Borg, wakes up in the middle of the night from a bewildering and strange dream, goes to the window, looks out, and then turns the other way with a body language that transmits determination, obviously related to the experience of the dream, but in ways that are yet unclear (Bergman 1957). That sense of vague but powerful determination is also shared by the old woman in *Pandora's Box* when, following her strangely concentrated stare at the mountain, she decisively turns away, as if driven by a sudden change of mind.

The sequence immediately following the credits comprises short scenes depicting a number of characters moving about in a defined environmental context, but still telling us very little about their identities. First, in the sequence is a picture of a seaport at dawn, very grey, its flat horizontality standing out in strict juxtaposition to the vertical mountainous scenery of the opening scene. It takes a few seconds to spot a young man, Murat, lying on the stone deck of the harbour, woken up by the sound of a cellular phone ringing. Listening for a few seconds, he does not reply and puts the mobile phone back in his coat pocket. The scene then cuts to the bedroom of an urban apartment, where a woman, sitting beside a bed where a man is sleeping, shows signs of frustration as her calls are not being returned.

The way the narrative unfolds is significant in that it renders the viewer responsible for putting together these bits and pieces, which are disconnected in terms of place and narrative logic, yet are connected by an underlying emotional logic. They belong to their environment, but at the same time they are also alienated from it. These scenes are minimalistic, patently visual, deliberately doing away with either dialogue or soundtrack, creating an overall effect of barren distress, blocked communication and general estrangement. It is a puzzle of disconnectedness. The structure of the introductory scenes is deliberately fragmented, fallen apart as it were, the way the acorns in the old woman's sack spread apart, the way her consciousness is being destroyed by AD.

About a quarter of an hour into the film, a story seems to be forming. The old woman of the first scene had disappeared from her village somewhere in the mountains above the Black Sea in contemporary Turkey. Her three adult children drive up from the city to find her. There is also a grandson, Murat (the young man from the opening harbour scene), a student whose relationship with his parents is in deep crisis. Crisis is an on-going reality in the lives of the old woman's children. The older daughter is unable to maintain a marital relationship with a husband who loves her, the younger daughter is having a frustrating affair with a married man, the young son is leading a down-and-out-life in a poor, rundown neighbourhood and the grandson, Murat, who had never met his grandmother, is a school dropout and a drifter.

Into this drab family situation enters the old, Alzheimer's-stricken woman. To her family, she is "acting strangely". At first they do not make

the medical connection, probably because she had been a stranger for them for many years, and vice versa. Bits of information scattered throughout the film depict a grim picture of desertion and even hatred. The father had apparently left the household for a younger woman, and there's barely a mention of him. There is not only a mixture of bitterness, envy and grudge but also closeness, intimacy and occasionally warmth and care among the children, little of which shows in their attitude to their mother.

The medical establishment plays a minor role in this film. The old woman is diagnosed (through the usual procedures and tests), and the doctors are sympathetic to the family's helplessness and suffering, but that is all. At the point where grandma is inevitably institutionalised, her grandson takes it upon himself to take her to "her mountain", the mountain that was the focus of her gaze in the first scene, the only constant mental feature that she can hold intact in a consciousness that is falling apart.

The critical role the grandson will come to play had been carefully prepared from the very beginning. From the start, he seems to have a deep affinity with the old woman who is, like himself, a lost soul, thrown out of normative existence into a whirlwind of estrangement, distress and terrible loneliness. He sees her medical condition, not as a clinical symptom, but as some kind of extension of his own way of being in the world. A "standard" feature employed in AD films to signify the advanced stage of AD is incontinence in public (e.g. *A Song for Martin*). When Grandma urinates on the carpet in his mother's living room, Murat, his aunt and uncle respond with uncontrolled laughter. A comment later on sheds some light on this presumably improper behaviour: "I'd urinate on that carpet too" Murat tells his uncle, a wanderer himself, with whom he can comfortably confide. When he is robbed, and then almost killed by his robber, the experience of imminent death also informs Murat's bond with the old woman.

The moments these two lost souls spend together; the mute, natural warmth that infuses their time together, literally light up the screen as they break bread on the deck of a cruise vessel on the Bosphorus. Indeed, the only sunlit scenes in the film take place when they are together. The second sunlit scene is also the closing one in the film, another richly

metaphorical scene. Murat, Nusret's grandson, has assumed the role of her only caretaker. He grants her wish ("take me to my mountain") to return to her village. The moment the decision is taken is significantly tied up, in pure cinematic terms, to the recurring symbolic topography of the *mise-en-scene*. The moment follows the institutionalisation of Nusret by her children, as they realise they are incapable, in their miserable helplessness, of caring for her. Left alone, she is seen wandering in the institute's fenced inner yard, very much resembling a prison courtyard. The camera's point of view is that of Murat watching from above, positioned, as it were, at the top of the brick wall surrounding the yard. Next, grandmother and grandson are seen together in the midst of a crowded city street. The act of abduction is made clear in hindsight: the youngster who had been drawn close to his Alzheimer's-stricken grandmother took action in going over the fence, both literally and metaphorically, down into the lower yard, and has lifted the old woman up into the street, and then through Istanbul's bustling confusion, up to the mountain.

The scenes back in the mountain village form an unusual, almost uncanny mixture of tranquillity, inner peace and imminent departure. It is an idyllic picture of grace that at the same time acknowledges the bitter and distressing reality of AD for both bearer and caregiver.

The mountain is a dominant presence throughout the film. It provides the framework for the dramatic development, first the yearning to be borne out of a dreadful situation, namely the disease, then as a getaway from a devastating estrangement of a hopeless and helpless social environment (the Istanbul scenes) and finally as a salvation-in-death, as Nusret asks Murat to let her disappear again into the mountain before utter forgetfulness takes over ("let me go to my mountain, before I forget that too") – her last, telling words in the film, as well as her ultimate, lucid autonomous decision.

The last scene, in Nusret's country home, comes full circle to the first, but with a change of direction that makes a crucial difference that produces a poetic, richly metaphorical ending. Murat wakes up to a perfectly clear day, the very clarity at the exact same location of the opening shot, only to find out that Nusret has gone. Looking out he sees her figure down in the valley, on the path leading to the heights. It is another moment of intense concentrated conflict, as his face and hands

twitch in an effort to contain the pain. His excruciatingly painful dilemma is laid bare in a close-up shot. It is his mute promise to help her—against the impulse to rescue her—and the obvious knowledge that having taken action to rescue Nusret from the mental institute meant he will have to take another decision, this time a decision not to take action, but to let her die and to respect her way of dying. Whereas his decision to “abduct” Nusret had been based on compassionate empathy, having also a reversible contingency component in the background (like leaving home) this time it is an ethical choice, forcing a different, adult responsibility, of the sort he had desperately been putting off prior to the events brought about by the story. It is at this junction that *Pandora’s Box* calls for a differentiated definition of care, in the immediate context of AD, possibly for a more generalised human context, where, drawing on Erikson’s typically adult stage of ego-development, “caring for” in such particular circumstances takes priority over “taking care of”. That is, attending to the call of subjective dignity takes precedence over that of continued communal care.

The end of the film again addresses this dilemma in the visual vocabulary and spatial architecture it has adopted from the start. Leaving Murat’s conflicted, agonised face, the camera tilts up slowly, gently drawing the direction of the old woman’s final destination, “her” mountain. The vertical movement of the camera is a perfect recapitulation and completion of its horizontal movement in the opening shots. Both opening and closing shots are slow, their pace calling for our contemplation. While sideways panning invites an attitude of detailed *investigation*, a slow upward shot directs us in the direction of contemplating a *transformation*. Still, here as well, the ending is highly ambiguous: lifting the viewer’s gaze up is not necessarily an uplifting experience, far from the proverbial “spiritual redemption”. The two mountain shots are indeed suggestively complementary, but they are not identical. The earlier is more distant, while in the latter, the mountain is upstaged in a close-up shot, suggesting that the old lady may already be *in* it. The metaphor of reaching the sky, connoting optimism and redemption, lies outside the teleological boundaries and hard-headed, unsentimental cinematic credo of *Pandora’s Box*.

“Unsentimental” is an apt descriptor of the third and last film we review here.

Onset in Slow Motion: *Old Cats*

Old Cats (Gatos Viejos, Chile, [Peirano & Silva 2010]) is a chamber film, a tough, tightly structured domestic drama with a twist: the emotionally charged drama of mother–daughter relationship is explored against the onset of dementia (Rich 2011). Faced with filial anger, the extent of which she had not fathomed, Isidora (Isi), in her late eighties, and experiencing devastating symptoms of cognitive as well as physical decline, makes a valiant and painful effort to resolve a lifelong crisis.

An outstanding feature of this film is its temporal, as well as spatial, constraints which create a strong sense of immediacy and urgency, thus reflecting the subjective situation of the protagonist. The story takes place over less than 1 day, the first scene in late morning, the second in late afternoon. Other than one time lapse that is omitted for the sake of narrative continuity, story time and chronology are identical. In other words, *Old Cats* unfolds in real time. As for location, the story unfolds in one enclosure, a flat on the eighth floor of an apartment building in Santiago de Chile, with one exception of a scene taking place outside the building in the street below. Not only is the setting sparse, but, no less important, background information about the characters is so slim that the only way the viewer can make their acquaintance and gain knowledge of their character is on the basis of their immediate actions; no reference is made to their history, or to their former or present occupations. What is made to matter is the immediate moment. This is the reason that when the outside world and other times make a brief appearance, their dramatic and psychological importance are magnified. This highly minimalistic setting provides the bare physical context, mere scaffolding upon which another story leans, a story that takes place at a sphere away from and beyond the physical reality of place and time. While confined to the “here and now”, the story of *Old Cats* tells a parallel story, where both place (here) and time (now) are collapsing from within, through a consciousness that is in the process of disorientation, falling apart as a result of dementia. Thus, narrowing down of physical reality of conventional time and place parallels the shrinking dimensions of the mental space brought about by this condition.

It also means that the story of the film, while involving various characters and a central dramatic conflict, is experienced in the present tense of the central character's consciousness, as she oscillates between

being in “sane” stability, being in the here and now, and the fluid evanescence of “other” temporal as well as spatial modes. Isidora’s inner story throughout the film revolves around these fluctuating polarities of a consciousness, at times stable and lucid, and then unexpectedly wavering towards forgetful oblivion, between presence of mind and the loss of mind, threatening to take over by surprise at any moment.

Isidora’s mental struggle between lucidity and opaqueness from the outset is echoed in the imagery and symbolic universe of the film. The opening image is of a statue of a horse, silhouetted against the light coming through the window of the apartment she shares with Enrique, her husband and caregiver. The horse is in a position of arrested movement, its two front legs caught in the air, as it were, and, as such, standing for an object at the same time animated and inanimate, an early symbolic anticipation of the protagonist’s liminal mental condition. Situated among various other animal statues, the image of frozen life is contrasted with the two cats of the title, gently moving through their adoptive territory, demanding food and attention, soon to be echoed in the character of Rosario, Isi’s daughter.

Moving into the couple’s bedroom, the camera shows Enrique reading in bed, while Isi is sleeping – a medium shot, squarely framed routine stability, yet short-lived. The next shot gets uncomfortably close to Isi’s old and wrinkled face, her eyes opening. They are frightened, restlessly scanning, yet essentially unseeing with unfocused gaze, her surroundings. Facing the camera at close range, this too-long-for comfort (35 seconds) shot established a theme of non-recognition. She blurts out a cry: “I don’t want to”, then impatiently explains it away, in response to Enrique’s question, as a bad dream.

A phone ring cuts the silence, instigating a panic-laden thought from Isidora fearing that an old friend about to make a visit has died. But Enrique, wryly informs her it is her daughter Rosario, which he finds worse. Rosario’s aggressive, demanding, highly stressed manner, already evident through her hyperventilated speech, and the visit she imposes on her reluctant mother, has Isidora “on her feet” again. Preparing for the unwanted visit further exposes her deep mental distress and precarious hold on reality. A beautiful, extreme close-up shot of her eyes looking up at the running water in the shower, holding out her hand, feeling the water

running, conveys a deeply sentient person, and also establishes the image of running water as central to her threatened being, a metaphor that will gain more meaning later in the story.

As Isi goes out the door for the purpose of getting food, she is held back by a stuck elevator (another image of halted movement, linked physically to her walking difficulty caused by a hip problem, as well as symbolically to the severed movement of her mind). Enrique's efforts to comfort her ("it's not you, it's your hips") fail to dispel a deep sense of despair. Left alone, as Enrique has to go out instead, there are a few moments of absence. This is followed up by incoherent speech, and Isa pouring the spilled contents of a drawer on the bed. Because she had forgotten to turn off the bathroom faucet, the flat flooded – another appearance, this time ominous and threatening, of running water. Before she manages to stop the flood, she has a moment of utter confusion and panic, about which she later tells Enrique: "I got lost Enrique! Everything is flooded! There's water everywhere! I lost track of time! I do not know what I was thinking!"

An image of the table prepared for the visit marks the transition to the afternoon and to the visit of Rosario. Into the darkly lit flat bursts an abrasive, cantankerous, deeply troubled woman who has been harbouring bitter resentments of her mother.

Rosario's neurotic desperation is soon revealed as a thin disguise to a profound hurt. There are hints of a history of financial abuse on Rosario's part towards her mother, money she has irresponsibly spent on bizarre enterprises that had come to naught. This time she is selling homemade, organic soaps she and her companion had just brought back from Peru, and she needs to get a lease on Isi's apartment. The old woman's signature becomes a metonym for autonomous identity and agency. The exchange takes place against the constant threat of exposing Isi's mental problems, moments of "checking out" that, despite Enrique's resourceful camouflage manoeuvres, she finds progressively difficult to hide.

Rosario, immersed in her feeling of maternal neglect, attributes her mother's occasional incoherencies to her cold, unyielding nature.

"I wish she was senile. That'd make things easier. Don't let her fool you, she's hard, cold, selfish. She'll die that way ... she never loved me".

Rosario's pressing emotional needs do not allow her to perceive her mother's condition. Enrique sees this as selfish lack of sensitivity on her part, yet, ironically, by refusing to recognise Isi's medical condition, Rosario perceives her mother as an active agent, a complete self, though a faulted one. This lack of perception allows Isi to maintain her autonomy, and finally make a major decision. In other words, by perceiving her mother as independent, Rosario in fact contributes to that independence. In contrast, Enrique perceives Isi as no longer independent; thus, he is willing to make allowances.

In the midst of this tense dialogue, there is a particularly pertinent incident in which Isi goes out to the balcony and looking ahead sees on a cliff opposite the building a group of people dressed in bee-like costumes, gently floating in slow motion on the rocky slopes. Isi is entranced by this mysterious apparition. The image is clearly dream-like, and, taking the point of view of Isidora, viewers of the film are made to wonder whether this may be a vision created by Isi's peculiar state of consciousness caused by the dementia. Ultimately, the viewers, like Isidora, become disenchanted when they realise that these aerial figures are real enough, dressed for the purpose of making a commercial. It is a moment of magic, a sweet illusion, and for this brief moment Isidora is carried away into the realm of pure imagination. Back into the reality of a bitter familial rupture, she demands to be left alone with Rosario, against Enrique's protest:

Isi: I know what you are going to say but it's now or never
Enrique: Now or never what? To be a mother?
Isi (quietly): Yes
Enrique: I think it's the worst possible moment
Isi: I better act while I am lucid.

Fully lucid, face to face with Rosario, Isi is confronted with her maternal failure. "Tell me one memory of us together" asks the deprived Rosario in anguish, and Isi is mute. It is clear this is not a case of dementia-related loss of memory, but an admission that the kind of memory Rosario is asking of her mother had never been there. Intent to conceal her mental deterioration, Isi cannot fall back on the illness to defend herself, but it is also clear she would not even if she could.

Rosario's silence lays bare the true nature of her greed:

You never loved me, you are ashamed of me, that's why I take your money.

When Rosario discovers a note from Enrique, hidden in her mother's palm, warning her against signing the lease, she slaps her mother on the face and walks out of the apartment. This turns out to be a moment of epiphany: it is as though parental failure literally hits Isi hard in the face. The bare physical expression of filial hatred deeply unsettles the old woman even as she begins a retreat towards mental oblivion. It may be the confrontation with another loss that shakes her profoundly. Now, at last, despite walking difficulty and an out-of-order elevator, Isi descends eight floors of steps, with apparent tremendous effort.

Until this moment in the story, the point of view has shifted back and forth between Isi's subjective state and an outside, more objective perspective of the filmmakers. Then Isi begins her trip down the stairs (a momentous decision, considering that when in the morning she learned that the elevator was not working, she immediately returned to the flat). And, for the entire duration of the next sequence, we experience everything through her eyes. Interestingly, while the initial impetus to step outside was to follow Rosario, who had left the apartment in anger and sat down on the stairs one floor below, now, as in the opening hallucinatory "dream" scene, the point of view taken is predominately Isi's own.

The encounter with the world outside her flat accesses two images previously introduced in the story, and closely associated with Isi's internal world, the floating bees, now at close range, and also running water, now in the form of a fountain cascade, into which she obliviously wanders in bewitched, transformed childlike wonderment. This powerful image of falling water symbolically coalesces from the different, contradictory meanings it has for the character of Isi into a complex picture of her mind, the mind of a person struggling with mental deterioration: clarity, purity, movement, transparency and rejuvenation, and, at the same time, drowning, flooding, suffocation and death.

For the now over-wrought Isi, this "getting lost" encounter is, paradoxically, a breakdown moment and an awakening experience of

self-revelation. As Rosario rushes to pull her mother out of the pool, there is a brief moment of mother–daughter physical bonding, where the exhausted, soaked old woman asks her daughter’s forgiveness, sharing with her the terror of her condition:

Forgive me. I’m losing my mind. I’m going crazy ...

Carried back to the flat, she turns to Rosario:

I have a memory! We were crossing a river, you up to your knees, the rest of the kids were on the other side, you were so small. You know what I did, I let go of you, and you made it.

The bewildered Rosario says she does not remember that, and she is right. A moment later Isi confesses to Enrique:

I realized that memory I told Rosario wasn’t about her. That happened to me when I was a girl ... not her. I’m not here anymore.

The strange and unexpected displacement of memory surprises the viewer as well as the one who remembers: memory here functions differently from usual memory: it is not reminiscing, nor is it nostalgia, not even a conscious recollection made for the purpose of preserving identity in the face of loss. The old woman, conscious of the fact she is about to “lose her mind”, recruits, then transforms, a dim recollection from her own childhood (instigated, we may assume, by her own “crossing a river” a moment earlier). This is a “white lie”, a creative use of memory and imagination. To borrow a phrase from Basting (2009: 48), “present and past overwrite each other”. The conflation of remote and recent memory, which normally would constitute a disruption of a normal sense of time, is here made to serve a purpose in binding mother and daughter together, and for the old woman aware of sliding to dementia, an opportunity never to be repeated to salvage lost motherhood and by that achieve a meaningful closure to a lifelong conflict. Encroaching dementia has inspired a restructuring of priorities, emotional growth and, for once, a connectedness that would have not been possible in the so-called “healthy” state prior to its onset.

