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EXTENDED REVIEW ESSAY

History and the making of young people and the late modern youth researcher: time, narrative, and change

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Making modern lives: subjectivity, schooling, and social change, by Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates, Albany, NY, SUNY Press, 2006, 275 pp., \$83.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-0791467671

This article takes for its general point of departure some major problems relating to the study of youth across time; its more particular concern focuses upon the state of contemporary youth studies research across the last two decades, including the key topic of youth subjectivity. A consideration of these issues affords an appropriate background against which to review an impressive recent publication by Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates, *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling, and Social Change*. This is a work which makes some very noteworthy contributions to what is now an extensive and ever-widening field of research. I have long felt that as the field of youth studies continues to grow as it has done in recent years, there is a parallel and pressing need for a reflexive awareness of the extent and complexity of the challenges of the field that remain to be addressed. McLeod and Yates' book endeavours – as a major empirical investment – to address that need, and achieves considerable success in so doing. In my judgement, *Making Modern Lives* offers us much more than a substantial critical engagement with the full range of contested meanings circulating about youth research and school cultures at the start of the twenty-first century. It also sets an agenda and a direction for a new interdisciplinary research focus that promises to widen our current practices of youth research in important and exciting ways.

Making Modern Lives presents us with a longitudinal study investigating young people (12–18 years of age) and youth subjectivity across a period of eight years (1993–2000) in four different Australian school contexts during a radical program of political reform. By explicitly addressing gaps in current theoretical and methodological approaches, the work tellingly illuminates the ways in which we might best apprehend fundamental categories such as youth research, the youth researcher, and indeed, young people themselves. A particularly important feature of the work in this respect is its foregrounding of the concepts of temporality and change through the engagement of longitudinal and generational research strategies.

This review essay is organized into three parts. The first concentrates upon the significance of 'time' and temporality as key concepts – though much under-

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theorized in recent years – in the study of young people, youth subjectivity and the wider sociology of education. The second briefly explores the concept of youth subjectivity – a central concern in McLeod and Yates’ book – and then goes on to explore some of the principal patterns in the use of this concept in scholarly work across the last decade. The third and final section locates McLeod and Yates’ volume more closely within the context of this wider body of work and seeks to identify its key contributions for the field. Among these, I will concentrate particularly on ideas which can be seen to offer ways forward in the overcoming of major aporias currently marking the state of sociological research on young people.

History, ‘narrative identity’, and change: dilemmas emerging from youth research

As historians of childhood and youth have shown us, the quest to better understand the ‘distinctive’ experiences of young people has generated an extensive and growing historical literature (see Gleason, 1999; Steedman, 1995). A major feature of this corpus of work is its demonstration of the links between the consolidation of the nation-state and the rising significance of the category of ‘youth’ in the years following World War I, the power of repressive sexual mores as a residual expression of colonial force, and the growing influence of modern science. Ariès wrote in his seminal and still much-debated work, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962):

One of the unwritten laws of contemporary morality, the strictest and best respected of all, requires adults to avoid any reference ... to sexual matters in the presence of children ... The modern reader of the diary in which Henri IV’s physician, Heroard, recorded the details of the young Louis XIII’s life is astonished by the liberties which people took with children ... and by the indecency of gestures made in public which shocked nobody and which were regarded as perfectly natural. No other document can give us a better idea of the non-existence of the modern idea of childhood [and arguably youth] at the beginning of the seventeenth century. (p. 33)

Whilst Ariès seems to be suggesting that the concepts of youth and childhood are virtually non-existent or at the very least poorly distinguished from seventeenth-century notions of adulthood, late nineteenth and twentieth-century theoretical legacies have, by contrast, promoted and established the category that we have come to understand as ‘youth’. Many have gone further, arguing that in the early twentieth century, the emerging concept of youth was intimately linked to a growing emphasis upon the medicalization of the individual, who was seen to embody the concept of progress through *development* (see Lesko, 2000), and the associated desires for social and moral order. Indeed, in what might still be seen as the post-Ariès moment in the ‘West’, the early twentieth-century study of young people has often been founded upon a biologically oriented view of youth development (see Baird, 2008; Gleason, 1999; Steedman, 1995) concerning itself primarily with resolving the developmental inadequacies of youth *identity*, conceived as a troubled form of immoral identification. Lesko (2000) writes:

the natural view of adolescence that grounds most of psychology, medicine, and policy-making assumes that young people between the ages of 12 and 18 have naturally occurring, largely biologically generated characteristics, behaviors and needs. In this view, biology is destiny, in that the adolescent body with hormone induced growth spurts creates psychological, emotional, and interpersonal problems ... The adolescent is outside society and history, and the important concepts are intra-individual, defined

largely by the knowledges of psychology, medicine, and to a lesser extent, sociology and education. (p. 7)

Arguably, the commitment implied in this view has served to shape our image of the young person in accord with a future civilization – perhaps a future adulthood – demanding certain commitments to the ‘frontiers’ of nation-building, the heterosexual family, and a growing emphasis upon themes of recovery, medicine and progress (see Miller & Rose, 2008). Again, turning to the controversial yet highly influential words of Ariès,

in the tenth century, artists were unable to depict a child except as a man on a smaller scale. How did we come from that ignorance of childhood [and arguably adolescence and youth] to the centering of the family around the child in the nineteenth century? How far does this evolution correspond to a parallel evolution of the concept people have of the family . . . ? It will be no surprise to the reader if these questions take us to the very heart of the great problems of civilization, for we are standing on those frontiers of biology and sociology from which mankind derives its hidden strength. (p. 40)

