Effects, Metaphors, and Masks:

Reading and Doing Age in Contemporary British Theatre.

By:

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Abstract

This thesis combines traditional and practice-based methods to research the representation of age and ageing in contemporary British theatre. My voice interjects intermittently in the thesis in acknowledgement of my culturally and historically situated position as a middle-aged female theatre-maker.

In search of performances that might counter the normative narratives of decline and disappearance that pertain to age (Margaret Gullette, 2004: 13), I look, in Part I at professional performances, considering mainstream dramas and contemporary autobiographical performances. I conclude that the latter, presented in postdramatic rather than dramatic mode, have the potential to unsettle the identity position of 'old', especially that of 'old woman'. In addition, drawing on Judith Butler's notion of the 'effect' of gender as produced by cultural apparatus (2006: 199), I propose the notion of *age*-effects, noting production of these in performances I see and make.

Part II discusses three practice-as-research performances: *Life Acts* (2013), *A Blueprint for Ageing* (2014) and *The Mirror Stage* (2015), produced with Passages Theatre Company, for performers over fifty, which supported this research. I include audience and cast responses to analyse the potential of these performances to 'trouble' the normative figure of the old person and disrupt the meanings that attach to the old body, both in performance and everyday life.

Across both parts I enlist the theories of several writers to develop my analysis. In addition to Butler's and Gullette's insights I employ Ann Basting's perception of the aged 'body in temporal depth' (1998: 22); Kathleen Woodward's notion of 'the mirror stage of old age' (1991: 69); Anca Cristofovici's analysis of the aged body in photography as 'significant form' and 'accomplished shape' (1999: 275); and Beverley Skegg's ideas of cultural inscription of identity onto the body (2004: 1), in order to develop new insights into how performance can unsettle the identity position of 'old'.

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Rear cover. DVD evidence of practice:

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A note on DVD evidence: The first performance of *Life Acts* and the post-show discussion was not filmed due to a technical staff error. Similarly the last part of *The Mirror Stage,* from the 'Hands' piece onwards, is not available due to technical errors. The Lab II section from *Blueprint* is missing, however the audio from this sequence is present on the main recording. *The Mirror Stage* rehearsal footage and the Wintergarden performance are included to mitigate the lack of documentation.

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Frank Abel	Judith Grundy
Ellen Bowes	Romola Guiton
Ruth Carter	Heather Hunt
Liz Cashdan	Stella Mckinney
Elizabeth Coatman	Clare McManus
Jen Creaghan	Elizabeth Seneveratne
Andy Dancer	Shirley Simpson
John Evans	Tricia Sweeney
Linda Evans	Hilary Taylor Firth
Ian Fisher	Jasmine Warwick
Shirley Fox	Roger Watkin
Joyce Franks	Rosemary Wenham

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This thesis is dedicated to the affectionate memory of Hilary Taylor Firth, whose quiet pragmatism and cool questioning informed the practice-as-research project.

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These links are 'unlisted' and are given on the understanding that they should only be used by genuine researchers who are accessing the work for scholarly purposes. There are also DVDs included at the back of the hard copy of the PhD and these are listed in the contents section (above). The online footage will be playable on all devices; however, it is not guaranteed that this will be the case for the hard copies of the DVDs.

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Ruth Carter's one-to-one performance
'Resonance'
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Introduction

By mid 2039 24.3% of the UK population will be aged 65 or over.

More than one in twelve of the population is projected to be aged 80 or over.

(Office for National Statistics 2015) [1]

There is a great deal that needs to be done to develop a more positive attitude to the challenge of ageing if the successes of the past, which have made our longer lives possible, are not to turn sour. The scourge of ageism is hugely under recognised and it is high time that we began a systematic enquiry into what needs to be done to accommodate the greatly increased numbers of older people within our society on an equal footing.

(Tom Kirkwood 2001: x)

Theatre is more inextricably bound up with age ideology than is the case with most art forms. The primary medium of theatrical performance, after all, is the human body. And the human body is always of a specific age [...]. The specificity of that age becomes part of the meaning of the theatrical experience as a whole.

(Michael Mangan 2013: 8–9)

The Ageing Researcher: A Personal Investment

I was, by the age of twenty-three, already mourning the passing of my youth. I believe this early awareness of ageing was a symptom of having internalised what Margaret Morganroth Gullette calls the '[d]ecline narrative' (2004: 13). It seems absurd to me now, but I perceived decline then as starting at a very early age. I can cite two definite instances among many factors that contributed to my problematic association of ageing with decline. [2] Firstly my mother (b. 1934), from the age of forty, when I was thirteen,

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[1] *Summary Results, 2014-based National Population Projections*; published by Office for National Statistics on 29 October 2015.

[2] I don't think I am unusual in this, in *Aging and its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*, Kathleen Woodward notes how 'from the moment of birth on [...] age is a fundamental and endlessly interesting category. New parents will tell you the age of their infants with a fantastic precision – a new father will tell you his baby is twenty seven days old, for example [...] Two-year-olds will insist on their proper place in the hierarchy of birthdays [...] Adults will speculate on how many years separate a husband and wife [...] Colleagues will wonder about the ages of their other colleagues" (1991: 5).

confided to me her ageing worries (she went grey relatively early for instance) but also related the little triumphs she experienced at work when she was mistaken for being younger. This heightened my understanding of the age-vulnerability of a woman in her middle years and modelled a feminine sensitivity to the issue of ageing. My mother has aged 'well' and is at the time of writing a very active octogenarian; looking back on photographs of her in her middle years, I can see that – having dyed her hair – she looked very young for her age. Even now her 'youthfulness' is a matter of pride for her. Secondly, literature reinforced my negative attitude to ageing. I was alarmed when reading *Persuasion* (1817) in my early twenties, by Jane Austen's assessment of the brevity of a woman's marriageable capital, which Austen describes as being embodied in the notion of youthful bloom. At the age of nineteen Austen's heroine Anne Elliot is persuaded away from a relationship with the ineligible Captain Wentworth. Austen writes that '[h]er attachment and regret had, for a long time, clouded every enjoyment of youth: and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effect' (1984 [1918]:57). On meeting Wentworth again at the age of twenty-seven Anne is described as 'altered beyond knowledge' and the intervening eight years as 'the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom' (*ibid*: 85 - 86). I took this personally and read it to imply that by twenty-seven my own 'youth and bloom' would also be passed. Internalising this assessment of the temporally fragile nature of feminine value had a negative effect on my own sense of worth. Yes, Anne Elliot's fictional opportunities in the early nineteenth century differed considerably from my real ones in the late twentieth, but in terms of physical beauty – still a commodity by which a woman is valued in the cultural economy – I reasoned that there was little difference between 1817 and 1985 in the way a woman looks at the age of twenty-three, when 'bloom' would undoubtedly be on the brink of decline.[3] This last example attests to the psychologically formative powers of literature – at least in my case – and both the

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[3] See, amongst others, Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*.

above instances are the most memorable examples of what must have been a long list of incremental pressures that produced in me a keenly sensitive and *negative* attitude to ageing.

Gullette argues that "[t]he kind of prospective age narrative each of us internalizes in childhood can be foundational" (2004: 16). Her experience contrasts with mine; she attests to a 'trustful progress story about the life course' (*ibid*: 16).[4] She does not analyse how she was able to withstand the negative age socialisation from influences outside her family, but stresses that she grew up with an unusually positive view of what the advancing years would bring. Gullette has become what she calls an 'age critic' (*ibid*: 5), precisely because her foundational age narrative differed from what she eventually recognised as the dominant account. By contrast, I have come to a study of ageing through hyperawareness of the problematic constructions of ageing and sensitivity to the social construction of the old person – especially the old woman – in western culture; and especially in my own field – theatre and performance. As I have aged into my middle years I have become increasingly sensitive to the age narrative perpetuated by representations on the stage. It is well known that as actors age there are fewer roles available, especially for women, in all forms of drama; this is true of film and television as well as theatre.[5] This evidences the sense that *all* people, especially women, become devalued as we age because our stories are no longer placed centre stage. The declining presence of the old person in drama not only has an effect on

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[4] Gullette relates the story of how, when she had cut her knee very badly as a child, her mother had offered this wisdom about the resulting scars: 'they'll be gone before you're married'. Her mother had offered an example of 'healing through time' through which Gullette came to understand time as a benevolent force, associated with progress (2004: 16).

[5] A 2008 report commissioned by the International Federation of Actors (FIA) produced by Deborah Dean at Warwick Business Schools found that 'Women perceive their gender and ageing as a disadvantage across all fields of their employment in the performing arts (including television, film, radio, advertising and theatre). Men do not believe that gender is a disadvantage and are split on whether ageing is an advantage or disadvantage' (cited in Equity UK's *Labour Older Women's Commission* 2013: 2), (www.equity.org.uk). The same report did comment that 'traditionally theatre and radio, and particularly publicly funded organisations, have invested in new writing that provides new opportunities for female scriptwriters and female performers' but that '[f]unding cuts, particularly to arts organisations is already reversing this trend as many companies will look to revive older plays and content rather than invest or take risks with new material' (*ibid*.).

audiences, in terms of who they see represented, but is also played out in the production politics of the theatre, generating casting decisions – and therefore career implications – that significantly disadvantage ageing actors, particularly women.[6] As the population in the UK ages, theatre researchers should sharpen their focus on the ways that theatre makers represent the lives of old people, and, where ageing people's stories *are* told, researchers should question the ways age and ageing is framed and the possible effects this framing might have on audiences.[7] Advances in the study of age in theatre and performance have been made in recent years, particularly by scholars such as Ann Basting, Elinor Fuchs, Núria Casado Gual, Valerie Barnes Lipscomb, Michael Mangan, and Leni Marshall. This study will research the performance of age and ageing both in and *through* theatre and performance, specifically concentrating on contemporary British theatre. This thesis presents the findings from my research into the mainstream and alternative contemporary British theatre scene, commenting on the way age is framed and communicated by performances seen; assessing the meanings that are attached to the figure of the old person on stage; and appraising the impact of performances, both upon audience members and myself, an ageing spectator.[8] In addition, I offer a detailed description and analysis of the creative work I have undertaken with Passages Theatre Group (Passages), the practice-as-research performance group that I set up in 2012 for people over the age of fifty. Passages, whose name suggests the passage of time and also hints at the possibility of passing as an age that one may not be biologically, was constituted to investigate the performance of age and ageing and to search for counter-normative, age-critical performances of old

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[6] Even when older characters are portrayed they can be cast with actors much younger than the stated age. At Sphinx Theatre Company's 'Vamps, Vixens and Feminists In the North', women in the performing arts, day-long conference at West Yorkshire Playhouse, one middle aged professional actress made the observation that 'my telly-husbands are ten to fifteen years older than me'.

[7] I use the term 'ageing' and/or 'age' to mean both middle and old age. The phrase 'ageing past youth' may sometimes be employed to denote the same category. The term 'ageing' is used to refer to the processes of, or being in the state of, ageing past youth, through middle and into old age. I am of course aware that everyone is 'ageing' from the moment of conception and that we all have an 'age', no matter what number might be attached to that.

[8] By 'on stage' I mean in theatrical representation of any sort, irrespective of genre, or site.

age through practice-as-research methods.[9] The group has done this, not only through the themes, words and actions of its performances, but through the very style of the work, which is participatory, intimate and postdramatic. This study focuses on the *performativity* of age in all its facets; the performance of age in everyday life is constructed (as this thesis shows) by what Judith Butler calls 'cultural apparatus' (2006: 199), which can encompass the staged performances that we see and those we make. I discuss the ways such works inflect the understandings and performances of age that are then made *possible* in everyday life. My research addresses, through making and reading performances, not only how the figure of the old person is represented, the narratives available, the politics of the stage with regards to age but also the possible consequences of these performances on how subjects – including myself – 'do' age in their everyday lives.

I am personally invested in this study. I have undertaken it to maintain psychic and social health and, by searching for open and affirmative representations of old age and ageing, I aim to 'de-internalise' my culturally acquired decline narrative. Ironically my admittance to the academy in middle age is fortuitously facilitated by the subject of my research: that is to say that researching a more open legibility of age and ageing has given me permission, psychologically, to be a graduate student at a much later age than is usual. So this act of research is performative, in the sense that it brings into being that which it names. Performance practice is central to the research, and whether in everyday life or within a theatrical frame the act of performance can challenge dominant age-narratives as it has other meta-narratives in the past. Brad Haseman argues that 'practice brings into being what […] it names and that the research process inaugurates movement and transformation' (2010: 150), so with this in mind, through performance practice, I am searching for a performative solution to the problem of

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[9] My performance practice-as-research methods encompass and utilise all material, sensual, live and interactive qualities at play within and reaching out from the theatrical frame; from staged drama to proximate, interactive performance. For a detailed discussion of this see the section 'Methodology' on p. 26 of this thesis.

living in a culture that would disappear, undermine or diminish me and other citizens as we age.[10]

I cannot approach this study without reference to my own gendered and socio-historical identity. Awareness of my own shifting status as I age and a sensitivity to representations of old people spurred this investigation and I am deeply embroiled in my own research project. Lofland and Lofland note that 'we "make problematic" in our research matters that are problematic in our lives' (1995: 13, qtd in Coffey, 1999: 6), and as a result of my status change as I experience middle-age that is certainly true of this study. In *The Ethnographic Self*, Amanda Coffey, influenced by feminist thinking, sets out a model for self-reflective research projects, asserting

> the desire to locate the self as a gendered, embodied, sexualized and emotional being, in and of the research; discounting the myth that social research can ever be neutral or hygienic. [...] [R]esearch is personal, emotional, sensitive, should be reflective and is situated in existing cultural and structural contexts
> (1999:12).

In the early twenty-first century western 'cultural and structural context', there is an emotional cost to individuals as we undergo the process of ageing beyond youth and of being 'othered' as age advances; this can involve feeling, amongst other things, anger, indignation, desire, frustration, acceptance and shame. Erin Hurley, responding to Nicholas Ridout's work on theatre as an 'affect machine' (2010: 8), sees theatrical labour as 'feeling-work' (*ibid*: 9). With this in mind and holding to Coffey's assertion that '[e]motion is a real research experience' (1999: 11), it is clear that the emotional impact of performance on the spectator-researcher and the feeling-dialogue established between spectator and actor in performance must be taken into account in any study of the performance of age and ageing. Moreover such understandings of affect should be pressed into service in research and practice that wishes to challenge the negative value

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[10] I hope wherever possible to use the term 'we' when referring generally to the processes of ageing. This avoids the othering that is brought about by using the term 'they', and acknowledges that with good luck all subjects will attain old age. We are all therefore implicated in the phenomenon of ageing past youth.

attached to the ageing body. Consequently, where relevant, I will include the voices of audience and cast members, recorded through questionnaires and interviews, in order to gage the age-effects of performances and detect shifts in age-awareness.

Research conducted from within the academy, as Jim Mienczakowski has pointed out, differs from artistic practice in its understanding of the term 'research': '[w]hereas [...] "artistic" process is often viewed as a process of self discovery and self learning at an aesthetic and emotional level, [...] "research" conception is often perceived to revolve around understandings of science, theory and methodology' (2001: 468). This is often the case in literary studies where a position of critical distance signifies academic rigour and a subjective or emotional response can be considered unsuitable. In *Method in Social Science* Andrew Sayer explains subject-object relations as they pertain to researchers: 'social knowledge [...] is sometimes said to stand in a 'dialogic' relationship with its object, or in a subject–subject relation rather than a subject-object relation' (1992: 27). In other words the researcher exists not only as the subject (the investigator) but participates in the object of his or her own research – the social system, within which the research object exists. I, the middle-aged researcher, stand both as subject *and* – being part of the audience and a theatre maker myself – within the object of research (the performance of age and ageing in the early twenty-first century). This would seem to substantiate the validity, or at least admissibility, of the researcher's emotional response to the research object, particularly when the object is the 'affect machine', theatre. Consequently my own voice is intermittently present in this study.

By drawing on observations from social scientists such as Coffey and Sayer, I acknowledge the social and intersubjective nature of theatre. Although theatrical performance, actors 'in character', and constructed stage-worlds are not usually the subjects of ethnographical study, the bodies, actions, scripts and gestures that inhabit

such performances do function as a para-ethnographical site, which reflects, reproduces and comments on real-world experience. Theatres and other performance locations are also real-world ethnographic sites where cultural phenomena can be detected and meanings transacted; these phenomena might include the politics of representation of a specific age category, or of age-relations, for example, between midlife and youthful characters or between the age of the actor and the age of the character. Such representations, as meanings transacted between stage and audience, influence the imagined performance of the self, shaping what one might call the 'age imaginary' of audience members; that is, the sense of what specific age categories mean, what is possible or impossible to conceive of at a particular age. Similarly the age-politics of theatrical productions impact on the subjectivity of both spectators and actors. Making or attending theatre shapes one's self-awareness as an age-specific, 'gendered, embodied, sexualised and emotional being' (Coffey, 1999:12). Consequently, I explore not only how the figure of the old person is or can be represented but also, where relevant, the age-politics of productions that I witness or make.

Attitudes to ageing have a bearing on behaviour as we age and here I enlist creative and research practice in order to navigate this developing experience of subjectivity. At the start of this study a meagre range of choices seemed available to me (limited by socio-economic and cultural circumstances) regarding negotiating becoming old. These narrowed to a choice between either normative disappearance and decline or a dissenting and exposing hyper-visibility. Currently, as this study shows, there are limited theatrical performances and/or images of age that might enable me to envisage a present, vital, visible, flexible, socially and culturally relevant personhood as I age beyond middle age. Moreover there is a disturbing absence of mainstream performances that would help me envisage a sense of full personhood while inhabiting what Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs call the 'Fourth Age' (2011: 138). This quest for a personal antidote to the prevailing narrative of decline and disappearance extends

beyond my own experience, to pose a challenge to representations of old people in general. I look for examples of resistant or disruptive performances of age by viewing and making work that might challenge cultural assumptions and engage with the complexities of lived experience of ageing. Furthermore, I explore the metaphors by which we understand age and the meanings that can be held by the figure of the old person in performance. To this end, my research pursues two strands: a critical analysis of contemporary theatrical representations of age and ageing; and the creation of new performances that both unsettle and scrutinise the meaning of being and becoming old in early twenty-first century western culture.

Age in Canonical European Drama

Representations of ageing and the human life course are present at the very origins of European drama. Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* (c. 430 BCE), as Mangan also notes, has as a central device the riddle of the Sphinx, which depicts the movement of 'man' from cradle to grave. It asks 'what goes on four legs in the morning, two legs in the noon time and three legs in the evening?' The answer, as Oedipus knows, is 'man', who crawls on four legs in infancy, walks upright on two legs in the 'prime' of life and with the aid of a stick in old age. This riddle maps out a narrative of progress and decline, and features the need for physical support that accompanies the equated states of infancy and old age; the sense of incomplete, dependent personhood that characterises the state of both childhood and old age is represented here at the start of European theatre in Sophocles's tragedy of intergenerational confusion. A similar sense of dependency in old age is reinforced in one of the most memorable dramatic speeches on the subject of the human lifespan: Shakespeare's character Jaques's discourse on the 'Seven Ages of Man' in *As You Like It* (1603, Act II sc. vii), which constructs old age as 'shrunk', impaired, and impoverished, and finally offers an image of deep old age as 'second childishness and mere oblivion/ Sans eyes, sans teeth, sans taste, sans

everything', (1894: 64).[11] It could be argued that in this speech Shakespeare/Jaques is merely reflecting the socio-economic and medical conditions of the times, in which old people were often unsupported, rendering old age fearful. Certainly the figure of 'the lean and slippered Pantaloon/ With spectacles on nose and pouch on side' (*ibid*: 63) reflects the financial insecurity of old age, which persists today. But in what sense is miserly and shrunken old age conditioned not only by economic and biological factors but also by the cultural fabric that produces such age performances as are represented by Jaques's speech? In his *Ars Poetica* (c. 19 BCE) the Roman author Horace, detailing what constitutes a good play, advocated that playwrights should reproduce real-world models and gives the example that old men should be portrayed as 'cranky' (cited in Hurley, 2010: 39). In this example from ancient Rome the problem of whether playwrights reflect or construct so-called real-world phenomena is evident.   To a twenty-first century reader with an understanding of how cultural apparatus constructs identity, what is apparent is that if the playwrights, to whom Horace is writing, heed his advice then old men's crankiness will be reproduced by their dramas as a naturally self-evident product of their old age, rather than as a result of socio-economic and cultural circumstances. Mangan argues that

> the social and communal nature of the theatrical experience and immediacy of the relationship between the stage and the audience mean that theatrical performance is quick to adopt and recycle the beliefs and attitudes, the codes and the signifiers, the prejudices and stereotypes of everyday life. And since historically ageism and respect for the elderly have been culturally intertwined in social life, so too are they in theatre.
> (2013: 79)

Alongside respectfully drawn elder characters European theatre history also evidences plays that represent old people as cranky, stupid, rigid, forgetful, unruly and/or dependent. Old characters can appear as honourable and sagacious, but they are also,

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[11] Pat Thane argues that the presence in the same or adjacent scenes of old characters who do not conform to the melancholy Jaques's assessment of the sixth and seventh ages of man, shows that Shakespeare admits an alternative version to this negative assessment of old age within the structure of the scene itself (2005: 24). Yvonne Oram also argues (as seen below) that in presenting some particular old women in his plays Shakespeare is unique in Early Modern drama in working 'innovatively […] in ways which value and promote the on-going strength and creativity of the old and ageing woman' (2013: xiv).

tyrannical, covetous, sexually and financially jealous, rapacious and rarely the protagonist of the drama. Maurice Sand argues that from Ancient Greek comedies to Vaudeville

> at the hands of Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence, Machiavelli, Beloco,
> Moliere and Goldoni, the old man of comedy […] has been always more or
> less niggardly, credulous, libertine, duped and mocked, afflicted with
> rheum and coughs, and, above all unhappy.
> (qtd. in John Rudlin, 1994: 91)

The *commedia dell'arte* – a form that arguably grew out of Roman comedy – proliferated in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe and influenced playwrights such as Shakespeare, Jonson, Lope de Vega, Goldoni and Molière (Mangan, 2013: 88).[12] Commedia, while providing substantial parts for old actors, depicts a generally negative view of aged characters.[13] The stock 'types' satirically fix the qualities of different ages or moral/social categories but the socio-economic conditions in which these types might once have found their equivalents no longer exist, whereas the influence of these dramatic representations continues to hold some sway.[14] The Pantalone character in commedia, as Sands intimates above, is a later manifestation of the Roman comedy character the *senex* (old man) who appears in many guises throughout European theatre history. He shows up as the father in dramas such as Shakespeare's c. 1595 play *Romeo and Juliet* (Lord Capulet), and as the sometime 'old dangling Batchelor' (now frustrated husband) Lord Teazle in Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777). Mangan has made a detailed study of the *senex*, identifying two variants of this character, firstly the 'cranky' authoritarian *senex irratus* (for example

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[12] Rudlin traces the origins of *commedia dell'arte* from the *commedia erudita,* a more literary, upper class and amateur form. Rudlin argues that particularly in terms of plotting scenarios the *commedia dell'arte* took extensively from the *commedia erudita* and this 'attempted little which did not derive from Plautus and Terence' (1994: 16). Drawing on Maurice Sand, *Masques et bouffons: Comedie Italienne,* English translation: *The History of the Harlequinade,* Michael Anderson asserts that 'Sand is concerned to show the continuity of the comic characters of *commedia,* tracing Pulcinella, *Il Capitano,* the old men [including Pantalone] and servants such as Brighella and Arlecchino back to originals in Roman and Atellan comedy' (1998: 167).
[13] As Rudlin does, I will italicise but not capitalise the Italian expression *'commedia dell'arte'*. And as Rudlin also chooses, the more anglicised term 'commedia' will be written without italics.
[14] In my own opinion the influence of commedia is detectable in UK television comedies such as *Fawlty Towers, Black Adder* and *Peep Show*. Michael Anderson in his review of James Fisher's *The Theatre of Yesterday and Tomorrow: Commedia dell'Arte on the Modern Stage* (1992) insists that '[t]here have been few periods since the sixteenth century in which the *commedia* tradition and its imaginative reinterpretations have not been active' (1994: 99).

Lord Capulet) and secondly the *senex amans,* an old man foolishly in love or lust (as is Lord Teazle) with a younger woman (*ibid*: 79–80). The two examples of this archetype draw ridicule or criticism. Of course *King Lear* (1603)*,* the emblematic dramatic portrait of masculine old age, presents a far more nuanced version of the *senex irratus.* Shakespeare takes the type and out of it builds a subtle picture, not only of the disintegration of Lear's body and mind under the pressure of age-related disability, disempowerment and abandonment, but also of the intergenerational strife that was a major concern of the commedia form and other dramatic/literary works.[15]

King Lear is notable as a complex portrait of aged masculinity, and as seen by the examples above (Capulet and Lear), Shakespeare moved between stereotypical, largely comic, and more nuanced, largely tragic, portraits of age. Shakespeare's tragedies however, while allowing for complex aged characters, construct the old person as associated integrally with the narrative of catastrophe and death that is usual in this genre. Apart from a few notable examples in Shakespeare, the figure of the old woman was subject to even greater negative stereotyping by renaissance drama. Yvonne Oram, writing on Early Modern representations of the old woman observes that

> Early Modern writing implies that the perfect old woman of the period is the one who accepts her aged state without fuss, denies her sexuality and most importantly, provides a good example to younger women.
> (2013: 9)[16]

The corollary to this, as Oram shows, is that in order to advocate for the perfect example of feminine old age, dramas and other works deliberately present old women who deviate from this ideal, who are then castigated for inappropriate behaviour. The ideal of elder womanhood and its opposite is therefore constructed and reinforced by dramas that encourage such admonition.

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[15] Of course *King Lear* also stages the King's coming to emotional and political consciousness, and at the end of the play offers the possibility of insight and redemption for all the old characters.

[16] Oram cites the examples of the two wives in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597–1598) Gertrude in *Hamlet* (1600- 1601); Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606); Voluminia in *Coriolanus* (1608); Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII* (1613); and above all Paulina in The Winter's Tale (1611), as portraits of aged femininity that allow characters agency and individuality on a par with complex male characters.

Through the later period of the English Restoration and on into the nineteenth and twentieth century, as well as a time to embody wisdom and decorum, late middle and old age – particularly in women – has been categorised as: sexually unruly (for instance Lady Wishfort in Congreve's 1700 play *The Way of the World*); as an object of ridicule (Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan's 1775 play *The Rivals*); as a symbol of the irresponsibility of the aristocracy and the passing of the old order (Madam Ranevskaya and Firs the aged servant in Chekhov's 1904 play *The Cherry Orchard*) and as an image of self-annihilation in the face of American capitalism's disregard for outmoded sentiments and unproductivity (Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's 1949 play *Death of a Salesman*).[17] Barbara and Allan Lefcowitz argue that when it comes to old age

> [r]emarkably similar perspectives turn up in widely separate eras – the ridicule and satire in Ionesco and Beckett is foreshadowed by the ridicule of the aged in Roman comedy; Elizabethan drama is filled with the same stereotyped senex irratus figures used by Eugene O'Neill [...]; wise old men and women appear in such [...] writers as Euripides [and] Shakespeare. (1976: 465)[18]

The old people who populate Beckett's plays do inhabit a world of absurdity and display a sense of disconnection with reality; this might be a reason to see them as the object of ridicule as Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz suggest. However, I would argue that the figure of the old person in Beckett's works stands as an indicator of the absurdity of human existence; old people (as all adults do) persevere in the face of certain physical annihilation. This takes a certain present-focused pragmatism and sense of hope maintained in the face of oblivion. This can be read, as Lefcowitz and Lefcowitz do when considering Beckett's four characters Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell in *Endgame* (1957), 'as the stagnant waiting and sealed "destiny" of old age at its most grotesque extreme' (1976: 464); or alternatively, Beckett's old characters could be seen to break with a normative representation of age, in that they are more than solely indicative of old age but stand for humanity in general, and point to the state of being human *per se*.

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[17] For more on age in *The Cherry Orchard* See Barbara and Allan Lefcowitz's 1976 study: 'Old Age And The Modern Literary Imagination: An Overview'.

[18] The authors do not state exactly whom they mean by Eugene O'Neill's *senex irratus* characters.

In Beckett the figure of the old person implicates all subjects in the experience of ageing and mortality. In this respect his plays stage old age *inclusively,* in contrast to the common marginalisation, ridicule or criticism of old characters common to drama of the European canon.

Recently age scholars in the humanities have offered readings of some canonical plays that suggest a more nuanced picture of ageing and the qualities of old age. Mangan's discussion of Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BCE) considers the correlation between the representation of old age and artistic 'late style'.[19] Mangan asks if old age – as exemplified by the old, blind Oedipus – and 'late style' – as exemplified by Sophocles's play itself – should be interpreted as evidencing 'serenity and reconciliation' or 'intransigence and difficulty' (2013: 67). Drawing on neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's developmental scheme for the life cycle, Mangan concludes that late style, as expressed in this play, balances an 'intense tension between these positives and negatives' (*ibid*: 69). In the end Mangan sees Oedipus in a liminal state, 'portrayed as something between a sacred and sacrificial victim and an angry old man' (*ibid*: 74). Oedipus's ending is unknown as the play enters a 'zone of perpetual uncertainty' (*ibid*: 71); he may have ascended to heaven or jumped off a cliff; commentators interpret the ending of the play differently. A similar ambiguous ending appears in Ibsen's last play *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) the last of three late plays that Elinor Fuchs identifies as a 'three-play meditation on age, on what it means to cycle off the planet and be succeeded by new life' (2014: 73). She enlists lifecourse theory to explore the imagined and scenographical landscape as a metaphor for ageing in this play and in *The Master Builder* (1892) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896).[20]

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[19] The phrase 'late style', as Mangan notes (2013: 66), was coined by Theodor Adorno in a 1937 fragment of an essay on Beethoven that addressed questions about the difference in style of works by artists in old age.

[20] Glen Elder first set out Life Course Theory in his 1975, article 'Age differentiation and the life course'. He later described it as 'an emerging paradigm' that stressed 'the social forces that shape the life course and its developmental consequences' (Elder, 1994, qtd. in Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, 2016: 303).

Fuchs detects a reiteration of the decline narrative in *John Gabriel Borkman,* which contrasts 'the trio of dying elders, and the trio of pleasure-seeking young people' (*ibid*: 74). Ibsen takes the elders onto the mountainside 'to the ironic "peak" of his tale of decline, their losses composed of old age, disgrace, poor health, bad temperament and now their coveted adult child' (*ibid*: 75). Similarly at the end of *The Master Builder,* as the eponymous character mounts his tower to fall to his death, Fuchs discerns 'an almost parodic peak-and-decline narrative, the trajectory of a human lifetime understood as rise and fall' (*ibid*: 74), and she identifies in this play the familiar prediction that 'the old will die with their insatiable lives incomplete [...] and the young will surge forward over their necessary bodies, taking possession of all they left behind' (*ibid*: 74). However, in the last act of *When We Dead Awaken* (akin to *Borkman*), as Rubek and his former model Irene climb to the top of a mountain, Fuchs perceives something transcendent, which she likens to some of the great aged heroes of European drama:

> [t]he ageing are almost out of life – the blind Oedipus, the near-deranged Lear, the embittered Rubek, Maeterlinck's stranded Blind, the blind Hamm. Viewed from the perspective of age, these plays seem to require a landscape, staged or told, that itself becomes a place of estrangement or exile – a forest, a heath, a mountain height, an apocalyptic waste. Here the limitations of age may terrify, yet a new horizon of old age may open.
> (*ibid*: 77)

So, in some canonical dramas, reinforced by scenographical devices, old age seems to overshoot stereotypical notions of decline and transcend the everyday world for a new landscape, becoming something beyond the horizon of common experience. This suggests a kind of sublimated position for the old in some dramas, especially those written at the end of the life of the playwright. Having said this, these dramas still postulate a separate and possibly sentimentalised or even glorified position for the very old, one that takes little account of material circumstances, as if the end of life were universally something very different from the other phases of human existence. Perhaps the end of life should be acknowledged and dramatised as a particular type of experience, however, separating off the old into this subliminal location (top of a

mountain, jumping off a cliff, ascending into heaven) risks constructing the personhood of the old as no longer fully engaged in in the material world to the moment of our very final breath.[21]

Feminist drama of the late twentieth century, without placing old women as central characters, brought aged women's experience into focus while exploring the effects of patriarchal oppression on women in general. In Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), during the offstage rape of her mistress Philomele, The servant Niobe laments her own invisibility in old age by confessing

> I wouldn't mind a soldier, they don't look at me now [...] what makes you invisible is death coming quietly, makes you pale then unseen. First no one turns, then you're not there.
> (1996 [1988]: 330)

A similar comment on the sexual dilemma of feminine ageing appears in Caryl Churchill's 1976 play *Vinegar Tom*, in which the widow Joan Noakes is accused of and hanged for witchcraft because she is old and unruly. One of the songs in the play, entitled 'Nobody Sings About It', focuses on the experience of sexuality and growing old:

> I met an old old woman
> Who made my blood run cold.
> You don't stop wanting sex, she said,
> Just because you're old.
> Oh nobody sings about it,
> but it happens all the time.
> [...]
> Nobody ever saw me,
> She whispered in a rage.
> They were blinded by my beauty, now
> They're blinded by my age.
> Oh nobody sings about it,
> But it happens all the time.
> (1985: 142)

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[21] Drawing on Lars Tornstam's 1993 'Gerotranscendence: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration', Erikson postulated a ninth stage at the end of life that operates in a similar way to take the subject beyond the concerns of bodily life (Erikson, 1998: 123–129). The practice element of this thesis engages critically with the notion of 'gerotranscendence', (see Chapter Four). It is notable that intimations of a transcendent phase at the end of life should appear independently in the work of Sophocles, Ibsen and Erikson and that it should have featured particularly in the work of their later years.