In her moment of transformation, Isi gives up her apartment, deciding, against Enrique's better judgement, to sign the lease for Rosario. "I'm not here anymore", she says, but the last shot of her suggests that at this moment, she is very much here, even as her being is an altered one. Seated calmly, her expression bespeaks of deep sadness, but also of a self-fulfilled relief. She has lost the lease of her apartment, but has gained a new lease on her disrupted relationship with Rosario. The signature, rather than an act of foreclosure, becomes a symbolic act of will and a signifier of advocacy.

Conclusion

The view that Illness fosters transformations, sometimes drastic, of identity (Beard 2004: 417), and that sense of self must be actively reconstructed (Cohen-Mansfield et al. 2000) is powerfully illustrated, with added artistic credence, in the last episode of *Old Cats*, discussed above. The climactic scene perfectly resonates with the late Tom Kitwood's eloquent words:

In dementia many aspects of the psyche that had, for a long time, been individual and 'internal', are again made over to the interpersonal milieu. Memory may have faded, but something of the past is known; identity remains intact, because others hold it in place; thoughts may have disappeared, but there are still interpersonal processes; feelings are expressed and meet a validating response; and if there is a spirituality, it will most likely be of the kind that Buber describes, where the divine is encountered in the depth of I-Thou relating.

(Kitwood 1997: 69)

Kitwood's seminal work on personhood and person-centred care clearly challenged the biomedical, capacity-based view of the loss of personhood at the onset and advance of dementia. The view of the self remaining throughout the progression of dementia is becoming far more established (Baldwin et al. 2007: 174).

Popular cinema both reflects and enhances cultural position and stigma (Behuniak 2011). AD has received considerable attention in the popular media, and the mainstream motion picture industry is no exception (Chivers 2011) in promoting a very negative and undifferentiated view of the disease (Kontos 2005). Until recently, the dominant story told about

people with memory loss is one where their speech is deemed meaningless, their memory defected and their sense of self lost (Beard 2004: 417). More recently, researchers have begun to challenge the view that dementia inevitably leads to loss of self (Sabat & Collins 1999). There is a "significant shift from the focus on tragic decline" in the stories we tell ourselves about dementia (Basting 2009: 48). This shift challenges the notion that people who have dementia, Alzheimer's and other types, become hollow shells, without a trace of personhood left in them.

Taken together, each of the three films discussed here, one made in France, the second in Turkey and the third in Chile, in its own particular way, offers a different picture of dementia, whether of AD type or other types, in that they insist on getting under the symptom-ridden medical reality of the disease and into the subjective mental territory and aspects of personhood scarcely touched upon in mainstream culture. Common to these films is the portrayal of the AD-stricken protagonist, two old women and a middle-aged man, as fully sentient, complex and complete human beings, despite, sometimes because of, their cognitive impairment. These individuals, one in already advanced stage of the disease (Nusret, *Pandora's Box*), moderate (Boyer, *Cortex*) and early (Isidora, *Old Cats*) possess a strong sense of identity and purpose, struggling to retain control over their situation and a sense, paradoxically enhanced, of inner freedom and choice. Determined to construct meaningful lives despite the challenges, these fictional portrayals provide a timely cultural corrective to the clichéd metaphors and representations in which dementia is characteristically drawn in colourful and disturbing images (Herskovits 1995: 152), images based on, and that in turn reinforce, widespread fear.

This fear, though quite understandably natural, has perpetuated the view that persons who have AD are more severely impaired than they actually are, and that instead of being seen as unique, diverse individuals, they are likely to be lumped together and seen only in relation to a category – late-stage AD. Late-stage AD is not always seen accurately either; research evidence suggests (Lyman 1989; Sabat 2001) that even those who are in the late stage are not always as impaired as they are assumed to be, a point poignantly illustrated in the character of Nusret in *Pandora's Box*.

Yet, as a collaborator in the struggle of cultural and humanistic gerontology to humanise dementia, films such as those discussed here can provide more than mere illustration. They operate like silent partners, going deeper than words. In other words, these films, primarily, if not exclusively, use as their major means of expression those very skills that remain fully active in the lives of people with dementia, their powers of suggestion working through visual metaphor and intuitive thinking. The dialogue between the concrete, actual materials the films use is analogous to the dialogue that persons with Alzheimer's or dementia maintain with their physical and social environment. Watching these films allows the viewers to transcend the barrier of language. The mountain for Nusret is a living entity, the essence of which she communicates to her grandson, who, through a naively unbiased, yet unspoiled cultural attitude, is intuitively able to decode it, and then act upon this intuitive understanding. Recognising a hermetic environment of a medical institute as a metaphor for a society hostile to people with dementia is not a piecemeal analytical process but a holistically immediate one. The dialogue with the narrative and characters in these films, during viewing and in retrospect, is mediated by the singular language of the film. It is worth noting in this respect, that although spoken dialogue plays an indispensable role in these productions, the scenes crucial to penetrating the inner world of the protagonists (i.e. the opening and sequences of *Pandora's Box*, the 35-second shot of Isidora's "dream" at the beginning of *Old Cats*, Boyer's preparation for hospitalisation in *Cortex*) have no spoken dialogue or background score, but are purely visual, as well as kinetic. The camera patiently explores their mind's work with slow-moving shots, projecting palatable inner space where pensive, wistful deliberation alternates with anxiety. In the context of media representations of dementia, these scenes stand for more than skilled cinematic artistry on the part of the filmmakers (which apparently they are, making lasting moving pictures imprinted in our mind), but more importantly a means of closely simulating the subjective experience of dementia. By facilitating identification with the protagonist affected by the disease, the movies create a change of attitude in the viewer. In shifting the expressive centre of aesthetic gravity from abstract linguistic cognition to the figurative, tangible expressive modality of the moving picture, these films stand to encourage a deeply felt

understanding of the human aspects embedded in the phenomena of dementia.

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No Country for Old Men: a search for masculinity in later life

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Abstract

As several recent studies have shown, contemporary scholarship on masculinity in later life is beset with significant limitations that mirror social and cultural aspects of the very subject that it is meant to study. Reflecting the culture at large, studies of masculinity have presupposed an unspoken, static image of midlife men as the criterion for manhood. This essay reads the protagonist of *No Country for Old Men*, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, in the context of masculinity studies, age studies, and the evolution of the American Western. Both Cormac McCarthy's novel and the Coen brothers' film adaptation will be addressed. We argue that, as a man who becomes deprived of the traditional props of ageless male identity, Bell offers an unexpected and intriguing instance of the search for late-life masculine identity. By the end of *No Country for Old Men*, Bell has departed from the traditional masculinity scripts of the American Western. He is an aging, ineffectual cowboy who has retired, renounced the violence that sustained his male dominance, and lost the moral certainty that ensured his identity. Bell is no longer certain of who he is – which leaves him free to find out what it might mean to be an old man.

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Keywords: aging, American film, identity, "the Western", masculinity, Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*.

Introduction

Gerontology and age-related studies have tended to omit analyses of older men, focusing instead on older women or ungendered portraits of aging. As a result, the field has contributed to the cultural "invisibility" of older men and the inverse correlation between masculinity and aging (Thompson 2006). Only recently have scholars begun to point out the problem and call for alternatives (see, for instance, Calasanti 2004; Spector-Mersel 2006; Swinnen 2011; Thompson 2006; Van den Hoonaard 2007). As Gabriela Spector-Mersel (2006) has noted, contemporary society offers older men an incomplete script for performing masculinity: "While in relation to early and middle adulthood we find clear models of dignified masculinity, these become vague, even non-existent, when referring to later life . . . Western masculinity scripts are not designed for elderly men, and thus are concluded somewhere before 'old age'" (73). Older men thus lack an alternative to midlife masculine ideals, depriving them of guidelines for being a "real" man and limiting their ability to fashion effective and culturally respectable identities.

This essay suggests that, by relinquishing the masculine expectations of the heroic lawman, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell offers a new script for older men in the struggle for a viable masculinity. As the lawman of Terrell County, Texas, for over 30 years, Bell has anchored his life in traditional values and common sense. But with the arrival of Anton Chigurh – a relentlessly violent, amoral mercenary – Bell witnesses social turmoil and senseless violence that shatter his sense of purpose and force him to reflect upon the ultimate meaning of his life. In our opinion, *No Country for Old Men* is not only a story about violence and greed; it is also about morality and the search for a coherent and socially viable identity for old men in contemporary society. Our discussion will focus on these concerns within the context of the American Western, a genre in which the cowboy hero offers an exaggerated instance of what it means to "be a man". In contrast to his heroic counterparts, we suggest that Bell represents a unique

character: an aging cowboy whose inchoate search for an alternative form of aging masculinity moves toward nonviolence, dialog, and community.

To appreciate Bell's distinctiveness within the genre, this essay will set him alongside two archetypal heroes of the Western: the Lone Ranger and Clint Eastwood's William Munny. While neither figure *must* be paired with Bell, they both stand as useful counterpoints for tracing the historical transition from the ageless to the aging cowboy in American cinema. Traditionally, the cowboy hero (exemplified by the Lone Ranger) has been portrayed as an ageless guarantor of unchanging truth and justice. However, in the last 20 years, American Westerns have evolved to make room for the aging of the heroic cowboy who, in spite of his age, reasserts male dominance through violence. Aging successfully (or, for the fantastical Lone Ranger, not aging at all) remains tied to the performance of youthful masculinity scripts (Spector-Mersel 2006). In contrast, Bell is a convincingly human protagonist who departs from conventional scripts of what it means to "be a man", thereby offering a potentially illuminating model of late-life masculinity.

The Story and the Crisis of Ed Tom Bell

Thanks to the Coen brothers' film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel, Bell's story has become inseparable in popular imagination from the actor who plays him (Tommy Lee Jones) and the cinematic tradition of the American Western. In considering the novel and the film together, we are faced with a kind of artistic hybrid, or what Rick Wallach (2009) has called "a dialogue between two mediums" (xi). While the film adaptation is faithful in most respects to McCarthy's novel, a key difference that should be mentioned here is Bell's role as a central character. In the novel, the 13 interior monologs feature his extended reflections and clearly delineate Bell as the protagonist. In contrast, although the Coen brothers open and close the film with voiceovers taken from Bell's monologs, most of these ruminations are sacrificed in favor of the faster-paced contest between the two other protagonists, Llewellyn Moss and Anton Chigurh. This essay relies primarily on interior monologs from the novel but also will reference key moments in the film – especially the final scene in which Bell discusses

his two dreams with his wife, Loretta. In this way, the novel and the film mutually inform and enrich our understanding of Bell.¹

McCarthy presents Bell's story in two ways, moving between third-person narration and Bell's first-person, italicized monologs that preface each chapter. Rather than presenting the action in a straightforward manner, Bell's testimonials are usually further ahead in the chronology of his narrative than the events detailed in the chapters proper. As retrospective reflections on what he has seen, Bell's monologs expose us to the intimate, interior thoughts of a character who otherwise seems as impervious as the vast desert landscape. The oscillating movement of the narrative, which swings between the events of the story and Bell's interpretation of them, illuminates his gradual process of transformation as a man. As we will see, Bell is a dynamic character whose experiences – especially those involving Anton Chigurh – lead him to question, and ultimately to leave behind, many of the certainties on which he has based his life.

At the outset of the story, Bell's moral world seems to be intact. He believes in Truth with a capital T and has no doubts about right and wrong or which side he is on. In short, Bell is the quintessential small-town sheriff: honorable, old-fashioned, and set in his ways. Like many a conservative red-neck – which is how some critics see him (Cremean 2010: 21–31) – Bell retains nostalgia for older times and stubbornly believes that society is getting worse. He notes, for example, that the worst problems teachers faced in the 1930s were talking in the classroom, chewing gum, running in the hallways, or copying someone else's homework. However, in Bell's world of the 1970s and 80s, teachers are dealing with rape, murder, arson, drugs, and suicide. Although he thinks that the society is sliding into moral chaos, Bell's holds to his father's advice: "My Daddy always told me to just do the best you knew how and tell the truth. He said there was nothing to set a man's mind at ease like waking up in the morning and not havin to decide who you were. And if you done somethin wrong just stand up and say

¹ For an insightful discussion of the relation between the novel and the film, as well as McCarthy's preoccupation with cinematic modes of representation, see Wallach (2009).

you done it and say you're sorry and get on with it" (McCarthy 2005: 249). Despite these affirmations, we eventually learn that Bell has fallen short of these standards, which causes him to reassess his identity as a man.

The man who throws Bell's life into uncertainty, Anton Chigurh, appears from the start as a model of ruthlessness and efficiency. He methodically pursues Llewellyn Moss, a young welder who, on a hunting trip in the desert, stumbles upon a botched drug deal and a briefcase filled with just over two million dollars. Moss picks up the briefcase, takes it back to his trailer, and plans to make a new life with his wife, Carla Jean. As Chigurh hunts Moss and the money, Bell helplessly trails the action and ponders the implications of their bloody conflict. By the end of the plot, Bell is overwhelmed. Chigurh has escaped with the money. Moss and his wife are dead. The peace in Terrell County has been shattered. Bitter and bewildered, Bell retires from his post as sheriff, no longer certain of who he is or where he fits in the world. After serving his country for 30 years and following traditional codes and values, he finds himself in a position of impotence, disrespect, and confusion. Bell's unreflective moralism, his tepid faith, his stubborn belief in the "older times", and the men who lived during them – all of these consolations have proven to be worthless when Bell needed them the most.

The title of McCarthy's novel alludes to William Butler Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium", which was written when Yeats himself was, like Bell, in his early sixties. Just as Yeats's old man seeks unchanging spiritual and artistic values in the holy city of Byzantium (Yeats 1928: 102), so too does Bell yearn for a timeless moral order. For Bell, this "country" is located in the timeless plains and mountains of West Texas in a mythical era when strong, white men enforced a clear, unquestioned morality. What sort of man embodied the "older time" that Bell yearns for? The fictional star of this mythical world was another Texan and perhaps the most widely known and beloved figure of 20th century American popular culture, that ageless hero, the Lone Ranger. As we will see, the Lone Ranger and the genre of the Western contain a "script" that concludes in middle age, thereby confirming Spector-Mersel's (2006) view of hegemonic masculinity scripts as "never-aging stories".

From Byzantium to West Texas: The Lone Ranger Rides Again

The Lone Ranger was written as a thrilling tale of morality of the Old West for children and their parents of the Great Depression. As a masked vigilante who operated outside an ineffectual government – but who also had the best interest of the public in mind – the character attracted listeners to the original 1933 radio show “The Lone Ranger” (Hoppenstand 2008). In short order, Superman, Batman, Green Arrow, Sergeant Preston of the Yukon, Green Hornet, and Flash Gordon also swooped onto the radio waves and into comic books – ageless, white, male superheroes ever ready to defend truth, justice, and the American Way (Dorfman 1983). What separated the Lone Ranger from these and other characters was his status as the quintessential hero of the American Western. The Western, as John Cawelti has shown in his classic study *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1971), follows an archetypal formula: it takes place near the frontier at a point in history when social order and anarchy are in tension, and involves some form of pursuit. The genre of the Western thus encapsulated and gave form to idealized notions of the American West as a site of adventure and innocence. The Lone Ranger rode into town on a white stallion, defeated his enemies with a few well-timed silver bullets (always fired in self-defense), and road off in a cloud of dust. He was a white man who defended “middle-class institutions of marriage, home and womanhood” (Horton 1974: 570–578), showed respect to Indians, and lived by his famous Creed.²

² I believe that to have a friend, a man must be one.
That all men are created equal and that everyone
has within himself the power to make this a better world.
That God put the firewood there but that every
man must gather and light it himself.
In being prepared physically, mentally, and morally to
fight when necessary for that which is right.
That a man should make the most of what equipment he has.
That this government, of the people, by the people and
for the people shall live always.
That men should live by the rule of what is best for the greatest number.
That sooner or later ... somewhere ... somehow...

The radio show “The Lone Ranger”, which eventually ran for over 2,500 episodes, was followed by a comic book series, 18 novels, and three feature-length films.³ As his popularity soared during the mid-20th century, the image of the noble, manly Lone Ranger remained essentially unchanged. The crucial point here is that the traditional cultural scripts that the Lone Ranger epitomized – power, retributive violence, physicality – rely on the performance of youthful masculinity. Spector-Mersel (2006), for instance, argues that “as a result of the ungendered image attributed to older persons, and the construction of older men as an invisible, paradoxical, and unmasculine social category, Western hegemonic masculinity scripts are concluded at middle age. The absence of cultural guidelines for being both a ‘true’ man and an aging person constitutes the context within which contemporary older men struggle to build acceptable identities” (69). Rather than challenge ageism, this construction reinforces age inequality by defining prosperity in old age in terms of younger experiences (or in relation to one’s younger self). In the Lone Ranger franchise, the problem of an older, ineffectual hero was “solved” by making him ageless. As a *literally* “never-aging” man, to use Spector-Mersel’s phrase (2006: 67), the iconic hero continued to save the day, performing the hegemonic masculinity script of middle age.

Even if the Lone Ranger never grew old, the tension between ageless heroism and aging surfaced in the real-life drama between Clayton Moore, the actor who played the Lone Ranger from 1949 to 1951 and from 1954 to 1957, and Jack Wrather, the television show’s creator. After the show went off the air, Moore worked in commercials, at country fairs, and made other public appearances (always in costume) for many years. Through his off-screen performances, Moore unmasked the fantasy at the heart of the franchise: the fact that, for 30 years, its hero never grew old. Wrather, who

we must settle with the world and
make payment for what we have taken.

That all things change but truth, and that truth alone, lives on forever.

In my Creator, my country, my fellow man. (Hoppenstand 2008)

³ The three films are *The Legend of the Lone Ranger* (1952), which existed as a compilation of three television episodes; Warner Brothers’ *The Lone Ranger* (1956); and United Artists’ *The Lone Ranger and the Lost City of Gold* (1958).

was planning a new movie version with a fresh young hero, wanted to separate public perception of the 65-year-old Moore from his younger replacement and obtained a court order forcing Moore to stop making public appearances as the Lone Ranger (Lawrence 2009: 87). Moore countersued, substituted similar wrap-around sunglasses for the mask, and continued his public appearances. He eventually won the countersuit that permitted him to appear in full costume, which he did until his death in 1999. Today, although the allure of the Lone Ranger remains strong in some cultural quarters and film studios, efforts to revitalize the franchise have been largely unsuccessful.⁴ In its place, a new image of the aging cowboy has found its way into the Western.