If Ariès is astute in his implicit suggestion that the concept of childhood – ‘as a man on a smaller scale’ – takes us to the ‘very heart of the great problems of civilisation’, then, as youth researchers, inevitably we are faced with a number of questions concerning our own intellectual histories, the history of the human sciences and the development of the category ‘youth’. Why, for example, may it still seem so difficult for us to reconcile ourselves to the fact that our own use of such categories (e.g., childhood, youth) may exert a residual force which remains masked through the very practice of youth research itself? How might we, as academic interlocutors of a particular discipline, govern and therefore exert a hidden meaning – indeed a surplus meaning – about these categories and in so doing narrow the scope of our work or the questions which can be asked? What might history, sociology and other disciplines we may be associated with have to do with this narrowing?

Paradoxically, it is Ariès’s account, however controversial, that provides some rather early responses to these questions. Perhaps inadvertently, he does so in the first instance by pointing to the role that disciplines such as sociology and history have played in shaping the state’s relation to such categories. And in substantially more intentional ways, there are now large bodies of evidence in a wide range of social science and humanities disciplines (e.g., psychology, law, criminology) which point to particular knowledge convergences across fields and state institutions directed towards the reconciliation – primarily through ideas about young people as symbolic repositories of the qualities of the nation – of rising moral fears over social order and national prosperity. For example, as Walkowitz (2006), Arendt (1968) and Connell (2007) remind us, in the first half of the twentieth century, alongside the continued growth of modern science, we witness close affiliations between the rise of the bounded state and affiliated territories and the study of history (see, for example, Foucault’s lectures on Security and Territory, 1977/2007; Geertz, 2000; Walkowitz, 2006) and, to greater or lesser degrees, sociology. The category of *youth as homologous with identity* – as a form of classification and as a historical typology – was a notion which grew out of such a history and science of sociology, and might be seen as a key moment in the individualization of modernity itself.

As part of the individualization processes associated with institutional and national practices and convergences, a historical narrative about young people – as relayed through the authority of the disciplines – could be seen to provide a certain ‘place to be at home for its characters and its readers’ (see Steedman, 1995). Institutional convergences of this kind operated at deep symbolic levels as the category ‘youth’ itself began to emerge as an entity in need of resolution, in need of correction, requiring assimilation if it was not to become a site of crystallized public anxiety. For those narratives of youth which did not fit comfortably or easily within a dominating national narrative of hope, transition and homogeneity, it was, as Steedman (1995) suggests, easy to relegate young people to categories such as ‘disorder’, ‘danger’ and ‘immorality’ (see, for example, Dillabough, 2008; Gleason, 1999). Taken together, such categories have often served as a symbolic constellation of ideas for critical attention, identifying youth ‘folk devils’ who constituted an object for the moral gaze and the associated reforms which it seemed to demand (see Cohen, 1977). Hence we have witnessed across the twentieth century the reactive need for what Steedman has named, ‘the comforts of narrative exegesis: the comforts of a story’ about young people as a way to respond to re-circulating moral panics about social instability (see Steedman, 1995).

History (along with sociology, with Durkheim a particularly prominent example) as a discipline closely associated with the development and growth of modern Western science (see Arendt, 1968), was a field of thought well placed to assist in the task of civilizing society’s members and particularly in taming young ‘folk devils’ – Joseph Conrad’s ‘phantom of the dark world’ comes to mind – who threatened to disturb colonial stability. In this way, we could argue, echoing Raewyn Connell (2007) and her thoughts on Northern Theory in the book *Southern Theory*, that some elements of intellectual work in relation to the category ‘youth’ were grounded in a reactive and *anti*-democratic form of theory making concerned largely with a Eurocentric and imperialist account of what it means to be young: ‘any realistic view of intellectual history must acknowledge that social science has a broad *anti*-democratic heritage, from nineteenth century justifications of imperialism to modern technocratic management science, corporate funded market research and more’ (p. 230). It should be no surprise, then, that the notion of ‘youth’ – as a developing theoretical category – has often emerged as a radical alterity to notions of the good and abiding ‘citizen’.

Beyond the critique of the normative discipline of history and its still incomplete role in the making of the category ‘youth’, Carolyn Steedman’s (1995) work also reminds us, importantly, that there are other possibilities available to historians and the sociologists in thinking about young people. For example, the mid- to late twentieth-century practices of cultural history and critical sociology are suggestive of a deeply analytical or even genealogical account of youth as a central object of *cultural* analysis. Many recent scholars have seen in this an intellectual tool for revealing, rather than reproducing, the moral imperatives and cultural operations of states as they have endeavoured to construct a utilitarian idea of youth in particular historical moments. By contrast, then, with the disciplinary functions of science and many normative historical and sociological traditions, more recent cultural accounts of ‘being young’ have been seen to provide the observer or interpreter (or indeed the wider social world) with a set of authentic memories and inherited narrative acts opening a cultural window upon an uncertain past on what it means to be young

– allowing a reflection on time, space and place (see Strange, 1998). In so doing, such accounts have sought to interpret cultural traces of a social world which could not be confined to the interiority of the immoral young person, or to their resolution as a ‘problem’. The central insights which emerge here rest upon the cultural dialectics operating between the concept of youth, place and time, even if *time*, *periodization* and *temporality* have more typically emerged as the super-ordinate constructs.