This second-wave feminist play brings into appearance the complex power dynamics of sexuality, age and social prejudice, presenting Joan's taciturn behaviour and subsequent execution as a result both of a cognitive disability and her refusal to be ignored because she is old. Churchill recognises that old women such as Joan are, in Butler's words, 'illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate' (2006: viii) and shows that they pay for the crime of feminine ageing with a real or symbolic death.

The Performance of Age and Ageing in Contemporary British Theatre

One of the aims of this research project is to investigate the extent of that symbolic death in early twentieth-century theatrical representation, in other words to assess the visibility of old people and to scrutinise the ways in which old age and ageing are currently represented in or absent from British theatre. A study of how age is represented requires examination of the physical and performative qualities of ageing; the live and interactive qualities of theatre practice make it best placed to explore this subject. This recognition is reflected in the methodology of this thesis, which combines traditional research, reading both text and performance, with practice-as-research methods. I search, both in viewed and created performances, for *new* ways of representing ageing and old age, ones resistant to the narrative of decline and invisibility and crucially, I investigate the range of meanings that the figure of the old person can embody on stage. Consequently, this thesis is divided into two parts: Part I details my research into theatrical performances on the mainstream and alternative British stage, arguing that having age or ageing as a central theme does not necessarily subvert the normative representation of old people (Chapter One). The first chapter constitutes a survey of the British mainstream theatre offering of the autumn/winter season of 2011/12, set in the context of a theatre scene that seems to be paying more focused attention to the subject of age and ageing and is increasingly offering central roles to old actors. This chapter provides a close analysis of five plays, performed in the 2011/12 season, and engages Butler's theory of performativity and an analysis of the

detectable narratives of decline to anticipate the 'age-effects' of these plays on the viewing audience. This analysis finds just one specifically disruptive performance of *masculine* ageing (Mark Rylance's portrayal of Johnny 'Rooster' Byron in Jez Butterworth's 2009 play *Jerusalem*). Chapter Two, responding to the absence of subversive performances of feminine ageing and old age in mainstream dramas, argues that alternative, autobiographical performance presented by veteran female performers can express and unsettle the figure of the old woman on stage. Here I enlist the theories of Philip Auslander, Deirdre Heddon and Hans Theis Lehmann to argue that, with regard to ageing femininity, 'performance' (particularly autobiographical performance) as distinct from 'drama', because it acknowledges the body's materiality and its socially and historically constructed status, can successfully unsettle the identity position of ageing femininity. In this chapter I focus on the work of Bobby Baker, Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw and Wendy Houstoun to identify disruptive strategies that sidestep or draw attention to the meanings that attach to the figure of the 'old woman' through performance. I look at the medicalisation of the ageing body and the performance of self-care in Baker's *Mad Gyms and Kitchens* (2011), at how the most explicitly age-focused performance – Houstoun's *50 Acts* (2011) – stages the multifaceted complexity of social, cultural and chronometric ageing. I discuss Weaver's practice of assuming a guise of 'motley' to trouble readings of feminine ageing and I examine Shaw's three age-performances *Menopausal Gentleman* (1998), *Must The Inside Story* (2009) and *Ruff* (2013), which reveal complex and imaginative strategies, including 'interoception' – the sensationalising of her psycho-physical interior – that enable Shaw both to circumvent and acknowledge normative readings of the feminine ageing body.

The theories applied to the analysis of performance, and the findings of the first two chapters, map across onto the practical work discussed in Part II. In this section I describe the work of Passages Theatre Group. Chapter Three discusses our inaugural,

exploratory performance *Life Acts* (2013). Chapter Four and Chapter Five detail Passages' two performances *A Blueprint for Ageing* (2014) and *The Mirror Stage* (2015) respectively.[22] Drawing on arguments made in Chapter Two my commentary on *Blueprint* not only makes a case for the use of the postdramatic as an appropriate theatrical form for disruptive elder theatre but also discusses how the performance explores schemes and metaphors that construct ageing in western culture. The final chapter discusses how *The Mirror Stage*, exposes and plays with the presence (or absence) of the old person within the visual field; this links to the analysis of representation and absence in Chapter One. *The Mirror Stage*, unsettling in its very form, moves the audience from place to place and provides different types of encounter with old and middle aged people, from a one-to-one meeting and solo performance lecture to a performance where only the hands are seen. The show finally offers a masked carnivalesque performance that includes filmed projections, and tests not only the playful possibilities of exuberance and cantankerousness but also the meaning of the figure of the old person on stage.

Methodology

Before I discuss in detail the way theory and practice are inextricably linked in this thesis I will outline the methodology for the practice-as-research element of the project. My approach to the research practice draws on *experiential* theories of knowledge, primarily those developed by David Kolb.[23] Kolb brings together the experiential learning theories of philosophers, psychologists and educationalists such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget, and also draws insights from Jerome Bruner, Paulo Freire, and William James, among others, in order to develop an adapted theory of how knowledge is arrived at through *experience,* a process central to practice-as-research and one that Paul Carter in his book of the same name calls 'Material Thinking'

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[22] A note on punctuation: I have chosen to spell the possessive of Passages as Passages' without the final 's' in order to avoid the clumsiness of the correct spelling – Passages's

[23] I had encountered these theories when studying for my Post Graduate Certificate in Education with the University of Huddersfield in 1998 - 2000.

(2004). Alice and David Kolb outline their understanding of Experiential Learning

Theory (ELT) thus:

> The ELT model portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience – Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) – and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience – Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE). Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes that is responsive to contextual demands. This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral, where the learner "touches all the bases" – experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned.
> (2005: 194)

Kolb proposes a cycle (or reiterative spiral) where 'Concrete Experience' is followed by

'Reflective Observation', as a result of this the learner engages in 'Abstract

Conceptualization' followed by 'Active Experimentation', which results again in

'Concrete Experience'. Kolb states that '[t]hus in the process of learning, one moves in

varying degrees from actor to observer and from specific involvement to general

analytic detachment' (1984: 27). Though Kolb's cycle has generally been associated

with formal, directed learning rather than with independent research situations, it is an

ideal model for the process of generating knowledge from performance research in the

studio, particularly when you take into consideration the part of the theory (quoted

above) which posits that 'Reflective Observation' in tension with 'Active

Experimentation' is a way of 'transforming experience' and therefore, I would argue,

bringing into being new insights. In his seminal *Experiential Learning* (1984), Kolb

points out the similarities between his model and those of William Pound's 1965

problem solving process, H. A. Simons' 1947 decision making model and G. Wallas'

1926 model of the *creative process* (1984: 32–33, my emphasis). This validates the use

of Kolb's model in the practical/experiential aspect of creative practice-as-research,

where 'Concrete Experience' is derived through 'Active Experimentation'. The iteration

of Kolb's cycle was employed carefully during periods of my practice-research. I would

enter the studio for the weekly three-hour sessions with Passages, having reflected on

the concrete experience observed in the previous week(s) active experimentation. In

the interim period I had engaged in abstract conceptualization in order to enter the studio the next time with a plan for active experimentation, which would then ensue in the following three-hours. Sometimes micro cycles would take place within the sessions themselves as well as across short periods in the developmental stages, in a process that continually renewed and modified the process of experimentation as a result of reflective observation on the concrete experience of that experimentation and further abstract conceptualisation. For an example see Chapter Five in which playful masked dancing develops, after reflection and conceptualisation, out of a period of experimental studio work aimed at performing youth. The concrete experience of the impromptu 'carnivalesque' encounter with young people outside the Student Union is finally developed, through active experimentation, by putting live and filmed elements together in rehearsal, to become the multimedia performance of live (masked) and filmed dancing in *The Mirror Stage*. On an even larger scale, Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle maps across the whole of the development and presentation phases in the creation of the three Passages' performances described and analysed in Chapters Three to Five. In this macro view, the reflective observations of the audience and participant/performers are also taken into account and the abstract conceptualization that ensues in the exegesis – a result of the reflective observation of the shows and of reactions to these – further fuels the active experimentation that takes place in the following practical processes.[24] For instance, some of the experimental work of the first performance *Life Acts*, appears again in a more developed form in *The Mirror Stage* performance and the notion of the representation of the aged body in temporal depth is developed through a series of experiments from the photographic 'Life Course

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[24] This process did not end with the final performance detailed in this thesis (*The Mirror Stage*); Passages are still refining and adapting their work for a variety of venues and audiences and, in order to create new performance pieces which develop out of previous work. For example the Hands piece led to Passages fourth show *You Need Hands,* which was presented at Sheffield's Theatre Delicatessen on 8th December 2016.

Signatures' section of *Life Acts*, through the 'Emotional Journey' micro-action in *Blueprint,* to the 'Hands' piece in *The Mirror Stage.*

Anna Fenemore outlines four aspects of a practice-as-research project that incorporates devised performance; these are: '1: anticipation, imagination, and projection, 2. playing, pretence and pleasure, 3. direction, repetition and/or insistence, 4. editing, *mise-en-scéne*, and composition' (qtd in Nelson 2013: 28). This sequence describes fully the process that I undergo in developing each of the Passages' presentations, as can be seen in the exegesis in Chapters Three to Five; these phases equate with Kolb's cycle. For example, the anticipation and projection phase (1) is in effect Kolb's 'Abstract Conceptualization', the playing, pretence and pleasure phase (2) is 'Active Experimentation' and the direction repetition and insistence phase (3) equates with 'Concrete Experience', in that the show is being brought into an iterable form and is experienced by the performers (and vicariously, even practically, by participant-audience members subsequently). 'Reflective Observation' is brought to bear in the editing and compositional phase of the devising process (4), completing the cycle.

As Fenemore suggests, an arts-professional process is brought to bear on my developing practice-as-research project. I utilize my own expertise in the form of embodied, tacit, haptic and performative knowledge in designing performance experiments, conducting them in the studio and in making performances. Robin Nelson, in his 'multimode epistemological model for PaR', calls this knowledge 'Know How' or 'insider, close up knowing' (2013: 37). In the Passages project this know how has an aesthetic dimension but also draws on my skills and understanding of technical aspects of theatre-making, organizational skills and experience of the dynamics of group work. In planning for the 'Active Experimentation' (Fememore's 'playing' phase) I select from my 'toolkit' of games, exercises and strategies that together make up my professional practice, developed over approximately 35 years in mainstream and

community theatre and in theatre education. This equates to Nelson's 'Know What' mode of knowing, in which I rely on knowing what works, what has impact and what methods of composition should be used (Nelson, 2013: 37). I select these tools and apply them to the aims of my research, adapting them to address the inquiry into normative and 'troubling' performances of age and to the questions and problems that arise as a result of the experimentation. For example 'walkabout' exercises are often used to start the sessions, they serve as physical warm ups, to unite the group and, in developed forms, are also used to gauge opinions, and generate movement, action and performance text. This class of exercise is finally used and adapted through a series of iterations into the 'Leaf-fall of Identities' piece that is so potent in the *Blueprint* performance and which has developed since into a generalizable exercise that investigates and reveals aspects of identity (see Chapter Four pp. 190 – 195 and Conclusion pp. 255 – 256).[25]

Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean refer to a crucial aspect of the PAR cycle as 'idea generation' (2009: 20). They place the item 'idea generation' at the *top* of their 'Iterative Cyclic Web' diagram, which links 'practice-led research' with 'research-led practice' and also with 'academic research'. They situate this dynamically (around the circumference of their 'web') between 'research' and 'creative practice'. By 'research' the diagram makes it clear that Smith and Dean mean 'data' (empirical or otherwise), 'ideas' and/or 'relevant theory'. This situation describes my approach to developing the initial (and some later) ideas that I bring into the studio. I had spent the first year of the project reading widely in age and age-identity theory, investigating areas where

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[25] What I call 'walkabout exercises' usually consist of all members of the group walking around the studio, filling the space equidistantly, trying to match the pace of the whole group, once group unity is achieved certain instructions from the leader might bring about certain configurations of movement. For example, the whole group might speed up or slow down in unison (no one leading), or the group might be instructed to come to a halt when they observe that one person in the group has stopped and/or begin walking again when anyone starts to move. The opportunity to speak, or read, or introduce a particular action into the space is then open and subsequent suggestions from the leader or actions devised by the group can lead to the creation of any number of complex performance pieces.

notions of performance and representation, age-identity, images and/or perceptions of ageing intersected with the gerontological social sciences and with literary and cultural studies. I also attended performances, which I analysed age-critically. Many of these key thinkers and performances are referred to in this thesis and in the section below I specify the ways in which these ideas stimulate and/or inflect the practice. I select possible actions, ideas or images from theory that seem to have particular application to a practical investigation into the performances of age. This leads me to bring to bear, in the studio work, the ideas of writers such as Kathleen Woodward (the 'mirror stage of old age') Anca Cristofovici (the notion of 'accomplished shape' and 'significant form') and the concept of iconic images of the body which I developed in my writing on mainstream British theatre out of Cristofovici's photographic theory (see Chapter One). Other thinkers help me conceive of an holistic approach to the work, for example Gullette's work leads me to challenge the normative narrative of decline, obsolescence and disappearance both within the meaning making of the work, in guiding the age-aware interpersonal relations within the group and with respect to the contemporary performance forms created.

Smith and Dean's category of 'ideas generation' (in this case from reading theory and viewing performances), equates to 'Abstract Conceptualization' in the experiential learning cycle described by Kolb. There are elements however, that Smith and Dean propose, that stand beyond Kolb's cycle and these are termed 'outputs' (2009: 20); these could be called the results of learning. Kolb is only concerned with such elements in the ways they feed back into the cycle but for the purposes of a research project there must be some specific 'findings' that are expressed in the form of 'outputs'. The outputs of this research are numerous in form: three performances; their exegesis (presented in this thesis); theories, which emerge from the practice (and which feed back into later experiential learning cycles), for example the potency of the mask in troubling the normative figure of the old person on stage; many conference papers on

the practice and its theoretical implications; an article in an international journal and a chapter in an edited collection. In addition I have developed transferable, flexible techniques and exercises whose principles can be adapted and reproduced to support research and/or performances, exploring many aspects of identity and/or the representation of such, for example the 'leaf fall of identities' piece.

To summarise: I have used my understanding of the experiential cycle, adapted and developed by Kolb, to generate knowledge through practical experience. This mapping of the process has similarities with Fenemore's list of four aspects of a PAR project, with Nelson's 'multimode epistemological model for PaR' and with Smith and Dean's 'Iterative Cyclic Web' for 'practice-led research', 'academic research' and 'research-led practice'. These various attempts to map the way knowledge is grasped and transformed through experiential creative arts practice attempts to describe what Mark Johnson calls 'Embodied Knowledge', his description of arts research neatly sums up the overarching aims of my practice-as-research:

> arts research [is] inquiry into how to experience can transform the unifying quality of a given experience in search of deepened meaning, enhanced freedom and increase of connections and relations.
> (2012: 150)

For George Lakoff and Johnson the notion of ageing or being old is a 'basic domain of experience', what Johnson here calls a 'unifying experience'. I aim, through performance practice, to transform such experience into a deeper understanding of performing age, the value of the old body on stage and how to challenge normative constructions of age through performance. Thereby I wish to offer enhanced freedom to performers, audience members and participants, to connect and relate to old people in everyday life, no matter what their own age at the time. I hope to have lived up to these precepts in the design and execution of this practice as research project.

Many of the ideas outlined above were discussed freely and carefully with the participant/ performers, who I involved in the work with an understanding of co-

research principles in public engagement projects.[26] The benefits of working to investigate the performance of age and ageing with people in their sixties, seventies and eighties is that they are experienced in living a long life and so have special insights and expertise; indeed they are what social scientist Tehseen Noorani, calls 'experts-by-experience' (2015: 32). For example, the questions that were generated for the 'Where do you Stand' section of *Life Acts* (Chapter Three) were developed out of a reflective evaluation conducted after the first term of the project. In some instances key readings, for example Cristofovici's chapter 'Touching Surfaces' on ageing in photography and Ann Davis-Basting's chapter on Yazuo Ohno's *Water Lilies,* were shared with members of the group who wanted to read further. However, all principles and ideas were introduced to everyone in the sessions in accessible language and were discussed carefully before and during the practical experimentation. In the making of the pieces, the group – though they acknowledged that it was my research project and credited my expertise as a theatre maker – were also engaged in elements of the decision-making process, and at points expressed their outright disagreement with ideas. For example in *Life Acts*, in the scene 'John's Philosophical Question' which dramatized a hypothetical fatal accident of a young motorcyclist, the group unanimously vetoed the idea of using the tape measures that I had introduced as a visual device, even though, in my opinion, an initial try-out had worked well. In the initial experiment, this device reinforced the link between measurement and value, particularly the notion of 'future value', which I was addressing visually and spatially in this piece. The device was possibly too abstract or perhaps, as the retractable tapes were metal and apt to snap

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[26] In *The Engaged University: A Manifesto for Public Engagement* published by The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (www.publicengagement.ac.uk) one of the three guiding principles for public engagement states: 'We are committed to sharing our knowledge, resources and skills with the public, and to listening to and learning from the expertise and insight of the different communities with which we engage' (2010: 3). The principle of learning from the expertise and insight of the participants in the Passages project guided my studio research. The participants, 'experts by experience' (having lived to between 60 and 87 years of age) gave valuable information which led to increased understanding of the experience of ageing, how cultural messages take effect and about the representation of age and ageing by cultural apparatus.

quickly back into place, it seemed too risky to use. Whatever the reason, this incident showed that there were some limitations to our experimental practice, and the methodology had to accommodate working practices that could be made accessible to all participants, some of whom had little or no experience of contemporary theatre. At other times, the lively discussions that ensued especially when engaging with theories such as Judith Butler's notion of performativity helped me hone my understanding and ability to communicate such ideas and developed the long term understanding of the group and the individuals within it.

Finally, in the last performance I incorporated an autoethnographical examination of my own emotional responses, my thinking and every day performance practices with regard to age and ageing. My performance lecture – detailed in Chapter Five – brings together some of the work of the thesis in a final statement and performance of my own experience of ageing. It outlines the liberating theories I have encountered, explores the contradictions with which I am grappling on a personal level and outlines the impact that I understand cultural apparatus is having upon my body. In the lecture I demonstrate the resulting personal resistant-practice that I am developing to counter the narrative of decline, disappearance and obsolescence, with which the whole research project is concerned.

Theory and Practice

Throughout this project, in addition to Gullette's insights about the narrative of decline, I engage with theories that probe the representation of identity, particularly those of Judith Butler and Beverley Skeggs (who write on gender and class respectively). These thinkers do not address age specifically but I recruit their ideas in order to understand how age is constructed, valued, read and performed in contemporary culture. Butler's phenomenological propositions concerning the performativity of identity implicitly support a performance practice-as-research methodology. She contends that (gender)

identity is created and reinforced through iterative performances and repeated behavioural scripts, and though Butler is eager to emphasise the difference between the real world and the stage – where performers have permission to migrate across and manipulate identities, mostly without real-world cost – I contend that the exemplary nature of theatrical performance and the concept that identity is constituted in and by the body, indicates that a performance practice methodology can be efficacious in finding new ways of representing and 'doing' age. Augusto Boal argues that the 'rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality' (2000: 142) and this indicates a potential for performance practice to shift what Butler might call 'normative behavioural scripts' for those who act and/or participate in performances designed to challenge commonly held understandings of old age. Throughout the thesis I apply Butler's theory of *gender* performativity to that of *age*, specifically concentrating on the *effect* of age, as it is produced in mainstream, alternative and my own theatrical works.[27] Periodically, I interject the voices of audience members, responses of the cast and – particularly in Chapter One – my own subjective reactions to performances, in order to map such age-effects and to detect shifts, however subtle, in the age-scripts available as a result.

As this thesis will show, the aged in capitalist societies are often considered unproductive and burdensome, consequently the notion of *value* associated with old age is central to this thesis.[28] Throughout the research I adopt Skeggs's notion that bodies are culturally 'inscribed' with value; this is discussed in detail in Chapter Three,

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[27] Investigating the age-effect requires noting how the effect of age (as with Butler's effect of gender) is produced by cultural apparatus.

[28] Featherstone and Wernick, in their introduction to *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life* assert that the move to industrial capitalism was responsible for 'weakening the value of accumulated life experience' (1995: 7). Basting asserts that the same process meant 'workers became prized for their energy and productivity rather than experience, and youthful vitality won out over the wisdom and experience of older workers' (1998: 11). For a discussion of the issue of burden as associated with old age in a medical context see Gullette's 2011 *Agewise: Fighting the new Ageism in American Culture* (pp. 42–61). For a consideration of the social construction of dependency in old age see Toni Calasanti's and Anna M. Zajicek's 1997 'Gender, the State, and Constructing the Old as Dependent: Lessons From the Economic Transition in Poland'.

in which I offer the notion of negative 'future-value' as a stigma borne by the old body. Unsettling the meaning of the markers of age and disrupting the value attached to the figure of the old person on stage drives the dramaturgy of *The Mirror Stage,* explored in Chapter Five. I assess the meaning and therefore the *worth* placed on the aged body in my readings of performance in Parts I and II, and attempt to shift this through performance practice, appraising and endeavouring to extend the legibility of age on stage by focusing on the ways in which social, economic and cultural *value* is read off the old body in performance.

The following critical thinkers have also been central to the way I have both interpreted and created performances of age throughout the project: Kathleen Woodward, who argues that age as a category of difference has been largely ignored, particularly by the academy (1999: x), has been writing on the broad field of ageing, and particularly on feminine ageing, since her seminal text *Aging and its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* explored 'the social construction of old age from a psychological perspective' (1991: back cover). Drawing on Freud, Lacan and other psychoanalytic thinkers she explores how age manifests itself in literature, including via the representation of 'masquerade' (dressing to mask ones age). [29] For Woodward 'the mask does not hide old age but […] makes it more visible' (*ibid*: 150) and she argues that masquerade reflects the social anxiety of ageing that engenders a 'visual disappearing act [that] is the analogue of the psychological repression of old age and of the social oppression of those visibly marked as old' (*ibid*: 161). Woodward's insight into masking and masquerade comes into play in this thesis as I analyse the use of mid-life burlesque in April de Angelis's *Jumpy* (2011) in Chapter One. Her insight informs the discussion of motley and masking as a strategy for troubling the negative value associated with old age in the performances of Weaver's *What Tammy Found Out* (2012) in Chapter Two

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[29] Woodward discusses for example the process of masquerade and how it is central to a decline orientated discourse of ageing in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.

and Passages' *The Mirror Stage* in Chapter Five. The image of the mask appears also in Mike Hepworth and Mike Featherstone's analysis of 'ageing as a mask that is hard to remove' (1991: 382). This idea, critiqued by Molly Andrews (1999), also makes a contribution to the exegesis of the partially masked performance *The Mirror Stage*.

The title of Passages' third performance is taken directly from Woodward's chapter of the same title (1991: 52–71) in which she proposes that in old age subjects experience a reversal of Lacan's infant 'mirror stage' as we reject the reflection of our aged selves and therefore experience a crisis of identity as we slip beyond representation and become located beyond legitimate personhood. Woodward extends this to postulate that such rejection and consequent disappearance of the old is rehearsed in literature and perpetuated in society more generally. Woodward's theory is applied here to performance analysis and is a starting point for the practical experimentation with disruptive performances of age. Woodward's notion of 'the mirror stage of old age' informs the analysis of *The Last of the Duchess* (2011) in Chapter One but is also present in my *Mirror Stage* performance lecture. In addition I have combined the image of rejected mirror-reflection with that of the mask, which Featherstone and Hepworth argue represents the illegibility of the aged face and the resulting representational praxis is discussed in Chapters Three and Five.

One of the most prominent thinkers on age and ageing in the theatre, Ann Basting, proposes 'the depth model' of reading age in performance, reporting that when watching the then eighty-seven-year old Kazuo Ohno's performance *Water Lilies* she perceived his aged body 'in temporal depth' (1998: 22), and that Ohno's performance exemplified the 'powers of embodiment at all stages of age' (*ibid*: 146). This sense of performing – and thus exposing – a layered identity, composed archaeologically of a series of successive selves, is brought into play in Chapter One when discussing the interlacing timeframes and the binary of youth and age, reinforced in Frantic

Assembly's production of Abi Morgan's *Lovesong* (2011) and blurred in Nick Payne's *One Day When We Were Young* (2011). The reading of the body in temporal depth also informs Passages' early practice explained in Chapter Three, and is demonstrated in 'The Leaf-Fall of Identities', the 'Gerotranscen*dance*' discussed in Chapter Four and the 'Hands' piece detailed in Chapter Five.

Woodward and Basting have concentrated, almost exclusively, on the *image* of the aged person, as this is (or will be) reflected in everyone's personal mirror, as it is found in the social reflection (who we see active in what social arena), or in the picture that stares back at us from the theatrical frame. Anca Cristofovici's chapter 'Touching Surfaces' (1991), similarly concerned with the visual, concentrates on how the photographic image captures something of the essence of chronology, memory and presence and has the power to evoke identity across time (*ibid*: 270). Her insightful proposal that the photographic representation of the old person, rather than being defined by youth – 'and therefore essentially by what it lacks' (1999: 269) – should evince a sense of 'accomplished shape' and 'significant form' (1999: 275) is central to this thesis. I have employed his proposition to illuminate the intersection of gender and middle age in the plays *Jumpy* and *Jerusalem* (Chapter One) and the idea drives the self-presentation by cast members in the practice element of this project. Performance exercises inspired by the search for 'significant form' and 'accomplished shape' are outlined in Chapter Three but in a wider sense Cristofovici's ideas about significance and accomplishment and her notion of the 'poetic body' (which Basting also draws on in her analysis) one 'that ensures the connection between the physical and the psychic self' (1999: 290), is a regular point of reference in Passages' rehearsal process generally. Combining Cristofovici's and Woodward's ideas of the photographic and psychic representation of age, I propose the notion of an 'iconic self' which I discuss in the analysis of *The Last of the Duchess* in Chapter One and in my performance lecture in Chapter Five. This notion of the iconic also inspires the live feed

filming in *Life Acts* (Chapter Three) in which the image of the aged performer is elevated to iconic status.

As is outlined above, the theory on which I draw has informed the reading of performance in Part I *and* the experimental practice discussed in Part II. The research evidenced across both parts of this thesis might be called 'abductive' in that it moves continually between observation, theory and practice. Each of the successive layers of theory and reading-research (that is, reading text *and* performance) have impacted on the practice, and the practice has produced understandings that have inflected the analysis of performance I have witnessed and the theory I have sought out. For example, at the same time as I was understanding how postdramatic performance could 'unsettle a particular identity position' (explained in Chapter Two), I was applying this to performance practice, creating postdramatic, interactive performance and confounding expectations of what old people's theatre can encompass.

Many other thinkers have provided insights to illuminate this research: Raymond Williams, whose cultural materialist approach informs the perspective taken across the project, offers the notion of 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent' cultural forms and practices (1977: 121–127). His assessment has helped conceptualise the potency of engaging in experimental practice with old performers (see Chapter Four). I argue that Passages' members might, because of their age, be seen as 'residual' in their generational and perceived cultural position and practices, but they are engaged in experimental, postdramatic performance, which can be described as 'emergent'. Consequently, in Williams's terms, they simultaneously occupy both marginal positions (the 'residual' *and* 'emergent') and are therefore *doubly* dissenting from the 'dominant' paradigm. Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of 'intersectionality' (1989) helps to unpick the sense of multiple and multifaceted identities, which proliferate with age, a phenomenon that is examined in the work of Peggy Shaw in Chapter Two and in

Blueprint in Chapter Four. The exegesis of *Blueprint* also enlists the theories of Lakoff and Johnson to discuss how metaphor, in literature, drama and the wider culture, functions to conceptualise ageing. Thomas Cole and Mary Winkler contend that understanding the process of living a human life is ubiquitously structured as 'the stages of life' or 'the journey of life', (1994: 13); Chapter Four shows how *Blueprint* explores and exposes the shape these notions give to our experience of ageing and, while the show challenges such notions and offers new metaphors, it also acknowledges the way our lives are shaped by these metaphorical conceptualisations.

Following from Lakoff and Johnson's theories about the function and effect of metaphor, I engage with Bruce McConachie's insight into the way audiences hold knowledge about real-world and created-world phenomena simultaneously in a conceptual blend. McConachie draws on Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's 'conceptual integration' or 'conceptual blending' theory (2002: 18) which is also enlisted to explain the way that the mask functions in *The Mirror Stage* to trouble the figure of the old person on stage and bring about new conceptual formulations. Finally, Rebecca Schneider's critique of the 'occularcentrism' of western theatre (2000), Simone de Beauvoir (1953 and 1972), and Peggy Phelan's (1993) discussion of the 'other', and Gordon Allport's Group Contact Theory (1954) – which argues for the power of relational contact between groups to reduce prejudice and bigotry – enable me to theorise (in Chapter Three and Chapter Five) a politics of proximity in Passages' participative practice, which to some degree compensates for the heavy emphasis on the visual aspects of age and ageing in performance, on which this thesis generally relies.

Aims:

A succinct statement of the aims of this thesis, drawn from the discussions above is as follows:

1. To focus on the ways that contemporary British theatre represents the lives of old and ageing people, and, where such representations *are* present, to question the ways age and ageing is framed in the multiple realities of performance and the possible 'age-effects' this framing might have on the ways subjects – including myself – 'do' age in their everyday lives.[30]

2. To assess the meanings that are attached to the figure of the old person on stage and what it is possible for the figure of the old person – especially the old woman – to represent in performance.

3. To bring age-theory and other categories of theory together with performance analysis and apply these to performance practice, in order to investigate how such ideas might illuminate and shift the representation and conceptualisation of age and ageing.

4. To use practice-as-research methods to find new performance theory, practice and/or forms that address the representation of old age and ageing, and might produce counter-normative, age-critical performances that both acknowledge and trouble common conceptualisations and understandings of the aged subject.

5. To research the impact that performances have upon subjects (including audience members, performers and myself), focusing particularly on the potential of performances and performance making to change ways of thinking about and 'doing' old age.

A Note on Terminology

I have chosen, with Barbara Macdonald, to embrace the word 'old' rather than 'older', though unlike Macdonald I don't dislike the word 'elder' as it conveys upon the old person a sense of status in an age-hierarchy that accords value to old age. The word

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[30] The phrase 'multiple realities of performance' is borrowed from Valerie Barnes Lipscomb (2012: 117) and is fully credited and referenced in Chapter One, p. 45.

'older', as Macdonald observes, is euphemistic, she sees the 'avoidance of "old" as the clearest sign of our shame around ageing' (2001: x). I also argue that it constructs the old person only in relation to a projected age-normative citizen. Consequently, I have applied the word 'old' where the referential word 'older' would conventionally be used.

Age Studies: A Nascent, Interdisciplinary Field

The field of age studies in the humanities, particularly in literary and performance studies is in its infancy. As Aagje Swinnen, Cynthia Port, and Valerie Barnes Lipscomb remember when describing the long fought campaign to institute the Modern Languages Association (MLA) Age Studies Forum (eventually agreed in 2008): '[a]t the group's inception, then, the utility, value, and relevance of age studies perspectives to literary scholarship were under debate' (2017: 20). In spite of this late recognition by the MLA, the category of analysis represented by age studies has vast potential. [31] What follows is the record and analysis of a particular performance studies research pathway taken within age studies: its findings, both in terms of age performance on the contemporary British stage, and in producing counter-normative performance practice, represent a new contribution to this nascent field.

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[31] In cultural studies and sociology more generally gerontology has of course received quite a lot of attention, this thesis draws on much of that work, thus highlighting the relative lag in literary and performance scholarship.