“Yes, We Still Can”: The Aging Cowboy in American Cinema

Beyond the rolling plains, bawdy saloons, hostile Indians, and other iconic images of the genre, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the classic Western film is the model of masculinity at its core (Chivers 2011). “Westerns insist on this point”, writes Jane Tompkins (1992), “by emphasizing the importance of manhood as an ideal. It is not one ideal among many, it is *the* ideal, certainly the only one worth dying for. It doesn’t matter whether a man is a sheriff or an outlaw, a rustler or a rancher, a cattleman or a shepherd, a miner or a gambler. What matters is that he be a *man*” (17–18). Much of what it took to “be a man”, as Tompkins and others have noted, involved the aggressive and often violent assertion of white male privilege and dominance – over women, over ethnic and sexual minorities (male or female), over animals, and over the land (Peterson 2011: 74–88). Indeed, when we talk about Westerns, whether they are set in the Old West or the New, questions of masculinity

⁴ The film *The Legend of the Lone Ranger* (1981) was a critical and financial disappointment. The two-hour television pilot “The Lone Ranger” (2003), which follows the exploits of the character before he became a legend, was similarly a commercial failure (Lawrence 2009: 80). A film remake starring Johnny Depp – who plays an edgier Tonto rather than the Lone Ranger – is in the works. Following F. Scott Fitzgerald, there may be no “second act” in the American life of the ageless Lone Ranger. He may be gone for good, along with the idealized fictional world he was meant to instantiate.

are central and unavoidable; the genre is perhaps the ultimate venue for the display of male power in conflict with both the wilderness and the bad guy.

But what about men who no longer enjoy the physical strength they once held? Who no longer are able to dominate villains through sheer strength and quick reflexes? In an aging society in which some of American cinema's most beloved male actors are growing old, these issues are no longer banished from the silver screen, as they were during the heyday of the Lone Ranger. In the last 20 years, Hollywood has given birth to a new kind of hero, an aging hero whose waning physicality and strength becomes the stimulus for the reassertion of the desired midlife masculinity in later life. In her recent study, *The Silvering Screen* (2011), Sally Chivers examines a number of contemporary films in which the role of the older male figure is recast from a man whose masculinity is thought to be fading to a man whose masculinity is exaggerated and compensatory. She argues that "enormous effort is made to shore up each male star's increasingly fragile sense of virility at the expense of others, usually women dismissively treated as potential or rejected sexual objects and racialized men easily killed off" (2011: 102). Many of these films, from Harrison Ford's *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008) to Sylvester Stallone's *The Expendables* (2010), suggest that, in spite of real signs of physical decline, aging men need not relinquish any of their power or their dominance. In the American Western, which foregrounds fantasies of power, omnipotence, and control, this struggle is especially prominent.

Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) offers a paradigmatic case of an older man who follows the hegemonic masculinity script of middle age. The film, which stars Eastwood during his early sixties, presents a model of masculinity in which aging physicality is compensated by means of "astonishing if apparently justified violence" (Chivers 2011: 112). His character William Munny is a legendary, murderous villain who has become a family man and mended his ways thanks to his loving wife who is recently deceased. As a lonely pig farmer mired in poverty, Munny's body is beginning to fail him. He is first seen rolling around in the mud chasing his pigs, consistently unsuccessful in his efforts to catch them. Fetching his gun, he fails to hit the mark a single time during target

practice, and has even more trouble mounting his horse. The Schofield Kid, an aspiring gunslinger sent to find Munny, comments, "You don't look no meaner-than-hell cold-blooded damn killer" (Eastwood 1992). Munny's comical, bumbling image is further underscored by the actor Eastwood himself, whose previous, younger cowboy roles – *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966), and *Pale Rider* (1985), among others – epitomize the physically powerful, bad-boy hero.⁵

From the start, then, Munny seems resigned to his fate as an ex-outlaw, widower, father of two, pigpen owner, and over-the-hill cowboy. However, soon enough, Munny is drawn against his will to avenge his friend Ned Logan (played by Morgan Freeman) who is brutally whipped to death by the sheriff, Little Bill. With the plot established of the reluctant, wifeless hero thrust back into the fray, Munny embarks on the flurry of retributive violent acts which reinforce his masculinity. The violence culminates in a gripping climax in which Munny guns down the inhabitants of the local saloon, including the corrupt sheriff Little Bill, by himself. "Eastwood's Munny", argues Chivers (2011), "proves his ongoing purchase of power by annihilating his enemies through no real choice of his own, having been drawn back into violence in order to make money for his children, fighting on the side of right even if he does so against the law. He manages to appear simultaneously helpless and powerful, but always a 'man'" (113). Thanks largely to Eastwood's Munny, a host of aging cowboys have continued to roam the Hollywood countryside, their masculinity reinforced with a smoking shotgun.

What is significant about Ed Tom Bell is the way in which he stands apart from William Munny.⁶ The process by which Munny's masculinity is preserved in *Unforgiven* – through violence and racial sacrifice – is entirely absent in *No Country for Old Men*. There are no rejected women or racialized men who are sacrificed to reaffirm Bell's status as a patriarchal,

⁵ For a treatment of Eastwood's continual engagement with questions of masculinity (especially as a director), see Cornell (2009).

⁶ Like Eastwood, whose previous cowboy characters ooze masculinity, Tommy Lee Jones, who plays Bell in the film, also has a long history of hyper-masculine Western roles. His role as the laconic, steadfast Woodrow Call in *Lonesome Dove* (1989) is perhaps best known. Others relevant roles include *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), and *The Fugitive* (1993).

white, sexy, strong man. Bell has lived in a long (if imperfect) marriage with his wife, Loretta. However, most importantly, he is not impelled forward by avenging violence, as Munny is, but through renunciation. In her insightful discussion of models of masculinity in *No Country*, Stacy Peebles (2009) argues that the novel in general and Bell in particular present us with “an alternative mode of engaging with the world, one that doesn’t rely on the need to take control with the use of cleverness, stubbornness, rationality, tradition, or lethal force. Instead, this alternative practice is based on renunciation and the surrender to those forces that are beyond one’s control rather than in service of it” (125). While Peebles rightly links Bell to this revised model of masculinity – indeed, she is one of the few critics to discuss it – she does not mention the ways in which Bell’s experience of aging contributes to this process. In our opinion, it is precisely because McCarthy and the Coen brothers present Bell as a believably aging man that his character can offer a revised masculinity script.

From Certainty to Doubt: Bell’s Journey

I always thought I could at least someday put things right and I guess I just dont feel that way no more . . . I’m bein asked to stand for something that I dont have the same belief in it I once did . . . Now I’ve seen it held to the light . . . I’ve been forced look at it again and forced to look at myself. For better or worse I do not know . . . I never had them sorts of doubts before. (McCarthy 2005: 306)

These grim words, spoken at the end of the plot, contrast sharply with the facile pronouncements that Bell once made about virtue, integrity, and right and wrong. It is a powerful admission. To a large extent, the agent of Bell’s transformation is Chigurh, a man who turns out to be not only a killer but also a philosopher. “Tell me something,” he says to a competing mercenary, Carson Wells, “If the rule you followed led you to this of what use was the rule?” (McCarthy 2005: 175). As Jay Ellis (2011) has noted, Chigurh functions as a kind of “Socratic figure” who intends to help his victims comprehend the significance of their past actions (96). His question to Wells surely applies to Bell as well: if tradition and common sense do

not work as the “rule” for governing one’s life, then of what use is it? With no clear answer in sight, Bell is left with only his doubts.

How should he respond? With more violence to avenge the deaths of Moss, Carla Jean, his deputy, and the innocent civilians left in Chigurh’s wake? Bell makes a critical decision: he will not “put his soul at hazard” by pursuing Chigurh (McCarthy 2005: 4). Unlike the Lone Ranger or Munny, Bell walks away; he “quits”. On Bell’s last day at work,

he walked out of the courthouse for the last time. He walked down the steps and out the back door and got in his truck and sat there. He couldn't name the feeling. It was sadness but it was something else besides. And the something else besides was what had him sitting there instead of starting the truck. He'd felt like this before but not in a long time and when he said that, then he knew what it was. It was defeat. It was being beaten. More bitter to him than death. You need to get over that, he said. Then he started the truck. (McCarthy 2005: 306)

Not surprisingly, most critics consider Bell a failure, albeit a good man and a sympathetic failure. According to Peebles (2004), the end of the novel “sounds a distinct note of defeat for its protagonist and intermittent narrator, Sanderson Sheriff Ed Tom Bell . . . He quits – though not without reason” (29). From this perspective, Bell not only fails to catch Chigurh but also fails to “be a man”, to live up to the masculine expectations of a sheriff and a productive member of society. In this way, critics unwittingly rely upon a midlife image of masculinity rather than being open to possible masculinity scripts of later life.

In our view, Bell’s feeling of defeat is not, in the end, a failure. It is the beginning of a transformation that leads not to superpowers but rather to humility and uncertainty. As David Cremean (2010) puts it, “Bell has examined his old certitudes and found them lacking, recognized them to be at heart but mere excuses. He is now unconcerned with what others think, has moved beyond thinking and acting the way he was expected to” (28). He has, in other words, moved beyond the hegemonic masculinity script of middle age and seeks to redefine its meaning for himself.

Interestingly, McCarthy suggests in the text itself that Bell’s personal growth will require more than interior monolog. Monolog, as we learn from Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), fails to acknowledge the equal rights of another’s consciousness by treating its own discourse as the final word (292). A number of scholars, most notably Judith Butler (1990), have noted

the perennial association in Western culture of monologism with masculinity and dialogism with femininity (1990). For most of his life, Bell, playing the part of the taciturn cowboy, gives in to the temptation to shut out other voices. He is, as Bakhtin (1984) puts it, “deaf to the other’s response” (292). Bell recalls, for example, meeting a woman in Corpus Christi who worried that her daughter would one day be denied the right to have an abortion. “Well mam”, he replies,

I don’t think you got any worries about the way the country is headed. The way I see it going I don’t have much doubt but what she’ll be able to have an abortion. I’m goin to say that not only will she be able to have an abortion, she’ll be able to have you put to sleep. Which pretty much ended the conversation. (McCarthy 2005: 117)

The way in which Bell recalls the woman’s insistent talking – “she kept on, kept on” – suggests that her point of view is a mere annoyance. Bell rules out in advance the possibility that the woman’s perspective could change any of his own thinking. He also refuses to discuss those things that are most troubling to him: his daughter (“We lost a girl but I wont talk about that”) and his military background (“I wont talk about the war neither”) (McCarthy 2005: 90, 195). For much of the novel, Bell conforms to a kind of “monologic masculinity”, in Hugh Campbell’s (2006) words, that “limits the range of topics deemed appropriate for men and women to discuss, regulates a specific definition of what constitutes work and success, and recognizes precise boundaries of manhood” (28). But after the transformative and traumatic events that he witnesses – when his views are “held to the light” – Bell realizes that his own perspective is insufficient to account for what he has seen, which opens him to a different kind of conversation. Bell embraces a more flexible, alternative understanding of what it means to be a man – a kind of “dialogic masculinity” (Campbell et al. 2006: 28) – that leads him to transformative conversations with strangers, his family, and his wife.

To find answers, Bell goes out of his way to speak with a wide range of people: at least two men on death row, Moss’s father, Carla Jean, and his uncle Ellis. On the one hand, this search for dialog is quite literal, as he drives along the West Texas roads in his weathered police cruiser. On the other, it is a metaphorical journey into Bell’s consciousness, where he grapples with himself, past and present, and questions his role in a society

where, it seems, he no longer has a home. Perhaps the most important moment of Bell's transformation occurs when he visits his uncle Ellis, a man presumably in his eighties, who was shot while working as a deputy and lives in a wheel chair on some old, isolated ranch. The scene takes place directly after the most harrowing murder in the novel – Carla Jean's – so that questions of death, morality, and justice are foremost in Bell's (and the reader's) mind.⁷ Bell finds Ellis sitting alone, grizzled and stoic, in his cat-filled shack. "I got to say you look older", Ellis says when Bell walks in (McCarthy 2005: 264). "I am older", Bell responds, thus setting the stage for the conversation that he needs to have (McCarthy 2005: 264).

A number of details – the dusty road leading to Ellis's solitary home, the cluttered kitchen filled with dirty dishes and week-old coffee, and the tired, unhurried pace of their conversation – reveal a life filled with idling memories and no remaining active purpose. After initial bantering, the tone eases to a quiet vulnerability, a genuine openness and authenticity that are missing elsewhere in the story. In the film, agony and sadness are beautifully etched on Tommy Lee Jones's fleshy, expressive face. The tone of their conversation is pensive and retrospective, with both men conscious of the fact that, having lived most of their lives, the time has come for reflection and, perhaps, contrition. As they talk, several core questions come into focus. First, the use of violence: the man who shot Ellis and left him in a wheel chair has died in Angola Prison. Bell asks Ellis what he would have done if the man had been released. "Nothing, there wouldn't be no point to it", Ellis responds (Coen 2007). "All the time you spend trying to get back what's been took from you more's going out the door. After a while you just have to try and get a tourniquet on it" (Coen 2007). Ellis suggests that mastery and retributive violence – the kind that Munny and other cowboy heroes engage in – is no more than a misguided illusion. One should simply move on and, as it were, "get a tourniquet" on one's losses. Bell is surprised by this response, which seems to confirm his own decision not to pursue Chigurh.

⁷ In the film, the Coen brothers chose to insert the scene directly before Carla Jean's murder, implying that Bell is not yet aware of her death. It is thus Moss's death that weighs most heavily on his mind.

At the same time, Ellis, whom many critics see as the moral center of the novel,⁸ refuses to accept Bell's nostalgia as a fitting attitude toward the "new" problems that he faces. He recounts the story of Uncle Mac, their distant relative who was gunned down in a horrific fashion on his own porch. As he listens to the story, Bell may have been reminded of Moss's demise. Like Uncle Mac, Moss was outnumbered, ambushed by surprise, and shot in a doorway in a thwarted effort to get his shotgun. Whether one lives today or a hundred years ago, "This country will kill you in a heartbeat and still people love it", Ellis says (McCarthy 2005: 271). Ellis rejects the notion that violence is always on the right side of the law: it is far too volatile and capricious to be in sole possession of "the good guys". Following Joan Mellon and others (see also De Boever 2009), one is tempted to relate Ellis's cautionary words to the long, bloody history of America as a whole. As Mellon (2008) puts it, "The stain of imperial domination, first at home at the moment of America's creation, and later in Vietnam and Iraq, has borne an accelerating historical legacy, symbolized by the spreading pool of [Carson] Wells's blood. Anton Chigurh is America's signature future, while Bell and his alter ego Hank Deerfield have found themselves no longer living in the country in which they were born" (31). Ellis is surely correct, then, when he tells Bell that his recent bout with violence "aint nothing new" (Coen 2007). Just as Bell searches for a nonviolent model of masculinity by which to live his life, Ellis's indictment of violence in *No Country* suggests the need for an alternative to America's recurring history of violence and imperialism.

Renunciation, Retirement, and the Road "On Ahead"

Bell's conversation with Ellis does not resolve any of his questions. As one of many reflective reminiscences and conversations, it stands as the centerpiece of an ongoing life review (Butler 1963).⁹ Just as importantly, it also shows that Bell is finally willing to confront his doubts and fears

⁸ Cremean (2010), Peebles (2009), and Ellis (2011) all see Ellis as an unlikely source of wisdom.

⁹ The literature on life review is enormous. Some of it is reviewed in Achenbaum (2013).

with those closest to him. Indeed, their conversation is ultimately a rehearsal – Ellis calls it a “practice run” (McCarthy 2005: 279) – for the intimate conversation that Bell plans to have with Loretta. “You aim to tell her?” Ellis asks. “Yes sir. I do” (McCarthy 2005: 279). Though the novel leaves Bell’s conversation with Loretta to the imagination – Bell talks more to himself (or to the reader) than to his wife – the final scene of the film offers a glimpse of their future together. As the pair sits around the breakfast table, Loretta pours them coffee; Bell looks uncomfortable and out of place. Their discussion foregrounds problems of who he is and how to spend his days. “Maybe I’ll go riding”, he suggests. “I can’t plan your day”, she replies (Coen 2007). After suggesting that they go for a ride *together*, she replies, even more pointedly, “Lord, no, I’m not retired”. Unlike her husband, the comment implies, Loretta still has a useful role to fill in the community. Bell keeps trying: “Maybe I’ll help out here then”, he offers. “Better not”, she answers, clearly delineating her role as keeper of the home (Coen 2007). In the end, their relationship will still remain traditionally gendered. Bell will depend on her for every kind of moral and emotional support, and she will love him without any resentment, regret, or reservation. But without the social props and privileges of the cowboy hero, Bell seems consigned to inactivity and confusion.

Is this not the image of a man who has “quit”? Mellon (2008) sums up the common opinion when she describes the final scene of the film: “Sheriff Bell, a broken, idle man, sits at his kitchen table, empty of occupation and usefulness to the community he had served since he was a twenty-five-year-old lawman” (33–37). From this perspective, Bell is overwhelmed in the face of impending retirement and death, which are ultimately the same thing. However, in our opinion, the road “on ahead” is not death but a new phase of life that is filled with uncertainty and promise with Loretta. Critics who dismiss Bell as a failure should consider the courage that it takes him after 30 years to question his most cherished values and to pursue conversations with urgency and honesty. In this respect, as Bell tells his wife his dreams, the narrative act is itself a kind of victory. It is a different kind of breakthrough, to be sure, but it is a crucial one.

When one considers the final scene from this perspective – Bell telling a vital and vulnerable part of himself to Loretta – his final dream takes

on further significance. In the dream, his father has gone ahead to an undetermined location to prepare a fire, and there is no telling how long it will take to get there. Bell can only follow behind, knowing that he will always arrive a bit too late but knowing, too, that his father has gone ahead to comfort and protect him (McCarthy 2005: 308–309). While critics have tended to interpret the dream in terms of its broader resonances, especially Bell's impending death,¹⁰ the images might also stand for the uncertain phase of Bell's retirement. Like Yeats's old man, who exists in transit between his homeland and the transcendent city of Byzantium, the final images in *No Country* are of travel, impermanence, and flux. By declining to reveal Bell's fate, McCarthy situates himself within a modernist tradition that foregrounds the *process*, or the coming-to-be, of the journey over any final outcome.