Given that the aim of the latter part of this essay is to review a contemporary text exploring youth and social change in Australia, one might perhaps ask at this juncture: what is the purpose of identifying the varied tasks of the historian or the sociologist of youth and young people?; and why make that identification explicit at the outset? My purpose, I would respond, is to show how our very concern with the category of youth in the present moment itself emerges from past time and intellectual history, whether it be the historians or traditional historical texts which tell us that this is so. Youth, as a category, is an inherited intellectual legacy from past time and from the disciplines through which we engage that time. Speaking from the vantage point of sociology and youth studies in the present, we might point to the fact that despite the now vast and growing knowledge that we have of the role of history in the formation of the very category of youth, over the last decade youth studies researchers have focused very little on the concept of temporality as it might support a sociological understanding of ‘youth’. One might therefore argue, as I am attempting here, that a focus on concepts which might help us to better understand the changing conceptions of youth over time – or the idea of a young person as an embodiment of time – therefore seems a useful way forward in thinking about the study of modernity and subjectivity in places which may not be familiar to all of us. Two concepts seem particularly useful in understanding such a relationship and may be drawn upon indirectly as a way of addressing the aporias which are identified in *Making Modern Lives*; these are the concepts of *representation* and ‘*historical time*’.

In the case of the first – *representation* – through a social and cultural historiography of youth we witness a reconstruction of a time past and an account of young people in the context of what Ricoeur (1976; 1992) has called ‘historical time’. What we learn from this kind of historical interpretation is something other than a straightforward charting of youth progress over time, or of young people’s role in the achievement of national stability, or indeed of the representation of biological or psychological development; rather, it is the social and cultural force of the young person’s narrative identity, or the adult or expert account of that identity, to the degree that it shapes and may govern normative moral convictions about young people. In this way, it can never be simply liberal comforts or narrative exegesis which emerge from the stories which are told or recorded about the experiences of being young or what could be described as youth subjectivity. Instead we learn that any recorded temporal experience of being young or a concept such as youth subjectivity – as a representation of time – is best learned indirectly. No dramatic moments, no developmental wellspring of events or characteristics, brings immediate illumination to the identity of the young subject. Rather, youth narratives and symbolic representations provide a form of cultural and textual witnessing, a detour and referencing of the subject as it has encountered others in a theatre and dramatic performance of decentering and temporal re-contextualization. Through the social texts of youth we gain only a ‘partial draft of a human person’ (see Kearney, 2005, p. 104) which can never be witnessed directly.

In respect of both temporality and representation, connections may be sought between the symbolic order of any given time and place, existing bodies of knowledge and social imaginaries circulating about young people, and the reconstructed experience of being young. Arguably then, one way to imagine the category of youth as a temporal entity inherited from the past is through the concepts of ‘restaging’ and surplus meaning – that is, as a theatrical and dramatic re-staging of an existing social narrative that has been reconstructed for a public audience in order to retrieve that which might be lost through the processes and charting of social change. As Kearney writes (2005, p. 54), ‘For a human being-in-the-world in its most everyday sense involves a process of temporalization which makes our present actions meaningful by interpreting them in terms of a recollected past and a projected future’. Whilst the public desire for narrative comfort about young people, whether represented as history or as the present, has increased across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the idea of youth as something which masks the profound temporal complexities of social change has seldom seemed so powerful. In the remaining sections, I hope to show how elements of this complexity are addressed in McLeod and Yate’s book, *Making Modern Lives*.

Recent trends in the study of youth subjectivity and the making of modern lives

As McLeod and Yates themselves tell us, the range of topics concerned with youth and youth subjectivity continues to proliferate. Within the expanding boundaries of youth research in the West, work has particularly clustered around a number of dominating trends and approaches which I have sought to elaborate elsewhere (for a review see Dillabough and Kennelly, 2009, in press). One such concentration is gathered around the question of youth subjectivity; as McLeod and Yates’ work falls within this area, it is worth looking in a little more detail at the reasons why it has become such a prominent concern for the field of youth studies.

What does it mean when we talk about youth subjectivity? For whom has the term ‘subjectivity’ been defined, and to what ends do youth researchers deploy this term as both a mediating point between the young person and the state, and as a mechanism for the refinement of methodological approaches? Within the ever-widening scope of youth research, subjectivity emerges as many different and sometimes overlapping entities: it is, for example, sometimes understood to concern the ‘properties, perceptions and orientations’ – sometimes unconscious – of young people to the social world; these perceptions are thought to represent subjectivity to the extent that such perceptions reflect a phenomenologically driven *point of view* rather than an objectifiable reality. The opposite of this approach is therefore commonly seen as one which represents ‘objectivity’ – an observable property or truth about the ‘subject’.

Within the broad constellation of phenomenological approaches, subjectivity also is sometimes seen to constitute a unique or *relative* expression of the young person’s experience in time and place and the forms of identification – both conscious and unconscious – which are associated with such experience. Young people are both subjected to particular life experiences and governing processes which they cannot escape (Miller & Rose, 2008), yet there are elements of a subjective life experience which are specific to them. In both cases, these unique experiences and shared conditions interface with a world in which the young person

is both cultural object and a subject of the state. Subjectivity is therefore sometimes understood as the interpretive dimension of historical experience – which is to say that a subject is a being with the burden of experience. Subjectivity has also been defined within early cultural studies movements as a human and deeply cultural dimension of social interlocation. That is, subjectivity might be understood as an unconscious ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1977) – social ‘thought experienced as feeling’ and feeling experienced as form of social thought.