Part I

Chapter One

Depth, Significance, and Absence:

Age-Effects in New British Drama[32]

> The reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as
> *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that
> are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity
> categories as foundational and fixed.
> (Butler, 2006 [1990]: 201)

Butler's *Gender Trouble* proposed the notion that gender 'as an *effect*' is generated by 'cultural apparatus' (2006: 199). Age studies scholars have elaborated on Butler's ideas, extending them to examine ways in which *age* is similarly produced as an effect.[33] How might older people and those – such as writers, artists, performers and photographers – who construct age through social, mediatized, and/or representative acts, generate age-troubling effects? Media images and performances of old age are part of a generating economy, which as Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick point out, 'represent[s] bodies which become increasingly fixed and inflexible as they move towards the end of the life course in terms of the range of cultural messages they are allowed to depict' (1995: 11). Such representations exert a powerful influence on the ways subjects might conceptualize and consequently perform age or ageing, thus generating an *effect* of age. As E. Ann Kaplan argues, '[a]ge staging and stereotyping must unconsciously shape such perspectives' (2012: 18). The particular characteristics

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[32] A version of this chapter under the same title was published as the Graduate Student Essay in the inaugural issue of the international journal *Age, Culture, Humanities,* Jan 2014 (ageculturehumanities.org)

[33] See, for example, Basting (1998: 7–8; 2001: 258–71), Chambers (2012: 167–68), Lipscomb (2012: 117–41), Russo (1999: 21) and Twigg (2004: 60– 61). However, Biggs doubts the usefulness of the performative as a way of conceptualising the management of ageing identity (2004: 49–50).

of a real world performance of old age, such as acceptable behaviour or wardrobe, are circumscribed by mediated images and performances. In order to expand this narrow range, signs of age 'trouble'–that is, disruptions to the normative scripts of age– however limited, must be sought or created (Butler, 2008: xxiv–xxxii). Such expressions, gestures, images, speech acts or performative moments may build incrementally, in the way Butler proposes, towards a displacement of accepted enactments of age and ageing, thereby opening up the possibility of agency in modes of self-presentation (2008: 202–203). As the introduction to the inaugural conference of the European Network in Ageing Studies (ENAS) in Maastricht 2011 asserts:

> Theories of performativity claim that age identities are formed and perpetuated through the repetition of behavioural scripts connected to chronological ages and life stages. Since these repetitions can never be identical to the original scripts, there is room for subversion and change (anon. 2011, n.p.).

In searching for new ways to (continually) re-script old age and ageing, it is appropriate to look to theatre as a site where troubling effects might be generated or discovered; as Herbert Blau asserts, 'it is *theater* which haunts all performance whether or not it occurs in the theater' (qtd. in Auslander, 1997: 4). Therefore the performative characteristics of theatre might be profitably mobilized to displace the production of normative age-effects.

In the introduction to the Special Issue on 'Ageing, Narrative and Performance' of *The International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, Aagje Swinnen and Cynthia Port identify four organizing concepts that can work as tools to connect disciplinary circuits in ageing research: '*Cultural age*,' '*Age as a narrative*,' '*The performativity of age*,' and '*The materiality of age*' (2012: 12).[34] '*The performativity of age*' denotes age as a state of both being and doing; Swinnen and Port note how, in performance studies, there is a slippery and complex interplay between an actor's and character's chronological age and such 'behavioural norms' as their performance challenges or reproduces. Valerie

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[34] The special issue was comprised of selected papers delivered at the ENAS conference.

Barnes Lipscomb claims a special role for theatre as 'a research site' where the 'critical, narrative and performative turns in age studies' might be profitably interrogated (2012: 118). She identifies these as corresponding to 'the performative on . . . stage, the narrative in the script, and the critical questioning of ageism in the multiple realities of performance' (*ibid*: 117). Swinnen and Port note that the boundaries between categories are fluid (2012: 13), and I would add that the narrative turn bleeds particularly into the performative, in that narratives are constitutive of identity and therefore contribute to the production of what Butler calls 'effects.'

Reflecting Lipscomb's claims for theatre's potency as a research site, and keeping in mind Butler's assertion that 'effects' are generated by cultural apparatus, this chapter aims to interrogate the age-effects generated by some examples of early twenty-first century mainstream British theatre.[35] I analyse the extent to which productions unsettle normative age narratives and to what degree they reproduce a decline narrative (Gullette, 2004). I also explore the often contradictory consideration of age in the 'multiple realities' of mainstream British theatre. To analyse the complex ways in which age is played out on the British stage – which seem at once both to challenge and to reiterate long-standing assumptions about age – I closely examine five productions seen in autumn/winter 2011/12. These are Frantic Assembly's *Lovesong,* by Abi Morgan (2011); Paines Plough's *One Day When We Were Young*, by Nick Payne (2011); two Royal Court productions *Jumpy,* by April De Angelis (2011) and *Jerusalem*, by Jez Butterworth (2009); and Hampstead Theatre's *The Last of the Duchess*, by Nicholas Wright (2011). In this exploration I enlist the theories of Butler and others, including Anne Basting, who proposes a model of performance that enacts the body in its 'temporal depth' (1998*:* 22); Anca Cristofovici, who offers a conceptualization of the

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[35] 'Mainstream' is taken to mean theatre offered by subsidised or commercial theatre buildings and is defined in opposition to what might be called 'experimental,' 'avant garde,' or 'fringe' theatre. See chapters on 'Mainstream Theatre' and 'Alternative Theatres' in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Vol. 3.*

aged body as 'significant form' (1999: 275); and Kathleen Woodward, who ponders the psychic crisis resulting from a rejected – and therefore absent – reflection of the ageing body (1991: 53–71).

John Bull comments that '[m]ainstream theatre is a constant, but it is a constant that is always changing in response to its context' (2004: 327). Viewing the staging of age in these plays through the lens of 'depth,' 'significance,' and 'absence' will expose the meanings of specific age-performances and uncover the age-effects of a theatrical community that is responding to the changing context of an ageing Britain.

Age in Mainstream British Theatre in the 2011/12 Autumn/Winter Season

Screenwriter and playwright Abi Morgan has had much to say on the subject of ageing: having written the screenplay for the film *The Iron Lady* (2011), which Phillip French called 'a study of the process of ageing,' (2012: n.p.) she also wrote the play *27* (2011), for the National Theatre of Scotland, which examines the politics of a scientific study of ageing and Alzheimer's disease and charts the impact of this study on the members of a fading religious community. Morgan said in an interview during the rehearsal process for her age-centred play *Lovesong*: '[w]hat intrigued me is that suddenly at this pivotal moment of 40, I know what it's like to be a 20 year-old and I'm getting an inkling of what it is to be older' (in Chamberlain, 2011: n.p.). Lipscomb and Leni Marshall (2010) see 'the worlds of theatre, dance, and similar media … turning their attention to the presence of older people, presenting a broader range of ages' (2010: 4), and Morgan's recent output seems to confirm this.

In a necessarily selective survey of theatre in British mainland venues in the 2011/12 autumn/winter season, I counted twenty-five productions, twenty-two of which were new works, that explicitly highlighted issues of age and/or ageing in their publicity or

content.[36] These ranged across different styles of performance and included children's theatre, such as Pied Piper Theatre Company's touring production *Great Gran's Great Games*, by Mike Kenny, in which young Ollie, who reluctantly gives up his room for his great grandmother, becomes aware of her past sporting achievements at the 1948 Olympic games; RedCape's touring performance *1 Beach Rd.,* which explores poetic links between Alzheimer's disease and coastal erosion; and Tim Price's lyrical examination of Alzheimer's, *Salt Root and Roe,* in which septuagenarian twin sisters drown themselves because one of them has dementia. There were celebrity 'evenings with,' such as Virginia Ironside's *The Virginia Monologues: Why Growing Old is Great* and *A Round-Heeled Woman*, staring Sharon Gless, which was based on the book of the same name, by sixty-six-year-old Jane Juska, who placed an ad in *The New York Review of Books,* saying, 'Before I turn 67 – next March – I would like to have a lot of sex with a man I like.' The play, which opened in London at the Riverside Studios in October 2011 to highly favourable reviews, transferring to the Aldwych Theatre two months later, tells the story of Juska's response to the sixty-three replies and of the sexual adventures that follow. Earlier age-focused productions, mounted in the first years of the twenty-first century, include Laura Wade's 2005 *Colder than Here* (revived at Keswick's Theatre By The Lake in 2012), which examines a family coping with the mother's eccentric preparations for her own funeral; Tim Firth's 2008 adaptation of the film *Calendar Girls*, in which taboos are broken and fame ensues when a group of middle-aged women pose nude for a fundraising calendar; Sean O'Connor and Tom Morris's 2010 *Juliet and Her Romeo*, a reworking of Shakespeare's play, set in an old people's home; another adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Ben Power's 2009 *A Tender Thing* (revived by the RSC in 2012), which examined a couple's journey towards euthanasia; and Mike Bartlett's 2010 *Love, Love, Love* (revived by the Royal Court in 2012), in which Kenneth and Sandra age from their hippy youth in 1967 to prosperous

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[36] This information was gathered through extensive Internet research, taking *The Actors' Yearbook* (2009) as my guide, or by reading publicity or reviews. Resources allowed me to attend only a limited number of productions.

retirement over forty years later. All of these works, considered together with Brad Fraser's 2011 *Five @ Fifty,* about five women battling addiction as they turn fifty, Nell Dunn's 2011 *Home Death*, which explores the politics of end of life care, and another critique of the profligate baby boomer generation, Stephen Beresford's 2012 *The Last of the Haussmans*, suggest that mainstream British theatre is certainly beginning an exploration into what it means to age in the West in the early twenty-first century.[37]

Mainstream British theatre's preoccupation with ageing, which seems to predate my 2011/12 survey by a few years, might seem to have come about because a number of playwrights, part of the post-war baby boom, are beginning to move into their later midlife and old age in the early twenty-first century. However, only three of the playwrights covered in this article were born before 1960.[38] It is more likely therefore, that ageing is becoming a widely debated topic as questions arising from an ageing population are seen to impact on western economies, especially after the 2008 economic crisis.[39] Some consistent themes are emerging in the way meanings of age are staged in British theatre: an association of ageing with Alzheimer's disease (*27*, *Salt Root and Roe* and *1 Beach Road*), with euthanasia, assisted dying or a good death (*Home Death*, *Colder Than Here*, *A Tender Thing* and *Lovesong*) and with the supposed profligacy of the post-war generation (*Love, Love, Love* and *The Last of the Haussmans*). Through breaking age-related taboos such as elder sex (*A Round-Heeled Woman* and *Calendar Girls*) and a determination to laugh at age-related challenges

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[37] Unlike *Five @ Fifty* the majority of the plays mentioned in this survey deal with old rather than middle age, however, midlife does feature as a stage through which characters pass, (*Love, Love, Love*) or beyond which some do not progress (*Calendar Girls*, and *1 Beach Road)*. Midlife is the focus of detailed analysis in the later section on *Jerusalem* and *Jumpy*.

[38] A Google search showed the following: April De Angelis b. 1960; Mike Bartlett b. 1980; Jez Butterworth b. 1969; Nell Dunn b. 1936; Jane Juska b.1933; Abi Morgan b. 1968; Laura Wade b. 1977; Nicholas Wright b. 1940. Birth dates for Stephen Beresford, Mike Kenny, Nick Payne, Ben Power and Tim Price were not available online but photographs at *doollee.com* suggest these playwrights were born later than 1960.

[39] The Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) is a research institute and publisher of the *Intergenerational Justice Review*. The 'Themes' section of its website states, "[g]enerational justice' is well on its way to becoming the driving issue for the next centuries'. The growing focus on ageing is demonstrated by a simple Google search for 'the ageing population debate,' which on 4 July 2012 yielded 20,000 000 results; the more scholarly Web of Knowledge offered 1,468,464 results in response to a search for 'ageing population'.

(*The Virginia Monologues*), some productions offer a tragi-comic view of ageing. Considering this emerging focus on age, one might question the degree to which early twenty-first century British theatre reinforces what Gullette calls the 'hostile age gaze,' or offers a more open range of representations of older age (2011: 107). In addition, it will be important to investigate the mechanisms by which theatrical representations produce meanings of age, and the way meanings of age are created through overt or covert narratives. Given the 'multiple realities of performance' that Lipscomb identifies, can we detect, through the minutiae of performative moments, a troubling of normative age scripts? Finally, and crucially, what age-effects – that is, age identity as culturally generated – can be postulated as resulting from enactments of age on the British stage? To open a discussion of these wide-ranging issues, I offer close examinations of the productions *Lovesong*, *One Day When We Were Young*, *Jerusalem*, *Jumpy* and *The Last of the Duchess*. These productions show differing age-effects and illuminate the scope and limitations of the way age is played out on the mainstream British stage.

Lovesong

Both *Lovesong* and *One Day When We Were Young* use metatheatrical techniques to stage the complexity and multi-temporal experience of ageing. Consequently, these works represent a fruitful research site where the narratives and performative possibilities of age can be critically assessed. *Lovesong* tells the story of Margaret/Maggie and William/Billy's marriage from two points in time.[40] The opening phase of their relationship spans ten to fifteen years, during which Margaret (Leanne Rowe) and William (Edward Bennett) move to America; he sets up his dental practice, she fights to be allowed a part-time job, they struggle with finances, childlessness, threats of infidelity, and his drinking. From the opposite chronological viewpoint we witness the end of their marriage which happens during one week as Billy (Sam Cox)

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[40] Margaret and William are the younger couple, Maggie and Billy are the older couple.

helps Maggie (Siân Phillips), who is terminally ill but not yet bedridden, to end her life. The production's physical theatre style facilitates the staging of these two time zones as fluid; Maggie opens and enters a wardrobe and Margaret comes back out, the older and younger characters pass each other, sit at the same table and handle the same objects across the decades. Although they do not interact in any realistic sense, the couples are represented relative to each other across time. Margaret gives William a skull for his twenty-eighth birthday, but when Billy brings it down from the loft forty years later, Maggie has no recollection of it. The birthday and the loft-clearing scenes, by happening simultaneously, dramatize memory at the moment of its making and speak to the potency of objects to recall past times.

Scott Graham, in Frantic Assembly's *Lovesong Resource Pack*, cites as influences for this show, among other things, T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and the song 'Starlings,' by Elbow (2011: 6). Both generated elements in the production that link past and present. The latter prompted the use of starlings as a visual and sonic motif, emphasizing the continuity of the marriage and the couple's historical connection with place. The former inspired the peach tree as a feature in the couple's garden.[41] The tree reveals the developing characteristics of the marriage: the details of its fruiting and maintenance, and who interacts with and around the tree, express the vicissitudes and routines of the relationship through time, articulating the couple's fluctuating closeness and distance. When they first arrive at the house, they are enchanted by the tree; William, in a performative gesture, which constructs his identity as the attentive, and eager lover, eats a peach from Margaret's hand, licking the juice as it runs down her arm and then kissing her. His reluctance to re-perform this exuberant, erotic act later, towards the end of the play, signals a time of disconnection at the end of the first phase of their marriage. There is, however, a poignant intervention in this scene by (older) Billy, who, in a hopeless bid to reclaim his role in this coupling, accepts

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[41] From line 122, 'Do I dare to eat a peach?'

the offer and eagerly eats from (younger) Margaret's hand; the longing and regret he feels for lost opportunities for intimacy is simply and powerfully staged by this interlacing of timeframes. The age-effects produced by this act are in tension: whilst sympathetically revealing the sexual desire of an old man, the eating of the peach reinforces the association of old age with regret and an age-identity that is heavily reliant on memories of the past as opposed to potential action in the future. The shift from the young couple's concern with a dynamic life narrative – property acquisition, career moves, alcoholism, sexual fidelity, and sexual politics are all debated carefully and passionately – to the older couple's narrowed concerns with health-related and petty domestic details supports this latter age-effect. Moreover, in their shift away from a connection with the world, the older couple's story shows no evidence of the now-matured interior life or mutual understanding that we see developing in the younger relationship. As the older couple, Billy is bewildered and Maggie is stoical.

The end of the play, when Maggie takes the pills that will end her life, stages euthanasia in a way that might be considered problematic:

> BILLY: There's still so much I have to say.
> *Silence*
> Maggie -
> MAGGIE: Shh …… It's all been said.
> (2011: 94–95)

The complexity of emotion in facing death by your own hand or supporting this decision in your partner is erased by Maggie's performative 'shh' which constructs her as the aged stoic; it might be supposed that the agonizing thing about parting in this way is precisely that everything can *never* have been said. This end-of-life narrative, embodied in the stoical act of silencing that Maggie performs, risks simplifying and diminishing the older couple's struggle with separation, which is not staged in as convincing emotional detail as their younger struggle to stay together. Billy does have a, outburst (performed by Sam Cox as at first petulant, then moving) about losing Maggie:

> I will live as someone who used to have a life. Who used to have a life with someone. But that someone isn't here any more. I will live my life as I fucking want. Without you.
> (2011: 79)

However, this insight into Billy's deeply felt response to imminent bereavement is portrayed, until the last moment (quoted above), as a reaction of childish rebellion. An 'othering' of the aged experience in confronting death is produced here by representing this aged partnership as unsophisticated and the older couple's parting as an uncomplicated act. In *Agewise,* Margaret Morganroth Gullette writes about the mythical phenomena of the Eskimo on the ice floe as 'a fantasy of a society in which social murder, coerced suicide or voluntary self extinction of elderly people as an age class is necessary or even desirable' (2011: 22). *Lovesong* stages such a narrative, where Maggie (albeit terminally ill) simply eases herself out quietly, without unseemly agonizing, and the audience is moved to tears. One might question whether assumptions about the ease with which an aged character can take leave of this world might result in dangerous age-effects that diminish the value of a long-lived life and dishearten younger people as well as older viewers. As the performance of *Lovesong* that I attended came to an end with Maggie's death, the youngish man next to me sniffed and wiped his eyes, and as I left the auditorium I heard a teenage girl behind me say, 'I don't want to grow old'. My eyes are damp too but my critical voice is at war with my feelings of identification. I am moved by the story of suicide in the face of terminal illness, I am sad that this is the end of the couple's relationship, I am seduced by the lush and sophisticated production, admiring the subtle movement quartet that eloquently revealed this love relationship across time, but I am worried by a view of the aged person as dramatically interesting only in terms of a tragic proximity to death. The cultural norms that present old people in terms of tragic, end-of-life scenarios were restated and re-performed in this drama, producing an age-effect on myself and the young person behind me, such that as a result we both perceived old age unequivocally as a stage to be feared rather than grown towards.

In her review of *Lovesong,* Lyn Gardner comments that,

> while this show may be shamelessly emotionally manipulative with its musical underscoring and videos of rising flocks of starlings, [it is] the manipulation of time that is most heart-stoppingly effective.
> (2011: n.p)

Time *is* manipulated with great subtlety through shifts in the linear narrative and enactments of parallel events, which complicate a strictly chronometric conceptualization of time (Barrs, 2012) and communicate the deep layering of experience that ageing brings. In this respect, *Lovesong* holds great potential for reinscribing old age as a stage when a lifetime – precisely because so much of it has been lived through – can become boundlessly fluid. In the latter stages of the play there is a startling love quartet where the older and younger members of the couple become entwined across time, dramatizing an erotic continuum that also challenges taboos of old age and intergenerational sexuality. However, particularly because the old and the young are represented by markedly different bodies, a binary that places youth and age in opposition is reinforced, undermining the admirable performance of supple significance that the older actors' bodies achieve in much of *Lovesong*. Staging this youth/age binary causes a disruption to the ageing continuum, resulting in a discontinuous relationship, where the younger is unrecognizable as the foundation of the older.

The potential of the individual body to reveal a temporal continuum is theorised by Anne Basting. In her book *The Stages of Age*, Basting draws on Butler in seeing the ageing process as performative; she develops a 'depth model of age,' that is, 'a model of age that embraces change' (1998: 136; 142; 134). Here the aged body, countering the normative mask of youth in performance, might be seen 'in temporal depth' (*ibid*: 22; 184). In the chapter 'The Body in Depth: Kazuo Ohno's *Water Lilies*', Basting analyses the way eighty-seven-year-old Ohno's performance 'entwined a series of möbius strips of culture, gender, and age', an eloquent description of the ways in which Ohno achieved a continuous fluidity of effects as he metamorphosed seamlessly between ages,

genders and cultures (*ibid*: 134). For Basting, Ohno's performance of *age* was revelatory:

> Throughout the scene, he shifted from an aged person to an infant, rolling playfully on the silk cloth. Resting on his back, as though looking up from a crib, Ohno's fingers reached out and his facial features widened with the curiosity of an infant. As he moved across the piece of silk, Ohno appeared to gradually age until at last he returned to the aged body whose slow, determined steps began the scene. (*ibid*: 139)

Basting sees in Ohno's performance a new model for constructing age, 'using performance to imagine and embody past and potential changes across time' (*ibid:* 141). Basting proposes a new symbolic economy that honours the depth of experience of the aged body, and I contend that this should accord it the *utmost* value because it can represent the greatest sum and variety of age.

Whilst Ohno's performance was conceived within Japanese culture and performed in the Butoh style, one that is quite different to the physical theatre style of *Lovesong*, using Basting's model can help illuminate the age-effects of Frantic Assembly's production. The lives already lived by the older characters in *Lovesong* are elucidated 'in temporal depth' through the interactions between their older and younger selves. The couple's relationship reflects itself across time, and objects and events are juxtaposed within interlacing timeframes, evoking their passage through history. However, unlike Ohno's performance, this depth of personal history is not inscribed on one body. Consequently, a demarcation rather than a blurring of different life stages is achieved. As Cristofovici points out in her essay 'Touching Surfaces,' '[o]ld age is defined in relation to youth and thus essentially by what it lacks' (1999: 269). In *Lovesong*, the characters' younger and older selves are played by different bodies and the story of a crucial period of their lives is omitted (the later half is obscured). This plays out a binary of pregnant youth and barren age that is counter to the reading of 'the body in depth' that Basting proposes: 'The depth model of age [helps] shift strict divisions between life stages both in and out of the performance space [...] divisions that continue to feed the cultural devaluation of ageing and the aged' (1998: 142). By

staging a youth/age binary, *Lovesong* obscures the sense of continuity and fluidity between life stages that the production has gone some way to establish. Basting asserts: '[n]ot only does the self shift across time, but at any given time, one is a complex amalgam of multiple selves' (*ibid*: 136). She further comments: 'Ohno's performance conjures a body that encompasses a lifetime of changes and possibilities at the dense point of overlap between theatrical performance and theoretical performativity' (*ibid:* 145). By embodying a youth/age binary and omitting a narrative of ageing through and beyond midlife, *Lovesong* falls short of such a performative production of time on the bodies of the actors.

Notably, physical theatre employs predominantly youthful performers who are able to achieve extraordinary physical feats. In this respect, the staging of a later-life drama in the physical theatre mode constitutes an extension of the possible cultural positions inhabitable by the old body.[42] Keeping in mind Lipscomb's notion of the 'multiple realities of performance' – the meaningful interplay between performance and performers – audiences might find that Philips's and Cox fail to achieve the extraordinary youthful physicality often witnessed in previous Frantic Assembly works such as *Hymns* (1999/2005) and *Pool (No Water)* (2006). However, they do represent performances of eloquent suppleness and confound expectations as to the expressive possibilities of the old body.

One Day When We Were Young

Whereas *Lovesong* does not stage the temporal continuum that is contained within an individual body, Nick Payne's play *One Day When we Were Young*, in which Violet's and Leonard's youthful experience of the Second World War determines their future lives, comes closer to a performance of Basting's 'body in depth.' Payne achieves this by

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[42] For an interview with Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett about working with old actors on *Lovesong* go to, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF-22alcjAU An informative trailer for the production can also be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRuqJpnYGFI

using the same two actors to embody these characters across three time periods. *One Day* is a story of frustrated longing and historically anchored experience. The play's three episodes are set respectively in 1942 in the Hotel Regina, in Bath, during an air raid; in 1963 in The Royal Victoria Park in Bath; and in 2002 in Leonard's run-down one-bedroom house in Luton. The characters' identities are fundamentally defined by their historical position: Leonard (Andrew Sheridan) suffers arrested emotional development due to the trauma of his service as a soldier and prisoner of war. Having been given up for dead, Leonard is not repatriated until 1946, narrowly missing the opportunity to marry Violet (Maia Alexander). As Violet moves forward with a conventional life narrative of marriage and parenthood, Leonard's progress is impeded by the losses he suffers as a consequence of war.

This play is essentially concerned with the passing of time, and, as suggested by the title, both future and past bear heavily on the present. In the first scene, the night before he ships out, Leonard is disturbed by reading a neighbour's diary account of the horrors of the Great War and fears the consequences of his own impending experiences; encountering this history informs and foreshadows Leonard's projected future. Violet promises to wait for Leonard, however, by the second scene we find her married to someone else; having been presumed dead has had a devastating impact on Leonard's future. His quasi-death freezes him in this moment, his body ageing but his emotional life arrested. His experience thereafter – a lengthy hiatus – exists outside the conventional progress-narrative that was contingent upon the love relationship we saw developing in the opening scene. It is not until the final scene that a possibility opens up for Leonard to redirect his life, as Violet (now seventy-seven to his seventy-eight) visits after the recent death of her husband. In this narrative of ageing, growing old represents a positive transformation: in spite of their now reduced time, and Leonard's failing mental capacity, it is possible for Violet and Leonard to realize happiness.

In this production, director Clare Lizzimore employs a lucid method of staging, not described in the published script: the actors are first discovered on the in-the-round stage, seated at make-up mirrors as if in a theatre dressing room. As the audience enter, the actors are making-up to conjure a 1940s appearance. Maia Alexander (Violet) creates an especially elaborate coiffure using curlers and pins. Initially this scene simply appears to stage a young woman in the 1940s – possibly an actress – and her colleague getting ready, however this device signals a metatheatrical consideration of age and the performing body. After the first scene, in which the characters are seventeen and eighteen respectively, the mirror units are returned to the stage and the actors stage a transformation to the thirty-eight/thirty-nine-year-old characters of the early 1960s. The actors' body language as well as appearance undergoes a slow transformation from a younger to an older embodiment of character. As false eyelashes are applied and new hairstyles created, fashions change, gestures and bodies become more contained and less pliable. What is being played out in this interludic space is the technical, performative and psychic process of ageing past youth to the edge of the middle years in the space of one toilette. Between Scenes Two and Three the actors age another forty years, further enacting both the acquisition of bodily restrictions and what Butler calls a 'corporeal style' (1988: 521), a style which 'is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities' (*ibid*: 521). This performance of ageing reveals the relationship between an acquired style and the ageing body. The actors, signifying the bodily changes of old age, grey their hair, add glasses and prosthetic belly pouches but also acquire a historically and culturally determined old age body-style, characterized by low-status posture and facial expressions, and dressed themselves in ill-fitting corduroys or leisure wear in pastel shades. In concert with the variety of inescapable disabilities that the old body might be subject to, these interludes perform the relentless limiting of sartorial and cultural possibilities that commonly occurs with age.

While transformed by a stooped stance, more restricted body movements, and an accompanying old-age body style, these aged characters still possess a trace of their younger selves as a foundational – and therefore unsettling – aspect of their being. Witnessing the ageing transformation means that the retained image of the younger characters informs the reading of these present (newly-old) bodies, problematizing the age-effects that are seen to be played out on and within their bodies. Dramatizing ageing *as an event* allows these problems to be thrown into relief as the audience witness the body in temporal depth. As Basting argues,

> to see the body in depth is literally to see time across space. It is to witness *the event* of ageing, to anticipate the changes the body will produce and to remember changes already passed.
> (1998: 141, my emphasis).

While not replicating the fluidity of Ohno's seamless transformations backwards and forwards across the life course, the metamorphoses of these bodies from younger to older selves and through stages in between presents a multilayered accretion of successive selves and, by revealing such depth, questions the origins of the body style of the aged subject. Having much *younger* bodies 'passing' for old might be seen to subvert Basting's depth model and lead one to question whether a young body can achieve the same authentic representation of ageing that is possible in an old body. This is answered not only by noting that this 'passing' is made explicit through the metatheatrical device of the 'dressing' interludes, but also by the assertion that all stage representation is a form of 'passing' that might involve class, sexuality or even gender migrations, as well as changes in age.

One Day and *Lovesong* both explore the losses that are suffered across a life course and neither concentrates on the middle years. It is here, however, that they diverge: *One Day* elucidates the continuum of ageing by staging ageing 'as an event' and offers a hopeful, yet qualified narrative of the resumption of love towards the end of life; *Lovesong*, through a physical theatre performance featuring two vital and physically able aged bodies, brings into view a generally unexamined aspect of elder experience,

namely the complex history and stoical final days of a marriage. However, by restating the normative binary of youth and age, omitting midlife in the continuum of ageing and by employing 'shamelessly emotionally manipulative' devices, *Lovesong* produced a palpably disheartening age-effect for some audience members.

Ageing Through the Middle Years in *Jumpy* and *Jerusalem*

Ageing through midlife is problematically omitted from *Lovesong* and to some extent from *One Day*, however this life stage is the focus of two Royal Court productions: the long-running *Jerusalem* (2009) and *Jumpy* (2011). *Jerusalem* uses the elegiac song by Sandy Denny 'Who Knows Where the Time Goes?' as fifty-year-old Johnny 'Rooster' Byron (Mark Rylance) dances with Phaedra, the 15-year-old, soon-to-be-supplanted May Queen. The song continues, underscoring Byron's savage beating by Troy Whitworth's gang, men who Byron knew well in their youth. The question the song asks is also asked by the central character Hilary (Tamsin Greig) in *Jumpy*. Shocked that the Berlin Wall came down over twenty years ago, Hilary asks 'where does time go?' (De Angelis, 2011: 81). However, these plays present contrasting midlife narratives and, in so doing, produce gendered age-effects. In both plays the central characters search for significance and body strategies in the face of loss, the passing of time, and diminishing social capital. Both Byron the 'gyppo' and Hilary the now middle-aged mother of a resolutely independent urban teenager are marginalized and have understood this about themselves all their lives. Byron has always lived on the margins, tax-free, on land he claims is his but to which he has no title. Hilary, a second-wave feminist, one-time protester at Greenham Common, has always known her gender can render her peripheral. Fighting to hang on to her radical politics, she finds 'the practical thing of life is more tricky' (2011: 63); her hard-won sense of self is assailed as she turns fifty and struggles to come to terms with ageing, desire and her daughter Tilly's sexual(ised) behaviour. Tilly uses the word 'OLD' as a weapon against her mother, in much the same way that the Flintock thug Troy Whitworth uses the terms

'gyppo', 'pikey' and 'diddicoy' to 'other' Johnny Byron (*Jumpy:* 85; *Jerusalem:* 80-81). Both characters attempt to resist these disqualifications – delivered by a one-time dependent, younger character – in quite different ways, resulting in divergent and gendered age-effects.

In *Jumpy*, Hilary's friend Frances also struggles to find a way to retain her social and sexual significance. She recounts a nightclub incident where she was sure a man was watching her from the other end of the bar, but when she approached, 'smiled, looked him straight in the eyes [they were] Dead. Not so much as a flicker. Total reptilian blank' (2011: 17). In an attempt to resist becoming what Butler calls 'illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate' (2006: viii) she employs an extreme body strategy – performing burlesque – and advocates this as a route for Hilary, after Hilary has left her husband. This has embarrassing consequences. The play frames the burlesque performance as riotously grotesque; at the end of the first half, Doon Mackichan as Frances presented an outrageous routine with tassels and balloons in a bring-the-house-down, pre-interval finale. Frances's burlesque, a 'hi vis' bodily act, re-enacts a hyperbolized image of the desirable feminine and of feminine desire, producing a middle age that masquerades as youth in a patriarchal production of desire.[43] However, as Kathleen Woodward points out, 'the mask does not hide old age but . . . makes it more visible' (1991: 150). Rather than obscuring middle age and revealing what Cristofovici calls the 'poetic body' (1999: 290), Frances's burlesque exposes middle age as the 'comic body'.

Cristofovici uses the phrase 'the poetic body' when examining the photographic work *The Giant* (1992), by Jeff Wall. Exploring an aesthetic of the old body that would allow the aged form to be significantly represented, she notes that 'Wall . . . exposes the body

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[43] See Kathleen Woodward's chapter on 'Youthfulness as a Masquerade' in *Ageing and its Discontents*, and also Judith Butler on parody in the chapter 'Subversive Bodily Acts' in *Gender Trouble*.

as it is – not as a youthful body but as an *accomplished shape*, as *significant form*' (*ibid*: 275, my italics). While photography lacks a specifically performative dimension, photographs are, in Susan Sontag's words, 'a trace, something directly stenciled off the real', 'a consumer's relation to events', which can be conceived of as Butler's 'cultural significations' (Sontag, 1977: 154; 155; Butler, 1988: 525). Such significations delineate scripts, which in turn inform acts. Peter Brook, asserting the potency of images in the theatre, described Beckett's images – such as 'two men waiting by a stunted tree, [...] the woman buried up to her waist in sand, the parents in the dustbins' – as 'theatre machines' (1990: 65). Viewing the central, animated, images of a play through the lens of Cristofovici's notion of accomplishment, or significance, helps in assessing whether a specific enactment of age might admit the possibility of agency for the aged subject. The achievement – or otherwise – of Cristofovici's 'accomplished shape' or 'significant form' in performance helps differentiate the success of *Jerusalem* and *Jumpy* in offering agentic stagings of age, which might disrupt the normative figure of old age as a site of gradual material disappearance and slow retreat from significance.