From the perspective of masculinity studies, Bell's dream is typical of the incomplete and inchoate scripts for older men. As we have suggested in this essay, Bell stands apart from the heroic violence of the Lone Ranger, William Munny, and other heroes of the American Western. While he cannot offer a solution, Bell's search implies that there may be numerous ways of being an old man – not a one-size-fits-all image to which one must conform. By the novel's end, Bell seems to understand that any new scripts for late-life masculinity must begin and end with self-knowledge. As he puts it: "it's a life's work to see yourself for what you really are and even then you might be wrong" (McCarthy 2005: 295).

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¹⁰ De Boever (2009), for instance, writes that the governing symbols of the dream, light, and fire, "can easily be read as the light and fire of justice: as the dream of final control that is projected up ahead, with the sheriff's long-dead father protecting it until the sheriff will get there himself, in other words: until the sheriff himself will have died. One does not have to be a psychoanalyst to understand the dream's significance: only in death will the sheriff's work of justice be completed. Final justice is not a part of this world" (143).

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“The play’s the thing”: theatre as a scholarly meeting ground in age studies

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Abstract

Addressing three current critical turns in gerontology, this article proposes the theatre as a fertile ground for various theoretical angles in age studies – including the performative on and off stage, the narrative in the script and the critical questioning of age and ageism in the multiple realities of performance. Beginning from a shared site in the theatre, researchers may be able to establish greater common ground, resulting not only in multi-disciplinary efforts but also in truly interdisciplinary work. With a foundation in performance studies, this article suggests promising directions for age studies and theatre scholarship by examining three aspects of theatrical production: a play script, Jan de Hartog’s popular *The Fourposter* (1951); a collaborative development of a script and production, Jeanette Mathewes Stevens’ 2010 senior drama *ElderSpeak*; and a performance, a 2011 song-and-dance revue staged by an established senior theatre troupe, the Sarasota Senior Theater.

Keywords: Ageing, theatre, performance, performativity, narrative, interdisciplinarity.

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One of the major challenges of multi- and interdisciplinary scholarship is to establish common ground, providing theoretical and practical foundations for fruitful discussion. This challenge is evident in humanities-oriented age studies; although we express common interests in the ageing process, our methodologies may differ widely. Swinnen (2011) foregrounded this spectrum of perspectives in a call to interrogate disciplinarity by engaging critical, narrative and performative turns in age studies. While most research focuses on one of the three approaches, this article indicates how the three perspectives may be beneficial at one research site: the theatre. Hennessy and Walker (2011) summarise the potential rewards of utilising more than one perspective: "The advocacy for multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research on ageing is driven by the recognition that a comprehensive understanding of complicated phenomena like ageing is best achieved through the contributions of different disciplines" (53). While Hennessy and Walker address multi- and interdisciplinary ageing research efforts primarily in the sciences, I suggest that the theatre is a promising site for a multiplicity of approaches, both interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary, and age studies in particular. The promise of multi-disciplinary efforts may seem more apparent, but theatre also is inherently interdisciplinary; the staging of a play requires multiple media, comprising music, the visual arts in scenic design, the actors' performances and the literary nature of the script. Theatre already is built on integration within the arts – experts in various artistic media work together, with shared concerns and shared outcomes. This article advocates for extending that sense of integration further to theatre research, and interprets the theatre as a locus for various theoretical angles, such as the performative on stage, the narrative in the script and the critical questioning of ageism and chronological/biological age in the multiple realities of performance.

I wish to encourage age studies in the theatre in the broadest terms, building from the work of Basting (2000), whose outline of the intersection of performance studies and age studies includes a section more specifically on theatre (263). That work also divides a consideration of performance and age into the categories of "drama therapy, literary gerontology, and theoretical accounts of performance" (261). I offer here a broader consideration of critical paths in age studies and theatre as well as an indication of how the three prevalent paths may converge in the staging of a play. It is

useful to adumbrate first the critical paths briefly as I see their relationship to theatre. First, as Holstein and Minkler (2003) note, critical gerontologists question the questions, exposing and interrogating the assumptions underlying gerontology and attitudes towards the elderly in society at large. Not only is that critical voice needed in theatrical practice but also theatre can be used as a tool to raise the questions of critical gerontology. Theatre practitioners have too often compartmentalised treatment of the elderly, as drama activities commonly are arranged for the elderly in institutionalised settings, while the working theatre unquestioningly welcomes the elderly as audience and excludes the elderly onstage, casting the younger to play the older, if older characters are included at all. As scholars ask how the visibility of critical gerontology may be raised (Swinnen 2011), theatre can be a powerful tool to probe norms and raise awareness of ageist practices among all types of audiences, from academics and health care workers to the elderly themselves.

Second, narrative approaches encompass the relationship of the personal life story to master narratives. Literary age studies scholars typically examine a dramatic script for its representations of ageing and old age (e.g. Deats & Lenker 1991). I suggest that theatre advances a unique opportunity to study the interaction of those experiencing the ageing process – actors, audience members, playwrights – with master narratives of culture as they are manifested on stage. Hartung and Maierhofer (2009) point to one definition of narrative as the sequencing of events according to a specific ideology; I assert that the multiple negotiations of the ageing narrative observable in the theatrical process, from plot to audience reception, merit critical attention, revealing and shaping social attitudes towards ageing.

Third, the performative turn in humanities-oriented age studies may appear to be the most developed link to the theatre. Viewing age as performative has been advanced by such theatre scholars as Basting (1998) as well as Lipscomb and Marshall (2010), who, building on Butler (1990), emphasise the self, created by repeated performance, the “doing” that constitutes “being.” These scholars foresee the potential for growth in the field of age studies built on a performative theoretical foundation. This article extends that analysis to scripts and productions that span ages from young adulthood to the fourth age, with particular interest in the

implications of performing against the grain of one's apparent chronological age. While age studies researchers long have adopted theatrical techniques for therapy with elders in institutionalised settings (e.g. Noice & Noice 2009), a turn towards research of the production of a published play script in a theatre setting (which I will call "traditional" theatre) affords rich possibilities for age-oriented scholars. Zeilig (2012) asserts that "narrative and literary approaches to age and ageing when allied to perspectives from critical gerontology can furnish scholars with important perspectives for interpreting and re-configuring 'age'" (7). Similarly, age studies could benefit from the multiplicity of research opportunities as yet unexplored in the traditional theatre, from professional and community productions to troupes specialising in senior theatre. Perhaps, researchers from various disciplines could collaborate in examining the same theatrical production, leading to increased true interdisciplinarity. Such collaboration could foster shared methodology to reveal greater insights about age and ageing identities.

As primarily a literary critic, I do not presume to be able to indicate all the possible avenues for theatre research in other disciplines. Rather than being exhaustive in such a broad proposition, in this article, I attempt to pique interest in theatre research by limning three examples that lend themselves towards different turns in humanities-oriented age studies. This study begins with literary analysis of a mid-century play script, *The Fourposter*, incorporating performative and narrative perspectives to examine the written text and its possibilities in production, rather than a specific production. *The Fourposter* has not heretofore attracted attention from age studies scholars but has enjoyed enduring popularity in amateur and professional theatre. The play text reveals issues of age and ageing that have been overlooked in drama. The article then explores both the development and production of a new script, *Elderspeak*, indicating narrative and critical approaches to its anti-ageist theatre activism. This play is an example of a collaboratively produced script by and for seniors, chosen for insights into the process of creating senior-oriented theatre. Moreover, this script has been featured by the leading ageing-oriented publisher of plays, ArtAge, whose website states that the play has "been well received at retirement homes, senior centers, and conferences for health care professionals" (Vorenberg 2011). Finally, a call for greater

“The play’s the thing”

attention to the growing senior theatre movement focuses on one Florida production that can be studied from all three critical foundations. This production was chosen because the Sarasota Senior Theater is a long-standing troupe considered exemplary among US senior theatre endeavours, “a strong company with an excellent reputation” (Vorenberg 2011). Rather than conducting a fully detailed analysis of each example case, this essay will point out elements of the theatre that intersect with each of the three perspectives in age studies in the hope that scholars in a variety of disciplines see the theatre as a valuable site of encounter for age studies. As Marion Fries-Dieckmann (2009) notes, many Western dramatic conventions regarding the performance of age can be traced to Shakespeare. In that vein, whether research pursues the health benefits of senior theatre or an analysis of age portrayal in *Hamlet*, “the play’s the thing” (Shakespeare 2008: 2.2.609) offering significant potential to better understand the human experience of ageing.

Performativity, Narrative, and the Ageing Process in *The Fourposter*

The intersection of age studies with the theatre may at first seem to rest in textual analysis of older dramatic characters. I suggest that age studies will benefit from broadening its scope beyond a focus on plays featuring older characters (e.g. Fries-Dieckmann 2009; Lenker & Lipscomb 2002; Lipscomb & Marshall 2010) to plays that invite analysis of the ageing process. Both the performative and the narrative turns in ageing studies could apply; a dialogue about such plays between performative and narrative critics would enrich the understanding of age in both areas. Numerous plays highlight the ageing process by employing the convention of one actor portraying different ages during the course of the action – canonical modern plays (such as Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, Wilder’s *Our Town*, and Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive*) may come to mind immediately. However, for this study, I focus on a popular play that has not yet garnered traditional literary-based critical analysis, but warrants attention from cultural age-studies critics because it has struck a chord with contemporary society.

Jan de Hartog's *The Fourposter*, written in 1951, spans the period from 1890 to 1925 in the life of one couple. The Broadway production ran for 632 performances and won the 1952 Tony for Best Play (Broadway League 2012). This play has been a staple of US community and student theatre, not only in its original form but also as the 1966 musical adaptation *I Do! I Do!* In fact, the musical version evidenced such enduring popularity that a professional theatre near Minneapolis presented it continuously for more than 15 years, totalling more than 6500 performances (Freeman & Nelson 1989).

While the play's lasting popularity with theatre groups is due in part to the ease of staging – one set and two actors – I assert that this drama continues to draw audiences by its depiction of the life course on narrative, theatrical and performative levels. A consideration of age in the script shows the intertwining of these three veins. First, the performative age-studies approach to such a play may be the most apparent choice of the three critical perspectives, as the concept of performativity has become central to performance studies, which can trace its roots to theatre studies (Loxley 2007). The narrative critic can read in *The Fourposter* a master narrative, the depiction of major events constructed to represent a "typical" Western life course. On theatrical and performative levels, however, this presentation of a dominant "aging" discourse is challenged. The audience witnesses a changing performance of age that interrogates the accepted understanding of "being" an age, rendering instead age as repeated performance that creates the sense of reality. As one actor is cast to portray a certain character over years of time, the ageing process represented on stage points out the mechanism of the performativity of age off stage. The actors not only represent older men or women in a narrative, they also and at the same time remain themselves, the reality of their bodies being in dialogue with the dominant social and cultural discourse of ageing.¹ In *The Fourposter* and similar plays that show the passing of decades on stage, the actors' corporeality is in dialogue with the characters' changing ages, revealing the basis of performativity: repeated iterations that constitute reality.

¹ For an analysis of performances that insist on the body's persistent materiality, challenging the dominant social and cultural discourses of aging, see Stalpaert (2012).

“The play’s the thing”

The conscious age performance on stage points out the unconscious performativity of age off stage.

The Fourposter script begins on the wedding night of Michael and Agnes, and continues with scenes in their bedroom until the day they move out 35 years later. The six scenes in *The Fourposter* depict marriage milestones rather than time milestones, so that the performance of age does not change at regularised time intervals, and the impression of choosing events to build a narrative is particularly strong. The second scene of the first act occurs just one year after the wedding night, as Agnes goes into labour with the couple’s first child. The two discuss how they have matured in just one year as well as what they have learned about each other and about marriage, but there is no overt reference to age in the dialogue or stage directions. Only one year has passed; the action focuses on inward change and does not connect that change with ageing. However, this is not the case at the beginning of the second act, which takes place eleven years into the marriage. The stage directions dictate that everything in the bedroom except the fourposter bed has changed, which marks the passage of time and a new level of success for the couple. Michael’s professional success leaves Agnes feeling insecure, so that when he informs her that he has become infatuated with another woman, Agnes asks, “Is she . . . young? How young?” (55). Her first assumption is that she would be replaced by a younger woman, but Michael denies this accusation. Agnes also refers to her age in conjunction with her reaction to the news: “What do you think? That I should faint in my thirty-first year because of something so . . . ordinary?” She implies maturity gained since the play’s first scene, a loss of naïveté. During the course of their disagreement, they claim to have changed; when Michael asks Agnes what she sees when she looks into his eyes, she replies, “Wrinkles!”

Because this scene occurs at the beginning of the second act, accompanied by a significant set change, the actors would have had time to add markers of age, perhaps apply some ageing makeup in addition to changing their costumes. However, the stage directions do not mention a change in appearance for the characters in this scene, even though the dialogue signals an ageing process. The script’s silence leaves the staging choices fully open for individual productions, as the director must deal with the tension between the dialogue’s focus on change and the continuity of seeing the

same performers on stage. Agnes's outburst asserts that the physical changes over eleven years, from the early twenties to the early thirties, reflect inner change as well. Meanwhile, the actors are both "doing" changes in age on stage [following Schechner (2001) who defines performance as "showing doing"], and "being" their own chronological age. The conscious change in "showing doing" from one scene to the next reveals to the audience how age is performed, that in fact age is performative, that repeated "doing" creates the sense of "being."

While the play as a whole establishes age as a performative, the second scene of act two revolves around the master narrative of coming of age, as the couple awaits the late-night return of their teenage son. The dramatic theme has alternated between the conjugal relationship and parenthood; this scene establishes a sense of one generation's being replaced by the next. Michael worries about his son Robert, contrasting their behaviour: "Now, in my young days, if I was told to be in at a certain hour—" (73). The comparison and contrast between generations are more pronounced because the couple has one son and one daughter, replicating themselves. When Agnes accuses Michael of being less strict with their daughter Elizabeth, he even alludes to the Electra complex, replying, "So! I have an unhealthy preference for my daughter. Is that it?" (76). Michael objects to Elizabeth's taste in beaux, and Agnes asks, "Are you suggesting that the only person the child will be allowed to fall in love with is a younger edition of yourself?" (81). Their discussion of Robert's possible drunkenness and Elizabeth's love life recalls the play's first scene – Michael and Agnes, both a bit tipsy and very much in love on their wedding night. They, too, were once young, and, although they do not address the issue directly, obviously Agnes and Michael are no longer claiming youth now. This relinquishing of their youthful titles to the next generation as the children approach adulthood causes some conflicted emotions, ending in resignation (85). Their references to age leave a distinct impression of the progression of the couple's life story, reflecting on their ageing processes and the unstoppable life course, while the actors themselves remain relatively static.

Thus, narrative and performative critics may be able to collaborate in studying a production of a play such as *The Fourposter*, finding commonality in questions raised. Basting (2000) notes that a performative

“The play’s the thing”

approach to play analysis expands the scope of questions to be asked about producing a play:

How will the characters be depicted? Will they wear age makeup? Will they wear age-appropriate clothing? What *is* age-appropriate clothing after all? How will they move on stage? Will the characters be cast according to the actors’ ages? (262)

The Fourposter highlights such questions, as the actors change generations during the action, moving steadily through the life-course narrative.

The play’s sense of the repetition of the life course is even more pronounced in the stage directions for the opening of act three, which indicate that Agnes is holding a wedding bouquet and Michael is “humming the Wedding March” in anticipation of their daughter’s wedding day (89). Rather than delivering the typical reminiscences about their own wedding day (which, in stage time, happened only an hour earlier), Agnes realises that she has been a wife and a mother, but an unfulfilled human being. She complains that she goes through life like a puppet, not even feeling alive, remembering what it was like 23 years earlier when she had looked at herself “in exactly the same way, in the same window perhaps” to check on her bridal veil (96). All at once, her life seems worthless, “[o]nly wrinkles and a wedding ring, and a new cash book for the household every year” (96). Michael convinces her that she is reacting to the emotion of the day because, since her children are leaving home, “she imagines her job is over” (103). He reminds her that she is his inspiration, that he will always need her, and Agnes “is so amused and relieved that she cries and laughs at the same time” (104). The episode is constructed as Agnes’s mid-life crisis, peppered with references to the passing years for both husband and wife. Despite the emphasis on mid-life review, Agnes’s reference to wrinkles – which seem to be the major outward marker of age in her estimation – furnishes the only overt allusion to physical ageing. The sense of the life cycle is particularly strong in this scene; the narrative aspect of age is more prominent than its performative aspect.

The life-course narrative of *The Fourposter* does not extend into old age but stops after 35 years of marriage, which could raise questions for critics. Does this choice reflect the elision of old age from the adult life story? Does the ending imply that one actor may play young and middle

adulthood, but not an aged self? The action ends when Agnes and Michael will no longer be sleeping on the fourposter bed, which will remain in the room as they move to a smaller apartment – but a newlywed couple will be the new occupants. Michael notices the repetition: “It’s odd, you know, how after you have lived in a place for so long, a room gets full of echoes. Almost everything we’ve said this morning we have said before” (116). Of course, in compressed stage time, most of these repeated lines were uttered less than two hours earlier, strongly supporting the concepts of self-continuity and coherent story throughout the ageing process. The couple’s exit from the room also echoes their initial entrance, as Michael carries Agnes over the threshold. This is one of the few times that the stage directions point to the physical changes accompanying age, explaining that he “leans down and hesitantly, but surely, picks her up” (117). Their kiss on the way out of the room represents the standard happy ending, but also a sense of having lived a satisfying life together.

The Fourposter demands that actors work across a span of 35 years, with little time between scenes for the physical ageing transformations that the dialogue acknowledges. Some plays’ notes indicate how to perform differences in age; for example, *How I Learned to Drive* directs in scene one that Li’l Bit is “softer-looking” in her 40s than at 17, and “stands awkwardly” as a 13-year-old in scene 13 (Vogel 1997). However, De Hartog’s script leaves staging and casting choices to the individual production. Interestingly, the well-known actors who originated the Broadway roles were middle aged: Jessica Tandy was 42 and husband Hume Cronyn was 40, while the script covers the period from young adulthood to what is considered the end of middle age, from about 20 to 55 years old. During this span of time, the characters of Michael and Agnes would be expected to garner some of the simplest markers of advancing age, but the story does not continue into the characters’ elderly years, which would require the actors to display more evident physical markers. Simple adjustments of makeup and costume could suffice to maintain a conventionally realistic mode of production, the range within audience suspension of disbelief – which is broad. The audience unquestioningly accepts the enactment of different ages on stage, an unchallenged convention of the stage that speaks to age as performative offstage, supporting the

“The play’s the thing”

assertion that constant iterations of performance constitute the ageing self (Lipscomb & Marshall 2010).

