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**Book review: MICHAEL BAMBERG (ed.), *Narrative — State of the Art*.  
Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007. vi + 271 pp.**

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MICHAEL BAMBERG (ed.), *Narrative – State of the Art*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007. vi + 271 pp. EUR95.00/USD143.00.

This collection, a reprint of a special edition of the journal *Narrative Inquiry*, aims to cover a range of approaches used in the expanding field of narrative study to 'reflect on the present state of narrative inquiry with the purpose of critically taking stock and proposing new venues for future directions' (p. 4). As a cross-section of current research, the book comprises 26 chapters with an average length of ten pages. The chapters address different debates within the larger research contexts of, among other things, narrative and social psychology (McAdams, Schiff, Taylor, Kraus), narrative therapy (Gergen and Gergen), healthcare (Charon, Ramirez-Esparza and Pennebaker), and sociolinguistics (Labov, Johnstone, Georgakopoulou, Freeman, Bamberg).

In his editor's introduction, Bamberg identifies two strands of study at the start of the turn to narrative. The first is the 'person' or 'subjectivity-centered' approach', where narrative is viewed as an 'ontological proposition' (p. 2). The second is a 'template' approach, which Bamberg states has a 'social or plot orientation' and where the research concern is 'communal ordering principles' (p. 3). Recent research, represented in this volume, brings together these separate strands.

The chapters in *Narrative – State of the Art* are not clearly delineated into sections, but frequently fall into groupings of three or four chapters that provide dialogues on common approaches. The first two chapters, including Bamberg's introduction, examine narrative from the perspective of managing the diversity of the field. Josselson's chapter poses the important question of how to bring together the increasingly varied work on narrative. The life-story as personal and social narrative has held an important place in narrative research (Linde, 1993). McAdams's chapter focuses on the relevance of life-story narrative in personality psychology, with an insistence that narrative has much to offer the understanding of personality. The following chapter (Schiff) deals with the wider picture, lamenting the peripheral place of narrative psychology within the broader field of psychology. The self and personal narrative are also central to Fischer and Goblirsch's chapter, which introduces the notion of 'biographical structuring' as a useful approach in the 'helping professions'; their approach offers a means of understanding the processes of writing and re-writing the self.

The chapters following those that examine the place of narrative in psychology take a sociolinguistic approach. Labov, continuing his work on narrative structure (Labov, 1997; Labov & Waletzky, 1967), discusses 'pre-construction' and 'reportability' as they relate to understanding narrative syntax. Johnstone's chapter examines how narrative might provide useful ways of understanding 'linguistic variation and language change'. To explain, she discusses data gathered in Pittsburgh, in which participants made language diversity salient. Stokoe and Edwards draw from the conversation analysis and discursive psychology frameworks to move beyond 'researcher-elicited narratives' to narratives as situated and thereby shaped by the context of their telling. They use examples of telephone interaction and 'police-suspect interrogation' to explore 'how members' sense of "stories" is displayed in and for the interactional contexts in which they are put to use' (p. 78).

The further range of work on narrative in the volume includes: narrative and cognitive neuroscience (Hogan) and debates surrounding literary theory and narrative (Herman and Phelan). Taylor and Kraus both address narrative as an identity resource, an approach that is expanded later in the collection through work focusing on the intersection of narrative identity and performance (Atkinson and Delamont, and Peterson and Langellier).

One notably cogent section of the book is comprised of the three chapters by Georgakopoulou, Freeman, and Bamberg, which focus on the issue of 'small stories' versus 'big stories'. 'Big stories' here refer to the well-formed narratives often gathered in research interview contexts that have been a strong focus in narrative study. 'Small stories', on the other hand, are often those gathered in a variety of contexts, for instance through ethnographic methods, which may not be fully formed, but play an important interpersonal function nonetheless. The three-paper section is tied together by Bamberg's chapter, in which the editor of the book argues for a complementary approach where researchers look both at and beyond the traditional 'big' narrative at the pieces that might otherwise be dismissed as unimportant fragments.

There is a strong focus on applied work in the collection, which is, in the majority, concerned with the role of narrative in health professions, including psychiatry and medicine. Gergen and Gergen, for example, discuss the use of narrative in therapy as a way of re-telling the self for positive psychoanalytic outcomes and include a call for further dialogue between narrative theorists and practitioners. Charon, identifying herself as a medical doctor and drawing from her own experiences, discusses the importance of allowing patients to adequately voice their narratives in doctor-patient interaction as an integral part of the diagnostic process. The final chapters in the book also deal with applied approaches. McLeod discusses the influence of narrative study on therapy practices, but primarily as it is used in examining interactional processes. Ramirez-Espanza and Pennebaker also focus on health, with a concern relating to 'good stories' and whether and how they relate to 'good health'. The definition of 'good' relating to narrative in this context is not well defined.

One chapter that is concerned with applied work outside the medical profession is that of Blommaert, with his focus on what he terms 'ethnopoetics', an

approach using 'ethnographic performance-based understandings of narrative' to examine 'voice'. Here Blommaert applies this work to such contexts as asylum application interviews, something examined in further depth in Blommaert's wider work (Blommaert, 2005).

Bamberg, in the introduction to this volume, acknowledges the broad scope of the field of narrative study and the difficult task of covering the proposed research area. The use of short chapters allows the reader concise introductions to a wider variety of work. The writing style in general tends towards the more informal and accessible. In some areas the book succeeds in presenting a compelling dialogue between differing approaches to narrative, and in others it fails to present a cogent overview. The claim is that one could pick up this text and use it as a reference, starting at any chapter to gain an overview of one piece of current narrative study. While this is true, to some degree, a different approach to structuring the book might have been beneficial; for example, numbered chapters and themed sections, in order for it to be more easily accessed in the way that it claims. As a small detail, information about the contributors to the book would also have been appreciated.

*Narrative – State of the Art* is recommended for those familiar with the field of narrative study who have an interest in short and accessible outlines on the varied approaches currently in use in the field.

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MICHAEL A.K. HALLIDAY, *Language and Society: Volume 10 in the Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday*, ed. by Jonathan J. Webster. London and New York: Continuum, 2007. xii + 304 pp. ISBN 9780826458766 (hardback), £75.00.

This is the tenth and last volume of Michael Halliday's collected works edited by Jonathan J. Webster (the other nine are: *On Grammar; Linguistic Studies of Text and Discourse; On Language and Linguistics; The Language of Early Childhood; The Language of Science; Computational and Quantitative Studies; Studies in English Language; Studies in Chinese Language; and Language and Education*). The collection