Or, by contrast, drawing upon Foucault, defining subjectivity might emerge as the problematic itself. Instead the aim might be to identify precisely those forms of regulation, surveillance and governance through which a self ultimately comes to understand and constitute itself and engages in associated performances such as self-regulation. In this case, we might be addressing what McLeod and Yates address, drawing on the work of Henrietta Moore, as the *project of the self* – those thoughts, actions and desires which are seen to be shaped by the wider expectations of a re-ordered set of power relations linked to the state but which also move well beyond it (see Miller & Rose, 2008), and the varying and complex orders which divide and classify ‘subjects’ – what is sometimes referred to as the process of ‘subjectivation’ (see, for example, Butler, Foucault). Of course, the definitions do not start and stop here but perhaps the piece that matters most is the idea of *subjectivity* – as a deeply hermeneutic frame – being tied to an interpretive account (even if governed) of being young which stands in stark contrast to the objective medicalization of youth as a Victorian, if not early liberal, category of emerging modern traumas.

Why has youth research been so concerned with subjectivity over the last two decades? There are many possible answers to this question. A skeptic might wonder whether one reason for the abundant concern over ontological questions relating to young people – that is, a theory of being young in the late twentieth century – is that there has also been a general interest in understanding or objectifying the self in late modernity (the period that McLeod and Yates’ work engages). Under this aspect, there has been a marked turn away from the study of youth subjectivity as a social collective or as structured by history or memory,¹ and doubtless linked in some way to the wider turn away from social class or wider social conflict. This has been paralleled in methodological terms by a declining emphasis on objectivity, positivism and some normative accounts of structuralism within youth research. In its place has come a powerful concern with issues of identity as associated with a wide range of theories and accounts of the self (from, for example, Neo-Marxist, Liberal, Post-Structural, and Late Modern Theories of Individualization alongside Psychoanalytic Accounts), together with a revival of interest in psycho-social approaches and, more recently, affect and emotion.² In educational scholarship of recent years, the work of Butler, Lacan, De Certeau, Foucault, Deleuze and other continentally-influenced theories concerned with the constitution or making of the subject has been highly influential (*pace*, the *Making Modern Lives*). And of course a persistent public and academic trend is the growing and ever-expanding interest in liberalism and neo-liberal obsessions with self-understanding and its impact on the state (particularly in terms of self-realization, self-improvement, self-perfection).

McLeod and Yates’ work on youth subjectivity, as central to the idea of making modern lives, is, I believe, tied to the symbolic locus of continental thinking on the ‘constitution of the subject’ as it has emerged in the mid- to late twentieth century. Much of the work is situated in a Foucauldian perspective and reflects the associated

shifts in theoretical thinking which have taken place in the contemporary Australian context. Indeed, Australian researchers have been very heavily influenced by debates about the self emerging in continental thought, arguably in ways that are quite distinct from those in Canada and the UK. *Making Modern Lives* reflects many of these interesting trends and Australian inflections. However, with due respect to other work in the field, what is so powerful in McLeod and Yates' book is the manner in which the authors seek to embrace a wide array of contemporary youth debates and theoretical issues as they explore the meaning of youth subjectivity, with a key and compelling emphasis on a temporal reflexivity which changes the ways in which we come to think about youth as a category of understanding. Indeed, *Making Modern Lives* reflects a kind of generous and relevant theoretical scholarship which does not foreclose the possibility of a wider range of theoretical ideas which draw upon time, generation and youth representation. The authors do not at all negate or ignore other traditions in their accounts of young people. In its breadth and scope, their theoretical reach represents some of the finest interdisciplinary thinking that youth research in the sociology of education has achieved to date.

I now move forward to focus my analysis of the book much more directly around three key themes which have been substantially missing in the youth studies literature but which McLeod and Yates have not only addressed, but have integrated into their work as an exemplary account of how to 'do' youth research. These areas are: (1) time, narrative identity, and the making of the storied self; (2) methodology and theory; and (3) late modern social change, education and youth identity.

Time, narrative identity, and the making of the storied self

As the lifetime work of a thinker such as Paul Ricoeur so impressively demonstrates, the project of all disciplines concerned with questions of [youth] subjectivity – including youth studies – must always make its long detour through hermeneutics: 'beyond a phenomenological idealism of pure reflection to a phenomenological hermeneutics of interpretation which acknowledges that the meaning generated about "subjectivity" or the project of the self is never first and foremost *for me*' (Kearney, 2004, p. 16). If we accept this principle, then we can begin to move beyond the idea that the category 'youth' is bound by intra-individual capacities (*pace* Ariès) as in earlier historical moments, and we can begin a shift in how we think about our theories of young people. Thus, for example, to say youth 'selfhood or subjectivity' can never be merely to say 'I' (Kearney, 2004, p. 2). The subjective accounts of young people, as a means of communication, are always symbolically produced in a space and time – 'the symbol gives rise to thought' (Ricoeur, 1967, pp. 347–357), and offered back to public interpretation.