De Angelis comments wryly on the falsehood of – as Frances puts it – 'ironically deconstructing' burlesque by having Hilary assert, 'I won't become a 'fuck-me puppet'' (2011: 64).   Burlesque is thereby shown to be a bogus route to 'accomplished shape,' and throughout the rest of the play Hilary searches for the 'significant form' that will offer her agency to enhance – or at least maintain – her socio-cultural capital. Hilary's struggle against redundancy as a mother and sexual being is analogous to her loss of 'core funding' at work (*ibid*: 26), and at the play's denouement the 'shape' she finally adopts illustrates her acceptance of unmitigated *in*significance.   In the penultimate scene, when she mistakenly believes – Tilly having not been home for two nights – that her daughter has been 'dumped in a reservoir' somewhere, Hilary, defeated, '*curls up on the floor*' (*ibid* 93; stage direction, 95).   The shape she holds on the stage floor is a performative gesture that signals and constructs midlife impotence. The final image of

Hilary shows her standing centre stage, isolated and calm – a contrast to her usual 'jumpy' demeanour. This static acceptance seems emblematic of a future that is blank; Hilary, now back with her husband, having seen Tilly through the difficult years and off to university, plays out the final scene in a narrative of redundancy. Her last line to her half-listening, half-asleep husband is '[a]re you awake?' (*ibid:* 99). She is calm now, accepting her insignificance.

The play stages the midlife impasse at the intersection of age and gender. If, as Butler asserts, 'the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time', midlife is the moment where the suite of constitutive gender acts that have scripted life up to this point become progressively more ludicrous to play out (1988: 523). This was evidenced by the squeals of shock and amusement with which I witnessed the audience responding to Frances's burlesque. *Jumpy* stages the tipping point where enactments of youthful femininity (including practices of age denial) begin to leave women open to social ridicule, and normative age scripts only offer a progressive narrowing of signification to the point of disappearance.[44] Given the difficulty of achieving agency to trouble either of these scripts, women in midlife – as Hilary demonstrates – are left adrift, mid-stage, the lights fading, negotiating an ageing and feminine identity that has been rendered doubly impossible. De Angelis shows how the performance of femininity, as conventionally defined, is increasingly prohibited to the ageing woman, and the onset of middle age requires a discreet disappearance from public view.

While *Jumpy* does not offer an alternative to the impasse of feminine ageing, De Angelis does expose it to scrutiny and raises awareness of the negative social construction of ageing femininity. However, ironically the production values of the

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[44] Butler's theories help explain the crisis of female midlife at this historical point, where politicized women such as Hilary are asked to exchange a script that plays out significance (however much predicated on sexual capital) for one that negates accomplishment and significance.

Royal Court Theatre played against the politics of De Angelis's play, obeying the dominant age economy by employing a forty-four year old 'name' – Tamsin Greig – to play a woman ageing from fifty to fifty-three.[45] This makes the line in the play 'I don't look fifty. I don't act fifty. I could get away with forty-three' (2011: 7) risible. Whilst this six to nine year difference might not seem very large, this is a sensitive age-moment for all women and casting Greig results in a problematic age-effect on two counts: firstly, the audience are encouraged to associate menopausal middle ageing with Greig's forty-four year old body, and secondly, this choice reinforces the 'hostile age gaze' in which the signs of age that would have spoken more transparently about the body aged fifty to fifty-three have been erased. For my own part, as a then forty-nine year old female member of the audience, choosing a younger body over an older one has a specifically problematic age-effect upon me. Sitting in the audience I had thought she looked good for her age and my sense of inadequacy, usually felt when viewing beautiful actresses of any age, was compounded by the uncomfortable feeling that I was supposed to look younger than this. I was only aware of the actor/character age disparity after the performance because I was researching the play. For me and other members of the audience of all ages and genders the casting of a younger actor obscures and devalues the embodied experience of middle age and leads to a sense of age-disorientation and age-inadequacy.

Midlife femininity in *Jumpy* contrasts strongly with the staging of midlife masculinity in *Jerusalem*: Johnny 'Rooster' Byron 'a man of about fifty,' stands bulwark-strong against the civil, chemical, and chronological forces ranged against him (Butterworth, 2009: 9). The play stages Byron's confrontation with these forces as time runs out on him, and can be read as a representation of the crisis of midlife. Jez Butterworth's achievement, while penetrating on the subject of national identity and the politics of belonging, is also insightful about the poignancy of mortality, juxtaposing an urgent

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[45] Born on 23 February 1967, Greig was forty-four in October 2011 (IMDb).

sense of finitude against an ageless, mythological landscape. 'Time' is *Jerusalem's* single-word opening line, revealing the play, at its beginning, as a drama concerned with the nature of time and a sense of approaching finality (*ibid*: 7).[46] Butterworth contrasts a focused urgency about the progress of time-in-the-now with the evocation of an ancient British culture that continues to permeate the contemporary. Byron is referred to as an 'ogre' or a 'troll' (*ibid*: 30); compared to 'King Arthur' (*ibid*: 32); in his personal mythology, Byron is born wearing a 'black cloak' (*ibid*: 49); and in one of his stories, a giant who he meets near Stonehenge gives him a 'golden drum' (*ibid*: 58). These allusions sit (comically) alongside references to contemporary phenomena such as 'neat Drambuie' (*ibid*: 57), Local TV news 'BBC Points West' (*ibid*: 58) and 'trance music' (*ibid*: 30). Bound by the running of the clock and also fighting the longer-term forces of ageing as much as he is fighting Kennet and Avon Council's 6:00 p.m. eviction deadline, Byron is presented as both fragile and granite hard, ephemeral and forever. Mark Rylance – rooster-like, head up, chest thrust forward, spine arched, legs firmly planted, and arms cocked open, held slightly behind his body, leaving his torso exposed – conjured an icon of titanic force contained within a battered frame. According to the character Ginger, Byron had been a daredevil stunt rider and had once actually died doing a bike jump over 20 lorries:

> He just gone teethfirst into a lorry doing a hundred mile an hour . . . on top of which he's just spent ten minutes in the hereafter and he gets up and hobbles in that tent and pays for his pint.
> (*ibid:* 32)

Byron's resulting damaged left leg is permanently thrown straight out behind him, an inscription of his daredevil past; his gait is halting as a result. This whole creates a

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[46] The line is spoken by Linda Fawcett, Kennett and Avon Senior Community Liaison Officer, to a camera recording the serving of an eviction notice on Byron, which will come into force at 6pm that day. Byron, up till now, has evaded the council's attempts to evict him for having an 'illegal encampment since September 1982, a period of twenty-seven years' (Butterworth, 2009: 95).

performance of a challenged, resolute, aged body permeated by a bedrock psychic strength.[47]

Rylance's iconic embodiment of this character performs Cristofovici's concept of the poetic body, 'a form that ensures the connection between the physical and the psychic self' (1999: 290). Butterworth's Johnny Byron is physically and psychically epic; he has found an agency that circumvents the disempowerment of ageing by engaging in acts of extreme masculinity that include death defying physical stunts and epic drug-taking. He embodies the figure of the subversive Lord of Misrule and is a weaver of tall tales, placing himself at the centre of heroic narratives that seem at first incredible but which some moments in the play indicate may hold some truth. Butterworth's play constructs a fantasy of aged masculine agency that engages forces beyond the earthbound. Byron is 'heavy stone' and seemingly possessed of a mysterious and ancient inner potency (2009: 45). He establishes this through a repeated act: asking particular characters to look him in the eye. Their reactions confirm his assertion that '[y]ou get close and stare into those black eyes, watch out. Written there is old words, old words that will shake you, shake you down' (*ibid*: 49). Empowered by his claim to a place in a genealogy of 'Byron boys,' his significance is rooted in his psychic association with primeval secrets and a physical connection to the ancient landscape. And yet Byron is completely of his time, achieving a poetic weight by uniting the contemporary and the timeless:

> I Rooster John Byron hereby place a curse
> Upon the Kennet and Avon District Council
> May they wander the land for ever
> Never sleep twice in the same bed
> Never drink water from the same well
> And never cross the same river twice in a year.

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[47] In the program for the 2011 Apollo Theatre production of *Jerusalem*, Butterworth states: 'In 1994 I moved to Wiltshire and met a man who was banned from every pub in the village. I once picked him up and he was light as a feather. A month later I walked into him in the street by mistake and it was like walking into a tree' (2011: 14).

(*ibid*: 108)

In Byron we are offered an image of a contemporary, ageing hero, possessed of special powers and knowledge, which are derived from his place in a continuum of generations. *Jerusalem* offers a performance not only of Byron's own body-history, but also his genealogical significance; he draws this value from belonging, not to an immediately recognisable civic community, but to an economy of generations, stretching deep into the Byron boys' past and on into the future (embodied in the person of his son Marky). This performance is not only beyond death – as Basting theorised Ohno's performance to be – but also beyond birth (1998: 141). As a consequence, the performance achieves that 'significant form' of the aged and ageing poetic body that Cristofovici claimed 'creates a generational continuum within the self' (1999: 290). I can attest to the profoundly hopeful age-effect that *Jerusalem* had upon me: even though Byron enacts a particularly masculine performance of age and ageing, I felt emboldened by his resistance. By asserting the significance of forces beyond the mundane power play of petty fiefdoms and the machinations of bureaucratic discipline, *Jerusalem* connected me to a sense of my place in and across time, strengthened me in my own battles against what Butler calls 'constitutive exclusions,' (2011: 141) and brought me hope in the heroic.

Absent Frail Elders in *The Last of the Duchess*

It is notable that in *Jumpy* the performance of ageing is ultimately one of female insignificance whereas middle age in *Jerusalem* is performed as an embattled but heroic masculine significance. A disparity exists between representations of men and women as they age, and midlife is the time when this comes into sharper focus. However, on reaching the frailty of deep old age, as Woodward argues, 'age as a category becomes equal to – rather than more important than – gender' (2006: 177). In the fourth age, which Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs call 'the abject other, objectified old age,' (2011: 138) any resistance – for women or men – to the 'social imaginary of a fourth age as ageing without agency and without redemption' (*ibid*: 139) seems entirely

impossible. This is clearly demonstrated by the absence of all the named *frail* aged characters in *The Last of The Duchess* (2011). Based on the book of the same name by Caroline Blackwood, Wright's play details Blackwood's failed attempts to meet with and interview the eighty-six-year-old Duchess of Windsor for a *Sunday Times Colour Supplement* article. This play is unusual in that it has a predominantly female cast and four of the six named female characters are over sixty. The title character, however, never actually appears as her aged self, and the staging of deep old age, though central to the drama, is consequently problematic.

The final scene of this play culminates in a heated argument between the Duchess of Windsor's vigorous eighty-one-year-old lawyer Maître Suzanne Blum (Sheila Hancock) and the writer Lady Caroline Blackwood (Anna Chancellor). Blackwood threatens to write a sensational exposé of the regime that Blum has orchestrated, in the aged Duchess's household, concerning her medical care and financial affairs. The formidable lawyer threatens to sue and, in response, the forty-nine-year-old Blackwood asserts that she will wait and publish after Blum's death. As Blackwood exits, Blum shouts defiantly after her: 'I will live longer than you! Much longer! Wait and see!' (Wright, 2011: 77). She then goes to a desk where she has secreted a canister of poison, which she aims to use in the event of declining mental faculties, smashes the canister underfoot, and Wright's stage directions tell us that she '*[s]taggers to a chair and slumps onto it, panting and exhausted but with a sense of triumph: she has looked her death in the face and defeated it*' (*ibid*: 77). This act stages a common fantasy: the triumph over death by a defiant aged subject, this is especially sweet in the face of the confident young. On the face of it, by staging a significant, triumphant elder, the age-effect of this drama seems to be agentic, offering a performance of age that is resistant to normative constructions of 'the elderly.' However, moments later, as the curtain falls, the audience read that although Blum lived for another fourteen years, dying aged ninety-five, she was bedridden, blind and deaf for her final two years and she failed to

outrun her opponent. Blackwood did survive Blum (if only by two years), and she published her book. The play is based on that book. What is revealing, however, is that Blum's inevitable failure to cheat both death and, crucially, frailty in her final years, is pushed to the margins of the drama, presented only as an epilogue caption. This relegation is illustrative of the marginalization of physical frailty in the play as a whole. I aim here to analyse the mechanisms and implications of the suppression of the frail aged subject in *The Duchess* and to examine ways in which the narrative maintains the taboo of decline, dying and death.

Blackwood comes to suspect that the Duchess's lawyer, the formidable octogenarian Blum, is not only keeping the Duchess prisoner, depriving her of her vodka and denying her visitors access, but is also secretly selling off the Duchess's possessions and slowly stripping the assets from her Paris home. The Duchess is ailing both in body and mind. Blackwood's alcoholic-dream-meeting with her at the opening of the play, however, presents a phantom of the youthful, iconic Duchess, who has the self-professed 'muscle tone of a greyhound and the waistline of an elf' (Wright, 2011: 10), standing in an elegant gesture, as Cecil Beaton might have photographed her, with one arm raised against the mantelpiece, turning into the room. On waking, Blackwood is told that the present incarnation of the Duchess is markedly different; as a result, both Blackwood and the theatre audience are denied access to the Duchess, and her state of 'objectified old age' is established. Blum's assistant Michael Bloch, who has also never met the Duchess, describes what he knows of how she is accommodated:

> There was a long dark corridor and the Duchess's suite was at the far end.
> Like a chrysalis at the end of a tunnel. Except a chrysalis is the start of life
> and this was the end of life. It was like the shrine of some long dead saint
> with a few old bones piled up in a velvet casket.
> (*ibid*: 29)

In a reversal of giving birth (references to 'a chrysalis' and a 'long dark corridor' evoking images of gestation and the birth canal), here frail old age is ghoulishly imagined as a living death. The Duchess is enshrined, like a 'long dead saint,' and the

contrasting youthful apparition presented at the opening of the play establishes her iconic self as the safe and stable identity of the Duchess; only this – not her frail – self is allowed a performative presence here, establishing youth as agentic. The still-living, present (but always absent) body of the Duchess is concealed, and negated, by the reliquary of her medical room, so many old bones. The play exposes the meaning, potency, and most importantly the ownership of the Duchess's iconic image, juxtaposing it with the problematic of her ailing self. The frail, aged subject exists only in the audience's imagination, objectified by Bloch's hyperbole. This privileging of the iconic over the aged disappears the incapacitated octogenarian Duchess and at the same time raises questions as to how far a photographic image can represent a living subject, given the physical changes that ageing brings. As Featherstone and Wernick argue:

> [i]t is the openness to the sense of loss of the substance of one's own body and face with all it might have been able to represent: the sense of discrepancy between one's self-image and the image we take others to see, and their subsequent dialectical interplay, which envelops photographs with poignancy.
> (1995: 4)

Such a dialectical interplay between iconic photograph and enfeebled subject is established in *The Duchess*, which questions the ways in which such a compelling image as that of the Duchess of Windsor in her prime functions in the cultural economy. Does the power of this historic-iconic image dissolve if the present, debilitated reality is exposed? Crucially, who owns this image-capital and who can wield its power?

Almost as old as the Duchess, Blum – 'a remarkable woman for her age, [who] walks as fast as most people run' – acts as a double for the present Duchess, both legally, having taken power of attorney, and symbolically (wright 2011: 11). At the end of Scene One, Blum stands by the fireplace, repeating the gesture of the phantom Duchess seen at the opening of the play, and she eventually takes the Duchess's place even as the person profiled by Blackwood and photographed by Lord Snowdon. The play, as much as it documents the jealousy with which Blum guards the printed image of the Duchess

(*ibid*: 13), also stages Blum's attempt to appropriate and re-inhabit the image of the iconic Duchess, claiming its potency for herself in the process.

Woodward, writing on age and psychoanalysis, proposes that at the end of life there is an equivalent stage to Lacan's mirror stage of infancy, in which, in a reversal of the Lacanian infant understanding and accepting the image in the mirror as a representation of his or her own body and so being ushered 'into the domain of the imaginary' (1991: 67), the old person rejects the mirror image as *not* a true representation of self. This rejection brings on a psychic crisis or dislocation of the imaginary. Woodward explains: '[t]he mirror stage of old age may precipitate the loss of the imaginary. Where then would we be located? Outside the mirror? Caught between the double and the absent?' (*ibid*: 69). Woodward is referring here to André Green's essay 'The Double and the Absent' in order to theorize the dilemma of both understanding and simultaneously repressing the knowledge of one's own old age, an understanding which presents to the elder 'the feared image of death' (*ibid*: 66).[48] The 'double' in Woodward's analysis is the reflection of the aged subject and the 'absent' represents her/his denial of this reflection. The aged subject is consequently located somewhere outside the mirror, presumably existing only as an acceptable, iconic-historic memory of the self, now existing beyond representation. While some, such as Butler, might contest the possibility of the subject existing before or beyond the symbolic order (2006: 202), Woodward's notion of rejection followed by dislocation is useful in elucidating something of the mechanisms of disappearance of the frail aged subject in *The Duchess*.

Reviewing the production for *The Stage,* Natasha Tripney asserts that 'this is a play with an absence at its centre'. She is right, the title is a misnomer; audiences never witness 'the last of the Duchess'. She is always what Penny Farfan calls 'ob/scene,' that

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[48] Green's essay was originally published in *Critique*, (May 1973: 312).

is, remaining 'out of sight off stage,' referred to but always (quoting D H Lawrence) 'that which might not be represented on stage' (2004: 65; 69). Butler alerts us to the 'constraints' which 'not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies' (2011: x), and this drama certainly operates to generate such opposing domains: not only the Duchess but also other declining, aged characters such as Sir Oswald Mosley and Blum's dying husband are referred to but, deemed 'unthinkable,' fail to appear on stage. While populating the stage world with vigorous old characters, the play is haunted by the almost-but-not-yet-dead who, as they confront the reality of death, are prematurely exiled to a place beyond representation, beyond the symbolic order of this drama, at least.

Woodward claims that 'narcissistic hostility allows the elderly to be rejected as a class more easily' (1991: 70). Just as subjects we deny our aged reflection, similarly the rejected image of old age extends to the social body; society (here represented on and by the public stage) rejects a reflection of itself in old age that is disintegrating, failing or dependent. *The Duchess* stages a neat – if temporary – resolution to this socio-psychic crisis. The decrepit, aged female, the Duchess of Windsor, is disappeared and replaced by the vigorous octogenarian Blum, the acceptable face of ageing, powerful and productive in a way that is socially desirable in old age, not quite yet associated with the 'image of death'. Similarly, the sub-plot, concerning Lady Mosley's rivalry with Blum, introduces us to another coupling of present-vigorous and absent-enfeebled old age. Lady Mosley, described in the stage directions as '*a beautiful white-haired woman of seventy*' (Wright, 2011: 36), depicts her absent husband Sir Oswald Mosley as 'falling to bits' (*ibid*: 37), characterizing him as a monstrous 'leathery old Komodo lizard' (*ibid*: 47). This doubling maintains the social equilibrium by staging old age in its acceptable, vigorous form, while suppressing the 'unlivable,' disintegration of the fourth age.

The absent aged Duchess – at least as she appears to the searching eye of the telephoto lens – is described with disgusted fascination by Blackwood and Bloch who, in Scene Three, read a double-page, paparazzi-illustrated, exclusive on the Duchess in *Ola!* magazine:

> MICHAEL. She looks like . . .
> CAROLINE. What?
> MICHAEL. . . . a marmoset. A very tiny one. Sort of paralysed, with its wiggly little hind legs dangling in the air.
> CAROLINE. Look at her hands. Curled up like claws.
> MICHAEL. And her face in the close-up.
> CAROLINE. How would you describe it?
> MICHAEL. Vacant.
> CAROLINE. And?
> MICHAEL. Desperate.
> [...]
> CAROLINE. Does she remind you of anyone?
> MICHAEL. Nobody human.
> (*ibid*: 66–67)

This dehumanizing description mediates the already mediated image of the Duchess and characterizes her, paradoxically, as at once vacant, desperate, *and* inhuman, successfully 'othering' her as a frail aged subject. This dialogue sustains the negative view of old age that is disseminated in the contemporary press by replaying a popular, ageist discourse. On the face of it, in disappearing the elderly Duchess, Wright simply replicates Blackwood's failed interview narrative. However, in making the dramatic choice both to stage the iconic duchess and to present a sensationalized description of the paparazzi pictures, he fails to critique and – by omission – contributes to the normalization of 'ob/scene' frail elder experience. Frail old age here – as in western culture generally – seems all the more disturbing because it is hidden, and the sensationalized descriptions of the frail elder in *The Duchess* go no way to dispel this disquiet. As Butler argues: 'the excluded and illegible domain [...] haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility the very limit to intelligibility, its own constitutive outside' (2011: x). The age-effect of the play, in doubling Blum with the Duchess, and Lady Mosley with Sir Oswald, solves this haunting by replacing the central frail and dependent aged body with a productive and active version.

The absence of the title character begs the question: is it not conceivable that theatre, a medium where it is possible to represent anything within the bounds of imagination, rather than staging the incapacitated Duchess as an absence – and to balance the dream-like presentation of her youthful, iconic incarnation – could reveal her frailty as a value, a presence-in-disintegration, and consequently trouble the illegibility of deep old age? Such a performance might, as Gilleard and Higgs propose,

> serve to remind us of our common humanity and the universal vulnerability of our bodies and our relationships. A remoralization of the life course that acknowledges human imperfection and the limits of autonomy provides redress to the all too ready objectification of frail and aged people as 'abject' objects.
> (2011: 141)

As it is, the play sets up a dichotomy between a monstrously enfeebled and a preternaturally vital old age, which in effect constructs deep old age as illegible, 'unlivable' and 'ob/scene.'

Conclusion

Remembering Lipscomb's advocation of theatre as a research site, in this selective snapshot of mainstream British drama, a perceived increase in roles for elders and those ageing through the middle years might constitute evidence of a widening of the 'range of cultural messages that [old people] are allowed to depict'. Quantitative research would be required to substantiate the impression of an increase in these roles, and such a shift – even if borne out by research – could be the result of a temporary response to the intense public debate being staged about the ageing population in the early twenty-first century. More roles for old people do not necessarily guarantee a subversion of the accepted script of ageing but may, to a degree, inadvertently amplify the normative construction of old age. I have argued that this happens in *The Duchess,* which, while offering strong parts for active old women, cooperates with the ageist discourse of the popular press. *Lovesong,* while offering a supple, multi-temporal performance of age, and a challenge to the taboo of elder sex, inadvertently reinforces a narrative of decline, predicated on a youth/age binary and a narrowing of meaning as

age advances. Moreover, *Lovesong* enacts an 'unproblematic' elder suicide that generates a problematic age-effect. *Jumpy,* by staging a female midlife impasse, draws attention to women's struggle against culturally constructed redundancy at the intersection of age and gender, but offers nothing beyond an enactment of the insignificance of ageing femininity.

Staging ageing as an event in *One Day* goes some way to presenting a multifaceted performance of the ageing body in 'temporal depth,' in which a gradual accumulation of selves can be represented by one body, and which reveals the certainty that all bodies change over time, however youthful they are in the present moment. Seeing 'time [...] produced by the body,' as Basting puts it (1998: 145), may not rely solely on casting an old actor's body, which has all possible lived-times inscribed upon or held within it. Having said this, when the body-politics of ageing at a *specific* age is clearly the subject of the play, as in *Jumpy,* the undeclared, commercially expedient passing of a younger body for an older one undermines dramatic integrity in the service of the dominant 'age ideology' (Gullette, 2004: 7), producing an age-effect that reinforces cultural hostility towards ageing women.

Jerusalem offers a hopeful performance of midlife, albeit one of heroic masculinity. Byron's 'poetic body,' his psychic and physical vitality, and his connection to a heritage of belonging, which founds this poetic significance, is predicated on a very *male* belonging to a line of 'boys' and on the possession of *rarity* in the form of his blood. These features, whilst they might be problematic in terms of gender and racial politics, do not erase the fact that by presenting an achievement of 'significant form,' Rylance's performance and Butterworth's character offer a playing of age with potential for a troubling and transformative age-effect. It remains a necessary project for sophisticated, age-aware mainstream theatre makers to create equally potent stagings of ageing femininity, and for all involved in creating performance to challenge the

objectification and absence of deep old age. It remains to be seen, given that age is the subject of increased focus, if new work might emerge in mainstream British theatre, or elsewhere, that can produce new age-effects whilst dramatizing a range of complex, significant, and even frail old women.

In the next chapter I consider performances that lie outside mainstream theatre, examining ways that ageing femininity is presented by veteran performers, engaged in autobiographical and postdramatic theatre. This route is taken in reaction to the dearth of disruptive performances of ageing femininity found in mainstream theatre and in acknowledgement that the experience of ageing femininity differs from that of ageing masculinity, as many writers have discussed, most notably de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. The subjugation of women, the suppression of female sexuality and the blindness to the value of feminine labour are all compounded when one considers age in intersection with femininity. The specific pressures on ageing femininity, being generally more acute, are the focus of the coming chapters to a greater degree than those of ageing masculinity, which resists the cultural disqualification of age for far longer. [49]   The final three chapters reflect on my practice-as-research project, which has attempted to subvert the dominant age ideology whilst dramatising complex, significant and visible old people, especially women.

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[49] There is a more detailed discussion of the contrast between ageing femininity and masculinity in Chapter Two when considering the impact of ageing on Shaw and Weaver's hyper femme and gentleman drag self-presentational choices. At points, discussion of the performance practice specifically acknowledges masculinity (*Blueprint,* 'Lab II' [p.164] and the 'Mirrors, Masks and Old Age' section [p. 128] in Part II).

Chapter Two

Ageing Femininity in Solo Performance

I have been thirteen bodies in my life. This is only one of them.

MUST: The Inside Story.

(Peggy Shaw, 2011: 146)

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that Mark Rylance's performance of Jez Butterworth's protagonist – Johnny 'Rooster' Byron – disrupted the normative performance of ageing masculinity; however performances of frailty or of ageing femininity beyond the middle-years, ones that could robustly counter narratives of redundancy and decline or carefully stage the complexities of the fourth age, were all but invisible on the mainstream British stage.[1] This critical analysis took into consideration a number of productions which were almost exclusively narrative, dramatic representations, textual in form, featuring 'dialogue, charged with suspense and pregnant with decisions; the subject whose reality can essentially be expressed in interpersonal speech; [...] action that unfolds primarily in an absolute present' (Hans-Thies Lehmann, 2006: 49).[2] 'Drama' (as Lehmann terms such presentation, setting it in opposition to 'performance'), because it is the conventional theatrical form, is at more risk of reproducing dominant age narratives that might struggle to accommodate a plurality of meanings. Such narratives are at risk of reproducing an oppositional binary, which sets redundancy and decline against 'positive ageing': a term characterised by Stephen Katz and Erin Campbell as involving 'activity, independence, resourcefulness, and creativity'

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[1] *The Last of the Duchess* while countering a narrative of decline in the figure of Suzanne Blum replaced this with a problematic and exclusive preternatural vitality.

[2] Whilst I acknowledge that *Lovesong* (see Chapter One) does not adhere to 'an absolute present' the play does rely primarily on dialogue and character as Lehmann outlines, and presents the interlacing of two chronologically stable 'absolute present[s]'.

(2009: 106).[3] However, the specific effects of ageing do not readily conform to such a dualism and the events experienced by a subject as she or he ages can confound norms: an eye operation in later life can gift better sight than in youth; mental disorders or relationship difficulties can be overcome as people mature. This contingency of experience might not conform to the cultural meanings that attach to age. Mangan has outlined the different ways in which gerontology distinguishes between meanings of age, identifying 'chronological age, social age and physiological age' (2013: 24); it follows that if performance is to speak accurately of the complexity of ageing experiences it must take into account this diversity by offering multifaceted, fractured, reflective, reflecting, and/or relational stagings of ageing. This requires works that take a multitude of perspectives on ageing or, conversely, allow for the specificity of an individual ageing process. Looking to productions of what Lehmann calls 'the new theatre' (2006: 18), and to 'performance' – which Lehmann sees as a field distinct from but associated with 'theatre' (*ibid*: 134-144) – offers the promise of such multifarious representations of ageing and old age.[4] These modes of production, which have developed since the 1960s and 70s under the converging influences of both performance art and the historical/neo-avant-gardes (*ibid*: 48), have been variously described as 'postdramatic' (Lehmann, 2006), 'experimental' (Baz Kershaw, 2004) or 'postmodern' (Philip Auslander, 1997), and this suite of forms and practices challenges what Kershaw calls the 'sticky heat of a middle-class and ageing theatre' (1999: 31). Kershaw asserts that '[i]t would be my generation that flew past the old constraints to

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[3] 'Active ageing' is a term also in use amongst gerontologists, which allows for a more subtle definition of a life that is resistant to the decline narrative. This term is defined by the World Health Organisation as 'the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age' (*Active Ageing A Policy Framework* 2002: 12), (whqlibdoc.who.int). However this term has its problems in that the perceived exhortation to be 'active' in old age can be seen as burdensome to those whose health is impaired.

[4] I acknowledge that theatre and performance scholars have contested Lehmann's definitions of the new theatre since the publication of *Postdramatic Theatre* in 2006. However, here I am not primarily concerned with detailed debates about the specific differences between dramatic and postdramatic theatre, more I wish to draw – as Lehmann does – a broad distinction between mainstream forms and those of contemporary, experimental, postmodern theatre, which are not circumscribed by the considerations of text, character and plot, as were the plays discussed in the last chapter.

make a new kind of world and a new kind of art and unlike Billy [Liar] we would do it without lying' (1999: 30-31). This move away from what Kershaw calls 'lying' – that is, pretending to be someone else in character, dialogue and plot-driven drama – towards the performance of a multi-layered consideration of specific themes, is explored by Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre,* in which he locates the new theatre as part of 'a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving', brought about, in large part, by a reaction to the dominance of the written text (2006: 16). The new theatre, Lehmann asserts, is characterised by, amongst other things, the 'use and combination of heterogeneous styles' (*ibid*: 26), it situates itself as after or beyond dialogue (*ibid*: 31) and can incorporate the notion of the 'performer as theme and protagonist' (*ibid*: 25). Postdramatic or postmodern performance focuses on the idea *and* the materiality of the performer as the content of the work and the locus of its politics. This offers hope in the search for performances that might trouble the normative figure of ageing femininity; such a disruption might be achieved through an idiosyncratic performance by a particular old or middle-aged woman, who is both the 'theme and the protagonist' of the work.[5] This suggests that solo, autobiographical performance might offer constructions of ageing femininity, which extend beyond or offer alternatives to those found so far in mainstream British theatre.

Deirdre Heddon draws attention to the opportunities presented by autobiographical performance to 'communicate and unsettle a particular identity position' (2008: 13),

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[5] It is not necessarily the case that postdramatic theatre with its interruptions, contradictions and multi-vocal approach avoids the pitfalls of the culturally normative narrative of ageing. Ira Brand's performance piece *A Cure for Ageing* (2012 and 2014) in its very title reproduced a negative view of ageing, postulating it as requiring a cure, thereby othering 'the old'. Brand stands outside this subject position, being at the time in her late 20s. Her historically aware 'palm reading' of the audience went some way to countering the generally melancholic tone, assessing, for example, that a member of the audience who was thirty-eight years old might miss the extinction of a large number of animal and plant species whilst she – considerably younger – would unfortunately be around to witness this. Brand does recognise the historical position of particular generational cohorts and goes some way to counter the dominant decline narrative of ageing by highlighting some advantages of being old. However, this piece, devised and performed by a person still in her 20s, equates ageing for the most part with mortality and seems to offer death as the main cure for the condition. It is notable that Brand's piece is not an autobiography of her own old age, rather it stands outside this experience, inspired as it is by witnessing an other (her Grandfather) at the end of his life.

and notes that most performers 'who use autobiography in their work are marginalised subjects' (*ibid*: 2).[6] This suggests that marginalised subjects such as old women might historically have found a more effective means of self-expression and self-exploration within the autobiographical form, as opposed to within the prescribed narratives found in dramatic theatre. Heddon argues that

> the lived experience that pertains to a certain identity position provides the foundation of the autobiographical act, but at the same time that foundation is strategically (and politically) unsettled *through* the autobiographical act.
> (*ibid*: 13)

It would follow then that autobiographical, postdramatic performance by an old or middle-aged woman might offer the opportunity to at once stage and unsettle the complex of meanings that attach to ageing femininity.[7] Moreover the cumulative effect on any individual spectator of attending a *range* of solo female performances – either by the same or different performers – might develop an understanding of the diversity of meanings that the ageing female subject *may* embody. This offers hope that the more ageing women's autobiographical performance is seen by audiences, the more a nuanced understanding of ageing female subjectivity can develop in such audience members. Philip Auslander asserts that:

> the body in some postmodern performance 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.
> (1997: 92)

It might be expected therefore that postdramatic/postmodern performances by ageing female performers would yield insights into the discourses through which the female body, in and beyond the middle-years, is produced. Such discourses may be exposed by performance, not only by revealing the ageing woman's perspective and experience or exposing the discourses that influence any encounter with her, but also by witnessing

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[6] She also notes that most autobiographical performance is produced by women, citing Spalding Grey and Fred Rochlin as the exceptions (2008: 2).