The narrative thread of *The Fourposter* transcends the typical binary construction of youth and old age to show both change and self-continuity from young adulthood to the cusp of old age. The choice and sequencing of major life events shape identity for Agnes and Michael in relation to the master narrative of the cyclical nature of human existence. Most intriguing in this type of play is the tension between a character’s proclamation of maturing self – a claim to the sort of progress narrative that Gullette (2004) has addressed – and the perceived stability of self that accompanies one actor’s portraying decades of the life course in only two hours. Studying the staging of such a play would allow scholars from numerous perspectives to raise questions about how a production can not only reflect but also influence attitudes about the life course – whether it facilitates intergenerational understanding. *The Fourposter* stretches the consideration of age as performative and narrative, viewing ageing as a predictable story that unites humans, who all are acting their age.

The Three Critical Turns and Anti-Ageist Social Theatre

Issues of age and ageing often have been deemed of minor importance (at best) in traditional plays and the scholarship surrounding them. More recently, accompanying the ageing of the post-World-War-II baby boomers in the United States, a number of plays have been published that overtly confront the concerns of ageing. Quite apart from plays such as *The Fourposter* that seldom mention age, these plays are narratives written to make sense of the ageing process, whether they directly or subtextually interrogate what it means to grow older. As Katz (2000) succinctly states, narratives “are practices that connect the contents of stories and the circumstances of storytelling to the art of rendering lives coherent and meaningful” (144). By depicting individualised characters, these plays address the individual meanings of ageing, asking whether these experiences are widespread and exploring the possibility of positive change. Frequently, they fall under the category of “social theatre,” as defined in Thompson and Schechner (2004): “theatre with specific social agendas; theatre where aesthetics is not the ruling objective; theatre outside the realm

of commerce, which drives Broadway/the West End, and the cult of the new, which dominates the avantgarde" (12). In addition to the performative and narrative lenses that are valuable in analysing these plays, the critical turn in ageing studies yields insights as well. Once again, the veins will intertwine, as anti-ageist social theatre uses narrative techniques to question current assumptions about and treatment of the elderly.

One script that recently has been capturing the attention of US senior performance groups, for example, is *ElderSpeak*, by Stevens (2010), which arose from seniors' experiences with ageist attitudes. It focuses on Joan, a woman in her 50s, as she copes with both a rehabilitation facility that is infantilising her mother, and the new ageist policies that her employer is adopting. The one-act script challenges norms of institutional care: In order to show the rehabilitation facility staff members that they are condescending to their patients, Joan asks Dunbar, the nursing supervisor, to pretend to be a new patient. Dunbar sits in a wheelchair and masquerades as a woman about 20 years older than her apparent age, as a nurse greets her:

HARRINGTON (to DUNBAR): Well, how are you young lady? (to JOAN) Dolly is it?

Doesn't she have a pretty name? Does she like it here at Shadyview Meadows?

(HARRINGTON fusses over DUNBAR) Here, Sweetie, let's get all comfy. (lifts DUNBAR's legs and places her feet rather roughly into the wheelchair footrests) I know we'll get along just fine. Would we like some yummy pudding for our tummy, Sweetheart?

DUNBAR: Quit talking to me like that. I'm an adult. And quit fussing over me. Talk to me, not them! Leave me alone. (17)

It takes only a moment for Dunbar to understand how insulting the staff's *elderspeak* is when she enacts old age on stage, when her actions create a reality of age. As she dons the physical markers of frailty, she immediately experiences the drastic change in interaction that accompanies advancing from middle to old age.

Turning a critical eye on how the US health care system continues to marginalise and objectify seniors, this script transforms everyday elder experiences into theatre for social change, a traditional function of

the theatre that involves all three turns in ageing studies. In a telephone interview (28 November 2011), playwright Stevens explained that the play is one of eight original works developed so far by the Silver Stage Players in Knoxville, Tennessee. The senior theatre group takes on such issues as post-retirement depression and losing a spouse, gathering stories from those who are connected with the local John T. O'Connor Senior Center, then using them as script material. "About ninety-nine percent of the script [*ElderSpeak*] happened to someone I know," Stevens recalled. Narrative and performance scholars may pursue the relationship between presenting a "real" story on stage, particularly portraying one's own story, and publishing that story as a dramatic script that anyone can perform.

From a performative view, the seniors who are depicting their own stories on stage create a special version of what Schechner (2001) describes as "showing doing," a conscious performance of self, even as the self is being created less consciously by repeated iterations of performance. Auslander (1997) explains that this performing body "can be understood as a body that exposes the ideological discourses producing it, through performance that insists on the body's status as a historical and cultural construct and that asserts the body's materiality" (92). Each performing aged body is contextualised by other onstage bodies as well as the hegemonic discourse of ageing. The sense of "truth" perceived in performing one's own experiences on stage can lead to social change off stage.

From a narrative perspective, the Silver Stage Players see the creation of onstage narrative as life writing; other theatre groups who purchase the script may regard it as a dramatic work that privileges verisimilitude. The shaping of such personal narrative into purposeful drama is the nature of social theatre. To fight ageism, these seniors are devising conscious narratives of the ageing self, which merit scholarly attention as an alternative form of life writing. One model for the narrative analysis of ageing in the dramatic text is supplied by Fries-Dieckmann (2009). Using Maierhofer and speaking of various elements in works by Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard, Fries-Dieckmann concludes, "Above all, it is the narrative act that constitutes or rather negotiates old age identity in the plays" (195). Narrative critics can find theatre particularly insightful regarding age, in that the story is told in/by the body as well as in language. This emphasis on the physical narrative is particularly evident in

Stevens' play: The physical markers of age immediately lead to discriminatory treatment.

In staging works that intend social change, theatre practitioners often collaborate with outside groups, perhaps indicating willingness to cooperate with academic researchers as well. Because the Silver Stage Players wanted to investigate employment discrimination as well as more general ageism, the members worked with the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee Office on Aging (2011), a public non-profit agency serving Knoxville and its surrounding county. According to its website (<http://www.knoxseniors.org/about.html>), the agency advocates for senior citizens, assesses their needs and coordinates services to meet those needs. The Office on Aging assisted the group in locating older citizens who were seeking jobs and believed they had encountered age bias, either in losing their positions or in being unable to find a new position. The script then takes a narrative approach to fighting ageism by representing those stories on stage. In the 2011 interview, Stevens reported that this real-life plot has generated numerous responses of recognition, as audience members stop the performers afterwards to tell them, "That's exactly what happened to me." Attending issues-oriented theatre is unusual for these audiences, Stevens noted, so the comic portions of the play are essential. "No one likes to be preached to," she said, "and this is a critical audience. If they don't like the play, they'll get up and leave. But we had capacity audiences for *ElderSpeak*."

Although many of those audience members already were aware of the cultural issues that the play engages and appreciated the drama's foregrounding of such concerns, others had internalised ageism so thoroughly that they did not believe they had experienced it. Stevens recounted that when the dozen members of the acting troupe asked senior centre participants for examples of ageist treatment, some claimed they knew of no examples. After viewing the play, they realised that they had indeed encountered ageism and age discrimination. "We definitely raised their awareness," Stevens asserted. Social theatre is intended to be transformative; these senior audiences were empowered to identify and fight against ageism in their everyday lives. Currently, this performing group's evidence of effectiveness in fighting ageism is anecdotal and informal; research could provide a more solid basis for their efforts.

“The play’s the thing”

Multi-disciplinary collaboration with such a group is again the most obvious option. However, as Thompson and Schechner (2004) observe regarding separate disciplines, “Social theatre is not – or at least in our view, ought not to be – limited to taking performance practices to ‘nontheatrical’ spaces, as a meeting of two distinct unrelated wholes: theatre and social work. We need to think, rather, about the dynamic interaction of the two practices, an interaction that can change both disciplines” (12–13). Perhaps, if performative, critical and narrative age studies scholars from such disciplines as literature, psychology and sociology also could be involved from script development through the production process to analysis of audience reception, truly transformative interdisciplinary scholarship would emerge in anti-ageist social theatre.

The Untapped Potential of Senior Theatre

The *ElderSpeak* script is designed for a mixed-age cast from 40s to late 70s, but it was developed by a senior theatre group and is marketed through ArtAge, an Oregon-based publisher specialising in supporting senior theatre. Senior theatre groups define themselves as being reserved for older performers, usually at least 50 years old and often composed primarily of retirees. While I have suggested that mainstream plays and activist drama hold potential insights for age studies scholars, the most obvious common ground for multi- and interdisciplinary efforts would be in the senior theatre movement. Basting (1998) paved the way for such projects in *Stages of Age*, which analyses the work of several senior theatre groups. She argues for scholarly attention to older actors: “Performance, in terms of how we perform ourselves in everyday life and in terms of theatrical representation, offers a way to imagine old age as a valuable stage of life; one that links generations, that is engaged in both the present and the past, and that is constantly changing. For older adults the very *act of acting* interrupts popularly held notions that old age is a narrative of decline and rigidity” (2). Still, more than a decade later, this branch of the arts remains woefully under-researched and under-theorised, despite its growth. The Senior Theatre Resource Center, affiliated with ArtAge Publications, has tracked the development of senior theatre from 79

US companies in 1999 to nearly 800 troupes in 2011 (Vorenberg 2011). The troupes sometimes attract theatre academics as directors or consultants, but seldom attract researchers or theorists. The potential for collaborative age studies work in senior theatre deserves to be tapped.

In addition to performing the real-life experiences of seniors, elders also challenge their culture's ageist stereotypes by creating alternative narratives and performing the age they choose, regardless of social constraints. Eighty-year-olds play the ingénue or the dashing romantic hero, the roles that society continues to claim are in their past, despite the insightful analysis by Gullette (2004) of performing younger ages. Gullette (2004) posits the notion of a "default body," a "package of habits" that become the physical self with repetition (161), reminiscent of the ageing body as performative. She emphasises the conscious choices of everyday bodily performance that can be transformative in altering perceptions of age, similar to the transformative power of performativity that Butler (1990) has discussed. While society may censure or simply humour the elder who is performing significantly younger on stage, Gullette argues that the performance is credible because that actor has in fact been younger – as opposed to the younger actor who has never been older (166). Still, casting practices favour the younger actor who performs an older character by adding wrinkle makeup and other markers of age, as if the audience will value those physical markers over the obvious psychological advantage that Gullette points out of having experienced the younger age being portrayed.

These senior troupes defy typical ageist casting practices, often in a gleefully self-aware, postmodern fashion. As Auslander (1997) explains, a tension continues to exist between scholars' postmodern understanding of the self as constructed and acting teachers' traditional pedagogy, which values being truthful, seeking truth. However unconsciously, senior actors often abandon that traditional model, playing what they do not believe to be true (such as teenage nubility), but constructing their own relative truth in performance and affirming a model of ageing that differs from the master narrative of decline and decay. Moreover, the groups do not necessarily promote the opposing master narrative of "successful" ageing, which sometimes denies the normality of changes that accompany old age. The troupes welcome seniors of all abilities, not only those who are exceptionally talented and physically able.

“The play’s the thing”

That welcoming atmosphere is an important social aspect of senior theatre, which rejects the typical decline narrative of seniors’ isolation and alienation. Particularly in contemporary US society, older people may be physically separated from biological families who are scattered all over the nation and world, but it is common for senior theatre participants to view the theatre as creating an extended family, a group of people who care about and for each other by choice (Vorenberg 2011). Moreover, these family-type groups often span about two generations of ages, from 50 to 90. Senior theatre troupes are known for reaching out beyond the troupe to make intergenerational connections as well, whether by collaborating in dramatic activities with students or mentoring young performers (Strimling 2004; Thomson 2009). Senior theatre is therefore typically fully engaged with the larger community.

Exploring a recent production by an exemplary troupe will illustrate some of the facets of senior theatre that would benefit from further age studies inquiry. According to its website (<http://www.sarasotaseniortheater.com>), the Sarasota Senior Theater (2011) group was founded in 2000 and “is the only official senior theater group in Florida. SST performs musical variety shows, dramas, and intergenerational projects.” The group merged with a respected community troupe in Sarasota and transformed into the Sarasota Silver Stars in September 2011. The senior theatre’s spring 2011 show, *The Blue Revue*, subtitled “The Bluest Show in Town,” combined musical numbers and sketches, all with a blue theme. Much of this was standard variety-show fare, but the show also included a section called “Burley-Que Blue,” featuring an elegant striptease and a Sally Rand-style fan dance. Of course, all the performers were over 50 years old, and most were at least 70. The burlesque elements of the show were performed absolutely straight, no irony or comic exaggeration, and only the soft lighting may be construed as an accommodation of aged bodies. A full feminist reading of the troupe’s choices, delving into the objectification of women throughout the show, is beyond the scope of this article, but it is intriguing from an age studies perspective to consider this strong burlesque denial of a narrative of decline and decay.

The entire burlesque section of the show challenged stereotypical notions of sexless older women who are no longer erotically appealing or inclined. While the women who stripped or participated in the fan

dance met contemporary standards of fitness for the exposed body, they also were visibly aged, choosing to bare skin that would be rejected as unattractive by the culture at large. The instance of striptease asks the audience to consider whether the aged woman is allowed to claim a fullness of identity, an unrestricted ability to perform a self, especially a self that remains consistent with the individual's past. According to *The Blue Revue's* playbill, some of the performers had been professional dancers or models in their youth; one had been crowned Miss Rhode Island Universe. As these women perform stereotypical female sex appeal, they continue to construct sexual outer selves despite the sense of alienation from the mirror image that Woodward (1991) has described as a mirror stage of old age, in which the older person rejects the strange, aged reflection, thereby rejecting old age (67). The dance performance can be read as a proclamation that this body, too, is attractive, is sexual and is integral to self-construction.

The theatre provides to the performers and the audiences a space where they can feel that freedom to construct the self, to engage in play, to examine taboos, to speak of the unspeakable, to imagine and explore possibilities. On stage, the senior can be overtly sexual or perform youth without the spectre of cultural censorship that may materialise off stage. As Schechner (1985) has noted about the nature of the staged performance, the actor is not the character, but also not *not* the character (110). The actor subjunctively behaves "as if" he or she were someone else, and rather safely lays a claim to that someone else. The conscious performance and behavior "as if" rely in part on the presence of an audience that also is conscious of the performance. The live performance is not fact but also not fully fiction. This in-between liminoid space is especially open to analysis relating to our understanding of the cultural construction of older age, exposing assumptions about elders.

This in-between space is evident in *The Blue Revue* in one additional element: Several scenes describe the characters on stage as being actors or performers from the past, rather than fictional characters. Performers impersonate Sally Rand, Marlene Dietrich, W. C. Fields, and so on, rather than characters that these performers depicted or generic singers and dancers. Perhaps, it is more comfortable for these seniors to add an extra layer of performance by representing a performer, rather than to lay claim

“The play’s the thing”

to a character directly. When the performers choose to portray characters from the past, they link present-day selves to memories, affecting their own self-construction as well as that of senior audience members. Likewise, the formats and plots of vaudeville-style shows are likely to be familiar; *The Blue Revue* included not only a scene between W. C. Fields and Mae West, but also a traditional meet-me-round-the-corner-in-a-half-an-hour routine. However, younger audience members may have no previous exposure to these bits or performers. While the seniors may feel more comfortable performing famous performers who are performing famous sketches, young audience members may have no forestructure for these scenes, and see a character for the first time, judging that character and scene on their own merits rather than through the layers of performance that older audiences see. The seniors have the opportunity not only to entertain but also to pass down a history or legacy of particular live performances to younger generations.

As scholars consider how to move forward in humanistic age studies, the intergenerational connection may be crucial. Critics such as Gullette (2011) recently have noted that as the youngest members of the US baby boom pass 45 years of age, and the oldest reach retirement age, tensions abound about generations feeling separated; we see possible generational conflict in policy debates about US entitlement programmes for seniors, such as Medicare and Social Security. Just as we explore bringing various disciplines together in our scholarship, we need to be considering how to bring generations together, to avoid isolating ageing studies from younger people as an us-versus-them concern. In the theatre, we can scrutinise intergenerational relationships not only in textual characterisation but also in production, such as addressing the casting practices in plays, or the relationships between senior theatre performers and the younger directors, stage crew and college students who may work with them. Members of the Silver Stage Players, for example, rely on the expertise of younger members of a related community theatre’s board of directors, who provide on-going backstage/offstage support.

Even though the senior theatre designation seems to create an artificial separation by age, it actually welcomes the major age demographic that has been overlooked in recognition of artistic worth. Typical casting practices in US theatre bring to the fore the cultural assumptions about the capabilities

of and limitations placed on the elderly, as directors routinely exclude elders based on presumptions of physical and mental impairment. The challenge issued by Schechner (1989) still is relevant: "It is time to break the chains binding the performing arts to a narrow vision of human possibility. We need to see on our theatre and dance stages women and men dancing and acting in roles previously reserved for one gender or the other; old people playing a variety of parts; and a full-fleshed parade of body types" (10). The growth of senior theatre may dispel myths about the mental and physical capabilities of senior actors. A senior theatre troupe often is organisationally connected to a community theatre group, and there may be cross-casting or other types of collaboration between the two companies, increasing understanding about age-appropriate casting.

Concluding Comments

Swinnen (2011) calls for "discipline-challenging dialogues" along the "three paradigm shifts in the cross-disciplinary study of aging" that will "open new ways of collaborating." The many-faceted nature of the theatre challenges the disciplines with each performance. Scholars from any humanities-related discipline may rise to the challenge, devising collaborative projects to investigate age from numerous vantage points. As an indication of the type of collaboration I suggest, I point to Basting's recent work, *The Penelope Project* (2011), a bold move in this direction, as is evident from the project's website (<http://penelopeproject.wordpress.com/about/>):

The Penelope Project used the story of Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey* to engage an entire long term care community in creativity and learning. Discussion groups, movement exercises, visual art, stories, and music all emerged from this multi-year project that culminated in the performance of "Finding Penelope," a professionally-produced play staged inside the care facility. Over 400 people attended the performances, which were staged in March, 2011 ... The evaluation plan includes pre/post surveys of students; assessing student coursework; focus groups with residents; interviews with staff; analysis of all materials that emerge from the project; and audience feedback in post-show discussions.