As I have argued, theoretical approaches conceived in these terms do not reside at the centre of current youth studies work. Indeed, with few exceptions (see Wyn, 2000), the *bulk* of youth research now represents short-term qualitative studies or quantitative research on the nature of youth pathways, transitions and cultural performances in the present. However, McLeod and Yates' book – which points to the power of the narrative in showing that to say 'I' is never merely to say 'me' – demonstrates precisely how these short-term approaches limit our understanding of just how this or that young person landed up where they did, and why change among young people is so often exaggerated, along with their representational history in the

state. The authors tell us that if we fail to reach beyond our disciplinary training, we risk losing sight of the relations between time and narrative in young people's accounts of themselves, and particularly the realization that any social narration of youth is a medium and representation of time – indeed a historical project – rather than a straightforward exemplification of an abiding self. Indeed, McLeod and Yates' book firmly and explicitly addresses the issue of time in relation to subjectivity in ways that are well beyond the scope of most youth research today. While they are not claiming that their work is explicitly historical (and may not see it that way at all), there are subtle temporal moves throughout the book that both utilize and trouble the concept of change in relation to young people. In so doing, McLeod and Yates are in a position to argue that young people's accounts of change, as experienced by them, represent a narrative that is reconfigured in temporal experience.

In taking this position, McLeod and Yates set themselves the task of ascertaining whether a kind of poetics of temporal narration shared by both the youth researcher and the young people themselves may resolve the aporias of youth studies in relation to dominant understandings of change (e.g., Beck's risk society, 1992), or the ways in which young people might experience what Bourdieu names as 'positional suffering' as an expression of a *structural temporality*. For example, while McLeod and Yates do not foreground temporal narratives of young people as the focal point of their study, it remains an enduring element of the work as they seek to redefine their longitudinal research. Their argument rests upon the assumption that while snapshots at a given time of young women and men living through substantial social change may be useful to the researcher or to the public in the sense that they provide some insight into the complex difficulties they face at a given moment, they also tell us that enduring narratives of youth struggle over time mark an important ontological gesture which reveals something more about the making of youth selfhood and of the modern state. As McLeod and Yates write:

the making of the self in the current historical period, whether we define that as late or post- or a second modernity, is identified by a range of theorists . . . as being of new and distinctive importance, a process that signifies the emergence of new kinds of identities and social relations. Equally, for researchers writing from the perspective and politics of social movements such as feminism, *anti-racism*, and post-colonialism, the construction and development of subjectivity remains a central issue in a different way: what keeps old patterns of inequality recreating themselves in new contexts? What kind of a thing is subjectivity and how is it formed? How does it develop? How might it change? (p. 37)

What is important about this aim of the book is that the authors tell the reader that they wish to look both to the future and to history in recursive and discursive ways, particularly in terms of what might be being said by the person talking to us in order to 'confront a flat linearity' in how modern lives are represented:

in comparing interviews over time, our aim was not to point out disjunctions or contradictions, to see when they were telling the truth or fabricating stories. (p. 81)

Utilizing recursive comparative reflection, the authors sought to capture the changing nature of young people's conceptions of themselves both through time and over time in different contexts, as well as to see themselves anew. In this way, young people's accounts of themselves (there are 26 young people in all, 14 girls and

12 boys) do not emerge as a liberal narration or a form of narcissism which paralyzes the reader. Rather young people's self narration serves as a way to understand how their conceptions might tell us something about the formative elements of modernity and that which might constitute the youth subject of modernity, the project, as they suggest, of becoming a self, and its variations in form. Not only do the researchers work in this recursive fashion but so too do their participants, particularly in relation to the many topics which they link back to the concept of youth subjectivity. We learn, for example, how youth subjectivity and the notion of the good student are connected through methods of school disciplining and its intersection with family life. We begin to see how the social institution of schooling 'produces' the good student but does not determine a kind of youth subjectivity which necessarily always resonates with success. This is primarily because, as the authors so effectively point out, young people are not only regulated by contemporary educational cultures of competition which invoke anxiety and fear, but they carry with them the burden of their history, of those who have gone before them (see also Nayak and Kehily, 2008; Thompson, 2003). In other words, if youth subjectivity itself is a particularly modern concern, the reality of it in practice can never be truly modern. Time has played a central role in its making and McLeod and Yates have seriously grappled with both historical and modern representations of time as narrated through their youth participants. In Chapter 3, for example, we learn about Nassar, a 12-year-old boy who had immigrated from Sri Lanka to Australia, and the temporal significance of change in his biographical accounts:

When we first interviewed 12 year old Nassar at the beginning of high school, he told us he hoped to become a scientist when he grew up and left school – get some degrees and be a professor or somebody ... over the next few years Nassar tells us that he thinks about girls a lot and it distracts him from his studies. On his recounting, he seems to be struggling with his school work and having difficulty achieving the grades he would like ... He says with pride that he works hard, but not as hard as a friend from Sri Lanka, who is a similar age and at school from 7:30 in the morning until 8 at night. (p. 47)

Later, as the story of Nassar unfolds, we learn that he is suffering from anxiety and is struggling in school. Much of this struggle appears tied to the cultural conflicts he experiences with a system which he has inherited through generational migration, a particular family position, and the forms of competition operating in the school over time in relation to gender, race and class. In other words, Nassar, the person or individual in struggle, is not what the authors want us to focus on, for to do so would be to be seduced by the narrative of liberal traumas. It would direct us away from seeing how time, experience, structure and school culture come together to shape Nassar's narrative, the very processes underlying the 'project' of selfhood, and indeed its associated social outcomes – a particular, temporally inflected 'structure of feeling' about his place in the world.