[7] These might include positive meanings such as longevity (Bond & Coleman, 1993: 343), or care giving (Jerrome, 1993: 228), but will also incorporate negative associations such as loss, loneliness and widowhood (*ibid*: 252), a decline in power that corresponds to loss of physical beauty (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1993: 312) or poverty (Walker, 1993: 288–289).

her body engaged in the act of performing *per se*. The materiality of the ageing female body engaged in experimental, postdramatic/postmodern performance has the potential to trouble the normative representation of 'the old woman' or 'the middle-aged woman' and to scrutinise the possibilities and limitations of a specific ageing female body.

Identifying that performance can challenge accepted understandings of what bodies are and what they can mean Auslander argues that

> a body that is understood to be discursively produced and ideologically encoded can also be seen as a site of resistance where hegemonic discourses and codings can be exposed, deconstructed, and, perhaps, rewritten.
> (1997: 140)

This suggests that ageing women's solo/autobiographical performance, presented broadly in the postdramatic mode, which would be both diverse across the range and particular when viewed singly, might have the potential to rewrite scripts of ageing femininity by offering multi-layered re-codings of age, embodied in the figure of the old or middle-aged female performer.[8] With this in mind, this chapter will consider together four, solo autobiographical performances by old women: Baker's *Mad Gyms and Kitchens* (2011); Shaw's *Must: The Inside Story* (2008); Shaw's piece with Split Britches: *Ruff*, (2012); Weaver's *What Tammy Found Out: A Front Line Report from the Back Porch, the Schoolyard and the Dinner Table* (2012); and finally it will consider singly Houstoun's TMA award winning *50 Acts* (2011).[9] This chapter will first gloss the performers' previous relevant performances, showing how these have confronted the experience and discourses of ageing to date. It will then analyse Baker's,

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[8] I use the terms 'old' and 'middle-aged' rather than the blanket term 'older' not only for reasons explained in the Introduction but also to clearly describe the categories that match the performers under consideration in this chapter. Sometimes the term 'ageing' is used here to conveniently describe all the performers, and indeed people over the age of fifty generally. Apart from Wendy Houstoun all the performers whose work is the focus of this chapter are over sixty, Houstoun in *50 Acts* considers her own ageing beyond the current moment and represents here an equivalent to the characters of Hilary and Frances in *Jumpy*, detailed in Chapter One. These characters are also facing the sense of redundancy and decline that plays out as a defeating force in DeAngelis's play but which is exposed as a narrative in Houstoun's work.
[9] *50 Acts* won the 2013 TMA Award for Achievement in Dance.

Shaw's and Weaver's work, exploring the emerging themes of 'expertise and experience', 'interoception', 'motley' and 'intersection' and investigating ways in which these performances are able to trouble the meanings attached to ageing femininity. Surprisingly, since Houstoun is the youngest performer, *50 Acts* is the only work that directly confronts the discourse of ageing; the chapter thus concludes with a detailed reading of how she anticipates disqualification as she approaches old age. Through these analyses the chapter argues that autobiographical and postdramatic formulations offer a potent means by which to both communicate and unsettle identity positions and that placing the ageing female body within such performance offers the opportunity to expose the ideological discourses that produce it.

Ageing in the Spotlight

Baker, Houstoun, Shaw and Weaver are all veteran performers: Baker began making work that was 'from myself for myself' (2007: 26) while a student at Central St Martins in the late 60s and early 70s, coming to wider attention with her first Arts Council-funded work, *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home,* in 1976. Shaw and Weaver began performing in the 1970s, meeting while working for Spiderwoman Theatre Company and founding Split Britches and W.O.W. Cafe theatre collective in New York in 1980.[10] Houstoun began her career in the 1980s; she is well known for her work with DV8 and Forced Entertainment as well as for her solo work. These women, now in their fifties, sixties and seventies, have all had careers spanning thirty to forty years or more, and as their work is to varying degrees autobiographical, it is clear that they will now be dealing with the physical and cultural realities of ageing, both in and through performance. Houstoun is at the threshold, perceiving her approaching 'old age'; this is evidenced by the fact that her dance-theatre piece *50 Acts* – which explores the ageing dancer's body, memory, generational position, sense of creative redundancy and the passing of time – highlights, as Judith Mackrell says, 'a gamut of reasons why a woman

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[10] See Shaw's resume at splitbritches.files.wordpress.com

over 50 might be angry' (2012: n.p.). Weaver and Shaw are older than Houstoun by over a decade and have already explored the subject of ageing in various shows, including their 2009 collaboration *Lost Lounge*, which explores lost spaces, ones that are social, cultural, concrete and abstract. It is billed in its press release as 'a tribute to last holdouts – both the people and places people gather to face or fend off encroaching cultural extinction', 'riffing on aging and losses of all kind', and speaking 'of how fantasy remains even as age reminds us of our limitations' (qtd. in Hughes, 2012: 135, 136). Weaver began her performance research project within the academy with her 2008 solo performance *What Tammy Needs to Know… About Getting Old and Having Sex*. This inquiry responds to her growing concern with the cultural, physical and political implications of ageing, both in a personal and political sense.[11] Peggy Shaw's solo show *Menopausal Gentleman* (1997), 'about a menopausal body and the fires of its ageless heart' (Ferguson, 1998: 375), explores the intersection of feminine ageing and butch lesbian identity in a heteronormative context. Bobby Baker first performed *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (1988) at the age of thirty-eight, for a 'showcase "audition" for the National Review of Live Art' (2007: 49), and about this return to performing after a career break she reports: 'I ruefully realised that I was a generation older than my fellow performers' (*ibid.*).[12] In her 1993 performance *How to Shop*, Baker starts with her now traditional introduction, saying: 'I am Bobby Baker and a woman', then adding: 'and I'm also, and this seems to be of great relevance and interest these days, […] middle aged, I am 42 years old and, to be precise, I am a mother of two and a housewife' (qtd. in Harris, 1999: 56). Even at this relatively early age, Baker had a developing awareness of growing older and how this positioned her, *vis a vis* her audience, *particularly* as a performer in the worlds of live art, autobiographical and

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[11] See Weaver's (publicaddresssystems.org, 2013). Weaver is Professor of Contemporary Performance at Queen Mary, University of London and as such connects the worlds of the academy and live performance; her status as Professor confers on her the undoubted title of 'expert' (see the next section for a particular focus on the notion of the expert and how this relates to the figure of the old person).

[12] She was auditioning after a gap of eight years in which she had given no performances and so her awareness of the age gap was heightened.

solo performance.[13] It is clear then that Shaw, Weaver and Baker's engagement with the cultural, emotional and physical aspects of growing old predates the productions under scrutiny in this chapter.

Age, Experience and Expertise

Baker's defiant declaration of her identity as a housewife and mother foregrounds a persona, through which she claims for herself a degree of expertise. In *Drawing on a Mother's Experience,* she focuses on parenting, which she claims as 'one of the most important jobs to accomplish successfully for the benefit of human kind' (2007: 49). A focus on her acquired knowledge and skill is central in other work, in which she presents herself – comically but nonetheless compellingly – in the role of 'The Expert', specifically on domestic and emotional matters. For example in *Cook Dems* (1990) she skilfully constructs a portable kitchen from disparate elements and demonstrates a range of suggestive cookery procedures, from baking a pair of breast pizzas to smearing a man, dressed only in a pair of blue Speedos, with sauce. At the end of this last procedure she stands back to admire her work, 'although apologising, as it is not British to openly praise one's own achievements' (*ibid*: 52). In *How to live* (2004) Baker appears as an expert in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, teaching the eleven skills of the process to a pea (her patient). In all of these performances she wears her signature costume, the white coat of the 'expert'. *Mad Gyms and Kitchens*, as with the other work mentioned here – in a characteristically light-hearted way – reveals Baker's long-developed strategies for coping with the vicissitudes of her physical and mental health, as she accumulates not only years of experience, but also various forms of serious illness.

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[13] At the post-show discussion after the performance of *Autobiographical Food* (University of Sheffield Theatre Workshop, 4th February 2016) I asked Baker how she felt about being an old woman working in live art and performance, Baker said she was grateful for the question as she wanted to express how much she enjoys being in her 60s and how much it gives her to make work about. However she also revealed that only recently, for the first time in her long (and acclaimed) performing career has she been asked to sit on an Arts Council panel. She questioned whether if 'Bobby Baker' had been a man it would have taken so long for this acknowledgement. The reproduction, in the arts, of intersecting patriarchal and ageist power structures has given Baker good reason for her early age-awareness.

The association of old people with both physical decline and accumulated knowledge is an historical trope. Harry R Moody asserts that [t]raditional societies contain dual, even contradictory images of the movement of ageing: a downward movement toward debility and death and an upward movement toward unifying knowledge. (1986: 30). This dual, contradictory image is seemingly cross-cultural, for example an eleventh century Japanese folk tale, 'The Mountain of Abandoned Old People', tells of two sons who became lost on the mountain where, according to local custom, they had attempted to abandon their sixty-year-old father. He expertly guided them home and on their return the sons hid him under the floor of the house. One day the local overlord offered a reward for anyone who could make a rope out of ashes. The sons made many failed attempts but after seeking the father's advice they succeeded and presented the ash rope to the overlord. When the secret of its making was revealed, the lord, recognising the skills that old people could bring to the community, banned the practice of abandoning elders on the mountainside (in Cole and Winkler, 1994: 116 – 117). In this story knowledge is finally preferred above the perceived burden of physical decline. De Beauvoir in *The Coming of Age* details many examples of respect being accorded the old in communities around the world because of wisdom and knowledge associated with the old (1996: 61, 63, 71, 72,). However, she does comment that in contemporary society 'the standing of old age has been markedly lowered since the notion of experience has been discredited' (*ibid*: 210). Paul Verhaeghen adds that '[o]ne of the few positive clichés about ageing is that old adults are wiser than younger adults', and while his survey of current research in this field seems to disprove this view, it is acknowledged here as a specific popular perception about old people. The fact that elders do acquire a measure of *expertise* is however borne out by his research (2011: 181 – 185). It can be seen then that while old people's knowledge of specific active working processes in a 'technocratic society [...] does not accumulate with the years, but grows out of date' (de Beauvoir, 1996: 210), old age is still popularly associated with

a discreet wisdom or understanding, which denotes a kind of emotional, creative expertise that can only be acquired through longevity.

While old people in popular conception can occupy the position of knowledgeable and experienced 'sage', the version of 'experience' enacted by Baker, Shaw and Weaver might trouble the popular figure of the sedate, sagacious elder that western and other cultures attach to an old person, especially a woman.[14] The title of Weaver's performance lecture *What Tammy Found Out* is structured around the premise of a lifelong acquisition of knowledge; however she has 'found out' about a decidedly alternative milieu, one in which 'otherness is a given' (Weaver, 2013) and which details Weaver's experience of a lesbian, queer, femme, feminist and activist life. The show's subtitle, *A Front Line Report from the Back Porch, the Schoolyard and the Dinner Table*, while conjuring images of domestic life, also invests the veteran Weaver with the intrepid heroism that might be needed by someone identifying as a femme-lesbian, living in a conservative Southern US context. Weaver's long life is framed as a 'front line' mission and performed as a series of vignettes, one for the (then) 63 years she has lived.[15] Performed through the persona of Tammy WhyNot – a 'celebrity-based representation of hyper-femininity' (Weaver, 2011: n.p.) – Weaver distils each year of her life as she progresses from a girl from the rural American South to an urban lesbian, then a feminist then a femme-feminist. She insists on the elevation of these

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[14] Figures in popular fiction and film such as Gandalf in J. R. R Tolkein's *The Lord of The Rings*, Oracle in Andy and Lana Wachowski's *Matrix* film franchise or Ellis Boyd Redding in Frank Darabont's *The Shawshank Redemption* (adapted from a novella by Stephen King), all exemplify the sagacious elder. Andrew Zuckerman's 2008 coffee-table publication *Wisdom* is described as follows: 'Andrew Zuckerman interviewed, photographed and filmed 50 of the world's great writers, actors, artists, designers, politicians, musicians and religious and business leaders of our time [...]. He posed seven questions to each of his subjects – all over 65 years of age – and their candid responses take us on a truly inspirational journey' (www.mymodernmet.com). Reflecting this popular concept of the subject in old age, in psychoanalysis, Erik Erikson's *The Life Cycle Completed* theorises that the successful conclusion of the 8th stage produces 'wisdom'.

[15] When I saw the performance in 2013 Weaver was then 63 years old, quotations about the show come from information about the performance a year earlier that was given as her inaugural lecture at St Mary's College, University of London in 2012 and some quotations from the show (indicated) are from the 2015 publication *The Only Way Home is Through the Show*. For information on the original performance lecture and about the 'birth' of Tammy WhyNot see www.qmul.ac.uk.

distillations to the status of 'findings from her 62 years of research' (Weaver, 'Staff Profile': n.p.). As she counts out the passing of the years she muses on her developing sense of identity or tells a pertinent story, performing actions to illustrate some episodes. For example she approximates the striptease routine, which at the age of nine, she dreamed would win her the Miss America title, and much later, in a 'bus to Damascus' (2015: 229) moment when at forty-two years old she revives the character of Tammy WhyNot, she breaks into song:

> She saw a blinding light and she knew she could
> No longer be a famous country western singer.
> She had to turn herself around and become a
> Lesbian performance artist. And all because of
> The wrong car with the right girl in a parking lot of the post office in Memphis.
> (Weaver & Paul Clark, 2015: 229)

Tammy, Weaver's 'super-femme superhero' whose superpower is 'the ability to fail and fail gloriously' (Weaver, 2015a: 291), comes into sharper focus from this point and, as Jen Harvie puts it, this persona enables her to 'challenge assumptions […], to try out fantasies and to erase boundaries of (gendered) expectations and protocols' (2015: 237). This she does with great humour and directness: at points she playfully distributes tokens of each of her 'findings' to members of the audience in the form of objects of feminine desire: pink frosted cupcakes, one for each year of her life. She hurls these into the audience with subversive joy and a mischievous pride at the immense achievement of mixing her business – performance, teaching and public engagement – with her pleasure – performing high femme. The performance stages her journey through a life in which her work 'has been foundational to feminist and queer performance studies' (Holly Hughes, 2012: 136) and in spite of the surface frailty of Tammy WhyNot's persona, her position as expert is cemented, both by the content of the piece – her 'research findings' – and the high status of this performance-lecture, which was originally given as Weaver's Professorial, Inaugural Lecture at Queen Mary College London in March 2012. Kim Solga, who attended the lecture, comments:

> Presenting *What Tammy Found Out*, discoveries from a lifetime of field research into what constitutes ordinary human expertise – knowledge about the kinds of things academics typically discount as unimportant or not properly intellectual – Tammy revelled, teased, invaded her audience, surprised more than a few of them, and threw cupcakes at the lot with glee, scandalising some while others hooted with pleasure. Everyone got a bit of frosting on them.
> (2015: 247)

Other commentators also note an impression of Weaver's expertise; Joanna Linsley asserts:

> Lois is an expert. She was being both honoured and interpellated as such by this institution of higher education. Yet one of the many skills for which she is so justly celebrated is her ability to reconfigure the assumptions of institutional authority, especially when it comes to what counts as knowledge or research.
> (2015: 251)

Weaver expresses, through Tammy WhyNot's subversive challenge to 'boundaries and protocols', her own undoubted 'canny understanding of how power is constituted in the production of knowledge and how this type of power acts on bodies' (*ibid*: 2015: 251). *What Tammy Found Out* both expresses and exemplifies Weaver's long-refined expertise, especially revealing the ways bodies can be employed to *question* power.

Shaw's performance *Must: The Inside Story*, presented in 'the nonlinear, imagistic, melancholic yet hopeful, dark but funny style that Split Breeches pioneered' (Jill Dolan, 2011: 6), concerns itself with a more visceral sense of experience. It charts the medical history of her body and likens her physical and psychological condition to that periodic state of high aggression in male elephants known as 'must'.[16] Shaw compares herself to an elephant with, as Dolan puts it, 'thick and ancient skin, experience crafted on its deep and hanging folds' (2011: 33). The association of elephants not only with rogue aggression, but also with resilience, longevity and memory, privileges these qualities as

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[16] This state is also called 'musth' and is defined as 'a state or condition of violent, destructive frenzy occurring with the rutting season in male elephants, accompanied by the exudation of an oily substance from glands between the eyes and mouth' (dictionary.reference.com).

a central focus of the piece.[17] Shaw describes medical events that have marked her, both on and beneath her elephant hide:

> I cracked my pelvis. I broke my heels. I smashed my knuckles on my right hand. I smashed my knees in the woods. [...]. I got pneumococcal meningitis when I slept with a woman for the first time. I died for three minutes. I was in a coma for two weeks. I had mononucleosis and couldn't kiss a boy for a year. [...] I had a lump removed from my breast. I have lumps on my forearms and the front of my thighs where I store my original thoughts. I smashed out my two front teeth on the ice fighting over a girl. I had a baby. (2011: 146)

The litany of (possibly fantastical, possibly historical) medical emergencies is complicated by the underlying fluidity of gender indicators and sexual orientation articulated in the speech. Shaw is, sleeping with, fighting over and (not) kissing both boys and girls. And while the medical events attest to a kind of activity and aggression that is associated with masculinity, this is contradicted by the punchline: 'I had a baby.' Clearly the 'experience' demonstrated by Shaw's performance of her body-history, is not circumscribed by the normative life narrative of a woman in her mid to late sixties, and as such her performance resists the sort of public discourse that would construct her ageing as much as it would her femininity.

Baker's *Mad Gyms* similarly foregrounds the value of her extensive life experience, something which Michael Polanyi calls 'tacit knowledge' (*Personal Knowledge*, 1958), that is knowledge that cannot be easily communicated through symbolic means such as text; it is such tacit, practical skill and emotional understanding that Baker has often revealed in her demonstrative performances, the exposition of which accommodates the frailty that she explicitly alludes to in her work. *Mad Gyms* sets out to demonstrate the tacit knowledge gained from many decades of contact and conflict with medical experts. This knowledge now informs her project to 'wend [her] way to wellness' (in performance 30 May 2014), manifesting itself as a suite of practices that she explains and demonstrates over the course of the show. This opens with a presentation of her medicalised body-history: Baker and her assistants erect a life-size, pseudo-scientific

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[17] See 'Elephant' *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols* pp. 99 - 100.

diagram of her body, with numbered lines pointing to its different parts; Baker's stories identify these as sites of illness. First she refers to her head: 'I'm mentally ill' she says, matter-of-factly, confirming that her diagnosis ranges from 'transient psychosis' to 'eating disorder'. She asserts herself as the authority on this matter as she disputes the doctor's original identification of 'borderline personality disorder', exclaiming: 'I was really angry, I thought, "my personality is the best thing about me!"' (in performance, 30 May 2014). Pressing her overriding expertise in the matter of her own body-mind experience she offers a self-diagnosis: she actually has 'anxiety', 'anguish', or 'distress' (*ibid.*). Here Baker exposes the medical discourses that produce her ageing, female subjectivity and also contests the pathologization of these body-mind events. Baker wrests control of the diagnostic and prescriptive powers from the medical profession, showing superior understanding of her own body-mind through this performance. At the next point on her diagram, indicating her breasts, she reveals that she has recently had *delayed* treatment for breast cancer. The doctor, in a case of 'diagnostic overshadowing' due to Baker's status as a mental health patient, miss-attributed Baker's passing out to psychological issues, repeatedly saying 'well you're very stressed' (in performance, 30 May 2014).[18] In the 'script' of the performance her self-direction note indicates at this point:

> **PENNY DROPPED -** NO ONE SEES ME AS A WHOLE PERSON EXCEPT ME – SO I AM THE ONE WHO HAS GOT TO GET MYSELF SORTED OUT.[19]

Here she re-appropriates her body in the form of a pseudo-scientific diagram, staging the demotion of her doctors from their position of authority, showing her identity to be constructed by medical discourse, and elevating herself to the position of expert, not only in matters of her own diagnosis, but also in methods that will benefit her mental health and her post-surgery recovery. The remainder of the show is a demonstration of expertise in the matter of her own holistic wellbeing; after a lifetime's experience of her

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[18] 'Diagnostic overshadowing occurs when symptoms of physical illness are attributed to the service user's mental illness. This increases the risks of treatment delay and the development of complications' (Nash, 2013: 22).

[19] Baker kindly sent me her notes to the production in an email attachment on 14 May 2014.

own body-mind, without recourse to medical 'expert' opinion, she can now produce her own wellness.[20] Indeed the performance is not only a demonstration of this, but the act of demonstration is necessarily a production of wellness itself; in that sense Baker's work is truly performative, as it produces that of which it speaks.[21] As Baker opens the flight cases to reveal each of the four wellbeing environments (a gym, a kitchen, a bedroom, and a lounge) and proceeds, variously, to workout, cook healthy food, take a rest on her beautifully appointed bed, or relax with a magazine, she simultaneously performs and creates her own wellbeing. Baker has gained insight and know-how by enduring traumatic life events and facing illness of different kinds; *Mad Gyms* performs self-belief as a tool for recovery. In an online video interview Baker comments: 'people as individuals, having difficult times are not seen as the experts that they are. Value your own instinct, your own judgement, what you learn' (2013: n.p.). At the end of the performance, enacting this sentiment, she invites the audience to offer their own top tips for wellness in the form of drawings and collages, which are created while drinking her expertly made cup of tea.[22]

Interoception: the Journey Inside

Peggy Shaw's investigation into her body history in *Must* takes a different route to Baker's: Shaw brings into appearance, as the title suggests, her 'Inside Story', a term that plays on the sense of 'the inside' as both a physical phenomenon and also indicative of identity, ubiquitously reported to be obscured by an aged exterior. Shaw's 'Inside Story' is an invocation of what philosopher Drew Leder calls the 'interoceptive field' (1990: 39), by which he means one's perception of the physiological interior. In *The Absent Body* Leder writes, from a phenomenological perspective, of the differences

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[20] Baker also received the full course of NHS treatment for breast cancer in addition to her own self-applied therapeutic treatments.

[21] In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler illuminates the concept of performativity, saying: 'Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names' (2011, [1993]: xxi).

[22] These drawings are posted on the Daily Life Ltd. website dailylifeltd.co.uk, and so form an archive of top tips for wellness.

between 'exteroception' and 'interoception', that is the detailed perceptions of sensation on the surface of our bodies compared with the more generalised impressions we have of our physical interior. He explains that

> [i]nteroception does not share the multi-dimensionality of exteroception [...]. Interoception is not devoid of an expressive range', yet this is 'experienced as modulating a single dimension of perception i.e., "inner sensation," rather than opening on to distinct perceptual worlds.
> (*ibid*: 40)

In *Must,* however, Shaw works to 'sensationalise' the interior regions of the body; Lyn Gardner describes the show as

> an exquisite lesson in anatomy, a journey underneath the skin, a mapping of the human body in which the sites of love and loss are placed under the microscope and analysed with a forensic gaze.
> (2009: n.p.)

The impulse to pursue this 'inside' investigation could be read as Shaw's particular reaction to ageing; with advancing age the awareness of the interiority of the body becomes ever more acute, medical problems generally increase, one is more keenly aware of joints, bones, muscles and organs. Levels of subcutaneous fat diminish and the veins and bones of, say, the hand, begin to be discernable through the thinning membrane of the skin, or as Leder asserts 'a medical mishap can suddenly awaken us to the significance of such bodily lacunae' (1990: 43).[23] Ageing brings with it an increased possibility of bodily betrayals and incontinences and the interior begins to show evidence of itself on the surface of the body. However, Shaw displaces a dominant image of ageing, that of the sign of the interior breaking through the surface of the skin, by reversing the focus, switching from the external – the surface, where culturally constructed signs are at play – towards an imagined journey into the uncharted territory of the *internal* where the production or encoding of signs has not penetrated.

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[23] According to the Cleveland Clinic website's article on 'Aging or Painful Skin', 'Underlying structures – veins and bones in particular – become more prominent', and '[t]he skin becomes more transparent as we age. This is caused by thinning of the epidermis (surface layer of the skin)' (my.clevelandclinic.org).

In cultural terms the audience are now led into the *terra incognita* of the organs, muscles, joints and bones. This offers Shaw an opportunity to sidestep the signs which denote ageing that the surface of the old body gives off; being unable to rank the cultural value of organs, veins or bones – of whatever age – leaves the audience without reference points. There is no specific value, for example in terms of productivity or beauty or strength, which a layperson can attach to an older or younger organ, such as the liver. There are no coordinates to help the non-medic, for example, identify or compare a younger spleen to an older one, or, given this identification, ascribe a greater sense of worth to one or the other. Shaw's words – which evoke her epic interoceptive journey – and the series of fascinating Welcome Collection Archive micrographs that are projected both onto the upstage wall and finally onto Shaw's naked back, evince the fascinating beauty of bodily structures of *whatever* age.[24] Shaw's poetic journey into the interior exposes the audience to what Leder calls a new 'perceptual world'; in this realm age falls away and what is glimpsed is an alternative, half-remembered, half-fantastical world in which you can find traces of the hidden subject:

> When my skin cracks open
> You will find my meat.
> My carnivore body.
> You will see the anthills and mole tunnels underground and food being carried from place to place by millions of workers. You will see a magical landscape, like New York City in the seventies [...]. Evidence that someone lives in here. Really lives here and leaves traces.
> (2011: 140)

By imagining her body's fantastical interior Shaw opens up a fluid territory that lies beyond that where identity is circumscribed by discursive practices. Shaw places herself at the centre of the inscriptive, internal action; she is the one who 'leaves traces'. As she begins her journey she is not without a fear that is fuelled by the ideological discourse that constructs old age: 'I'm afraid of finding something I didn't know about – like a bear shitting in my woods, or a field of Irish potatoes in my uterus' (*ibid*: 140-

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[24] These projections came courtesy of the Welcome Library in London and included images of: 'cells of the upper respiratory tract', 'the uterus', 'network of collagen fibrils' and 'spinal chord motor neurons' (Shaw and Willson [Clod Ensemble] 2010, n.p.).

41), and she elevates her physical losses by likening them to ecological losses: 'Underneath my thighs is where all the oil is being stolen from, leaving empty pockets inside' (*ibid*: 141). In addition, by taking this journey she also repeats in some ways the common plea of the old person to see behind the visible surface of the ageing body. However, she goes further than merely requesting insight, leading us into the texture and detail of this 'underground' space, evoking a multiplicity of images, from the geology of landscapes and the sporadic appearance of memories, to mechanistic systems and the evolution of flora and fauna. She reveals her emotional and interior subjectivity in visceral terms. 'Shaw' as Lyn Gardner says, 'is taking a scalpel to herself, opening up old wounds, so that the shadows of a lifetime are rendered visible' (2009: n.p.). By telling her 'Inside Story', which is, paradoxically, a story 'About coming from the darkness into the light' (2011: 143), she enlists the powers of performance to disrupt the discourses that construct her aged identity.

In this sense Shaw's journey resonates with the notion of the internal that Butler proposes. If we replace structures of 'gender' with those of 'age', Butler's explanation of how the idea of the 'internal' operates in establishing identity is pertinent here: 'Gender is [...] a norm that can never be fully internalized; the "internal" is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally *phantasmatic*, impossible to embody' (Butler, 2006: 192, my italics). So Butler clears the ground of the 'internal' field (whether it be the physically, emotionally or psychologically) rendering it virgin territory. Basting, among many others contends that Butler's ideas of gender performativity are to a great extent applicable to the category of old age.[25] Drawing on the ways in which Butler asserts that gender is not a norm that can be fully internalised, I argue that old age is similarly unstable as an internalised identity. Aged subjects have a sense of identity and interiority that has been developed over time, shifting with

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[25] Basting's project in *Stages of Age,* is to 'read aging and old age as performative acts, both on – and off stage' (1998:9). See also the extract on performativity from the ENAS conference literature (www.agingstudies.eu) cited in Chapter One.

regard to many intersecting factors. So, while cultural norms will affect a sense of age identity in individuals, as Butler contends with gender, it is impossible to reproduce such a culturally constructed set of performances in an identical way to a supposed original. These multiple individual failures to reproduce given age performances (such as a restrained, non-sexual mode of physical self-presentation) means that age norms change over time. Age performances have subtly shifted over the decades of the twentieth and early twenty-first century so that now the margins of acceptability have widened to some degree when it comes to age-appropriate behaviour.[26] Thus the sense of an internalised category of old age can never be fully internalised, indeed this 'identity' is merely a surface signification, indicated (in the case of age) by signs such as grey hair, wrinkles and sagging skin.

Engaging in a fantastical *interoception* and imagining her own particular emotional and subjective interiority in physical/visual terms, Shaw opens up the possibility of an alternative discourse that might re-construct her identity within an ageing body:

> There are different ways of seeing inside me:
> You could guess what's in here
> You could touch me
> You could X-Ray me
> Or you could believe what I tell you.
> (2011: 142)

Shaw's fantasy has the potential to destabilise the 'phantasmatic' surface significations (of age in this instance) that Butler identifies and to refuse such significations as being 'impossible to embody'. Shaw even attempts to refuse the markers of age that are present on her surface as cultural disqualifiers; she presents the lines on her face as products of an inquisitive, lifelong quest of self-discovery: '[i]t's a journey through the shadows of a city. A map. The wrinkles on my face are where the map gets folded over and over' (*ibid*: 143). Shaw also plays with epic notions of age-identity, presenting the

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[26] This shift is in large part due to the visibility of old performers especially in music, who challenge age norms. The obvious examples are rock stars Mick Jagger (73) (www.imdb.com) and Madonna (58) (www.google.co.uk).

ageing process as existing in geologic time and the 'perceptual world' beneath her
'elephant's hide' (*ibid*: 146), as one in which she identifies herself with tectonic and
evolutionary forces:

> I am sizematic. My back is slowly moving away from my hip-bone toward
> America, my vertebrae curving toward the horizon, slipping underneath the
> sea of love, taking a million years to crawl up out of the water.
> (*ibid:* 154)[27]

Here Shaw complicates her relationship to time, identifying her interiority not only
with geological time but also with processes of evolution and even embryogenesis. Her
claims echo the description Leder gives of the way embryonic development leaves
traces of vestigial organs in the mature body:

> visceral sensations are often vaguely situated with indistinct borders. [...] A
> process taking place in one organ can experientially radiate to adjacent body
> areas or express itself in a distant location. [...] This reflects the
> embryological origins; sensation is referred to that level of the body the
> viscus occupied in the developing foetus before it descended, dragging
> nerves along, to its mature position. [...] An almost magical transfer of
> experience is effected along both spatial and temporal dimensions, weaving
> the inner body into an ambiguous space.
> (2009: 41)

Shaw's performance of her inside story constructs just such an 'ambiguous space'
reclaiming her interior as a radically fluid location that effects a similar spatial and
temporal 'transfer of experience' in metaphorical terms and resists distinct locations.
Through this inside journey, Shaw evokes a continuum of forms and imagines a body
that in all its particularity has an ontological unity with all other bodies, and so unites
the particular and the universal, the individual and the communal. In the final act
Shaw slowly disrobes from the waist up and with her back to the audience, standing
against the upstage wall, her body is lit by, and overlaid with, projections of magnified
cell structures and tissue formations, archive material from the Welcome Collection.
Through this action Shaw overlays the external with the indecipherably internal and
brings into appearance the archived 'inside stories' of many anonymous lives,

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[27] In this she echoes the epic timelessness associated with old age that is such a potent part of
the construction of Johnny 'Rooster' Byron in Butterworth's *Jerusalem,* explored in Chapter
One.

associating herself, and by extension the audience, with a biological continuum that could encompass all of life and any age.