The project culminates in a documentary film, a summer institute and a book – obviously an interdisciplinary effort involving a broad spectrum of academics and professionals. Although the data are still being

“The play’s the thing”

analysed at this point, the work appears to be extraordinary and transformative for all those involved, with a great deal of credit to Basting’s talent and artistic vision. Basting’s blog for the project explains: “We endeavored to lift an entire care facility (and all those who live and work there) to the level of symbol – to mean *more* than what the world associates them with, aging and dying. We endeavored to make an entire care facility a symbol of meaning and possibility.” The Penelope Project may be so distinctive that it would be challenging to replicate its results. How might others launch similar efforts? One option, especially for literary critics and narrative-oriented scholars who are accustomed to analysing published texts, would be collaboration with established troupes in the traditional theatre, who perform published scripts, such as those described earlier in this essay. Multi- or interdisciplinary teams of scholars could focus on intergenerational or senior theatre troupes, addressing not only performative elements but also the scripts’ narratives, the performers’ health (physical/mental/emotional), the context of relations to the larger community, the conscious and unconscious responses to ageism evident in their work and their effect on the age-oriented attitudes of their audiences. Moreover, this type of collaboration can convince funding agencies of the practical relevance and importance of humanities approaches to ageing. The Silver Stage Players, for example, have received grants from agencies on ageing, despite lacking research showing benefits for performers and audiences.

While researchers such as Katz (2000) have found some negative reaction among seniors to institutionalised planned activities, which are seen as busyness for its own sake in a society that values activity, senior theatre performers commonly claim that their involvement gives them a new lease on life. Stevens noted the concrete positive effects that her troupe’s participants attest to anecdotally: “Their minds are better from memorising lines, and they breathe better from having to breathe deeply when they project their lines.” Audience members claim a more sophisticated comprehension of ageism, also. “Our purpose is to empower seniors, to give them actual information about ageism so they can go out and do something about it,” she added. No doubt their work can become more effective if based on academic research, possibly building on work such as that by Helga and Tony Noice, who represent exemplary small-scale

interdisciplinary age/theatre research, as the team comprises a psychologist and a theatre professional. Noice and Noice (2009) tested 122 older adults before and after four weeks of acting training. Those who participated in multi-modal acting activities similar to college-level acting classes improved on both cognitive and affective assessments. Research such as the Noices' and Basting's tends to take theatre activities into senior-living centres, while I advocate also working with troupes and/or scripts that highlight the performance of age, to take the researchers into the theatre. Perhaps psychologists, sociologists, social work researchers, literary critics, theatre researchers and performance scholars could team to study numerous aspects of one theatrical production, discovering together how the theatre yields insights into age and ageing.

Those involved in theatre from the ancient Greek religious festivals to today claim its significance in intellectual, emotional and spiritual realms. Considering the work of Augusto Boal and Herbert Blau, Auslander (1997) concludes that the theatre itself creates in the audience the desire for an experience of community and unity (100). We seek our shared experiences in the theatre; we pursue a belief in shared experience. The shared experience of ageing is integral to the theatre, as it is an art created over time, displaying a heightened presence of self in the actors, the crew and the audience. The narrative interchange, the shared story of actor and audience separates theatre from other genres, opening possibilities for what art can be, do and mean in age studies. Just as Hamlet concludes that "the play's the thing" because audience members may be "struck so to the soul" (Shakespeare 2008: 2.2.596) that they reveal their inner selves, so can academics fruitfully turn to the theatre to continue revealing the significance of age and ageing in contemporary culture.

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“The play’s the thing”

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Critical turns of aging, narrative and time

By JAN BAARS*

Abstract

As human aging is basically living (in) time, time is a fundamental, but also uncomfortably uprooting concept for aging studies. However, time is usually reduced to chronometric time; a mere measurement that has been emptied of the narratives that were traditionally part of it. Its abstract and instrumental character implies that to become meaningful, chronometric time still depends on narratives. Not only are narratives needed to relate chronometric time to the world, they are also crucial to interrelate the dimensions of lived time: the past, the present and the future. As late modern aging takes place in multiform life worlds and in confrontation with a diversity of social systems, political and cultural macro-narratives play an important role in shaping situations and destinies of aging people. However, because of the prestigious exactness of chronometric time and the role it plays in calculations and statistics, narratives tend to creep in and remain hidden behind chronometric exactness. It is argued that micro-narratives remain important for empirical studies of aging as they articulate human experiences, but that narratives also play an increasingly important role in the interrelation between systemic worlds and life worlds. Therefore, narrative studies should seek more cooperation and critical discussion with disciplines that study macro developments such

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as sociology, economics or political science to clarify the role of macro-narratives in policies on aging. The article ends with a contemporary example of new systemic (debt) clocks which have a major impact on the lives of many citizens, especially the aged. Although these clocks remain dependent on specific macro-narratives, their ominous ticking tends to hide them and to implode the debate about them.

Keywords: aging and time, systemic narratives, late modern life worlds, interdisciplinary narrative analysis.

Introduction: Aging as Living (in) Time

It would be convenient, both for me and for the reader, if I could begin this article by giving a clear empirical definition of "time". "Time" cannot, however, be defined in the same way as material objects such as a chair or even mental objects such as a straight line: it is a fundamental concept like "nature" or "life" in the sense that we are always already part of what we try to understand through these concepts. This does not mean that we cannot or should not try to clarify what "time" might be, but we have to be aware that concepts of time are of a complicated nature: we are always already living *in* time, and in some sense, we are always already *living* time. And although (unlike stones or trees) we can be aware of this, we cannot step out of time to observe it purely. Getting a clear understanding of time is not just hard because it is always difficult to distance ourselves from what we take for granted: time slips away *because we are living (in) it*.

This predicament has important implications for the study of aging: it is not possible to study processes of aging as we would study many other processes, because we cannot observe aging in an experimental group and compare the results with a control group that would *not* age. We can only compare different forms of aging. The notorious Age-Period-Cohort problem (Alwin & McCammon 2004; Baars 2007; Glenn 2004; Schaie 2007) confronts us with questions about what we have actually established when we have found, for instance, that a high percentage of a group of 70-year-olds suffer from obesity. Is this because of their age? Is it part of their specific cohort identity? Is it because they grew up and older in a specific period in a specific society? Is it a little bit of all that? The epistemological

riddle of this Age-Period-Cohort problem is another example of the *enveloping* and *elusive nature* of time: we are living in time and cannot step out of it to pinpoint it clearly. This fundamental human condition leads to problems even in the most sophisticated research strategies and could be called the *Heisenberg principle of uncertainty in aging* (Baars 2012): just as it appears to be impossible in quantum theory to determine simultaneously both the position and the momentum of an electron with equal accuracy or certainty, we cannot determine aging, period, or cohort independently from each other. Human aging cannot be studied in a universal or pure form; even a scientifically controlled life in a laboratory would be a life in a specific context that co-constitutes the processes that take place. We can only hope to determine specific forms of aging in retrospect, to learn from such investigations and to aim at developing better futures for human aging.

This does not imply that aging studies should be taken less seriously; it does imply that objectifying approaches are just one way of studying specific aspects of aging, using a specific and limited concept of time. Therefore, the sciences and the humanities have ample reason to work together in aging studies. This also requires a more fruitful interrelation between narrative approaches to aging as living in time and objectifying measurements of ages and durations.

Narrative Foundations of Chronometric Time

The understanding of time begins with the experience of change: we begin to notice (what becomes subsequently articulated as) “time” or begin to think about it when we experience change. In this process we may discover that some changes are regular and others irregular. Insofar as we try to influence or at least predict processes, we will be primarily interested in discovering *regularity*. Concepts of chronometric (also called “chronological”) time are the products of searching for regular change: its earliest forms were grounded in basic rhythmical movements of the earth and the moon. For ages, even such forms of measuring time have been saturated with meaning; when, for instance, seasons or changing astronomical configurations were seen as inherently meaningful and connected with seasons of life or life stages (Burrow 1986; Sears 1986).

An important transition in the understanding of time takes place when the concept of time is redefined by early modern philosophers as Descartes and Kant as a mere *form* of instrumental knowledge. Even though the most advanced quantum-logic clocks still use natural rhythms such as atomic oscillations to measure chronometric durations, these rhythms have been emptied of meaning. Moreover, in constructing chronometric clocks creative interactions with the environment as we see in living nature are avoided as they might change the rhythms and jeopardize the precision that is based on them. The time that is used to measure human aging is not based on the rhythms of *living* nature, but on the “movements” of *dead* material such as oscillations of cesium or aluminum atoms (Baars 2012; Yates 2007).

The scientific reduction of time to its measurements has its own practical merits but tends to be seen as the only concept of time that exists or that should be taken seriously. There is, however, also a dependence of chronometric time on other temporal perspectives such as narratives, which becomes obvious when we apply the chronometric perspective to itself. Questions that are inherent in time, even the most simple ones, such as “When did this begin?” or “When does this end?” show their profoundly uprooting character as soon as they are applied to time “itself.” For how and when did time begin? We can even ask what might have been before the Big Bang, a question that cannot even be posed within the perspective of chronometric time. Physics as a whole, as we know it, would break down and give up in confrontation with the singular moment of the Big Bang (Penrose 2010).

It is interesting to see how these simple but enigmatic questions were approached by the major pre-modern calendars that are still operating in the late modern world. Their answer, simply put, is that beginning is not a matter of chronometric time but that the idea or metaphor of *beginning* gives chronometric time its cultural hold and context (Baars forthcoming). Typically, calendars revolve around a major occurrence that opens time in an emphatically *new* sense that gives chronometric time a zero point from which it can begin to count the years. This occurrence is regarded as so important that it inaugurates a new era. In this way, dating in the Christian calendar starts with the birth of Christ, but in the Muslim calendar it starts with the *Hedshra*, the flight of Mohammed to Medina.

The inauguration of time is internally related to narratives about the beginning (“creation”) and ending of the world (“the end of times”) and is intended to give meaning to the time of the world and the human beings in it, between their beginning (birth) and end (death). Chronometric time needs a calendar or it would not know when to begin in counting the years.

Different calendars can be coordinated in an instrumental way by using chronometric time as the common chronometric units (years, months) make it possible to transpose age-related calculations from one calendar to another. The Christian year 2013 can roughly be transposed into the Jewish year 5773 or the Muslim year 1434, and the ages of people can be counted in much the same way within different calendars. However, this does not mean that calendars only have a chronometric meaning or that the differences between calendars can be eliminated by arithmetic (Baars 1997). In spite of their internal chronometric structure, calendars are not only used to count the years as we do when we speak of calendar age; they show how chronometric time is embedded in cultural narratives. Living within the horizon of such a culturally specific calendar also has consequences for the understanding of aging as living in time. Moreover, the temporal horizons that we find in different cultural interpretations of aging are not static but also changing over time.

Narratives: Meanings behind the Scenes

These seemingly abstract distinctions have important practical implications because unidentified forms of meaning tend to “slip in” and become fused with instrumental measurements. Although chronometric age (also called “calendar age”) is just a measurement of the amount of time that has passed since that person was born, it begets meaningful content from different sources. This may be personal associations between one’s age and life events but also broader cultural narratives about people with a certain age. It is not surprising that aging is meaningfully interpreted but it is problematic when the exactness of a chronometric measurement is used to legitimate normative assessments of people with certain ages. It may seem useful to generalize about 60 or 65 years olds for certain policy purposes, but such “aged” persons are very different; not only as unique persons but

even on major empirical indicators such as income, life expectancy or health. Therefore, retirement policies that generalize according to age can create many new problems, frustrating the societal participation of those who could still give a valuable contribution while continuing to overburden those who are already overburdened. Because the age structures of the life course that were built up in European societies over the last century have come under pressure, there is ample reason to discuss the narratives that play a hidden role in the age-related calculations that are meant to legitimate changes in social policy.

For studies of aging the problem is not that chronometric measurements are not reliable enough or irrelevant; the problem is that precise measurements of somebody's chronometric age are not very informative about that person's aging processes, unless chronometric age is used by societal institutions to organize and structure aging processes. Throughout history and in contemporary contexts we can find so much evidence of differences between persons of the same age that we must conclude that this chronometric dimension is just *one*, rather overemphasized element in understanding the time that is implicit in processes of aging. All this does not deny processes of aging, senescing or finitude but these issues deserve a broader and deeper temporal understanding (Baars 2010a; 2012).

We can hardly return to static life stages such as "old age" or "being old", but we can also not merely identify aging with getting a higher chronometric age. There may be several so-called "biological clocks" but living nature does not tick according to chronometric time: there is no such clock inside human beings which determines for all time and all places how people age. To clarify the possible interactions of the many processes that result in "aging" in a broad sense, we have to distinguish between three major "discourses": typical clusters of theories, practices, institutions and narratives. The first type are discourses that are based on *ages*, for instance when people are classified according to their ages or in terms of birth cohorts. The second type consists of discourses about the ways in which biological processes interact with contextual factors, leading to *senescing* and ensuing health issues. The third are discourses about *aging* as a social-existential process of persons who continue to lead their lives after they have been labeled by their societies as "aged" or "old" (avoiding the all too extensive meaning of "aging" as a process between birth and death).

While the first two discourses have been firmly established in late modern societies, in the form of demographics, bureaucratic institutions or laboratories, hospitals and health insurance, the third discourse is far less developed although it could be seen as the most important in guiding the other discourses and the lives of individuals.

In these discursive clusters that surround aging in a broad sense, micro-narratives play the important role of articulating and interpreting aging experiences of persons in their life worlds. Such narratives have been the main subject of “narrative gerontology” (e.g. Kenyon et al. 2001). However, micro-narratives are interrelated with macro-narratives in the three domains that were mentioned above: narratives that portray ages and the aged, interpret senescing processes and constitute what aging—and by contrast, being young or being “normal”—are supposed to look like (e.g. Gullette 2004). In the remainder of this article I will present some further reflections on such micro- and macro-levels guided by the question how to advance our understanding that aging is basically living (in) time.

The Constitutive Meaning of Narrative

Throughout history narratives have played a major role in interpreting lives but their constitutive importance for scientific or scholarly research on time has only been acknowledged relatively recently (Baars 2012). After a millennium in which the Aristotelian perspective on time had been dominant, the fifth century theologian and philosopher Augustine of Hippo (354–430) introduced the fundamental role of human consciousness in understanding time, which had been neglected in Aristotle’s physics of time. Augustine struggled with the question how to understand time and especially, how to understand time as an experiential reality of mortal beings. Besides Aristotle’s ideas, Augustine had to face the classical skeptic conviction which stated that there could be no time because the past is gone, the present does not remain and the future is not yet there. Of course, such a denial of time already presupposes an understanding of time in distinguishing the past, the present and the future. Augustine emphasized, however, in the famous chapter on time in his *Confessions* (1961) that mortals were confronted with the reality of time and that it would exist in the mind – or in the *soul*, as he would say – where the past

exists in its memory, the present in its actual attention and the future in its anticipation.

Twentieth century philosophers such as Husserl (1970), Heidegger (1996) and Wittgenstein (1953) have broken away from the Augustinian emphasis on inner consciousness, which had remained typical for the mainstream of modern philosophy. The liberation of theory from the narrows of rational consciousness, opening up to the constitutive dynamics of existential being, presupposed life worlds or language games brought important changes in the understanding of time (Baars 2012). One of these developments is a deepening awareness of the interrelations between time and narrative (Ricoeur 1984, 1985, 1988). Narratives not only convey what it is to live *in the world* or in *worlds*, but also what it *means* to live *in time(s)*. Here, narratives have again an eminent position: the temporal dimensions of human actions and experiences find their most adequate articulation in narratives. As Ricoeur remarks, there is no “living in time” or “temporal being” without narrative: they are “as closely linked as a ‘language-game’ in Wittgenstein’s terms is to a ‘form of life’ . . . Narrativity is the mode of discourse through which the mode of being which we call temporality or temporal being, is brought to language”. (Ricoeur 1991: 91; Wittgenstein 1953). Stories are eminently temporal: even in cultures where “time is money” it will be noticed that they take “precious” time to tell and to listen to; if we take the time to do that we may be reminded that our lives are temporal as well and, indeed, precious in a richer than monetary sense.

In this temporality chronometric time will play a role, but only a modest one. If we would ask somebody what a visit or a long period of work have been like, it would be surprising – and boring – if this person would give us a chronometrically detailed list of “events”. Boring, because chronometric measurement does not give a clue about *what* we should report, because we might measure anything: we would not know what to measure and report. Therefore, just like scientific research requires theories to develop a relevant structure in the face of an immense universe of possible facts or observations, life worlds employ narratives to structure and articulate meaning over time.

As soon as we have a narrative plot, chronometric time (with its emphasis on the timing and succession of events) can be included in the narrative along with other dimensions and experiences. So, narrative time

does not exclude or oppose chronometric time: what is emphasized and told in the story depends on its meaningful configuration (Ricoeur 1984): chronometric exactness is not important *per se*, but for reasons following from the plot. The plot transforms a mere succession of *incidents* into a configuration that can be *followed*, which has a certain *point* or *theme*.

This derived relevance of chronometric time implies that we can check the right date or the duration of events, if that is relevant in the narrative context. In the same way, narratives do not exclude or oppose logical structures. An important logical–temporal question that can be relevant in the narrative context is expressed in the classical logical problem *post hoc ergo propter hoc?* which poses the question whether something that occurred *later* was actually *caused* by the earlier event: whether a *temporal* sequence can be seen as a *causal* sequence. In aging studies this fundamental problem re-emerges in the question whether something that happened *as* people were aging was actually *caused* by their aging (Baars 2012).

Intertwining the Past, the Present and the Future

However, the Augustinian interpretation of time as an interrelation of the past, present and future has not lost its fruitfulness and remains highly relevant to understand and open up aging. One of the defining characteristics of aging is that an important part of life has already taken place. Even if the time ahead is regarded as equally exciting or even more so, the past will remain important in shaping the future. Since we have become whoever we are, questions of identity will also concern the past; a past that is, however, never over or completed because the changes that are inherent in aging also change the perception of the past. What is important about our pasts will vary with present situations and future prospects; in this sense, the past is never complete or transparent, but changes as time or life go on.

Here again, chronometric time can be helpful in ordering memories by dating events, but it is only of secondary importance in the intriguing temporal dynamics of memories. Something that happened to me forty years ago can be clear and vivid in my memory, whereas the memory of something which happened a month ago can be almost absent. Moreover, memory as presence of the past does not just comprise *what* or *how* we *want* to remember. We only evoke a part of our memories consciously; another part evokes *us* or keeps asking our attention, even when we might

prefer to forget it. In this context, Hannah Arendt (1958) referred not only to memory as a typically human characteristic of living in time, but also to forgiveness. Interestingly, *forgiveness* is connected with the promise of opening the future and freeing it from what one has suffered whereas its opposite, *resentment*, can be a destructive form of what Augustine called the presence of the past in which painful events remain as vivid as if they took place only recently and no time seems to have passed since. Intensified attention for the *past* can open the future in unexpected ways, when we discover old dreams that could still be fulfilled or restrictions that may have been useful in the past but can be released now. As the German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1993) emphasized: it is not the forced oblivion of the past, but the force with which we examine the past that opens up new opportunities.