More importantly, what we learn from this key concern with temporality in *Making Modern Lives* is that we can only speak of youth representation – such as Nassar's – as an outcome of a narrative act (not a subjective 'I'), which releases a certain force of representing that which is modern (i.e., something modern in the making), changing, enduring and historical. The narratives young people offer always therefore have more to give us than a mere account of their lives. They are

engagements in what Paul Ricoeur identifies as the wider notion of *représentance*, ‘representation by replacement’, recontextualization, or by encountering something anew. Here, narrative construction with representative force takes the place of a simple notion of representation or fixed accounts of an unchanging person or a developmentally sequenced sovereign subject: ‘History operates through an irreducible course of reconstruction, which is its only instrument for seeking truth’ (cited in Kearney, 2004, p. 369). Hence, youth subjectivity provides us with some indirect way of witnessing the power of time in relation to young people’s changing self-understandings and not a simple narrative of sociological change or presentism. And as McLeod and Yates tell us, it is precisely in this way that it becomes even more urgent that we recognize that the sociologist and the historian cannot continue to hold a distanced approach from each other, and we learn more about the dangers of merely reconstructing a narrative of young people as a single and decontextualized snapshot in time. Indeed, in holding on to such intellectual distancing we may fail to grasp key sociological questions such as those pertaining to generational conflict. As the authors ask: ‘what is demanded of the young person in this era, as they see themselves and their futures against the backdrop of generational change?’ (p. 3). Indeed, through McLeod and Yates’ work, we see that young people are both actors and at the same time expositors of a historical condition of existence. In such a context, the ability for action to be taken by young people and accompanying forms of youth subjectivity (for example, in the form of a ‘good student’) can be seen to unfold under the horizon of change over time. Yet other factors such as class and materiality are not compromised in these explanations. McLeod and Yates write:

The interplay of themes about distinction and hierarchy and themes about new work and cultural literacies characterizes the normative vision of the good student today . . . It is in part an ongoing engagement with questions about how gender or class or race and ethnic formations work today, with how individual identities, as well as social patterns are made and remade; and with how inequality, advantage, and disadvantage are produced and might be changing. (p. 3)

This approach to youth studies – time, change and the subjective – also allows us to see that young people do not own, as it were, their symbolic expressions as a statement of selfhood; rather they also carry the durable and sedimented effects of the social order with them as they attempt to live their lives in a radically changing world. In their perception, and against the paradigmatic dominance operating in the late twentieth century about constant change, the concept of such new times and radical change may indeed be over-rated. As the authors themselves say:

the book . . . argues that the constant theoretical and political focus on ‘change’, New Times, and new forms of identity has been overdone and the extent of change somewhat exaggerated. The new types of work and opportunities, new modes of entry to work, the intensified push to govern and present the self in new ways foregrounded in new times rhetoric, are taken up and experienced very unevenly by different groups of young people in our study. And many of the patterns and claims theorists have noted about previous periods, such as inequalities and class or gendered ways of being, or schooling role’s in producing and consolidating difference and inequalities, are still apparent, even though they may have different substantive forms today. (p. 4)

In summary, then, we learn that young people may be seen as neither author nor subject of their own narratives, but always subjected to, and subjectified within,

a particular time and place. To understand young people's actions, McLeod and Yates' book tells us that we must take a recognizable detour from the idea of young people as rational and developmentally sequenced individuals in order to demonstrate how youth identification in all its narrative forms arrives at the place of temporal expression. A temporal understanding of how diverse young people struggle to hold together the imagined identities they construct for themselves and with others as they navigate complex and exclusionary social terrain is therefore central to their project of understanding how the self is 'made and remade'. McLeod and Yates' work also succeeds in showing how a reconfiguration of past time in youth narratives leads to the interruption of traditional systems of meaning which change the course of the existing youth social narrative. Social change, temporality and youth subjectivity therefore emerge as mediators of social meaning. Showing this kind of connection in research is a rare and remarkable achievement. Youth can therefore no longer be seen as a 'truth', a simple construction through discourse, a future or a simple narrative of marginality which we must observe but rather a cultural medium and expression of temporal existence.

Methodology, theory, and the study of subjectivity

A further notable aporia in the field of gender, youth studies and education is the problem associated with the links between methodology and theory. All too often, certain theoretical frameworks are drawn upon to 'read' data about young people which tend to impose a certain kind of perspective before empirical study has been undertaken. More importantly, theory is often identified or conflated with the data themselves. In other words, theory emerges as the dominating source of information – as do its concepts in the context of a study. Theory is also used to signal one's relationship to a mentor, or it is used to signal one's positioning in the field. Method often follows as the subordinate construct which is drawn upon in the process of signaling theoretical sophistication in the work itself. What we as readers often fail to realize in this process is the power of the theory to guide our readings of young people or the ways in which the theory impacts on the formation of knowledge about young people. In such cases, theory itself emerges as a form of surveillance over the field and much research in youth studies can be read in relation to this kind of surveillance.