Masquerade, Motley and Myth

Theatre and performance are popularly symbolised by the two masks of comedy and tragedy. Gerontologists also use the notion of the mask in order to theorise the presentation of self in subjects undergoing the processes of ageing beyond youth. Simon Biggs argues that the mask in age studies indicates that 'presentation of an ageing identity is subject to flux and multiple possibility' (1997: 554). Therefore, the act of masking is pertinent to both the act of performing and the act of presenting an aged self. However, Biggs points out that there are two distinct conceptions of the mask that are held in tension in age studies: firstly the notion that the aged face and body operates as a mask – a cluster of culturally interpretable signs such as wrinkles and white hair – which obscures the 'interior' self, and beneath which the real – ageless – subject is concealed (see Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989). The second conception holds that a mask or masquerade – including all forms of costume and make-up – that is employed to prevent age-detection, actually reveals age, even as it attempts to conceal it (Woodward, 1991: 150). Given this tension over the notion of the mask in age theory there would seem to be a potential in the practice of masking or masquerade in performance to both illuminate and subvert the construction of aged identity. This thesis explores this potential through practice in Passages' final performance *The Mirror Stage* (Chapter Five); however, the tension between the mask of ageing, which obscures the validity of the subject/citizen, and the act of masquerade that actually reveals age through the project of concealing it, also functions in the work of Shaw and Weaver. Both have consistently played with the iconography of gender categories as a series of unsettling masks that displace identity. Kate Davy, writing about Split Britches' 1987 production *Dress Suits to Hire*, asserts that

> the project is to insist that the lesbian represent herself on her own terms, through strategies that thwart rather than facilitate the propensity to read her signs and symbols from a heterosexual perspective.
> (1989: 156)

The following section argues that, in playing with symbols of gender identity – which we might call the 'exteriority' constructive of discursive practices – Weaver challenges a reading of age by masking, as she adopts the erotic femme-lesbian guise of her alter ego 'Tammy WhyNot'. By doing this she thwarts the reading of the figure of post-menopausal woman and so suspends her normatively assigned age-identity.

The practice of dressing in motley has been used since medieval times. It licences the wearer – usually a fool in the court of a noble or king – to subvert power structures and reveal unpalatable truths. Feste, the Clown in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* in a risky exchange with Olivia in which he tries to keep his position as her fool (and his life) after a protracted absence, replies to her call to 'take the fool away' (I. v. 31) with this gambit: '*cucullus non facit monachum*: that's as much to say as I wear not motley in my brain' (I. v. 45 – 46). Feste's comic conceit turns the Latin saying – which roughly translates as 'the cowl maketh not the monk' – on its head. In the simple meaning of the phrase the cowl-wearer is taken for something better – a monk – which he is not; in Feste's conceit he reverses this meaning: his motley – his clothing – which presents him as a fool, obscures Feste, the highly developed thinker hidden beneath, while at the same time allowing him licence to critique relationships and expose the fallibilities of the powerful. The political power of wearing motley – that is assuming the costume-as-mask of the clown persona – is founded on a paradox: motley enables the clown to assume a protective, foolish 'persona' in order to tell hard truth to power. This is held in tension with the recognition that such a mask is associated with the idea of dissembling or 'playing a part'; so motley functions as an *open disguise*, it is simultaneously a mask and a talisman which protects the dissident speaker from sanction.

Baker, Shaw and Weaver all play expertly with the surfaces that construct a 'readable' persona, one that we might call a 'motley'. They play with the way persona is heteronormatively constructed, through gesture, voice, movement and attitude and particularly through the use of costume. The function of motley acquires an extra layer of complexity when considering the cultural position of ageing femininity; Baker's white coat, Shaw's suit and Weaver's white-blond 'big-hair' wig act as a talismanic and disguising motley, enabling the performer to disrupt and obscure the dominant image of ageing femininity. When Weaver announces, in *What Tammy Found Out*, that at the age of 42 she revived one of her foundational femme characters, 'Tammy WhyNot', she produces, by assuming the Tammy persona through costume, gesture and voice, an infinitely reflecting series of selves.[28] Harvie comments on the flexibility that Tammy offers Weaver: 'Lois-Tammy is a powerful hybrid who permits [...] contrasting characters not only to exist simultaneously, but to conspire and collaborate' (2015: 234). However, the power of the Weaver/WhyNot persona is accomplished not by a simple hybrid duality but by the cluster of Weaver's multiple incarnations, present in the performance: her person, her narrating persona, her performing persona *and*, on an additional level, the dual character of Tammy WhyNot/Tammy Wynette, who, taken together, reflect and destabilise one another. The destabilising phenomenon of autobiographical performance is explored by Gabrielle Griffin, who draws on Saussure's semiotics to examine the presentation of self in Claire Dowie's 1990 monologue performance *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?*:

> lurking behind/beneath/beyond the performing and performed selves – what in the terms of the linguist Ferdinand Saussure might be described as the signifier and the signified – is the referent, the actual person towards whom the performing and the performed selves seem to gesture. Here we have another and more complex split between onstage persona and the real-life person whose relation with each other eludes us even as we seek to solidify it into a source of meaning.
> (2004: 156)

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[28] Weaver had created Tammy WhyNot many years before on the tour in London with Spiderwoman Theatre when the group had lost their costumes and the drag troupe Hot Peaches (with which Peggy Shaw was working) had come to their rescue. (see Harvie & Weaver, 2015: 290-291).

Griffin offers a triangular relational diagram that shows the interplay between the referent Dowie (the person, who exists outside performed time) and the two 'on stage' entities: Dowie (the performing present, who is narrativising her life) and Dowie (the performed past self, who is communicated here through performance). She argues that

> [t]his triangular figuration is not stable throughout the monologue. Rather, the positions established within it slip and slide, especially those of the performing and the performed self.
> (*ibid.*)

Griffin quotes Jon McKenzie to illuminate the political function of such enactment:

> it is a mode of embodied activity whose spatial, temporal and symbolic "between-ness" allows for dominant social norms to be suspended, questioned, played with, transformed.
> (2004: 156)[29]

In *What Tammy Found Out* Weaver introduces into this complex, slippery, relationship of enacted selves, an additional instability in the figure of Tammy WhyNot. In this relationship there appears a second referent, namely Tammy Wynette, the historical country and western singer who functions here as a Barthean myth of femininity. Barthes defines myth as 'a mode of signification, a form' (1976: 109) that derives on the *first* level, of language, from the sign – which (when considering words), is made up of the signified (meaning) and the signifier (the collection of letters and/or the sound or collection of sounds) – together with, on a *second* level, an extra meaning that creates a whole other layer of significance which he calls myth.[30] So Weaver has chosen the figure of Wynette because this figure 'means something' (*ibid*: 111) this 'ultra-signification' (*ibid:* 133) involves an embodiment of the ultra-conservative hyper-feminine and so mythologizes an identity position that Weaver wishes to parody and confront.[31] She achieves '"between-ness"' by alluding to Wynette, the myth figure, via

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[29] From Jon McKenzie's 1998 'Genre Trouble: (The) Butler Did it', in Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (eds.), *The Ends of Performance,* p.218.

[30] See Barthes's *Mythologies* p. 115 for a simple diagram of the way of myth is produced as an additional layer to the simple mechanics of language.

[31] Among other hit songs Tammy Wynette was famous for *Stand By Your Man* (1968), which she co-wrote with Billy Sherrill. This song – written at the beginning of the second wave of feminism – encourages women to remain loyal to their male partners in the face of cruelty, neglect or disregard. She also typified the martyred woman in her personal life, reputedly having been beaten by her successive husbands and finally, according to Jimmy McDonough

its subversive alternative, Tammy WhyNot. Weaver the first 'referent' (in Saussure's terms) is therefore thrice obscured, slipping between, on the one level, Weaver the performer/persona and, on a second level, Tammy WhyNot, the fictitious performer/persona; this density of meaning is further complicated by a third layer, the figure of Tammy Wynette – the historical person, the performer *and* the femme myth/personality – to which the name Tammy WhyNot refers. Within all this complexity, reading the normative cultural meaning of Weaver's age is thwarted; age is unsettled by the motley function of Tammy WhyNot and further complicated by the myth function of Tammy Wynette; all the while Weaver is able to speak her truth about what it is to have lived to the age of sixty-three as a lesbian and a performance artist.

Tammy's motley – the big platinum wig, pink feather boa and cowboy boots – also functions to cushion Weaver's professional vulnerability, as an ageing performer. Weaver worries about how long she will be able to keep performing, fearing a time when she will forget lines or be unable to get up off the floor.[32] According to Weaver Tammy acts as a cover for this vulnerability as, unlike Weaver herself, she is able to accommodate a good degree of this developing 'creakiness'. So age is both displaced onto and disrupted by the figure of Tammy – who absorbs the ageing body's vagaries and betrayals – leaving Weaver, the person, the performer and the performed (in Griffin's terms), to forestall a reading of the cultural meanings of age.

The differing ways that Weaver and Shaw have accommodated ageing femininity in their performances and the ways they strive to subvert the culturally ascribed meanings of old age might be fruitfully compared here. Sue Ellen Case notes of the Shaw/Weaver performing partnership: 'when they stage lesbian seduction, they assume butch-femme roles, movie-star identifications, mythic beauties and beasts' (1996: 4). How does

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(2010: 287–321), plied with drugs by her last 'controlling' husband and forced to perform on stage in a state of severe ill health in order to continue to make money.

[32] Weaver gave this response to a post show question that I asked about how Tammy impacted on her as an old performer (on 22 May 2013).

advancing age play into this mode of erotically charged performance and, given the asexual meanings ascribed to old age, to what degree does the age-status of these performers mean that their role-playing has less erotic and therefore less disruptive potency with every passing year? At the time of writing Shaw and Weaver are still charismatic performers, employing the erotic and sexually charged performance style with which they made their name in the 1980s.[33] Shaw's wide legged pose and drawling voice and Weaver's explicit comments, rhymes and songs remain uncompromisingly sexual in their attitude, tone and content. Whilst Shaw has had to confront severe physical difficulties associated with ageing – having had a stroke in 2011 – her strategy for remaining a sexually potent figure and sidestepping the de-sexualisation of ageing femininity into and beyond her seventh decade has been quite simple: by donning what she calls 'Gentleman Drag' her masculine persona is able to accommodate and trouble the figure of ageing femininity.[34] While Shaw's performance of femininity *is* complex and multifaceted, by assuming the motley of masculinity – the pinstripe lounge suit – she successfully counters the normative meanings of ageing femininity. Weaver continues to perform ultra-femme into her sixties, a more radical proposition. Aged masculinity remains a potent symbol of power and productivity in western culture, however ageing beyond youth disqualifies women from embodying the ideal of femininity (as discussed in Chapter One). In order to sustain the hyper-femme role, Weaver must rely on the subversive power of motley to a greater extent than Shaw does when embodying her masculine persona. She does this by adopting the complex masking and mythologising tactics described above to destabilise cultural constructions of gender, sexuality and age identity. Weaver enlists the sense of '"between-ness"' that Jon McKenzie identifies to enable the constructed meanings of age 'to be suspended, questioned, played with and transformed'. So, Weaver's performances are suspended

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[33] I last saw Shaw and Weaver in their compilation show *Retro(per)spective* at Brighton's Marlborough Theatre on 20 April 2017.

[34] Shaw described her attire as such at the performance of *Must* on 15 November 2011.

between femininity and old age, allowing each to be simultaneously present while the normative reading of these positions is unsettled by the function of myth and motley.

Intersecting Identity Positions.

In the late 1980s critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw drew attention to the issue of intersectionality in the fields of American law and politics. She analysed how the experience of being both Black and female were erased in legal cases of sex and race discrimination, and obscured in antiracist politics and in feminist theory, arguing that:

> Both feminist theory and antiracist politics have been organized, in part, around the equation of racism with what happens to the Black middle-class or to Black men, and the equation of sexism with what happens to white women.
> (1989: 152)

In a similar way feminist theory has also failed to take account of the subject positions of old women. As Barbara Macdonald notes, 'so far the women's movement has resonated with its silence on the subject of old women' (2001: 36); and Toni Calasanti, Kathleen Slevin and Neal King concur:

> [a]lthough women's studies scholars and activists do not deny the reality of ageism, they have relegated it to secondary status, neglecting to theorize age relations or place old age at the center of analysis.
> (2006: 13).

Consequently Crenshaw's analysis, framed with respect to the invisibility of Black women's experience in legal or political discourse, could be used to examine some of the issues that pertain to the marginalisation of old women's experience. [35] Intersectionality is a useful lens through which to view the performances under scrutiny here as they expose the intersecting discourses that variously construct the old, lesbian woman; the old, female mental health patient; the old woman living with cancer; and the old, butch lesbian survivor of stroke. In revealing aged female

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[35] I am aware that race is particular in its socio-political origins, meanings and consequences; I wish here not to disregard the issue of race but to use the powerful concept of intersectionality in whatever way it pertains to the culturally determined experience of becoming and being old. I am especially interested in the ways that age-identity is disqualified, obscured or, conversely, made hyper-visible with respect to other identity positions held.

subjectivity, increasing multiplicities of identities (including political, sexual or medical) are shown to intersect with each other.

Crenshaw argues that 'feminist theories are constructed around white women's experiences', problematising the 'authoritative universal voice' (1989: 154) that is implicitly claimed by white feminists. Similarly autobiographical performances that set a single aspect of the performer(s) identity in opposition to the normative subject position, as in Dowie's *John Lennon*, (above) which, whilst acknowledging the ways in which 'fixity and fluidity co-exist' (Griffin 2004: 155), focus on how such opposition functions solely with respect to challenging accepted forms of *gender* identity. A similar example is Scottish gay and lesbian theatre company mct's 'community autobiography' (Heddon 2004: 217) *Fingerlicks*, which explores lesbian community identity but leaves out the complexity of social locations that proliferate where old age and lesbian identity intersect. An old woman can embody a complex intersectionality of marginalised subject positions: having already occupied the position of 'woman' (possibly 'woman of colour'), she has then grown into the designation 'old woman'; in addition, other non-normative locations such as 'lesbian', 'service user', 'disabled' and/or 'widow' could accumulate to complicate her experience, only to be overshadowed by the overriding and disqualifying position of 'old'.[36] Calasanti *et al* argue that the designation 'old' obscures other subject positions, commenting that

> [o]ld age does not just exacerbate other inequalities but is a social location
> in its own right, conferring a loss of power for all those designated as "old"
> *regardless of their advantages in other hierarchies.*
> (2006:17, my emphasis)

How much more so can the designation 'old' operate to hyper-marginalise subjects where it intersects with and erases experience of mental, physical, social or economic *disadvantage*? By bringing multifarious and complex experiences to the stage, the

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[36] The term service user is disliked by some people who have mental health issues, as it does not take account of the complexity of problems that may lead an individual to use the mental health services. I am adopting this term, within this argument, as an expediently short way of indicating someone who is living with mental health problems, while in no way wishing to ignore the complexity of these for each individual.

performers discussed in this chapter bring focus to the intersectionality of identities that proliferate as age advances.

Weaver has consistently sought to challenge and complicate culturally assigned identity values and her performance of the Tammy persona reveals an intricate web of varied subject positions, as Weaver says:

> Tammy [...] provides a context for the exploration of uncomfortable and contested categories – 'trailer trash' and 'high femme' are recuperated by Tammy in a complex form of identity politics.
> (2013: n.p.)

Evidently Weaver is aware of the intersection of class, sexuality and gender at play in her performance and attempts to 'recuperate' these subject positions. Even though she makes no direct mention in *What Tammy Found Out*, of the subject position of age, this identity category is also 'recuperated' by the fact of an old performer embodying a hyper-feminine country music singer turned lesbian performance artist in a contemporary performance piece.[37]

In a 2004 interview with Catharine McLean-Hopkins, Baker said, 'I go with whatever stage I'm at – one day I'll be making geriatric art!' (2004: 250), and while one could not claim that around a decade later *Mad Gyms* is particularly 'geriatric' (whatever that might imply for artistic production), Baker's performance takes account of the complexity of her current 'stage', examining and performing the losses, gains and changes that come with age. Through all her performance work Baker has explored what Marina Warner calls her 'excruciating troubles' (2010: 3).[38] In the 2012

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[37] However, from about 2013 she has begun exploring age and sexuality through practice based research entitled *What Tammy Found out about Growing Old and Having Sex,* which Weaver describes as 'a project that collaborates with older adults through interviews, performance workshops and public presentations in order to research the effects of ageing upon people's desire for, and ability to, obtain sexual pleasure and intimacy' (2013: n.p.).

[38] Marina Warner in her introduction to Baker's book *Diary Drawings: Mental Illness and Me* which charts Baker's 'private story from 1997 to 2008 of [her] somewhat lengthy journey to full recovery' (Baker, 2010: 17) notes that '[i]ntimations of the nature of BB's trouble glimmered in earlier works and with the Diary Drawings as testimony, previous manifestations can indeed be grasped now in retrospect' (2010: 9); she then goes on to cite examples from previous works such as *How to Shop* (1993) and *Take a Peek!* (1995).

performance of *Mad Gyms* Baker walked with a pronounced and idiosyncratic limp (since corrected by surgery); this disability – represented in surreal style by her three-legged picture on the show's publicity – evidences her ageing body. Baker is now located at the intersection between a self who is living with mental health issues, a survivor of breast cancer and someone experiencing the physical and social effects of ageing. While Baker does not explicitly mention age within the performance it is implicit and these three positions converge in *Mad Gyms*. The piece demonstrates Baker's self-care, performed at the point where her identities of old, disabled, service-user and female intersect. This is achieved in the face of a lifetime's struggle against a medical profession that dissects Baker's multi-layered identity into separate locations, which it then considers in isolation. Baker demonstrates that by holding all these positions in balance and addressing each one as part of a whole, it is possible to achieve a sense of wellbeing. The autodidactic and self-reflexive nature of Baker's project reveals that social discourse – and consequently the professional and institutional procedures that are founded on such ways of thinking – fails to consider the complex intersectionality that accompanies old age. *Mad Gyms* responds to Baker's specific physical and mental needs, considering the complexity of her increasingly multifaceted subject position.

Jill Dolan describes Shaw's 1997 show *Menopausal Gentleman* as spinning

> mournful, melancholic, piercing tales about the passage of time playing over and within a female body lived in a masculine style for which biology provides a kind of necessary historical referent.
> (in Shaw, 2011: 15)

She argues that Shaw's performances 'thoughtfully chart the intersection of gender, sexuality race and class' (*ibid.*) and although Dolan omits age as an intersecting factor, Shaw foregrounds age in its intersection with femininity and butch lesbian identity, by declaring herself "a 54 year old woman / who passes as a 35-year-old man" and by asserting "I keep young by passing you see. / I sacrifice being a woman for youth. It's a trade off" (2011, 76-77). Crucially Shaw claims her sexuality and butch self-

presentation as an opportunity to escape the reductive trap of ageing femininity, which is incompatible with a notion of 'youth'. Her 'gentlemanly' appearance works to co-opt the cultural flexibility of thirty-five-year-old masculinity into her project of evading the disqualifications of age and gender; thus she side-steps ageist and sexist constructions of her body. Dolan notes that 'both and multiple genders cohabit in Shaw's work' (2011: 19), and observes that she constructs:

> her own foundational brand of female masculinity, always complicating the combination of genders across her body and her performances but never willing to forgo the one for the other. In fact, female biology is inescapable in Shaw's performances, keeping her poised within complex gendered contradictions.
> (*ibid*: 18)

Class, as Dolan argues, is also an intersecting factor; Shaw portrays herself as a 'gentleman' – literally a man who is also gentle – mixing commonly ascribed masculine, feminine and middle class attributes in one designation. But this profession of middle class gentlemanliness, as Dolan also suggests (*ibid*: 19), is a class migration; Shaw was brought up as a working class Irish-American, a heritage that seeps through her effete tailored performance to generate a crotch-adjusting, wide-legged, drawling energy. Shaw also claims that she is a beast 'trying to pass as a person' (*ibid*: 71), placing her outside class and gender distinctions altogether. This 'tiger' (*ibid*: 72) – menopause – that she says lurks inside is a facet of her ageing self that complicates her gender identity. Her intersecting age, class, sexuality and gender identities are summed up in the assertion 'it's hard to be a gentleman in menopause' (*ibid*: 76). By 2010 Shaw describes herself as 'a sixty-plus year old, second-generation Irish, working-class, grand-butch-mother' (*ibid*: 41) and this intersectional focus is reflected in *Must*. As detailed above, at the end of this show she turns upstage and strips off her suit jacket, tie and shirt to reveal the softness of her back and the curve of her breast, which recedes out of sight, disclosing the feminine, ageing biology that lies beneath the lounge-suited image of masculinity. Microphotographs of cells and internal bodily structures are projected onto her bare flesh, and the interplay between femininity,

masculinity and age is invoked. Shaw's offering of vulnerable, aged, female flesh, unwrapped from its masculine carapace, overlaid with images of imagined identities that may have long since passed away, presents an image of intersection that holds aspects of femininity, masculinity, age and even death in balance.

Resilient Fragility: Performing Post-Stroke identities in *Ruff*

Shaw has always drawn attention to her complex identity, not only occupying a variety of subject positions, as described above, but also identifying with and embodying a variety of archetypal figures such as Marlon Brando, James Dean or Rita Hayworth (Case, 1996: 9, and Shaw 2011: 20). *Ruff*, which 'visually and verbally translates Shaw's internal experience of illness and aging into an external assemblage of her multifaceted, creatively capable, aging brain' (Weaver, 'staff profile': n.p.), explores her newest identity position: living with disability. The show's publicity flyer claims Shaw does this by bringing to life the 'host of Lounge singers, movie stars, rock and roll bands and eccentric family members living inside her' (*Ruff* flyer, 2014.), figures she claims have been with her all her performing life, released because of the stroke she suffered in 2011. *Ruff* focuses on the moment of the stroke and, in a conceit which collapses five and a half decades of her life, conflates the moment of the stroke with a time-displacing incident when as an old person Shaw saw film footage of herself *in a dress* at the age of thirteen. She thus equates the confusion of her thirteen year old brain with gaps in her understanding that still remain:

> But when my sixty-seven-year-old self saw my thirteen-year-old self, wearing a green dress, I could see a picture of my thoughts before I even thought them. Back then in the 50s, in a world that was not ready for me, I could see myself trying to fill in the blanks with information I needed, to be able to carry my brain on the top of my body. And then suddenly I was exhausted from still trying to hold my brain in my head and my head on my neck [...] fifty-four years later [...]. My old brain met my young brain and that one look shattered my insides all at once.[39]

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[39] *Loose Ends*, BBC Radio 4, 2 April 2016.

Shaw implies that her uninterrupted confusion has caused her stroke and that her current cognitive 'blanks' have as much to do with a long-term bewilderment over cultural notions of feminine identity as the physiological state of either her adolescent or her sixty-seven-year-old stroke-surviving brain.

Shaw 'channels' a plethora of charismatic characters, embodying Elvis's sexual potency in the rock star persona who sings 'The Okey Pokey'[40] in a strutting, fist-in-the-air, microphone-tilting style, even linking the physical site of the stroke to a favourite TV character, asserting that her stroke happened in her 'PONS, which rhymes, with The Fonz' (*ibid.*).[41] In her BBC Radio Four interview she explained:

> After my stroke I was able to define that I wasn't an original person, that I had a combination of a lot of people inside of me that I wanted to talk about and thank for all their help. Like Leonard Cohen, and Marlon Brando and Elizabeth Taylor, Malcolm X, Otis Redding.[42]

These figures supply both her gender-troubling, performative script and her supporting cast. Her allies – including an all female backing band who are projected onto the green screen behind her and who set the pulse of the blood in her veins – support a performance that is openly 'compromised' by the impairment of her stroke. Shaw's 'sexy' performance style now accommodates the limitations of her post-stroke body, clearly demonstrating – in Auslander's terms – the body's materiality. Shaw still has much of the vocal and physical presence and comic mastery of former performances but her reliance on autocue and occasional interruptions of the show to ask her director Weaver – who sits in the audience – about the next sequence or move, make explicit

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[40] This is similar to the 'Okey Cokey', often sung in the UK.

[41] The PONS is a part of the brain located in the 'hindbrain' directly above the medulla. It connects the upper and lower parts of the brain and is responsible for 'a message station between several areas of the brain. It helps relay messages from the cortex and the cerebellum. Without the pons, the brain would not be able to function because messages would not be able to be transmitted, or passed along' (brainmadesimple.com). The Fonz, a cool 1950's style, quiffed, leather jacketed character, reminiscent of Brando in his films of the 1950s is one of Shaw's appropriated characters, he was originally played by Henry Winkler in the ABC TV series *Happy Days* from 1974–1984 (www.imdb.com).

[42] *Loose Ends*, BBC Radio 4, 2 April 2016.

the fragility produced by the stroke, incorporating this into the performance aesthetic. Shaw comments:

> it doesn't matter whether I mess up or not because that's part of the performance. When I started performing after my stroke I would just tell the audience "hey I just had a stroke!" They'd say, "Wow you look great!" or "you're lucky", or something [...]. So we had, immediately, a conversation about it.[43]

Ruff is demonstrably a performance of old age, one that accommodates the limitations of Shaw's memory by employing the technical aid of autocue, making her cognitive losses explicit. However she still shows an ability to push the limits of performance through the use of green screen technology; in a metaphor for the 'dark holes left by her stroke' (*Ruff* flyer) the green screen populates the stage with her co-opted helpmates. The upstage projections show footage and computer-generated images, for instance her backing band who appear one by one, building the tune behind her. This supporting cast, springing from Shaw's post-stroke imagination, show through the points of transparency on the green screen, which, in a resilient performance of fragility, materialises the stroke damage she has suffered. The green screen both acts as a metaphor for the losses Shaw has endured and enables the performance of Shaw's hopeful, creative response to such depletion. This device and Shaw's performance disrupt the binary of positive ageing versus narratives of redundancy and decline discussed above. *Ruff* demonstrates a reassuring continuity of the Shaw persona and also incorporates her new identity position as an enriching contribution to her creative life. With its humour, plethora of colourful characters and openness about assistive techniques, *Ruff* shows Shaw's resilience as a creative force and performs the determination to incorporate cognitive obstacles into theatre making. As much as Shaw's female masculinity challenges gender ascriptions, her performance of resilient fragility challenges age ascriptions, and this exuberant and technically sophisticated

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[43] *Loose Ends*, BBC Radio 4, 2 April 2016.

piece, ultimately confounds expectations that an old, female, stroke-sufferer should be a clear case for retirement from the theatre.

The Futurism of Ageing

Houstoun is, as implied by one of her '50 acts', a record breaker; she stands centre stage reading from an orchestral score, punctuating the background music with crashes. Instead of cymbals, however, she 'plays' with a hammer on a series of brittle, shellac records that shatter with each blow. This is an arresting and witty image: by 'breaking records' Houstoun exemplifies the destruction of a lifetime's work and at the same time intimates the diminishing physical capacity that is proportional to a lifetime's achievement. Overwhelmingly however, Houstoun's action demonstrates that by obeying the performance score (or, in Butler's terms 'script' [1988: 526]) prescribed for us in old age we are compelled to destroy – that is give up – our work piece by piece. Houstoun's 2013 TMA Award for *50 Acts* attests she is admired as a performer, yet this performance responds to fear of the future as an ageing dancer. Through the act of performing well into her fifties – the act that encompasses all of the fifty acts of her performance – she exposes the discourses that produce her middle-aged performing body. As Houstoun says:

> [w]e think of older people in terms of wisdom and words; it becomes an odder and odder thing to do, to exhibit age through movement. You start to wonder, "Am I embarrassing myself and other people by carrying on?"
> (qtd. in Mackerell, 2014)

The title of the piece – *50 Acts* – has multiple meanings: at first glance it indicates that the work explores the past life of the performer, however it is also a pun on the phenomenon of performing at and beyond the age of fifty; in addition it intimates the possible 'acts' of the next fifty years, expressing Houstoun's expectations for future 'acts' both on and off stage. As Houstoun said in an email:

> [t]he title does very much have a forward thrust to it - a kind of retaliatory strike.....mostly towards the language I was continually hearing everyday – decline – burden – the panic about the changing demographic... a lot of lazy thinking.
> (19 February 2014).

Houstoun incorporates and critiques this 'lazy thinking', whilst also drawing attention to her position as artist/performer within a dance *milieu* that undoubtedly associates ageing with decline and redundancy and which generally relegates maturity to an off-stage position.

The show opens with Houstoun standing centre stage as extracts from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *The Futurist Manifesto* scrolls up on the screen behind her.[44] The publication of this text in *Le Figaro* in February 1909 launched a new movement at the opening of the twentieth century. The Manifesto declared that the old should be swept away, even to the extent that the Futurists themselves should be, in their turn, superseded by the next generation of artists: 'I stand before you – incendiary in my own dreams, from which I will emerge exhausted, diminished and trampled on' (1972: 43). The next part of the text was not projected in the performance but is still pertinent: 'The oldest of us is thirty: so we have at least a decade for finishing our work. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts – we want it to happen!' (*ibid.*). Houstoun, a *woman* in her fifties, appropriates the male and future-orientated ageist text, as her opening manifesto and in so doing she couples the 'old' figure on stage to the notion of the future, associating herself at the opening of this performance with Marinetti's youthful commitment to sweep away old forms: 'what is the use of looking behind when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible?' (*ibid*: 43). She thereby establishes a performative paradox in which she, a middle-aged – experimental – performer, disassociates herself from the type of outmoded forms dismissed by Marinetti, and attaches herself and her ageing performer's body to a vision of the future of art. As Christine Poggi argues, Futurism *did* aim 'to enable a process of constant self

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[44] Unless stated otherwise, quotations from this work are taken from the text projected in performance (translator unknown), *all* Marinetti quotations are referenced from the 1972 R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli translation referenced in the bibliography; this differs slightly from the projected translation.

re-invention' (2009: ix) and Houstoun shows in this piece that she is engaged in just such a process, in spite of the youth-orientated dance world, that that would normally have retired her from the stage well over a decade previously.[45]

50 Acts matches its appropriated manifesto; it embraces speed and is innovative in form. It is a kaleidoscope of frenetic 'takes', offering a multifaceted response to 'cultural ageing' (Katz 2009: 13), which interrogates the language and images with which we construct old age. Footage of stampeding crowds plays as Houstoun dashes about the stage, evoking the panic and sense of encroaching doom that is engendered by such current notions as 'the grey tsunami'.[46] The piece is shot through with intimations of physical dissolution and mortality: fading footage, in which a mother and daughter are obliterated by the chemical deterioration of the film, repeats on a loop; an answer-phone message of someone saying goodbye accompanies this dissolving image. Houstoun references the invisibility ubiquitous in the elder experience, returning a number of times to a sequence where, like an end-of-the-peer magician, she stands behind a black cloak, which she flourishes rapidly to the accompaniment of a drum roll, only to stand aside on the moment of the 'reveal' to show that there is nothing behind the sheet. Ironically Houstoun is still materially present on stage even as the space behind the cloak has been revealed to be empty; she indicates such by using a swift gesture and facial expression that denotes insistence on her continued material presence. This 'act' speaks eloquently of the absence of representation of bodies of women who have aged beyond youth. Houstoun's anger at the cultural obliteration she is confronting and also at the economic position of old people in early twentieth century Britain is clear: for one 'act' she sits completely still as a recording of a speech by David Cameron about cuts to public funding plays out,

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[45] According to Liz Schwaiger, '[t]he dancer in transition literature shows that dancers are retiring in their twenties [...]. This particular chronological age then becomes a "marker" of when one should retire, as social ageing is peer-driven' (2005: 2).
[46] On 22 September 2014 a Google search for the phrase 'the grey tsunami' gave 3,620,000 results.

offering an image of the dependent old who suffer in silent obscurity, unable to 'act'. Her immobility, in this instance, is an eloquent anti-action that reveals the ways in which decline is politically produced. Houstoun's defiance is embodied here in these fifty acts of performance, which deconstruct the discourse of decline and redundancy, protesting against a future that offers only the prospect of cultural and finally bodily disqualification. She slowly unreels a cassette tape, seemingly trying to tell the future, feeling the tape with her fingers for clues but failing to find any as the tape falls, unspooled, onto the floor. This speaks of fears for an unknown future, and also of the bodily unravelling and the dissolution of meaning that decline discourse marks out as life's destiny. *50 Acts* explores the subject of ageing from the threshold of 'old age', confronting, in anticipation, the fearful discourse of ageing. Unlike Weaver, who is located on the 'front line', Houstoun, though an experienced performer, is a novice when it comes to the awareness of being designated 'old' and is only beginning an engagement with political and philosophical questions of age and ageing. Her subsequent work *Pact with Pointlessness* (2014), which 'could be seen' – according to its publicity flyer – 'as a sequel to 50 Acts', continues this investigation, broadening it to ask more philosophical questions about the meaning of a long life and the ways subjects continue to function in the face of mortality.