But a changing perception of the *future* – possibly a result of changes in the present – can also lead to new questions about the past and restructure memories. In that way, questions about the meaning of the past also come from questions about the future when there is a need to clarify or to find out something in the past before we can go on. This presupposes an openness to *have* a future or to be concerned about the future of others, in an intergenerational or a transgenerational perspective (Achenbaum 2007). Nobel Prize Laureate Doris Lessing (2003) recalls in an interview how she had written about an old woman in *The Diary of a Good Neighbour*. In the novel this woman had the same age as Doris Lessing at the time of the interview: 84 years. The difference between the two characters is that the woman from the novel had decided to be “old”, which in her case meant not wanting to have a future. Doris Lessing does not want to be old in that sense. She does not deny that she is getting “increasingly older”. Yet the journalist meets a person with a zest for living, who tells her grandchildren: “Live, Live! Don’t be scared out of living your life”. As she was approaching her 90th birthday she published the novel *Alfred and Emily* (2009), about the devastating effects of the first World War on the lives of her parents and so, also, on her life. Here again the attention for the past is inspired by a desire to open the future: as Doris Lessing comments: “trying to get out from under that monstrous legacy, trying to get free.”

Stories live, however, in the present where they are told or written, listened to or read; they feed on the interest that brings them to life and

they break off when the interest in them dies. It is from the present only that we reflect on, interpret, amend or criticize stories and wonder if things “really” were like that or whether they should be seen differently. Stories may be reconsidered time and again and possibly retold, for we may continue to ask questions: does this story accurately describe what happened? Should it be interpreted and told this way? Am I doing justice to others and to myself? Do later developments shed another light on what happened?

In spite of well elaborated work on the constitutive importance of narrative (Handel 2000; Holstein & Gubrium 1997) it remains far from superfluous to emphasize the importance of the *present* and the *future* of older persons because in interviews with them and in most narrative work in institutions the attention appears to be one-sidedly directed at the past in variations of the question “What was it like in your days?” or “What has your life been like?” And the retiree may answer: “I have worked *all my life*” as a banker or a postman or whatever, as if he is not living in time anymore but has arrived at a point of elevated stagnation which allows him to overlook his life as a whole. But for other aging persons it can be quite annoying that it is apparently beyond many people’s scope that older persons also live in the present, that *these* days are also *their* days, and that they might even be interested in the future. There appears to be a widespread conviction concerning the life course that young people and “normal” adults would be *prospectively* oriented and make plans for the future, whereas older people are thought to have exclusively *retrospective* orientations: as if they have lived their lives and should keep themselves occupied with memories. For all of them, young people, so-called normal adults and the old, living in the *present* tends to fall out between these two preoccupations; a present which is not just a punctual now, but saturated with the past and the future.

Empirical Turns of Temporal Narratives

Narrative studies appear to be indispensable for empirical research on aging. Whereas molecular biology has its own conceptual strategies to conduct empirical research on senescing cells, empirical research on aging persons which takes their *experiences* seriously cannot evade to read or to listen to their stories. A strong argument in favor of narrative approaches is

the obvious importance of narratives for articulating, interpreting and sharing experiences, including experiences of aging.

The ways in which stories are told may have changed from sitting together around a fire to reaching out across cultures by internet, including the use of pictures, movies and audio-visual designs, but the basic activity has not changed although the textual elements have become more complicated. Story-telling appears to be universal among human beings; if there are cultural universals at all, one of them might be precisely this (Brown 1991). Alasdair MacIntyre even exclaims that "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (MacIntyre 1981: 216; Sandel, 1996; cf. Taylor, 1989).

Humans usually have a strong need to communicate important experiences to others, to be able to tell their stories and be heard. Beyond the conventional layer of "How are you?" begins the daily realm of narrative. However, there are also major questions regarding the possible contribution of narrative studies to further our understanding of aging experiences. One concern is, for instance, that writing down narratives or recording them implies a loss of directness. The special quality of narratives as a direct event in the presence of the speaker, is their vividness: a directness and richness of expression in specific situations, where spoken words are accompanied by non-textual forms of expression such as facial expressions, gestures or the unique voice of the speaker. Such loss of directness or vividness in the transition from spoken narrative to written narratives has probably been regretted since the origin of the written word. Already 2500 years ago Plato, who was no friend of literature or the arts in general, recalls in his *Phaedrus* an already much older Egyptian story about the discovery of the use of letters. The god who had invented writing went proudly to another god because he was sure his discovery would "make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories". The other god however, answered that what "you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality" (Plato *Phaedrus* 274d–275e). Jean-Paul Sartre and other existentialists went even

further and opposed the idea that living and telling stories could go together: "This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a story. But you have to choose: live or tell" (Sartre 1969: 39).

It is hard to see why such a choice would be necessary; we can live *and* tell others about our experiences and actions. And to record a narrative or to write it down is also a possible *enrichment*: the narrative becomes accessible outside the small circle of those who are directly present and opens, invites and facilitates opportunities to interpret the meanings of the text. Narrative brings experience to language, into the world of others. But it remains difficult to understand how this "works" precisely. The relation between experiences of aging and narratives about these experiences is not one of identity or direct representation and, according to the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976: 65) there is even an "unheard difference" between the "world" and lived experience.

Both lives and stories contain a *surplus* of meaning. On the one hand, persons and lives are more than narratives – they are their unfathomable source – and to live is always more than telling stories (Thomae 1998). Moreover, narratives cannot be isolated or individualized in time or social space: references to the present, past and future may change depending on situations and be interrelated in complex ways, as in remembering our plans or forgetting to anticipate. We are also confronted with the remembered pasts and anticipated futures of other people around us: the plans, memories, and actual experiences of children interact and interfere with the plans, memories, and actual experiences that their parents have regarding their own lives and those of their children. We see how these interacting temporal perspectives quickly become very complicated as more people enter the scene and as they change over time (Baars 2012). The many possible meanings of what humans experience and do during their lives can be partially articulated, shared and clarified through narratives but cannot be exhausted by them. And narratives have also lives of their own: they have a certain independence as texts and can, therefore, always be reinterpreted in ways that shed new light on them because their words and metaphors may have more than just one meaning.

If narratives can claim any empirical status they must be distinguished from systems of linguistic codes or semiotics where every reference to a world outside the text is seen as a referential illusion. Ricoeur's (1984, 1985, 1988) hermeneutics of narrated time represents an elaborated consideration of the problem how narrative arises from and is prefigured by the world of actions and experiences, but also lives from metaphors, symbols, elements of fiction and other representational dynamics that render it impossible to see the narrative naively as a representation of experiential reality. Some of these delicate processes of co-constituting knowledge have been explored, for instance, for the interview (Fontana & Frey 2000), for daily life (Ochs & Capps 2001) and for ethnographic representations (Tedlock 2000).

Here, the problem of the reference of language to a world "outside" language returns in the context of narrative representation: we cannot speak or think about the world without using language, but the (meaningfully shared) world is more than language. Such questions, which energized the later work of Wittgenstein (1953) can be illustrated by the simple (intellectual) experiment in which one would try to live in the *word* "home", or try to sit on the *word* "chair": the chair is more than the word chair, although we would constantly need words to describe and understand what sitting on a chair means. Although seemingly abstract, these challenging questions are of great practical relevance. It is an old political trick to try to profit from the lack of direct representation or reference by presenting the improvement of a problematic situation, for instance bad quality of care, by just improving the narrative about it.

Narrative research implies the challenge to reach out from the world of the reader to the world of the narrator, heeding the subtleties of the text without seeing these as the only subject of study. The world of the text may seem clearer to the reader and less problematic than it may actually be because the text emerges from the world of the narrator; which can be very different from the world of the listener or reader so that we must be ready to admit that we don't understand. Moreover, there are also challenges to include other disciplines in the process of understanding the world of the narrator. Studies of aging narratives usually focus on (inter)personal experiences which can easily lead to a microfication (Hagestad & Dannefer 2001) of aging experiences which fails to acknowledge the ways in which

societal macro-dynamics co-constitute not only the world of the narrator but also the world of the reader. Moreover, these macro-dynamics are often accompanied by cultural macro-narratives (Baars 2010b) which play an important role in the articulation of policies and their legitimization.

Systemic Macro-Narratives and Life Worlds

One aspect of the interrelation of micro- and macro-narratives is the question whether all narratives about aging are “equally important”; not in a moral sense, but with respect to the impact they have on policies, public debates or general opinions regarding aging and the aged. The influence of narratives will partly stem from their persuasive content, but most likely the power of the institution or organization they represent will play a major role. Narratives are not only a medium to share or clarify experiences but also to *influence* audiences: to raise compassion, urge the listener to help or to manipulate the audience. Such tendencies are inherent in narratives but they have become instrumentally sophisticated in systemic worlds to such a degree that they are almost leading a life of their own in creating and playing with audiences.

It is typical of the systemic world that it addresses anonymous people who are only relevant in terms of the specific perspective and interests these systems are after. Even encounters with systemic strategies that can be experienced as depersonalizing or even “inhuman” (Lyotard 1991) are typically embellished with fine narratives, from the usual formula that this will enable them to serve you better, to convincing U.S. citizens that their numerical identity guarantees them *social security* or its European version that such a personal number grants them *citizen service*. The bitter irony is that those who are not represented by such numbers are usually worse off.

In late modern society, small and large systems are invading practically all domains of life: the food we buy, the light we switch on, the water we drink, education, work, conflicts with others, income or health care – all of these domains potentially imply a confrontation with systemic worlds. Which specific systems become important to deal with depends on the situation at hand: when persons are out of a job, are having problems with their children or when they are looking for good quality of care for a dementing parent or partner, these situations will confront them with different, usually uncoordinated systems. As far as political systems are

still rooted in nation states, they are tendentially uprooted by an extremely complex, globalizing economic system with many different dynamics and unpredictable effects which are hardly kept in check by the nation-based political systems, although this is what they still intend or pretend to do.

Moreover, in this rapidly changing globalizing world we can also observe the disintegration of more or less integrated national or regional life worlds where ways of living were taken for granted, into even more diverse life worlds. The presupposition of an integrated life world in Habermas's diagnosis of contemporary society, which roots in his rather abstract and proceduralist understanding of communication, should be left behind for a pluralistic perspective. The concept of pluralistic life worlds that I propose comes closer to what was cited earlier from Wittgenstein's (1953) work, in the sense of a close link between "language-games" and "forms of life". Much depends on whether we are still able to understand experiences of aging as variations of basically shared *human* experiences of living in time.

One important effect of the intrusion of systemic worlds is that the multiform life worlds may become internally fragmented because of the ways these systems operate as they individualize customers, clients or citizens and take them out of their specific life worlds. This would be a way to reconstruct Habermas's theorem of a "colonization of the life world" (Habermas 1987) which implies that citizens are dominated by the systemic worlds to such a degree that they have internalized the bureaucratic and economic strategies and have lost the ability to communicate and discuss rationally with each other. Hopefully, such a diagnosis is not (yet) adequate. However, even well-developed systems supplying us with goods and services that are needed to live well require countervailing activities from the life worlds. This situation also makes it urgent to introduce and reintroduce narratives of aging experiences from the different life worlds into the public debate to counter the tendency to construct images of aging and the aged according to the interests of specific systems.

Narratives about aging and the aged that are spread by powerful systems, including the media, deserve critical attention because they are much more influential than the narratives that are not backed up by societal power and concentrate less on narrative persuasion. We can observe a cultural ambivalence regarding aging, corresponding with two expanding markets. One market, through commercially designed narratives,

advertises a successful campaign against the decay of human nature in the form of senescing cells, wrinkles, loss of energy and memory (Hall 2003; Stock 2003). In order to persuade the public to buy commodities, stories of aging people are used and professionally polished to market anti-aging products (King & Calasanti 2006). In such situations, narratives are intended to keep older people buying and busy, with a primary interest in manipulative strategies. Here, Aging Well is defined paradoxically as Staying Young (Baars 2012).

Another market concentrates on those elderly who are losing the battle to stay young forever, although they may continue to stay alive for a long time. Sometimes it seems as if aging is only seen in terms of the grey waves that will flood the rich countries of the world. These stories set a tone which makes poor music as they depict aging as a thoroughly problematic and upsetting affair; something to be concealed as much as possible under a cloak of youthful activism. But as aging populations put pressure on collective budgets, political narratives about aging are usually dominated by costs of care and pensions, leading to scenarios of aging as a profoundly problematic burden on society: a real threat to their expansion and development (Estes 2006).

The Emergence of New Systemic Clocks

However, it makes an important difference *where* political narratives about aging begin as this sets the tone for what follows. The last decennium has seen a series of international crises (wars, housing crisis, credit crunch, banking crisis) with major implications for the public finances of most countries and consequently for those who are dependent on public expenditure for their daily lives. These developments affect the time perspectives in which citizens frame important parameters of their future lives such as income or quality of care. Governments have been eager to confront their citizens with the changing realities of public finances and the need to restrict public budgets because “our common burden” of the national debt grows every hour with huge amounts. This pressing and alarming public situation has been represented by several debt clocks which tend to absorb and neutralize public debate and narratives about public priorities. The main result appears to be a restructuring of public expenditures, targeting those domains of social policy that have already

been carrying the burden of the financial disasters without having caused them. The ominously ticking US Debt Clock (<http://www.usdebtclock.org>) adds every 40 seconds 1 million US Dollars to the National Debt and we can wonder whether this clock and similar debt clocks in other countries are not more important for the fate and well-being of aging people than the chronometric clock which determines their ages. In some ways this is, indeed, as the website claims: the "Real Time".

These seemingly neutral, just precisely measuring clocks that set the agenda for the restructuring of public expenditures tend to occlude the processes which have caused these financial crises as they indicate that there is "no time to lose". Especially vulnerable groups in society which did not cause these major crises will be targeted because the expenditures which are meant to keep them out of misery can be reduced relatively easy whereas controlling the financial systems appears to be beyond reach. Another Debt Clock, figuring on the official US Government website of the costs of war since 2001 adds an interesting comment. In language that we know from commercial sponsoring we are informed that this billion-dollar Wasteland is brought to you by the *National Priorities Project*, "a research organization that analyses and clarifies federal data so that people can understand and influence how their tax dollars are spent". We can wonder whether such understanding or influence are actually made possible by the presentation of these data, but there is at least some notion that these clocks are the results of human activity and not mere parameters of developments that cannot be influenced. In spite of the seemingly self-evidence of these pressing Debt Clocks, there remain good reasons to ask where the narrative about the costs of aging populations begins. Even if we begin this narrative with the need to curb the growing world population – which implies aging populations – we would get another tone in these debates. Like the pre-modern calendars, even this apparently very advanced clock needs a narrative to back it up.

Narrative Confrontations – Sustaining Intermediary Tensions

Although the analysis of the mutual relations between the systemic worlds and the life worlds in terms of power can be clarifying, the different constellations of life worlds and systems should not collapse into a generalizing dichotomy where systems stand on one side and life worlds on

the other. We need more attention for the *intermediate* level, between the systemic worlds and the life worlds; a level that is too often neglected as research tends to focus either on the structural and systemic side *or* on the personal and interpersonal side. In this respect the disciplinary organization of the social sciences and the humanities usually reproduce the societal divide of systems versus life worlds without offering institutional platforms to confront societal macro analyses from political science, economics, sociology with research that focuses on interpersonal domains and personal experiences such as psychology, anthropology or the humanities.

The tensions between person-oriented life world perspectives and the impersonal, formally regulated systemic perspectives that take place *inside*, for instance, (inter)national political institutions or large corporations are also crucially important for the daily realities of aging persons. I propose that the concept of “life worlds” refers not only to the domain of personal relationships, family life or friendship, but extends into the daily interactions, efforts, creativity of those people who work in systemic worlds where decisions are taken with major implications for the daily realities of aging people all over the world. As long as bureaucratic systems are inevitable in contemporary society there will be more or less permanent tensions between the life worlds and the systemic worlds that should remain alive in order to assert the aging experiences of people who are more than mere representations of bureaucratic categories. Probably, the creative sensitivity still has to come from the interactive life world, where aging persons not only propagate, but “embody” inspiring and supportive views on aging or struggle with oppressive situations or societal exclusion. However, the relation between the systemic worlds and the life worlds should not be treated as a dichotomy: processes of tension and interchange between life worlds and systems can *also* be potentially creative processes of change. While many professionals are searching for improvements, alternatives and experiments within the tight parameters of the societal systems that restrict the range of their projects, the intermediate platforms that could support these efforts are lagging behind the usual rhetoric about interdisciplinary work.

Narratives play an important role at this intermediary level as they both express aging experiences and articulate in public debates how major

issues of aging should be seen and dealt with. Although many macro-narratives are constructed professionally as they are intended to serve the interests of systems in legitimizing their policies, this situation implies also that these systems need the support they try to gain through their narratives. The somewhat ironic or even cynical formula of the National Priorities Project “so that people can understand and influence how their tax dollars are spent” also points to the dependence of these systems on the understanding support by their populations. They need their narratives to be accepted and believed. Although the power of systems that regulate important societal domains such as educational opportunities, labor markets, health care, institutional care, insurances or pensions is not merely caused by the persuasive quality of their narratives, yet they need to convince whoever they are addressing and here we can follow them with some critical attention. An inspiring culture of aging needs inspiring but also critically interrogative narratives.

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REVIEWED by SIMON BIGGS*

While spirituality has historically been associated with adult ageing, as part of the wisdom games that we are encouraged to engage in in later life, it is perhaps surprising that so little has been written about it. In some ways, this reflects a secularist bias in the academy and parallels a continuing migration away from organised Christianity, mostly in Europe. Among social gerontologists, a few names stand out. Elizabeth MacKinlay (2012) has been a tireless advocate of the importance of spirituality both in the everyday experience of a long life, as also with specific reference to the care of dementia sufferers and the significance of deep old age. John Swinton (2010) has made a powerful critique of the position of dementia

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in society, based on spiritual understanding. Lars Tornstam (2003) has introduced the world to the notion of "gerotranscendence," which stands as an important counterweight to the materialist and productivist turn in mainstream social gerontology. Here, we are asked to celebrate the value of the big picture, thinking that it may be one of the hidden virtues of adult ageing and also the fascinating concept of "positive solitude," which is very different from social isolation. It lays the foundation for a powerful critique of "busy bodies," which Stephen Katz (2000) among others has identified as arising from 19th Century Protestantism, as the bumper-sticker "Jesus is coming – look busy" has made a gerontological debut for those who now believe that work is the principal means of social recognition for older adults. Euan Sadler is perhaps a member of a new generation exploring the significance of spirituality as a basis for an alternative notion of success in ageing.