McLeod and Yates are well aware of these problems in the field and are both long-time researchers and very familiar with debates and trends in social theory. The ways in which they respond to these kinds of problems in this book are accomplished through some noteworthy strategies. First, they draw upon interdisciplinary approaches to read the data such that any narrow reading of their accounts and of the narratives offered by young people – on the good student, on the nation, on pathways, on becoming someone – all seem an unlikely outcome. In so doing, they give the young people in their study a wide respect by allowing their accounts to document change and continuity as narrations of time, place and nation (see particularly chap. 6); they also use theory as a mediating device to assist them in not only understanding and interpreting why it is that the young women and men in the study performed in the ways that they did, but also as a means of trying to understand their data in the context of a larger body of literature on young people. The authors invoke what in hermeneutic terms might be identified as a dialectical reading of youth narratives. While they claim a primary commitment to the study of

subjectivity and to discourse (*pace* post-structuralism), they also make very clear the power of addressing questions of social differentiation through class, race and gender analyses. This kind of interdisciplinarity not only speaks to the impasse in much theoretical work on young people (discourse versus structure, identity versus constitution of the subject, or culture versus structure). It also demonstrates the power of such interdisciplinarity in understanding the category of youth and youth experience. Indeed throughout the book, McLeod and Yates demonstrate how young people's accounts can be drawn upon to read and ultimately to rethink theory and the category of youth. They work particularly hard at defining terms and concepts so that their own interdisciplinary and methodological experience are connected. They write:

The primary terms with which young represent ... their identities is significant to our account. But our use of the term subjectivity signals that those identities are not simple, given, presumed essences that naturally unfold, but rather are produced in an ongoing process, mediated by multiple historical and contemporary factors, including social, schooling, and psycho-dynamic relations ... The term subjectivity alerts us not so much to the idiosyncracies of the individual (though this is of course relevant), as to how subjects are formed – the range of influences, experiences, and relations that combine to produce a young person ... In this way, subjectivity refers to both general and particular processes and patterns in the making of modern lives. (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 38)

So while it is clear that a theoretical framework which draws upon these researchers' experience in the field and the academy is established, there is also a manifest widening in the scope of their theoretical reach. The authors extend the remit of one-off studies and move towards involved in-depth longitudinal approaches showcasing for example, video diaries, time lines and interviews (including interviews with mothers). In so doing, the authors do not rest in the world of abstractions nor do they turn the stories told by young people into realist accounts of life which are located in the bodies of those who voiced these stories. Rather they successfully bridge the worlds of theory, methodology and data in a generative reading of youth. As previously noted, Foucault is a symbolic locus of much of the theory underlying this work, as are Butler and other post-structuralists. Simultaneously, however, we also see contributions to understanding the materialist elements of enduring working-class narratives which are demonstrated in many of the young people's accounts. An excerpt from an interview with three working-class girls points us toward these forms of differentiation:

Interviewer: What do you think your life will be like when you leave school? Do you think about it that much?

[Silence ... All three girls shake their heads]

What would you like to be doing, Jackie?

1st girl: Maybe babysitting and play for Australia in netball.

2nd girl: Babysitting.

3rd girl: Same. (p. 167)

As the authors go on to write:

the way the interview happens, the way the girls relate to us and we to them, is as important in understanding subjectivity and class as is the literal context of what they say about themselves and their future. The entire interview from which this extract is taken is filled with silences, monosyllabic answers, and an overwhelming sense of unease. In contrast, interviews held at City Academy, the girls not only displayed a comfortable easiness in the situation but also an ability to self-monitor and adjust the impression their answers might be having on us – to add stories about caring for the less fortunate to a narrative primarily about hopes for a glamorous and successful future. (p. 167)

In such a case, we gain direct insight into a certain form of researcher reflexivity which is less about assuming equal relations with the participants and more concerned with a theoretical assessment of class relations and class conflict through the practice of methodology. From this vantage point, the researchers put the theory to work in a highly comprehensive way. In so doing, they are particularly successful in showing how materiality and regulation are in operation simultaneously and how both point to ‘visible cracks’ in youth experience. Class is not the only element which is monitored in such a way. A return to the case of Nassar highlights these linkages and visible cracks in experience. McLeod and Yates write that:

Nassar’s own views on cultural difference in relation to Australia pivot on understandings of modernity and ‘fitting in’. He is critical of whipping up racial enmities, but also thinks modernity and technological advance are important, and that Australian Aboriginal people would not have been better served by a non-colonial history. (p. 49)

McLeod and Yates then go on to quote Nassar as remarking that:

Let’s say if Australia, if Captain Cook and all those people never found it or cared about Australia and it was just here, it would just be primitive ... it wouldn’t be as civilized. I mean not as, no, a good word to say is, it wouldn’t be modern, it wouldn’t be technological, it would be just nothing. It wouldn’t fit in. (p. 49)

Late modern social change, education and youth identity

The third key contribution of the book to youth studies research is the manner in which the authors confront the relationship between change and youth subjectivity. As I argued at the outset, many contemporary researchers of young people attempt to isolate the study of change as their focal point of interest but often fail to achieve an in-depth account of change at the level of the state and young people. Here, the very language of subjectivity (as a late twentieth-century manifestation of theoretical dominance) has perhaps elided our sense of other elements of social life to which we ought to be attending.