Houstoun explicitly contests the discourses that produce the old body, specifically the old dancer/performer's body. Her rage at invisibility; her spoken stage directions, which she reads from the script, alluding to the fears that the old performer might have about remembering the moves; her image of passive, seated acceptance of cuts whilst a film of chorus dancers in a long-passed youth plays out; all these elements and more expose the discourses that play over the old female body. A designation of 'old' and its intersection with that of 'performer' is examined throughout the piece, as is the intersection of these with the designation 'female'. This whole is lucidly expressed in her cloak-flourishing disappearing act (described above). Other identity positions are

referred to, including 'poor person', 'disabled person' and 'care home inmate'. But the overriding investigation is into the culturally determined experience of being 'old', and as such this is the only show in the selection examined here that makes age the central concern.

It could be argued that by not focusing specifically on age and refusing to be defined by this principal social location, Baker, Shaw and Weaver are countering the overriding designation of 'old' that Calasanti *et al* identify as a disqualifier. It remains to be seen if, as they move further into old age, any of these performers produce, in Baker's words, 'geriatric art', which I take to mean work where the issue of 'geriatric' identity is at its heart. The cultural construction of age identity has not yet been singled out by these performers for focused consideration; only Houstoun's abstract dance-theatre piece provides a specifically age-critical lens through which other concerns such as poverty and isolation can also be considered.

Conclusion.

Petra Kuppers argues that 'Knowledge has arrived into powerstructures (*sic*) when it translates itself from its living form into public discourse. And in turn, knowledge feeds back into new forms of aliveness and seeing life' (2003: 3). The implicit or explicit projects undertaken by Baker, Houstoun, Shaw and Weaver to translate into public discourse what it is to be alive as a middle-aged or old woman (sometimes at the limits of what it can mean to labour as a performer) emerge from their autobiographical impetus at, or on the threshold of, old age. All four women continue to attract attention for their pioneering performances, produced on the edge of, or explicitly admitting, frailty of different kinds. Their works bring non-normative narratives and subversive performances into public discourse, examining and disturbing constructs of ageing femininity.[47] Baker frames her ageing female body-mind using a distanced, pseudo-

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[47] The chapter you are currently reading evidences, in part, the bringing of such narratives and performances into public discourse; this is also evidenced by numerous reviews, some of which

scientific perspective that exposes and subverts the medicalised discourse through which her body and mind are constructed (and constructed as separate). Shaw evades and exposes normative constructions of ageing femininity by not only adopting the gentleman drag that obscures femininity beneath the clothing, voice and body-style normally assigned to masculinity, but also, in *Must,* by defining her subjectivity from the perspective of interoception where fantastical, epic imaginings of her interior replace the normative constructions of ageing femininity, in which an interior sense of significance is hidden inside. In *Ruff,* Shaw enlists technology and conjures personae to overcome age-related disability, incorporating frailty into her performance in order to continue to labour as a performer. Weaver performs the old female body as a site for research, locating herself as a reporter on the front line of her own lifecourse and adopting an ultra femme persona as a foil to cope with 'creakiness' and a mask to thwart a normative reading of the figure of ageing femininity. Houstoun, the youngest and only performer who directly addresses age as a defining otherness, offers her audiences deconstructions of ageist discourse and narratives of decline and redundancy. She shows us, by the physical act of performing (at) '50', that she – like Marinetti – is committed to and must be admitted into the future of art, in spite of discourse which might seek to exclude her from such an arena. All the performances under scrutiny here, situated as they are, in Lehmann's formulation, 'after or beyond dialogue' (2006: 31), by 'use and combination of heterogeneous styles' (*ibid*: 26), and by incorporating the notion of the 'performer as theme and protagonist' (*ibid*: 25), engage critically with the ways in which old age intersects with other identity positions. In doing this they start from a position that ageing femininity is a complex and intersecting phenomenon, defying strict categorisation, and they show, through techniques such as use of motley,

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are cited here, and by the audience attendance at the shows under discussion. In addition, as previously mentioned, material from this chapter relating to Shaw is published under the title 'The Age Performances of Peggy Shaw: Intersection, Interoception and Interruption', in the forthcoming 2017 collection *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture: Reflections, Refractions, Reimaginings.*

masquerade, assistive technologies, interoception, and demonstration, that age does not necessarily have to overshadow other identity positions. The autobiographical acts explored in this chapter show the old female body in its status as a historical and cultural construct and, through techniques that insist on the body's materiality, such as Baker's demonstration of wellbeing and Houstoun's 'disappearing act', strategically unsettle the identity position of 'old woman'.

These multifaceted, fractured and reflective performances have the potential to offer, to people of all ages, new ways of understanding and discussing old age and, more specifically, the phenomenon of ageing femininity, thus generating troubling age-effects. The discourses that construct age (as with gender, race, sexuality, disability et cetera) are not mere abstractions but have real-world impact in terms of, for example, who has access to medical care or who can escape poverty. The work of these veteran performers exposes the mechanisms of the narratives of redundancy and decline that attach to old age. Their performances also focus attention on the intersection of multifarious identity positions to which old people, specifically old women, are subject; as such their creators disrupt the normative figure of ageing femininity and trouble the naturalised scripts of old age.

PART II

Chapter Three

'Older People Can Have Ideas, Dreams and Can Move Gracefully': Re-inscriptions of Ageing Bodies in *Life Acts*[1]

In addition to research on mainstream drama and postdramatic performance this research project is concerned with the possibility of challenging widely held notions of old age through the act of performance. To this end I established Passages Theatre Group in October 2012 and in the first phase, through a series of experimental performance workshops, the group explored the meaning and lived experience of growing older, grappled with the philosophical questions posed by the process of ageing and cultural notions of old age, while also challenging stylistic expectations of elder theatre by engaging in experimental and non-naturalistic theatre practices. The ages of the members of Passages – co-researchers in the project – in the early stages ranged from fifty to ninety-two but currently members are aged between sixty-three and ninety; members were recruited from the community, particularly, though not exclusively, through the University of the Third Age, Sheffield branch (SU3A).[2] As it stands, the demographic of Passages is predominantly middle class, exclusively white and mostly educated to degree level. While this presents a problem in representing the diversity of experience of ageing, Passages was, at its inception, to my knowledge the only group formed by old people explicitly for the purposes of researching the representations of age and ageing through performance practice-as-research.[3] Given

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[1] https://youtu.be/kIXMsAD3txk (all the time counts in this chapter refer to this link).

[2] The U3A is a national organisation for retired or semi-retired people over the age of 50 'providing opportunities for their members to share learning experiences in a wide range of interest groups and to pursue learning not for qualifications, but for fun' (www.u3a.org.uk). The Passages project became a Special Learning Project with the Sheffield branch of the U3A.

[3] Núria Casado Gual's production *CollAge* for the 6th Symposium of Cultural Gerontology at the University of Lleida is explored in his article 'Old Age as Theatrical Matter: Devising and Performing *CollAge*, a Play on the Masks and Mirrors of the Ageing Process' however whilst

this uniqueness, together with our focused awareness of the ostensible lack of diversity in the group, Passages can nevertheless claim its right to make performance about *specific* experiences of ageing, within a specific milieu and from a particular historical position. The interactive work of the group has involved diverse audiences, from members of a sheltered housing community to refugees and asylum seekers at an English language learners group. This has opened a dialogue about the experience of age and ageing with different communities and across different cultural groups.

In this chapter I concentrate on the creation and performance of Passages' first piece, *Life Acts*.[4] In outlining an ethics of theatre historiography, Bill McDonnell calls for one that 'might reflect more accurately a politics of process' that 'could take in the making of texts, rehearsal, performance and post performance, [...] supplemented with diaries or journal reflections' (2005: 136). He suggests that participants should be included in the making of the record to allow for a 'richer perspective on the values of these collaborations' (*ibid*). This approach also offers a multiperspectival assessment of the work and grounds claims of efficacy and/or impact in evidence contained within participant and audience comments. With this in mind, I set the voices of group members and their audiences alongside (amongst others) Beverley Skegg's (2004) ideas of cultural inscription, Anne Basting's (1998) theories of age in performance,

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exploring the 'socio-cultural perceptions of the elderly' (2008:183) it is clear from the article that the actors were considerably younger than the protagonists they sought to embody. Pam Schweitzer at Age Exchange has pioneered reminiscence theatre with old people and also the company Fevered Sleep have produced a thought provoking performance *On Ageing* (2010), in which the words of old people were voiced by young children aged 7–13. Other theatre groups made up of old people are documented in Kate Organ's *A New Form of Theatre* publication for the Baring Foundation and even more groups than this attended the West Yorkshire Playhouse's Older People's Theatre Symposium in September 2016, however, all this work is markedly different from a project where old people are central to the interrogation, the creation and the representation of meanings of old age.

4 The piece was created over a number of months and different versions of it were performed during this time. The earliest performance took place at the University of Sheffield on 3 December 2012 to postgraduate students and staff and was called 'Making the Time of our Lives', a fully developed and technically realised version was given a public performance at the university's Theatre Workshop on 18 April 2013 as part of the Arts Enterprise festival and the last performance was part of a multidisciplinary conference at the University on 11 June 2012. In the interim, versions of the piece were performed at St Mary's Community Centre on Bramall Lane, at Roman Ridge Extra Care Centre in Wincobank and at The Winter Garden in Sheffield city centre under the title *Life Acts*.

Anca Cristofovici's (1998) analysis of the image of the old subject in photography and Rebecca Schneider's (2000) critique of the occularcentrism of western theatre. I will outline the ways in which the process and performance enabled a 'making visible' of the past and consequently produced insights about specific old identities that would otherwise have remained obscure. Considering Kathleen Woodward's notion of 'the mirror stage of old age' and Mike Hepworth's and Mike Featherstone's analysis of 'ageing as a mask that is hard to remove', I chart Passages' exploration of the image of the mask and the mirror, showing how this illuminates cross-gender concerns about the image of the ageing body (Woodward, 1991: 67, Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991: 382). I also explore the ways in which *Life Acts* examines the socio-political position of old people, offering the notion of a nuanced 'polyphonic proxemics' when describing the devices through which we stage the diversity of opinion on age and ageing. Further, I propose a notion of 'future-value' and problematise the ascription of *negative* future-value to old age; I identify this as a stigma borne by the old body, one that encodes the figure of the old person as worthless. As a response, I argue that staging identity through time has the potential to challenge the negative 'future-value' inscribed on the old body and that, in addition, Passages' work provides 'narrative resources' which can counter the normative views of old age as a future-free, therefore value-free, position. I also explore the extent to which the company, through formal experimentations born out of a need to develop a new research dramaturgy, challenge normative models of age and ageing; finally I assess to what degree the work might contain 'new performances of age' – ones that might challenge notions of what it is to be and to perform 'old'.

Exploring Old Identities

Sociologist Beverley Skeggs applies Marx's theory of value to the study of identity, to outline a 'symbolic economy where the inscription and marking of characteristics onto certain bodies condenses a whole complex cultural history' (2004: 1). Although Skeggs focuses particularly on the ways *class* as an indicator of value is inscribed on the body,

we might extrapolate that *old* bodies carry particularly negative cultural inscriptions, associated with obsolescence, rigidity and dependency, and that such value assumptions are produced through complex cultural representations.[5] Passages Theatre Group's practice-as-research attempts to re-inscribe the old performing body with alternative and more nuanced characteristics and to shift value assumptions, replacing negative representations of old people with those that show, as one audience member put it, that 'older people can have ideas, dreams and can move gracefully'.[6]

Performance practice group-work generally begins – as with Passages – by building healthy group dynamics, developed through physical and emotional trust and the sharing of experience. As mutual understanding between performers developed – predicated on the unmasking of the multifaceted identities of each participant – the group found material that might create a deeper acquaintance with the performer for the audience members. These acts of revelation contained the potential for re-inscribing the old body. Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth identify the negatively connoted old body through their focus on the notion of old age as a mask 'which it is hard to remove', stating that:

> the image of the mask alerts us to the possibility that a distance or tension exists between the external appearance of the face and body and their functional capacities, and the internal or subjective sense or experience of personal identity.
> (1991: 382)

Passages' work attempts to find a way to stage this tension between appearance and the performer's sense of personal identity and to reveal the complexity that constitutes identity beyond the 'mask of ageing' (*ibid*.). In the exploratory stages of Passages' work, we staged early childhood memories, thereby revealing historical personality traits, for example cleverness, attention seeking, innocence or gullibility.[7] Performers' first

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[5] See Friedan, *The Fountain of Age*, pp. 49–51.
[6] Audience response questionnaire, 18 April 2013.
[7] A note on punctuation: I have chosen to spell the possessive of Passages as *Passages'* without the final 's' in order to avoid the clumsiness of the correct spelling – Passages's.

memories (1.32–13.11) were animated through solo storytelling, supported by the ensemble who, acting as a chorus, echoed, affirmed and often embodied aspects of the memory (see Fig. 1 below and). This goes some way towards facilitating a theatrical version of 'seeing beyond the visible' (1999: 275), a model that Cristofovici advocates for the representation of age in photography. Previous lived experience, which was originally undergone by bodies designated as children, is revisited in the same bodies of now old people. Through this reanimation of childhood experience, the wonder, disappointment, pride, bewilderment or innocence felt by the one-time child can here be found animating the old body, indicating the presence of something that is ordinarily beyond the visible. So sixty-six-year-old Linda Evans and sixty-nine-year-old Stella McKinney appear as innocent and credulous children, duped by their parents into believing that Santa Claus was either up the chimney or admonishing them for not eating their dinner; and seventy-nine-year-old Frank Abel is revealed as the 'clever boy' who once attracted 'general approbation' as he managed to work the gramophone player all by himself. What is glimpsed here is the possibility that these once childish characteristics are still present and are one of

Fig. 1: 'First Memories' in performance.

many layers still accessible within the present self. As Evans comments: '[p]ast experiences accumulate – they do not cease their effectiveness as we age, at some level they remain with us'.[8] Amelia Howe Kritzer identifies theatre's ability to bring into view that which would otherwise remain hidden as its most potent political instrument, characterising politically committed work as 'making visible what has occurred but has not been fully recognized' (2008: 94); similarly Joe Kelleher notes '[s]omething has been shown, something has been said, has been brought into appearance which might not otherwise be shown or spoken of. Lets say 'politics' begins right here' (2009:26). The aim, to reveal traces of invisible truths and experiences, places the work of Passages Theatre Group alongside participatory youth and community theatres that work to give a platform to the voices of the disenfranchised and misrepresented.[9] *Life Acts* stages performers' whole lives through movement sequences; these 'lifecourse signatures' (14.35–16.50) are accompanied by projections of photographs of each performer, pictured in series from youth to old age, revealing an accretion of successive selves over time.[10] This revelation of 'the body in temporal depth' is inspired by Basting's analysis (1998: 22), which springs from her reading of Ohno's performance *Water Lilies,* discussed in Chapter One. Basting sees in Ohno's performance a new model for constructing age, 'using performance to imagine and embody past and potential changes across time' (*ibid*: 141). This new symbolic economy honours the depth of experience of the aged body, and I extrapolate that it accords the old body the utmost value because it can represent the greatest sum and variety of age, whilst still accounting for the potentiality of the aged subject. In Passages' performance, the individual movement sequences are predicated on a formula that allocates each

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[8] Performer response questionnaire 3 December 2012.

[9] Adam, former Youth Theatre member and RADA student reaffirms the central ethos of many community theatre projects when he claims on the GLYPT (Greenwich and Lewisham Young People's Theatre) website, he that 'GLYPT absolutely saved my teenage years and gave me the best platform in the world to vent everything I felt. It is absolutely vital to have in the community and is vital to humanity' (www.glypt.co.uk).

[10] Later, at the insistence of the group, the title of this section was changed to 'Moving Through Our Lives'. In addition it is important to note that this projection is not part of the Winter Garden performance so does not appear in the same form on the video recording.

performer a quota of actions that increases according to their age; this movement sequence performs key moments in each life. By employing a guiding principle during the development of the work, which directly correlates age value with performance value (quota of time on stage), we challenge those terms on which early twenty-first century life is usually lived, where cultural status generally diminishes with advancing age.[11]   In discussion with the group after the performance, Ruth Carter gives a description of the way she understood the 'signatures' process:

> Because we're looking at age we'd [...] turn it upside down from the normal way the culture looks at it, so the person who's the oldest has the most value, because they have the most years and the most experience. [...]. You had to count up [round upwards] rather than down. So I'm seventy-one, so I had to count up as though I was seventy-five, which seems a bit mean [*laughter from the group*] so that gave me fifteen [moves].[12]

The joke at the end of this description demonstrates that cultural norms, which ascribe a negative value to old age, were not completely subverted during this discussion, however in the workshop space and in performance terms, advancing age correlates to increasing value. This exemplifies the theory expressed by Richard Schechner and others that the workshop space/time can create conditions that exist outside cultural norms (2003: 110); *Life Acts* reproduces such conditions in performance by according the oldest members the most time or most prominent position on stage.

In response to the sequence one audience member commented: 'one's wealth of experience is not an Apollonian looking-back and distillation of experience but the continued immediacy of all past experiences'.[13]   Another seemed prompted to reconsider old age as not inherently distant from youth, commenting: '[i]t made me question age in its chronological order'.[14]   A third felt that the 'photographic progression was a strong illustration of the life changes everyone experiences', implying that the performance had universalised the link between ageing and subjectivity. These

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[11] See Bill Bytheway, *Ageism* and Margaret Morganroth Gullette in *Agewise* who both discuss this form of cultural disempowerment.
[12] Spoken in the post performance discussion on 3 December 2012.
[13] Audience response questionnaires, 18 April 2013.
[14] Audience response questionnaire, 18 April 2013.

comments, when considered alongside Skeggs's theory of cultural inscription, and Basting's insistence that we see the performing body as an incorporation of all the ages it has ever been, indicate that the sequence allows a re-inscription of the aged body as multi-layered and perceptible in its 'temporal depth'. This effect on the imagination of at least some audience members holds the potential for re-inscribing *other* old bodies that may be encountered in the future, outside this performance. These audience responses also indicate that the photographic montage, when played alongside the movement signatures, stages a tension between the photographic image and the image embodied in real time/space, a tension similar to that which Featherstone and Andrew Wernick identify:

> It is the openness to the sense of loss of the substance of one's own body and face with all it might have been able to represent: the sense of discrepancy between one's self-image and the image we take others to see, and their subsequent dialectical interplay, which envelops photographs with poignancy.
> (1995: 4)

The implication here is that our self-image and therefore our sense of identity is strongly linked to remembered photographic images and yet may contrast with what 'we take others to see' of the present reality of our ageing bodies. In Passages' movement signatures there is a dialectical interplay between the representations that it is possible for the present, old body to contain and the meanings held by projected photographic images of the same bodies. This juxtaposition attempts to overlay historical images on live old bodies in space, thereby uncovering the invisible images that inform the sense of self. Passages' performance of early memories and lifecourse signatures unmasks characteristics that shape the complex personalities embodied on stage, re-inscribing old bodies – through performance – with temporally lived experience. This, I argue, has the potential for removing, or at least knocking askew, the 'mask of ageing'.

Anca Cristofovici proposes 'a reality that sees beyond the visible' (1999: 275) when examining the 1992 photographic work *The Giant* by Jeff Wall, which shows (through

techniques of photo-montage) the giant figure of a naked old woman on the staircase of a public library. Exploring an aesthetic of the old body that would allow the aged form to be significantly represented, she notes that 'Wall [...] exposes the body as it is – not as youthful body but as an *accomplished shape*, as *significant form*' (*ibid*, my emphasis). Following on from this, Cristofovici develops a theory of the 'poetic body'; this is 'a form that ensures the connection between the physical and the psychic self', and 'creates a generational continuum within the self' (*ibid*: 290). Her ideas provide a strong aesthetic target for the Passages' work; the movement signatures (described above) are informed, amongst other things, by the wish to achieve a performance of 'significant form' and 'accomplished shape'. This is facilitated by a physical theatre exercise that aims to imbue the performers with a sense of inner and outer

Fig. 2: Studio work exploring 'significant form' and 'accomplished shape'.

illumination; participants are asked to imagine a light that goes on within them that they can turn up or down as their sequences develop (see Fig. 2); they are also asked to imagine a spotlight tracking them wherever they go. This aims to evoke a sense of

visibility resulting from both inner inspiration and outer illumination, this acting as a counter to the creeping invisibility of ageing people.[15]   The use of such a technique in the development of these sequences allows a kind of 'accomplished shape' and 'significant form' to be achieved; old bodies become more substantial in the space, growing bold and open enough in their expression of shape and form to present as significant and accomplished subjects. One audience member especially appreciated the '[w]onderful movement & focus – including from the oldest person on stage!' and found the beauty of the arms opening at the end of the photo section' most resonant.

Fig. 3: 'Significant form' and 'accomplished shape' in performance at The Winter Garden.

These comments indicate that some sense of the significance of old bodies moving in the space has been stirred in the audience.

Mirrors, Masks and Old Age

We also explored Featherstone and Hepworth's 'image of ageing as a mask which it is hard to remove' (1991: 382), considering this in conjunction with Woodward's concept of 'the mirror stage of old age' (1991: 67), discussed in Chapter One. Our performance

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[15] For a discussion of ageing women's experience of becoming invisible see *Mother Time: Women Aging and Ethics*, where Sandra Lee Bartky (pp. 61–74) and Frida Kerner Furman (pp. 7–22) both investigate this common cultural phenomenon.

[16] Audience response questionnaires 18 April 2013

attempts to counter the common rejection of the reflected self that Woodward proposes; the piece – adopting Woodward's phrase – is entitled 'The Mirror Stage of Old Age' (27.12–34.25) and it opens with live music and masked performers holding mirrors, waltzing with their masked reflections. One-by-one, performers waltz downstage, removed the mask and address the audience with a frank, physical description, written by and about themselves. Each performer then places the mask on the floor downstage, and continues to dance with their now *unmasked* reflection. Performer Liz Cashdan's verse description reads:

> That's her in the mirror but it's also her mother,
> Her three sisters, daughter and maybe one
> Of her granddaughters; the wide nose and long chin
> Her brother's, so there's little that's actually her.[17]

Shirley Simpson's reads:

> I have a small face that is quite lined, especially around the mouth and chin, with deep creases. These lines around the lower half of my face remind me of my mother, as she had them too.[18]

Fig. 4: Performers dance with their masked reflection

[17] Liz Cashdan, reproduced with permission.
[18] Shirley Simpson, reproduced with permission.

Fig. 5: Performers dance with their unmasked reflection.

The appearance of relatives such as mothers and granddaughters in these descriptions reveals something analogous to Cristofovici's 'generational continuum within the self' (1999: 290), and the piece universalises (as opposed to essentialises) the experience of encountering the reflected image of one's aged body, expanding beyond the present time and currently visible body. The universalising potential of performances such as this, could be enlisted as a counter to the 'othering' of old people by western cultural apparatus, as the performance recognises that we are placed in a continuum of generations who have experienced ageing before or will experience ageing after us. In addition, by placing the performer's descriptions between the performance-image of subjects dancing with a masked reflection and then dancing with an unmasked one, we resist the commonly reported rejection of self that Woodward identifies.[19] This piece deploys the ambiguous image of the mask to question what exactly we desire as ageing

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[19] Audience response questionnaire, 18 April 2013.

subjects when looking in the mirror. The disturbing self-effacement, signalled by these dancing figures in smooth white masks, gazing at their reflections, their faces eerily similar, speaks of ageing denial taken to its logical extreme, where marks of a life lived – even of gender – are airbrushed out, the patina and colours of history and experience erased.[20]   Casting off the white mask revealed a secondary mask, one that, as Hepworth and Featherstone argue, is constructed by the marks of ageing that render the aged person illegible as a fully admissible subject.[21] However, the descriptions which are spoken by each individual – by naming the marks of ageing and holding up the body that bears them to staged scrutiny – disrupt this illegibility; facial lines, bent backs, thickening torsos and the quality of old flesh, are all brought into focus, owned and positioned as characteristics in the possession of the individual who speaks them. Through this device the aged body is both lucidly translated and elevated to significance, and thereby lays claim to a legible subjectivity. As a result of seeing this performance, audiences might be encouraged to view the same marks or potential markings on themselves and others in a different light. One audience member, in answer to a question about what was most powerful or resonant in the performance, wrote: 'The mask/mirror performance. Accepting who we are and the age we are'. However for some this piece did not challenge the imperative of visual attractiveness, as another audience member commented that the 'section on "appearance" could be expanded. More positive spin could be put on older people still appearing "attractive" to others'.[22]   It is clear that the cultural norm of old people representing 'a disruption of the visual field' (Furman, 1999: 11) is hard to dislodge.[23] In spite of this, one audience member found that the performance presented '[o]lder people taking

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[20] For a further discussion of the image of the mask in age discourse see Simon Biggs (1997).
[21] Luce Irigaray, quoted in Ruth Robbins states: 'Who women are is […] illegible or invisible, unrepresentable and unspeakable' (2000: 149). The same becomes true for the old subject, who, by ageing – irrespective of gender – increasingly loses what Dwight Conquergood calls 'the privilege of explicitness' (2002: 146).
[22] Audience questionnaire response 18 April 2013.
[23] In her ethnography of a U.S. beauty parlour, Frida Kerner Furman draws on the work of Lennard Davis's 'Nude Venuses, Medusa's Body and Phantom Limbs: Disability and Visuality' in order to explain how the beauty practices of the ageing clientele attempt to avoid embodying 'a disruption of the visual field'.

ownership of how they are viewed' and consequently it is possible that for some of the audience, the subjectivity of the performers, through claiming the legitimacy of their aged faces and bodies, permits the old face and body to be, in Howe Kritzer's words 'fully recognised'.

Given western culture's particular hostility to the ageing of women, 'The Mirror Stage of Old Age' piece could be said at first glance to be more relevant to women than to men; it is significant, however, that worries about the impression of severity in the ageing face, the problem of diminishing muscle mass and the development of a bent spine figure specifically in the men's descriptions. Airing issues of masculinity and ageing, serves to counter the cultural assumption that the discussion of ageing and appearance is an exclusively female sphere of concern. Whilst cultural expectations burden women with more unattainable requirements than they do men, it is imperative that issues of cultural ageing should be seen to impinge on both men and women. *Life Acts* enables a cross-gender examination of how the marks of ageing represent a masking of individual identity in old age and mounts a challenge – albeit on a modest scale – to the power of such inscription to shape both female and male elder subjectivity.

Staging the Socio-Political Position of Old People

Old age in western culture is persistently 'othered' by media representations. As some commentators argue, 'a great deal of our culture is frenetically oriented towards youth – notably in entertainment and marketing' (Rowan Williams, 2014, n.p.). On the whole, marketing, entertainment and the media ascribe a positive value to youth and a negative value to age.[24] Old people can also be the object of press criticism and feel this negative attention keenly: Passages member Linda Evans drew attention to Nicholas Hellen's *Sunday Times* article 'Oldies live it up as young feel the pinch', in

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[24] See Bytheway, *Ageism* and also Sally A. Gadow 'Frailty and Strength: The Dialectic of Aging'.

which graphs and statistics supported the claim that old people 'have already bagged the wealth, now the baby boomers are having all the fun' (2012: 16). She commented: '[a] recent trend which I dislike seems to be to castigate older people as having used up all the financial resources of the nation and beggared the younger generation'.[25] This echoes Pensioners Campaign UK's reaction to James Gallagher's BBC Online article 'Care costs could close libraries, say councils' (2012, n.p.). An anonymous Pensioners Campaign UK contributor asked:

> Why are we left in the wilderness with everyone trying to find a way to dispose of us? Maybe instead of complaining at the cost of care, the way those costs are arrived at should be reviewed.[26]

Such reactions exemplify the way old people can feel marginalised or blamed for the ills that are suffered by the whole community. The sense that this development may be related to the economic situation post-2008 is hinted at in these reactions. Jörg Tremmel for the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG), commenting on both ecological questions and intergenerational fiscal justice, notes that 'some nations are entering an era of intergenerational disputes which are reminiscent of historical class and industrial conflicts' (2011, n.p.). However, as Gullette analyses in *Agewise,* her 2011 critique of the ageist reaction to the global crash, the economic crisis has only exacerbated underlying intergenerational divisions. The FRFG 'Rationale' statement notes that '[i]n the last decade the number of books and articles referring to justice between generations [...] has soared' (*ibid*).[27] One example of this surge is a divisive *Sunday Times* article by Peter Conradi, which depicts figures showing the projected increase in pensioners per one hundred working people between the years 2003 and 2040, contained within a cartoon bomb (2003: 25). Evans's reaction exemplifies a keen sense of injustice over such coverage that is felt by some old people; point three of the Pensioners Campaign UK 2013 Manifesto states the wish '[t]o put a

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[25] In Passages member's questionnaire on 13 December 2012
[26] This comment was posted on the précised version of Gallagher's article on Pensioner Campaign UK's website (www.pensionercampaignuk).
[27] With offices in London and Stuttgart the FRFG is a research institute, advocacy think tank and publishes the journal *Intergenerational Justice Review*.

stop to emotive and discriminatory references used to describe the elderly and create resentment in the younger generations'.[28] The value that old people represent for the nation or more widely is studiously ignored by such discourse. Skeggs asserts:

> how people are valued (by different symbolic systems of inscription; by those who study them; by systems of exchange) is always a moral categorisation, an assertion of worth, that is not just economic. [...] The way value is marked on bodies and read, or a perspective taken, is central to the relationships that can be made between people and groups.
> (2004: 14)

So media representations of old people produce a problem of identification with the idea of the old subject that derives from a question about *worth,* one which is asked when any subject (of any age) initially encounters an old body or 'a perspective [is] taken' on that body. Robert Butler and Myrna Lewis define ageism as permitting 'the younger generations to see old people as different from themselves, thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings' (qtd. in Bytheway 1995: 30).[29] In response to *Life Acts* one audience member commented:

> I thought, mass media try to set conflict between the elderly and the young, the two ends of working power, and I sometimes even feel elderly people are the competitors of young people including me. But while I watched this play I felt the notion is wrong.[30]

This reaction to Passages' work indicates that theatre has the potential to shift political thinking on this theme, and could help audiences (of any age) identify with the old body – re-inscribed through performance as fully human with a complexity of experience – promoting pan-generational understanding.

In the scene entitled 'Where Do You Stand?' (18.07–26.28) Evans's remark about old people having supposedly beggared the young (mentioned above) is used as one of a series of controversial statements. In this scene, that reproduces a common workshop device, performers line up across the stage and are asked to show agreement or

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[28] www.pensionercampaignuk. For examples of negative values of age and ageing, see Bytheway and also Sally A. Gadow, who maintains that 'the dominant image of aging is weakness' (1986: 235).

[29] Robert N. Butler and Myrna I. Lewis, 1973. *Aging and Mental Health* (St Louis, MD: C.V. Mosby).

[30] Audience response questionnaire 18 April 2013.

disagreement with certain statements by moving forward or backwards in the space. Statements such as 'women shouldn't be happy with growing old', 'as we get older the age threshold for old people rises' and 'I'd like to be seen as ageless' have been generated from the performance-as-research process and performer questionnaires. The scene enables us to stage simultaneously the different shades of opinion held by individuals in the company about questions of cultural ageing and, notably, such polyphony could be said to confound the normative assumptions about this particular group of old people, in that – even whilst appearing homogeneous (old, white, middle class) – they are shown to be more heterogeneous than one might at first suppose. This was noted and processed by one audience member:

> The 'Where do you stand' questions and the broad range of responses they elicited suggested a tension with the idea of being in a group of people over a certain age, [...] in the sense that being of this age does not mean you have something in common with the other participants [...]. Of course the fact that this tension was being expressed was the result of people choosing to be part of the group and so the group's diversity [...] was its own validity and this tension was an inherent part of it. [...] '[O]ld age' e.g. the years 60 – 100 (?) are lumped together and considered homogenous whereas learning continues: e.g. [...] the act of joining Passages itself. [31]

This response is quoted at length as it reveals a spectator in the act of processing the polyphonic proxemics presented in this performance. This could evidence a new performance of age coming into being, or at least, the reconsideration, through performance, of old age as a homogenous category.

The 'Where do You Stand?' sequence invites members of the audience to register their response to particular statements. Some do this by standing in the appropriate part of the stage alongside the cast; some enter the subsequent discussion while still seated. Opinions are determined and points are addressed, leading to illuminating discussions, This was especially the case at the Roman Ridge Extra Care Centre, where intergenerational issues were a particular focus of debate. One audience member who,

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[31] Audience response questionnaire, 18 April 2013.

by chance, had caught the Winter Garden performance took the trouble to post the

following on Passages' Facebook page:

> the encouragement of crowd participation raised the interesting point that
> you can't have a valid opinion on a particular statement without being
> involved and exploring the wider issue. [...]. This raised a great point about
> [...] the potential benefit that age gives as a wider experience and
> opportunity to hold in tension the many contending viewpoints. [32]

This audience member seems to be concluding that this scene staged the possibility

that with age even one individual can accommodate many perspectives. Spatial and

verbal examination of these differing viewpoints staged a kaleidoscopic dialectics of age,

where many splinter debates sprung up momentarily and spontaneously in the space,

bringing into sharper focus the political thrust of the work.