So, two books examining the relationship between adult ageing and belief are particularly welcome, at a time when age-based identities are again in flux and a door opens to multiple ways of valuing the experience of a long life. The books are very different. The first, J. Gordon Harris' "Biblical perspectives on ageing" takes a theological approach and is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Old and New Testaments. However, little reference is made to Islam, the third Abrahamic tradition. This book sits somewhere between the traditional divide in faith studies, between religiosity and spirituality, but its main function is to place statements about old age and a long life in the context of the historical periods and cultures from which they arise to clarify their meaning and purpose. Peter Coleman's book, consisting of a number of individual and co-authored chapters, is broader in scope. It takes what could loosely be called a psycho-social perspective towards the question of belief in later life and draws on a number of perspectives, including Humanism, European diversity in Christianity, and wider belief systems, such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. If I were to identify a common thread throughout these chapters, it would be something to do with the diversity of belief and the positions taken with respect to ageing, tempered by the common benefits that belief can have as older people negotiate their lives.

Harris is primarily an Old Testament scholar and many of his examples are taken from there. God is seen to be an agent of blessing, as a protector

of social structures and a proponent of justice. God sides with fragile minorities and is the deliverer of the weak. A strong religious base to society is therefore seen as a means of protecting older adults from exploitation and abuse. However, there is no systematic theology of ageing identified in the texts themselves, and the reader has to work it out for themselves. However, what comes through is quite surprising. The old in the Old Testament are by no means uniformly wise. And, wisdom is not necessarily associated with a long life. Rather, some people exhibit wisdom, and sometimes this is associated with experience. It is closer to what one might call practical intelligence. Older adults sometimes are identified by their foolishness or depravity (Eli in Samuel, Noah in old age, Lott). Elders become physically disabled, intransigent, unable to enjoy sexual experiences and ... senile. Some books are structured as advice to younger generations (Ecclesiastes) and only sometimes portray older adults as role models in themselves (mostly Moses). And, these older adults are almost always men, although wisdom in itself is personified as female. In summary, wisdom is dependent on piety, rather than piety being the outcome of lived experience.

According to Harris, the Old Testament is where to look if you want cultural or specific role examples for understanding old age. The New Testament, partly because Christ died in his early thirties, and the millennialism of the first believers (i.e. the end times were almost upon us, so a long life was less of a problem ...), has fewer examples. However, as one travels from the Gospels, through Acts and on to the letters of Paul, the early church became much more concerned with how to live as a community over time, with younger and older members who need mutual support and new rules to live by. One example of this change can be seen in Christ's relative suspicion of family ties that could get in the way of pursuit of the kingdom. However, by the time we get to Paul, family becomes a more common metaphor for the new Christian communities, as the need to make provision for widows and widowers and find a place for the surviving first generation of believers become a more pressing concern.

Harris' book, which has been re-written, and judging from the (undated) preface to the first edition, is an easier read than last time around. For gerontologists, the language is sometimes less than politically correct – "the elderly" feature rather a lot – and apart from a nod towards

demographic change, it does not really engage with contemporary social issues or theoretical understandings. However, for the reader who wants to ground his or her understanding of ageing in a Biblical setting, it is an excellent introduction.

Peter Coleman's book, "Belief and Ageing", includes single authored chapters and those written with others. The authors principally address the role of belief from a UK perspective, with specific chapters on European and domestic diversity. Coleman gets around the question of spirituality versus religiosity, by focussing on belief – without which "life is unimaginable" (1). His writing is thereby freed of having to justify whether experience or institutional practice is its principal focus, and in doing so, he draws on a lifetime of empirical study, collaboration and critical reflection. The book can be seen as a response to at least two questions: Does becoming spiritually aware take time? And does the quality of belief and awareness vary across the lifecourse? Important issues are raised throughout, including the degree to which beliefs are life sustaining and whether they help people endure hardship and the pursuit of life goals. Given that the subject matter is both personally subjective and transcendent, it is perhaps unsurprising to discover early on that "Collecting information on people's use of belief is not straightforward. It is probably one of the most difficult areas of experience for people to articulate adequately what they think and feel" (7).

Following an introductory chapter, Coleman examines the changing social context of belief in later life covering generational differences in the strength of religious affiliation, the relative decrease in the belief in a personal God and the growth of non-institutional forms of spiritual belief. With Mills and Speck, Coleman then examines methodological questions around listening to and enabling the disclosure of beliefs and values in later life. Three case studies are examined in detail. In Chapter four, with Mills and Spreadbury, Coleman studies the role of stability and change in spiritual belief across the lifespan and in later life itself. Belief it appears can either increase or decrease as individuals become more aware of life's limitations and finitude, with disillusion becoming more closely associated with institutional systems rather than the idea of divinity itself. Rather than suggesting that spiritual experience intensifies, it appears that there is a growing clarification of views about belief as people grow older.

The related topic, the role of religion in coping with bereavement, is examined by Spreadbury and Coleman, and the concept of spiritual capital is introduced. There then follow three chapters on humanist belief (with Wlikinson), European diversity – with specific reference to evangelical growth following the fall of communism, the historical role of resistance and the vital degree of witness to the action of the Holy Spirit in people's lives (with Gianelli, Mills and Petrov) and religious difference and age in a multi-faith Britain (with Begum and Jaleel). Each of these areas, though the relation to spiritual as compared to religious experience is varied, points to a sustained and in some cases growing importance of belief across the life course. Throughout, there are important indications on the positive relationship between belief, health and well-being, although in some cultural contexts the interpretation of age, illness, particularly mental illness and divine will are complex and potentially antagonistic.

Coleman finishes with a sustained reflection on ageing and the future of belief. He identifies the often antagonistic relationship between the UK's secular culture and religious conviction, one consequence of which is that "religious knowledge within the UK has sunk to appalling levels" and a paradoxical situation in which "increasing salience but declining comprehension of religion" (157) co-exist. Themes, such as baby boomer interest in non-institutional spirituality, the increasing recognition of hospital chaplaincy as an important site for the expression and value of belief, and the salience of questions around meaning and purpose in an aggressively materialist and consumerist environment, are dealt with sensitivity and with conviction.

Both of these books would be a valuable addition to the scholarly library and to the collections of the interested gerontologists and non-gerontologists alike. One outlines textual source material that can be used to locate adult ageing, the other provides a contemporary context that is rich in its diversity and in the questions it raises for the human condition. Both in their different ways identify a route map by which to interpret the challenges of a long life. I was left with the feeling that a serious consideration of the role of belief, and in particular spiritual belief, has the potential to become a truly subversive discourse in our cultural adaptation to an ageing society.

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Christine Ceci, Kristín Björnsdóttir & Mary Ellen Purkis (eds.) (2011). *Perspectives on Care at Home for Older People*. New York: Routledge, 194 pp. ISBN 978 0 415 89590 3 (hardback)

REVIEWED by MARVIN FORMOSA*

This edited volume constitutes an excellent addition to debates on domiciliary care for older persons. Recent decades have witnessed an unprecedented growth of frail older persons who require some level of personalised care, if they are not to enter long-term care. In this respect, a key challenge facing all social systems is to provide good quality of care that at the same time follows the values of sustainability and equity. *Perspectives on Care at Home for Older People* offers a critical analysis of how to best respond to the perceived challenges of home care for frail older adults, providing outstanding responses to two crucial questions: First, how do the actualities of people's daily lives articulate with ideological, practical and programmatic discourses and material conditions? And second, what are the conditions of possibility for "care" where the frailties of older people matter? It answers such dilemmas by offering case studies (both policy- and practice-oriented empirical studies) from countries that share a basic orientation to social welfare, namely Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The chapters also set out a critical agenda for the development of equitable and sustainable practices in present times.

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The nine chapters of this book are divided into three parts, preceded by a foreword by Carl May and an introductory chapter by the editors. May's foreword frames the context and grapples with the conditions of the possibility for good care, founding his case on three basic principles. First, the "patient is not enough", arguing that the burden of illness now demands more than a co-operative patient, instead it requires a compliant network. Second, "illness is plural", suggesting that in a world defined by multiple chronic co-morbidities, sickness is experienced as an assemblage of management projects rather than a phenomenological unity. And third, "the co-ordination of co-ordination is not a paradox", since the multiplication of co-ordination gives recognition to the complexity of contemporary healthcare. Subsequently, the editors provide an introductory chapter in which they highlight the aims and objectives of the book and, quite originally, provide transcripts of conversation excerpts between them and other authors during a preparatory meeting. These transcripts are very illuminating and serve to break down the complexity of the book's intentions into more reader-friendly assertions.

The first chapter in the primary part of the book ("Home"), "Ageing, independence, and community" by Mary Ellen Purkis, seeks to answer the following question: "as elders age and become more frail, what sorts of accommodations can be made to their locations in community to enhance opportunities for independent living?" (p. 23). Drawing upon personal experience, Purkis underlines how knowledge is translated into each situation in such a way that it resonates with the preferences and values of older people, so that it remains fundamental to accommodating people's singularities. The second chapter by Joanna Latimer, "Home care and frail older people: relational extension and the art of dwelling", is an exploratory and discursive account. Its illuminating and constructive arguments cannot be done justice in the short space available here, but in essence the chapter continues to transform notions of care and caregiving based upon a less-functional notion of care and the involvement of practitioners, as well as older people as embodied persons in relations. This part closes with the chapter "Homes for care: reconfiguring care relations and practices", by Isabel Dyck and Kim England's, which observes how service workers are told in advance what they are expected to do, whilst not being allowed to attend to anything unusual that comes

up during their visits. Indeed, much of the work is prescribed in advance, and work that does not reflect this script does not take place.

The chapter "To work out what works best: what is good in home care" by Christine Ceci opens the second part ("Care"). Ceci shows how, in an attempt to constrain costs, methods have been developed to ration services such as increasingly detailed rules that dictate service availability. She constructs a strong argument against this, in favour of treating older persons as rational, choosing actors, with independence as an inherent activity and normal state, on the basis that no one can sustain existence without connection to a diverse assortment of socio-material structures and supports. In the fifth chapter, Davina Allen examines the ways in which hospital staff mediate opportunities for hospitalised patients to return to their homes, with or without formal supports. Her paper demonstrates an interesting and potentially problematic gap in understanding the extent to which frail elders function more effectively within their own home environments than may be evident in the institutional context. The final chapter in this part, "Assisting the frail elderly to live a good life through home care practice", authored by Kristín Björnsdóttir, reports on an ethnographic study focusing on the everyday life of the frail elderly receiving home care in Reykjavik, as well as the enactment of practices by official service workers. The way in which flexible organisational structure allowed the staff to explore and respond to each patient's needs and wishes is noteworthy, as is the way in which flexibility became a threat to quality care, if the workers had not developed clear ideals.

The third part ("Practices") opens with the chapter "Who can be against quality?", by Hanne Marlene Dahl, in which she approaches the topic of home care from the standpoint of policy makers. This chapter demonstrates the effects and impacts imposed through a discourse of quality rather than actual care for those responsible for providing assistance to frail elders in the community, and more worrying, how in many countries the commitment to provide comprehensive public-home services has been replaced by a concern for the cost of public services. In the seventh chapter, "Creating home care recipients: using a categorization as a tool in home care case management", Anna Olaison focuses on two case examples to illustrate the categories that take precedence in describing people's needs for home care. These cases illustrate how categorisation plays a significant

role in institutional welfare settings and functions as a tool for sense making and co-ordination of perspectives and activities, with case files generally ignoring the interactional dynamics that an older adult is located in. In Olaison's words, "the home care case files are controlled by a fixed organisational frame in the striving for standardization" (p. 168). In the final chapter, "The making of medico-managerial care work culture in public home care for the elderly", Lea Henriksson and Sirpa Wrede consider institutional shifts in the development of municipal home care for older adults, whilst paying particular attention to how the universalist welfare state reformed Finnish care work culture and the position of frontline carers. Noting how the care-friendly and the care-worker-friendly universalistic welfare state became questioned and dismantled through neo-liberal policies implemented since the 1990s, the authors underline how in the face of increasing inequalities there must be a renewal of concern about social justice and how it is to be distributed.

In sum, this publication has much to offer as a comparative account of perspectives on care at home for older people. It suffices as a comprehensive introduction to diverse empirical realities in domiciliary and personalised care. Its relatively brief and concise chapters make it possible for the reader to grasp an erudite understanding of the normative and moral qualities of care at home for older persons in diverse geographical settings. *Perspectives on Care at Home for Older People* is an eminently readable and accessible book and will be warmly welcomed by academics and researchers in social and public policy, health and social care and welfare economics. It will also be of interest to policy makers and non-governmental organisations involved in welfare and social care provision and will provide a useful source for students on undergraduate and graduate programmes. My only qualm is its price. At £89, it is surely out of reach of the average student/researcher, as well as scholars from low- and middle-income countries. This is lamentable as the publication is currently one of the best attempts at understanding why patterns of social care differ between and within countries, and the consequences of these variations.

Bennett, A. & Hodkinson, P. (eds.) (2012).
Ageing and Youth Cultures. Music, Style and Identity. London & New York: Berg, 208 pp.
ISBN 978 1 84788 835 8 (paperback)

REVIEWED by YVES LABERGE*

What happened to all these young angry men (and women) who survived the punk era and grew old? They probably got grey hair, raised kids and are still listening to music, perhaps attending raves or Goth Festivals. Some others are nostalgic of breakdancing (see Chapter 4) or slamdancing eras as they are growing older (see Chapter 5).

In their Introduction to *Ageing and Youth Cultures*, coeditors Andy Bennett (from the Griffith University of Queensland) and Paul Hodkinson (from the University of Surrey) articulate some key elements already present in the book's title. As individuals sooner or later have to settle down and lead a normal life: "Critical here is an understanding of how the identities and lifestyles constructed by 'post-youth' individuals may often need to include the accommodation of new demands, expectations and compromises created, for example, because of work and family commitments that invariably accompany the transition from early to middle adulthood" (p. 4). Put in other words, the co-editors explain that "the purpose of this book is ... to set out and define the study of older

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participation in 'youth' music and style cultures as a key emerging area of study" (p. 4).

The volume's twelve chapters are divided into four parts: "Aging, image and identity", "Constraints of the aging body", "Resources and responsibilities", and finally "Ageing communities". There is no conclusion as such, but one can find a short index at the end.

Methodologically, most chapters are case studies based on follow-up interviews centred on music, conducted in one of the four usual countries for cultural research: England, USA, Canada, and Australia (p. 9). For example, the opening chapter by Ross Haenfler questions the identities of the "Straight Edgers" generation (usually over 30 years old), who would likely adopt a "clean-living style" despite the fact they are still listening to punk music (p. 9); these older adherents – neither artists, nor musicians – often choose positive lifestyles, often reject the use of drugs and alcohol, and "beyond the drug-free living, many in the movement embraced vegetarianism, environmentalism, antisexism and antiracism" (p. 10). However, if these older persons embodying straight edge are "primarily remaining strictly abstinent", as the author admits in his concluding remarks (p. 22) their description as a group remains problematic and undoubtedly complex, with contradictions and exceptions. Therefore, as in the following essays, further fieldwork and more interviews are needed before general conclusions can be drawn.

The second part concentrates mostly on the body, performance, dancing, and rock culture when long-time adepts are not so young anymore. Among the best-articulated essays gathered in this book is Lucy Gibson's piece on rock music culture *at large*. There is an odd phenomenon of ageing audiences attending concerts by ageing bad boys like The Rolling Stones or the once grandiose Moody Blues: "As fans and performers collectively grow older, some fans can encounter feelings of dejection" (p. 88). In an interesting balance between observations and theorization in elegant formulas, Lucy Gibson argues that older rock fans (over 50 years old) attending rock concerts are nowadays the illustration of postmodern culture and individualism, as a manifestation of "ageing bodies and inner youth" (p. 82). Hence, the author elaborates an interesting (but yet incomplete) theoretical framework based on individualization theory and Mike Featherstone's idea of "the mask of aging"

(p. 91). One can obviously feel this vivid essay is only the embryo of a deeper quest.

The third part contains Chapter 7 on Dance Parties and lifestyles, in which co-editor Andy Bennett conceptualizes the spectacle of youth in terms either borrowed to postmodernism or the emerging field of Dance Studies, which focuses on resistance and "ritualistic practices of hedonism and escape" (p. 96). But the author examines these intergenerational dimensions (like the older participants at rave parties where participants are usually younger) and labels them as the illustrations of "new forms of generational exchange within the dance party scene" (p. 102). Further on, in the final essay by sociologist Nicola Smith (Chapter 12, about the Northern Soul musical scene in Great-Britain), more theoretical discussions are brought in, based mainly on Pierre Bourdieu's core concept of cultural capital (p. 159) and Erving Goffman's early works (p. 170). Here, Goffman's conceptualisation of performance is applied to such social gatherings, i.e. "Erving Goffman's notion that identity is constructed via the performance of self to others in a social setting, to achieve a sense of self-as-fan" (p. 170). She concludes her essay with some relevant thoughts about the intergenerational sharing of musical preferences (e.g. the Northern Soul music) which implies that whenever the Northern Soul music continues from one generation to the next one, "the stories of parental participation in this cultural sphere are not merely nostalgic anecdotes to tell offspring but are instead methods of subcultural capital exchange" (p. 172).

In summary, this book brings forth some new avenues for studying youth cultures (and subcultures) within emerging fields such as Post-youth Studies, Dance Studies, and other original intersections. Graduate students studying popular music, cultural studies, sociology, and youth studies will appreciate its questionings and conceptualisation about the practices and the (sometimes unusual) representations of age and ageing persons, mostly from the "X" Generation, in various contexts. Theoretically, all chapters rely on solid ground (see Joanna R. Davis' excellent mapping of the styles of subcultures from Howard Becker to Dick Hebdige, p. 105). Methodologically, the fact that most chapters are relying on only a small number of interviews (rarely more than 20 interviewees) can perhaps be challenging for some quantitative sociologists

who are always asking for more data and deeper analysis. However, readers of this book must keep in mind that these research papers and essays firstly try to investigate various emerging questions, concepts, and interdisciplinary issues at the same time, toward new directions.

I J A L

International Journal of Ageing and Later Life

The International Journal of Ageing and Later Life (IJAL) serves an audience interested in social and cultural aspects of ageing and later life development. The title of the journal reflects an attempt to broaden the field of ageing studies. In addition to studies on later life, IJAL also welcomes contributions focusing on adult ageing as well as relations among generations.

Being an international journal, IJAL acknowledges the need to understand the cultural diversity and context dependency of ageing and later life. IJAL publishes country- or cultural-specific studies as long as such contributions are interesting and understandable for an international audience.

In order to stimulate exchange of ideas on ageing across many parts of the world, IJAL is available free of charge to anyone with Internet access (www.ep.liu.se/ej/ijal).