Despite these concerns, there are a number of ways in which change is documented in *Making Modern Lives* which offer major contributions to theories of social change in the field of education. First, change can be illuminated through the longitudinal context to which the authors pay due attention, as well as the many diverse school contexts and their legacies of operation. McLeod and Yates show that social class continues to be a powerful predictor of young people’s futures but they also show how substantial variations in the effects of social class intersect with school culture and values, thus changing the course of traditionally predicted pathways or transitions (and thereby successfully challenging the idea that education

is a separate system of symbolic production; see Moore, 2006). They also show how engaging with school is a mediator of future directions as well as of schooling and subjectivity: 'we wanted to show how [young people's] engagement with schooling and with particular schools over the teenage years does become part of the making of the self, the making of inequalities, and the making of society' (p. 218). The authors also demonstrate very effectively the role of school experience and what they identify as the 'imprint of different school cultures' in the making of a modern subjectivity which is unique, regulated and shared in the form of becoming a modern girl or boy. But these are experiences that cannot ultimately be separated from biographical trajectories.

Finally, there are indicators of youth narration which suggest a deeply social and structural focus rather than simply accounting for theoretical interests, 'social discourse' or any individual self-indulgences. The authors state that they did not wish to tell stories to the public about 'what we already know'. They wished to show us, as McNay (2000) does, that a concern with subjectivity across time and place is indeed about change. But it is also about what McNay and others have documented as enduring sedimentation. This sedimentation cannot be found by looking only at class relations as the most legitimate ways of exposing such relations in the state. Nor do the authors rely on subjectivity as a concept which gives pride of place to youth language or discourse. Rather, they help us to see, as the structuralists of an earlier period also did, that the modern state can be witnessed and read in the forms of subjectivity that emerge among young people. The authors also tell us that simply focusing on the managerial or technician elements of late modern schooling experience in the affluent West masks the more complex temporal dimensions of subjectivities which can only be revealed by undertaking research with young people in relation to the elements of 'distinction' which emerge in both school and social cultures. McLeod and Yates also demonstrate, perhaps inadvertently, that across what might now seem to us like the *long* twentieth century, liberalism has indeed impacted upon young people in their new search for leisure and the need to be free of restrictions from some traditional family structures. For example, they write that:

the real mum ... no longer carries the gravitas it once did among these young people, hence a change for girls of the working classes and the middle classes. At the same time, the young boys ... continued to see their own experiences as the norm: there is an unshaken belief that 'males are just normal' or to put another way, that male experiences are indeed the norm. The social changes associated with feminism seem to have a much stronger impact on the young women than young men, and it is the young women – across all four different school contexts – who appear to be managing new work and social changes with more confidence. (p. 226)

Perhaps in this way, McLeod and Yates' book title might be slightly deceptive. It is not only the making of modern lives which they document, but the re-contextualization of the modern state, its forms of re-ordering, and its associated forms of regulation.

Conclusions

Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling, and Social Change offers us a comprehensive, wide-reaching, interdisciplinary and highly readable account not

only of what we mean by youth subjectivity, but also of the vast landscape upon which people's lives are made and played out in late twentieth-century Australia, and related to us as complex social narratives (see Cavarero, 2000; Skocpol, 2005). This is a classic and substantial piece of work that will be drawn upon by students and scholars alike for many years to come. Fundamentally, it does exactly what it sets out to do: that is, to document continuity and change. This is of course a key aim of the enterprise of sociology, but in outlining the various contributions of this work to the field of youth studies I have tried to show that it does much more than this. It focuses on the concept of time and shows that a broad comprehensive approach is what is needed to avoid over-arching and totalizing claims about youth and change that could very well undermine our knowledge of real change as it is experienced differentially by young people in space and place across regulatory cultures.

In conclusion, this book embraces social theory, educational research, creative methodology and presents us with a full and rich account of young Australian lives in late modernity, or at the closing of the twentieth century. It is a generous reading of the field and a cautionary tale about how to do research with young people, demonstrating the care that is required in avoiding the over-generalization of sociology's project of change. Change needs to be understood within the context of time and the discursive tropes that figure the youth narrative itself (Ricoeur, 1976; 1992; see also Simon, 2005). A major and lasting lesson here is that sociology and youth studies need both history and a deep theoretical understanding of youth narrativization if they are to be comprehensive. We cannot find this narrative simply as a sociology of youth in the present. We must construct it in relation to a social, cultural and temporal context. Inevitably some elements of the narrative serve the purpose of desirable myths and lost histories and some elements serve the purpose of 'truth' in the loose sense of meaning expounded in young people's stories of change. However, if we are to get past the long listing of often paralyzing youth narratives which hang endlessly off the pages of the now over-abundant supply of research studies charting the voices of young lives; if we are to grant them any cognitive purchase or legitimacy, we must attempt to locate them in sites of meaning which help us better to understand the world that young people face as part of history as well as of the present. McLeod and Yates have fully achieved this task, whilst at the same time providing us with a model of how we might each aspire to become better youth researchers. This is not a tale of narrative comfort; we do not always feel at home as we read this narrative tale about the highly retrenched Australian landscape. But as a scholarly work, the meeting of intellectual traditions inscribed here does not force upon us a particular way of reading young people's lives so that we are disciplined into agreement. Rather, the power of originality and sheer complexity reaches beyond itself, enabling us to learn something new. As Clifford Geertz has so aptly suggested, progress in any field often lies in conjunctions (*history and sociology and youth studies*): 'take care of the conjunctions and the nouns will take care of themselves' (Geertz, 2000, p. 334).

Notes

1. Perhaps with the exceptions of some of the recent biographical approaches and some more recent psychoanalytic work.

2. A recent small-scale conference was held at the Institute of Education, London, entitled 'The Emotional Geographies of Education' convened by Deborah Youdell and Jane Kenway (November 2008).

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