Fig 6: A polyphonic proxemics:
Audience members and cast respond to statements on age and ageing.

That audience members are engaged in a sort of spatio-verbal discussion, their bodies

proximate to the aged performers on stage, and involved physically in the issues under

discussion, raises questions about visuality in performance that relate to the issues of

masking described above. The body in theatre, as in many life situations, is primarily

perceived visually; Rebecca Schneider has analysed the way the binary of body/mind,

which has informed western theatre since the Ancient Greeks, is maintained through

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[32] Posted on www.facebook.com/passagestheatregroup, 15 May 2013.

what she calls the 'blinding occularcentrism' of traditional theatre (2000: 34). Schneider argues that in its split from ritual forms, the realm of the visual became paramount in western theatre, with a consequent devaluing of the other senses and an exclusion of the audience as active participants in the theatrical event. The senses of, for example, touch, taste and smell, are especially denied to theatre makers as tools for conveying meaning and the tactile, olfactory and taste sensations that audience members actually experience, are devalued in the meaning-making and meaning-receiving economy of theatre. Placing audience members in close proximity, even direct contact with the cast of old people shifts from the visual towards tactile, spatial – even olfactory – meaning making. The tyranny of body image in western culture – especially harmful to the old subject who no longer holds the potential to conform to the cultural ideal of youthful beauty – is partially circumvented at this moment, at the same time as a spatial and verbal discourse rehearses a polyphonous politics of ageing. In addition, audience members are admitted to the place-of-representation, standing shoulder to shoulder with aged people whose representation and experience is under examination, feeling what it means to be located in the place at which, moments before, they were gazing.[33]

The visual inevitably continues to be a compelling force in cultural and theatrical practices. Furthermore, when seeking new performances of age, it remains vital to address and/or unsettle inscriptions of age and ageing that are necessarily perceived visually.[34] However, for a moment in this performance, for participating members of the audience, attention is drawn away from the ocular towards the spatial, tactile and aural. Temporarily interrupting the visual inscription of an old body is a powerful way

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[33] By using the terms 'gazing' and 'place-of-representation' I am playing on descriptions of the Ancient Greek theatre, where the audience is located in the *'theatron'* or 'gazing place'. I am with Boal who, in charting the 2,500 year political development of theatre, asserts that – in a reversal of the moment when the chorus were relegated from a place of independent action – now 'all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformations of society' (2000: x).
[34] In Chapter Five I propose that Allport's Contact Theory (1954) offers insights into the way intimate performance might disrupt the visual field, and offers a counter to the visuality that Peggy Phelan (along with Schneider) distrusts as the effective locus of dissident politics in performance.

to circumvent negative associations with the ageing subject and could obviate the pull towards age differentials, according old people, if only for this moment, full inclusion in normative western citizenship.[35]

Future-Value

The length and therefore the *value* of all our futures is always in doubt; it is as yet unperformed and unquantifiable. The young are, however, imagined – rightly or wrongly – to have more future-value than the old. I wish here to consider the marks of *negative* future-value that the old body carries and the potential challenge to this inscription in performance. *Life Acts* ends with performers in a line-up at the front of the stage stating their age; they then draw breath and take an uncompleted step into the unknown future. This act poses a question about the extent of that possible future: how much of it can you have left at eighty-four? This *imagined* limitation of one's future, directly proportional to the expansiveness of one's past, could be called 'negative future-value', and is one of the reasons that social status diminishes with age. This sense of value is predicated on potential productivity; in capitalist societies the ageing person becomes progressively excluded from prevailing models of the productive citizen. Featherstone and Wernick argue that:

> [c]apitalist industrialisation [...] led to the transformation of domestic production and consumption. It idealised youth [...] while fundamentally weakening the value of accumulated life experience, both in itself and as a marker of social status.
> (1995: 7)

How much more so now, in an age of instant information, has the lived past lost value in favour of the potentiality exemplified by productive youth? Following Skeggs's analysis of the marking of value on the body it can be seen that as a consequence of inhabiting an old body we are judged to have exponentially less future-value than more youthful and therefore more 'productive' citizens; our powers are regarded as

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[35] Chapter Five details a further use of proximity in the one-to-one performances that are part of *The Mirror Stage* performance. Here the use of contact to break prejudicial barriers is discussed further.

diminished and the fruitful time left to us is perceived as limited. By standing at the edge of the stage space, confronting the audience and stepping boldly towards an unperformed future, as they do at the end of *Life Acts* (40.28), Passages' performers potentially open a territory between themselves and their audience, symbolic of the unknown, *unquantifiable* future that is consistently opening up for all, young and old alike. It is possible that this territory could be perceived as a metaphorical and unifying 'future-space' between audience and performer, one that indicates the edge of all our experience; this might hold the potential to dislodge the negative future-value inscribed on the old body.

Life Acts also presents a more overt negotiation between future and value in the scene entitled 'John's Philosophical Question' (34.58–38.40), which directly challenges the assumption that youth has a greater future-value than age. Narrating the story of a heated discussion with his contemporaries who, during conversations on their weekly walks, used to dwell on the idea of death, John postulates that the young motorcyclist, who has just passed them, might – in a hypothetical, short-term future – fatally crash. He then poses the following question:

> At the moment he [the motorcyclist] passed us, which of us would have been nearest to the end of his life? Given that it was the motorcyclist, which of us could be considered the 'oldest'? [...] In other words, why should we measure age by the number of years we have lived? Why should we see age as being an absolute concept? If we see it as years, or time we have to live, it becomes both relative (some of us have longer than others) and unknowable. I of course realise that the older you get the probability of being nearer to the end of your life grows, but on an hour by hour, day by day, month by month basis the probability becomes more and more random. [36]

Interpreted through playful physical comedy and narrated by John while other performers embody The Walkers, The Motorcyclist and various figures such as Angels, Time, and Death (The Grim Reaper), the piece ends with a direct exhortation from the whole group to the audience, to consider that life happens in the present moment.

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[36] John Evan's text, the original version of which was included in his 3 December 2012 questionnaire response, was developed for inclusion in *Life Acts* early in 2013. Reproduced with permission.

Thus the notion of the future as quantifiable and as having any sort of value that is intrinsically linked to our subjectivity is challenged:

> Since I assume that we all do, or I think should, live our lives on such a basis, I feel that numerical age should be regarded as of marginal relevance and of less importance than how we live our lives NOW.[37]

Audience members responded thoughtfully to this piece, commenting as follows: 'The "quantification" of age [was] particularly interesting', another said: 'How we measure age and whether this is in terms of proximity to death, [was] v[ery] thought provoking'[38] It is clear from such comments that the performance goes some way to suggesting a re-evaluation of future with regards to age. In view of this, the performance could claim an efficacy for audience members who may now be able to conceive of their own value, *vis-à-vis* the future, in a different light.

Andrew Sparkes, who applies narrative analysis to his qualitative and autoethnographical research into sport, identifies a need to draw on and/or construct narrative models that provide the subject with the means to face difficulties or provide ways of conceptualising challenging experiences (1996: 488). Responding to Arthur Frank's notion of 'the wounded storyteller' (*ibid*: 487) and Mary Gergen's concept of the 'cultural repertoire of stories' (*ibid*) Sparkes asserts that:

> there is a constant need for identities to be reflexively created, re-created and sustained by the individual through flexible narratives of the self. Such flexibility [...] depends on the cultural repertoire of stories that are available for synthesis into personal stories and the access people have to this repertoire.
> (1996: 487–88)[39]

Drawing on J Shotter's chapter 'Becoming Someone: Identity and belonging', Sparkes notes that 'some people have greater ease of access to these narratives within a political economy of developmental opportunities,' (*ibid*: 488) that is, there may be a drought of useful 'narrative resources' available to some subjects. It could be argued that one of

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[37] *Ibid.*
[38] All audience response questionnaires, 18 April 2013.
[39] See Mary Gergen's 1994 'The Social Construction of Personal Histories: Gendered Lives in Popular Biographies' and Arthur W Frank's 1995 *The wounded Storyteller*.

theatre's most important cultural and political functions is to offer such 'narrative resources' and certainly by dramatising 'John's Philosophical Question', Passages gives both audience members and performers access to a fortifying narrative resource. One audience member seemed to have benefited in this way, commenting that 'looking at age as a number of years shouldn't be a countdown to death'.[40] This offer of a narrative model for confronting the universal fact of ageing, in a world that devalues the aged subject and resists ageing processes, might be a means by which Passages' work transforms the attitudes of participants, both cast and audience members to the negative future-value typically assigned to old age and the old body.

A New Performance of Age: Research Presentation/Performance Hybrid

At the 2012 British Society of Gerontology conference, Anne Basting, co-presenter in a symposium entitled 'Theatre, ageing and community memory: translating research into performance', responded to my request for advice about starting my practice-as-research group (which became Passages), by suggesting that old people should *not* be restricted to older dramatic forms but be formally innovative and engaged in contemporary theatre practices. Her words confirmed in me a sense that a new performance of age would entail innovation or the development of unexpected performance forms. The style of dramatic production *usually* associated with old people is exemplified by 'amateur dramatics': typically productions of musicals, classic plays or adaptations of well-known fiction. Passages member Frank Abel, an accomplished actor in amateur theatre, commented: '[a]nother notch added to my belt of experiences – never done improvised drama before!' Another company member, Clare McManus, an ex-professional performer and creative arts commissioner, replied to my question 'what was the best bit [of the performance]?' by saying '[n]o individual best bit, rather the form and format'.[41] These comments suggest that the form is to some degree surprising and as such might represent the possibility of a new

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[40] Audience response questionnaire, 18 April 2013.
[41] Reflective evaluations, written on 25 April 2013.

performance of age, confounding as it does audience expectations of old people's production. Indeed the most conventionally naturalistic sequence, entitled 'Ageism' – that interweaves three scenes, depicting incidents of ageism at different stages of life – is to my mind the least successful part of *Life Acts*.[42] It also attracted the least audience enthusiasm. This leads me to conclude that the postdramatic form of the more experimental scenes functions to reveal a more complex representation of age and the ageing subject than the conventional, naturalistic form.[43]

Life Acts is essentially a sharing of practice-as-research and in order to do this we developed a performance/research presentation hybrid in which we re-perform research practices used in the exploratory sessions. The 'Where do you Stand?' sequence is an example of this and also, early in the performance, the cast present their researcher-personas by directly addressing the audience, offering comments on the research, emphasising areas they wished we had explored (more), for example old people and sex; or areas we had covered but were not going to present, such as issues of isolation in old age.[44] The conventional theatricality of the pre-show – in which the cast open the performance by playing as children – is interrupted by these researcher-performers who each make an alienating, direct-address statement that metatheatrically exposes the research and development process by discussing content and drawing attention to our search for new performances of age and ageing. Presenting the cast as researcher-performers – a status granted to each by involvement in the practice-as-research process – elevates the performer to the position of age-expert, and stages the curiosity of the research process as continuous with this present performance, thereby countering the normative inscription of old people as obsolete, rigid or dependent.

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[42] This sequence was not included in the Winter Garden performance so is not evidenced in the 'Life Acts at the Winter Garden' video.
[43] This is also reflected in the findings of Chapter One and Chapter Two.
[44] Again this sequence was not included in the Winter Garden performance so is not evidenced in the 'Life Acts at the Winter Garden' video.

This presentation/performance hybrid – a new research-dramaturgy – might be best exemplified by the 'live feed' videoing during the 'Images of the Future' sequence.[45] Images and facilitation practices inspired by Augusto Boal's Image Theatre method, used in the exploratory sessions are reproduced onstage.[46] The filming by which I recorded research sessions is replicated in the performance, the crucial difference being that the video recording feeds directly to a projector, which projects the close camera work *live* onto the upstage wall. Three 'Images of the Future' are staged simultaneously. The first is an image depicting feelings about the future, performers severally conveying fear, curiosity, wilful ignorance or denial about what the future might bring.

Fig. 7: Reproduction of research practice in performance: on the left a still from the video taken during one research session, and on the right a photograph of performers as they were filmed during the performance.

The second image depicts the ageing body through the metaphor of sport, exploring the acceptance of inevitable physical changes. The third, set in a care home, imagines a negative vision of old age: isolation and dementia. As I train the camera on each

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[45] The 'Images of the Future' sequence was not included in the Winter Garden performance so is not evidenced in the 'Life Acts at the Winter Garden' video.
[46] See Boal. 2000, pp. 126 & 134–139.

person it triggers the animation of each performance, in which actors voice statements about each figure's feelings, or – in the case of the final image – with interactions communicating confusion or pain. The figures are filmed in close up; their facial expressions and reactions magnified by the projection. One audience member commented: 'I found the videoing very powerful as it literally got close up to people and

Fig. 8: Doubled seeing: projecting the close-up elevates the image of the old person to iconic status.

revealed more'. [47]   Some audience members commented that the technique was uncomfortable: '[t]he video performance was the most powerful for me. It felt quite uncomfortable and intrusive at times, but it was also the most moving bit'; words such as 'intrusive' 'emotive' and even 'horrific' were used about this sequence showing that it is dramatically compelling as well as dramaturgically surprising.[48]

The live feed technique, more commonly associated with technically experimental theatre makers such as Robert Lepage and Katie Mitchell, accords a credible gravitas to the performers, raising their magnified images to iconic status whilst maintaining the materiality of the body in space in a kind of doubled seeing.[49]   Enlarging the subject by projecting these close-ups achieves Cristofovici's objective of 'accomplished shape' and 'significant form' and also compelled what might be called a 'considered attending', as audiences also heard the words and exclamations of the performers.   These older performers, embodying constructions of their future selves – for example an old, confused musician in a care home – were able to elevate such aged subject types to a place of significance, not only through the double image of the elder in care, but through the sound of the older subject speaking of the ageing experience: 'I don't know if I'm in tune any more'.   This technique might hold the potential to counter both the normative invisibility and inaudibility of older age and could consequently be considered to be generating a new performance of age, one that might challenge preconceived notions of what it is to be and to perform 'old'.

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[47] Audience response questionnaire, 18 April 13.

[48] All quotes taken from audience response questionnaires, 18 April 2013.

[49] Katie Mitchell can be seen talking about multimedia techniques on both http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAij9r9RvF0 *and* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAij9r9RvF0&feature=endscreen Robert Lepage is probably the best known multimedia theatre maker, see *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage* by Aleksandar Sasa Dundjerovic. An introduction to Lepage's work can be seen on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs_TnUqx51w

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the first phase of Passages' work, explaining the theoretical foundation and early strategies adopted by the group to explore and stage the performance of age and ageing. It has detailed how uncovering hidden aspects of early and changing identity was undertaken in an attempt to effect a re-inscription of the old body with characteristics other than those associated with the normative image of ageing. I have explored, and sought to name, specific processes such as the polyphonic proxemics that enabled some members of the audience to experience an embedded, kaleidoscopic dialectics of age and ageing; and I have explained how this brought into focus the political thrust of the work. I have described new research/performance dramaturgies that might have enabled a new performance of age, or at least have effected a reconsideration of old age as a category. I have put forward the concept of 'future-value', problematising negative future value as a stigma borne by the old body and one which functions to 'other' old bodies in a system predicated on the notion of potentiality and productivity. I have worked towards a description of how this was and might be further explored through performance, and furthermore argued that Passages' work holds transformational potential by offering 'narrative resources' that might reinforce resistance in old people to the devaluing of our subjectivity based on notions of future-value. Throughout I have attempted to interweave the voices of audiences and the members of Passages Theatre Group with my own and those from the academy, in a multi-vocal examination of both the work and of the cultural, economic and political position of old people. This multivocal method will also be used in the following exegesis of Passages' 2014 performance, *A Blueprint For Ageing* (Chapter Four) and the 2015 performance *The Mirror Stage* (Chapter Five).

Chapter Four

A Blueprint for Ageing:

Exploring Metaphorical Constructions of the

Lifecourse[1]

> After tonight I don't think there are any stages.
> I have no futures, just lots and lots of presents.
> (Audience member's response, in performance, 11 June 2014)
>
>
> 'we have largely ignored the vast undeconstructed binary of youth and age'.
> (Elinor Fuchs, 2014: 69)

Introduction

This chapter addresses the interactive show *A Blueprint for Ageing,* which Passages presented in 2014 in two versions: a 'first draft' was shown on 24th and 25th April with a final performance on 11th June.[2] The piece explores the metaphors and schemes present in the cultural and academic landscape that prescribe ways to conceptualise ageing, and which consequently tend to fix understandings and expectations of the lifecourse and ageing processes. This performance focuses on the degree to which such mappings are borne out by the experiences and understanding of the performers and/or audience members, exploring ways in which challenge or outright dissent might be registered by the words of the cast and actions of the performance. It also attempts to formulate new metaphorical constructions or juxtapose current ones with alternative

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[1] https://youtu.be/ROZPYOAoHkI (all the time counts in this chapter refer to this link).

[2] I will be writing here about the June performance rather than the 'drafts' given earlier and so unfortunately certain cast members, who were replaced in the two months between showings due to unavailability, will not be specifically recognised. For instance Hilary Tailor-Firth replaced Liz Cashdan who had previously interposed her own self-penned, female-focused version of the end of the 'Seven Ages of Man' piece.

aesthetic propositions, in order to offer new ways of thinking about old age and the ageing process.

Throughout and subsequent to the making of *Blueprint* this practice-as-research has been concerned as much about engaging with contemporary practice and exploring such forms with old performers as it has been with attempting to challenge the normative conceptualisations and representations of old people. Notably this project has addressed popular presumptions about old people and what Weaver and Shaw call the 'cultural extinction' of old performers (qtd. in Hughes, 2012: 136), specifically *through* the chosen form of performance. *Blueprint* attempts to confound expectations that old people are restricted to specific cultural practices, and performance styles, which stem from a circumscribed sense of our cultural/historical position. The following exegesis engages with Raymond Williams's notions of 'emergent', 'established' and 'residual' cultural forms (1977: 121–127), in order to explore the relationship between the form and the content of the work. In addition, it charts the development and creation of the performance and details how formal choices cut against the association of old age with rigidity, adherence to traditional forms and a sense of cultural extinction.

An Autobiographical Interjection

With respect to the issue of cultural extinction, I offer here an instance where my encroaching obsolescence – or at least a moment when my sense of being 'out of touch' as a thinker and practitioner – became apparent to me. In my early forties I attended a seminar at the Central School of Speech and Drama, where I had begun my MA studies. This was then twenty-five years since my first undergraduate year at The University of Kent. At the opening of this seminar we had read a play-text, the name and details of which escape me now, and alongside our regular tutor an eminent academic from University of London Westfield College joined us. After reading the text aloud, as usual,

our tutor asked for initial responses. No one said anything. Seconds ticked by in that tense space after the first question and the moment when some brave spark decides to venture something. I was the brave spark. Having nothing in particular to say but just wanting to get the ball rolling I offered what I thought was an innocuous comment, something I might have said in my undergraduate days: 'It seems quite a universal story', I said. At this there was a palpable sense of shock, the guest academic, having said very little up to this point, began questioning me: 'Universal? Universal? What does that mean?' Taken aback, the only thing I had the presence of mind to say was, 'oh you don't like the word 'universal'?' I never got a clear explanation, in that humiliating seminar, about the problem of claiming universality for a text or other cultural product. After this it became important for me to discover what could have made the academic fly into such a rage, and why my comment about universality, a concept once so acceptable in the academy, was now taboo. Of course I found the answer in the cultural theory that I have subsequently read, some of which is cited in this thesis. Postcolonial, feminist, race, sexuality, disability and age studies all argue convincingly that as subject positions differ from each other either subtly or radically, there can be no universal subject position; universality is generally claimed for the discursive positions of those who head the structures of power at the time of speaking. Therefore, as there is no universal subject position, the notion that an artwork can represent a universal experience is, of course, untenable.

This story, apart from demonstrating my ignorance, illustrates my specific historical position, studying for my first degree between 1980 and 1983. Moreover it is particularly indicative of my field of study – theatre – where cultural and literary theory was not at that time *de rigueur*. Consequently I was out of touch with developments in cultural theory, both then and in the almost quarter of a century since my BA and MA studies. I have since devoted more than a decade to overcoming this sense of cultural obsolescence, particularly in respect to developments in theatre. With

the coming to prominence of groups such as Forced Entertainment and the Wooster Group through the 1980s and the emergence of many other experimental theatre makers in the 1990s, I had become increasingly aware that the ground had shifted from the territory I was familiar with when I first studied and directed plays at university. At this time I had encountered an almost exclusively literary theatre, the kind of theatre that Hans-Thies Lehmann, drawing on Brechtian theory, labels 'Drama' (2006: 29–45), that is 'the "making present" of speeches and deeds on stage through mimetic dramatic play' (*ibid*: 21). This denotes a theatre predicated on performers acting as if they were fictional or historical individuals, characters who exist within the bounds of a linear or semi-linear plotline, one most often created by a single playwright.

Drama, Performance and *A Blueprint for Ageing*

This experience of theatre studies matches precisely that of Philip Auslander who describes the degree programmes that he undertook in American universities between 1979 and 1983 as 'Theory Free Zones' (1997: 5). In the years that followed and on the wave of performance theory that incorporated, for example, 'semiotics, deconstruction, reader-response theory, feminist theory etc.' (*ibid*: 5), there was a shift towards an alternative conceptualisation of what theatre and performance could be.[3] This new paradigm is what Lehmann terms *Postdramatic Theatre*.[4] Postdramatic theatre, as outlined in Chapter Two, breaks with the dominance of literary narrative, self-contained characters and overarching plot, to incorporate multifarious, disconnected, multimedia elements of performance, in which the performers embody versions of themselves or, when fictitious characters are employed, they are viewed from a distanced perspective and do not inhabit a coherent dramatic universe. Lehmann and

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[3] Auslander identifies the incorporation of cultural theory into theatre studies as beginning in 1982 with Herbert Blau's publication *Take Up The Bodies: Theatre at the Vanishing Point*. He also sites Elinor Fuchs's engagement with deconstruction and postmodernism around 1983, and Sue Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* ([1988] 2008).

[4] The term 'Contemporary Theatre' was coined by P Szondi in *Theory of the Modern Drama,* (1987: 7) (cited in Lehman (2006: 16)). Lehmann defines 'the new theatre' as a distinct development, beyond what Szondi identifies as Aristotelian or Epic forms of drama.

Auslander, among others, identify that the shift away from the exclusivity of dramatic theatre was influenced particularly by the post-war avant-garde, conceptual art installations, performance art, and happenings. Developments in performance, as it moved away from drama, largely map onto the paradigm shift from structuralist to post-structuralist thinking in the later half of the twentieth century. Terrence Hawkes outlines the structuralist project in broad terms:

> The ultimate quarry of structuralist thinking will be the permanent structures into which individual human acts, perceptions, stances fit, and from which they derive their final nature.
> (1977: 18)

Dramatic form, particularly naturalism, acts as a framing structure that in many ways replicates the 'ultimate quarry' that Hawkes outlines. As seen in the discussions developed by Auslander and Lehmann, detailed above and in Chapter Two, the features of narrative (which represent events in the world) and the presence of characters (representations of individuals and their relationships in the world) are inherent to drama; thus in dramatic plays, people and relationships are subjected to a unifying, authorial structure which (if this were ever its project and sometimes specifically if it was), struggles to stand outside the social status quo and can inadvertently reproduce power structures even where it means to challenge them (see the analysis of *Lovesong* and other plays in Chapter One). Drama can fail, therefore, to shift normative ways of representing the actions and behaviour of beings in the world, especially with regard to stigmatised identity and/or bodily 'difference'. With respect to the representation of subjects, the project of narrative theatre is, according to Josette Féral, concerned with a similar quest for fixity and wholeness to that which Hawkes suggests:

> Thus, whenever an actor is expected to ingest the parts he plays so as to become one with them (here we might think of nineteenth-century theatre, [and] of naturalist theatre [...]), the stage asserts its oneness and its totality. It is, and it is one, and the actor, as a unitary subject, belongs to its wholeness.
> (1982: 176)

In *A Blueprint for Ageing* (the title ironically suggests an instructional or foundational map for the processes of living to old age) the 'wholeness' (or universality) of certain

framing structures are presented and debated, including the ways in which particular lives do actually adhere to such essentialised constructions. These include narratives, plans, schemes, images, maps and other representations, which employ metaphors such as the journey, the race, the calendar year and fixed or indicative developmental stages. These constructions, originally presented in dramatic, poetic, prose, and song form, are offered and then cut across by the actions of the performance, by dissenting comments from the cast, audio interviews and, on occasion, contributions from audience-participants. Postdramatic performance often connects with, makes reference to and/or involves audience members in the performance construction and we incorporate this aspect into *Blueprint*. Josephine Machon describes immersive theatre, a form predicated on the involvement of the audience, as to a significant extent 'outside of everyday rules and regulations [...]. All elements of theatre are in the mix establishing a multidimensional medium in which the participant is submerged, blurring spaces and roles' (2013: 27*)*. While it could not be said that *Blueprint* is fully immersive in the ways exemplified by the companies which Machon surveys (such as Punchdrunk), it does employ interactive episodes in concert with other fragmenting techniques such as audio-montage, projection, promenade, and interruption, and in that sense can be categorised as a postdramatic performance which uses immersive techniques in a 'lightly interactive' way, standing 'outside everyday rules and regulations' by using participation and workshop techniques. The workshop is, in Schechner's words, 'a way of playing around with reality, a means of examining behaviour by reordering, exaggerating, fragmenting, recombining and adumbrating it' (2003: 110); by combining interactive techniques with other elements (listed above) *Blueprint* aims to problematise foundational metaphors of age and ageing, and 'play around' with a sense of the veracity of given processes of ageing and notions of elder identity, both through the content and the form of the performance.

Emergent Forms, Residual Performers

In his seminal work *Marxism and Literature,* Raymond Williams proposes that in applying the study of 'the internal dynamic relations of an actual [historical] process' to an 'epochal analysis' of history, there are three elements that intersect, as cultures and societies move from one epoch to another (1977: 121–127). Williams calls these 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' practices and forms. The term 'dominant' describes the prevailing or accepted cultural practices and forms. 'Residual' forms, which are 'effectively formed in the past but [...] still active in the cultural process' (*ibid*: 122), have two functions within 'dominant' culture: firstly 'residuals' exist as an 'incorporated' force, such as the monarchy or organised religion, rooted in a past order, yet still playing a stabilising role in the 'dominant' culture. However, such forms can also function as an oppositional force to 'dominant' ways of thinking and doing; for example the ideal of 'service to others without reward' (*ibid*) is oppositional to the profit motive of 'dominant' capitalist practices. 'Residual' forms can provide a focus, against which the 'dominant' social values and institutions assert themselves but which might occupy a marginal location, from which 'residuals' can critique the 'dominant' paradigm.[5] Williams defines the term 'emergent' as a collection of elements that are 'alternative or oppositional' to the 'dominant' forces; these are wholly new practices or forms (some of which are incorporated into the 'dominant' through the production of 'facsimiles').[6]

Williams's cultural materialist assessment of the macro-paradigmatic shifts in cultural history across the centuries could also be applied to the ways in which we assess the

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[5] An example of such might be the Occupy London community which set up camp outside St Paul's Cathedral in London in 2012, supported by the Reverend Giles Frazer, Cannon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral at the time of the protests. This is an arm of the Occupy movement, which grew up as a protest against inequality at the time of the global crash of 2008, and uses principles of representation that participants believe originate in Quaker practices from centuries ago (see 'Protest by consensus: Laurie Penny on Madrid's Occupy' in *The New Statesman,* www.newstatesman.com).

[6] A pertinent example from the time of William's publication might have been Punk Rock, which was an oppositional 'emergent' form but which was quickly assimilated into dominant pop culture.

passage of the generations with respect to micro-cultural shifts. Productive adults of working age are considered the 'establishment', in Williams's terms the 'dominant', and, as we age into maturity, we increasingly set the prevailing styles and modes of expression; the attitudes and forms associated with youth could be described as 'emergent' and the old conversely associated with outmoded, possibly 'residual' perspectives and practices. These young-emergent and old-residual forms and practices are, as Williams argues, often oppositional or alternative to the dominant culture:

> [t]he fact of emergent cultural practice [...], together with the fact of actively residual practice is a necessary complication of the would-be dominant culture.
> (77: 126)

While Williams is making *structuralist* claims about the ways that cultures develop (and structuralist ways of thinking are under critical scrutiny in this chapter), his defence of cultural materialist analysis is illuminating with respect to the *Blueprint* project. Williams takes in the historical understanding of cultural products, arguing that the epistemological basis for such products is as much the subject for analysis as the individual works:

> Cultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, *within the actual means and conditions of their production*.
> (1981: 64–65, my emphasis)

Williams's analysis of the way forms and practices converge to create dominant values and institutions and then diverge at the end of a dominant epoch to produce dissent and an alternative paradigm is useful for identifying the forces at play in the *Blueprint* performance and the Passages research project as a whole. As Lehmann and Auslander argue, performance has emerged in opposition to *mimesis* within dramatic structure (particularly in antithesis to naturalism), and as such could be called an emergent form. In terms of theatre, old people – either as performers or audience members – are associated with old (residual) popular naturalistic forms such as 'drawing room drama' and – in terms of a superseded style – 'amateur dramatics', or with a residual cultural

position that leads to forms such as 'reminiscence theatre'. Williams's theory of the dynamics of historical, cultural process helps tease out the way in which *Blueprint* might impact on the sensibilities and understanding of audience members: Passages members are – having all been born over 60 years ago – both residual (in their generational and perceived cultural position) and emergent (in terms of their performance practice) and so in Williams's terms they occupy both of the marginal positions (residual *and* emergent) simultaneously. In view of the fact that Passages' performers are residual, in that they are old and that the work is emergent in that it is innovative – incorporating contemporary practice and participatory arts techniques – the work is alternative in both form and content, and therefore challenges the prevailing theatrical paradigm with respect to questions of age, ageing and the old body in performance. According to Williams the dominant will try to subsume, appropriate into itself and thus disarm emergent forms, and is often set in opposition to or has already incorporated residual elements. Passages' dual residual/emergent position offers a doubled possibility of opposition and resistance to incorporation into the dominant. The possibility that the work can resist such incorporation can only be tested over time, with the hoped-for development of future performances, but for the moment I argue that this unusual residual/emergent cultural positioning can challenge normative expectations of what elder theatre can be.[7]

Williams aligns cultural materialism with what he calls 'radical semiotics' (arguably the beginning of the structuralist/post-structuralist paradigm shift). He describes this as

> a much more open and active process which is continually taking examples apart, as a way of taking their s*ystems* apart. [...] [W]hether it is analysing literature or television or physical representation, it is looking not for the *academically explanatory system*, but for the *system as a mode of formation*, which as it becomes visible can be put into question or quite practically rejected.

[7] Since the final practice-as-research performance, *The Mirror Stage* in 2015 (detailed in Chapter Five), Passages has gone on to develop a new performance out of the 'Hands' piece from this show. This has played at two venues in Sheffield: Theatre Delicatessen (8 December 2016) and Art Works (22 June 2017). The group's practice remains experimental and participative.

(1981: 64, my emphasis)

Blueprint was engaged in exactly this project, both through its unexpected performance style and its examination of the structuring metaphors of age and ageing.

The Development of *A Blueprint For Ageing*

My research into ageing femininity in autobiographical performance explored in Chapter Two was underway alongside the practice detailed in this chapter, and, unsurprisingly, that wider research resonated with the practice-as-research. The practical research coalesced around questions of the representation of age and ageing in media, visual, literary and dramatic discourse, particularly with respect to the use of metaphor, developmental theory and narrative structures. It seemed that the performance forms chosen to explore these themes would, if broadly postdramatic, reflect the questioning of these structures both through the fact that postdramatic theatre stands against a reliance on narrative and that it exposes the subject matter of the performance to scrutiny through dissident action and discussion.

Initially however, the group had concentrated on exploring age-focused texts, exploring poems such as Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art' (1979), which opens with the line 'The art of losing isn't hard to master' (2008: 166) and in speaking of the experience of longevity, implies forgetfulness and loss. Some time was spent on a transliteration of the first act of *The Old Law,* subtitled *A New Way to Please You* (c.1618) a play attributed to Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, in which the fictitious state of Epire enacts the ageist/sexist decree that all men aged eighty and women aged sixty should be put to death.[8] This latter took up a few weeks of experimentation but in the end we set this aside as it took little account of our own experience and did not present potent images or ideas that could be taken further. Focusing on this text was also an attempt to investigate age-blind casting. As the year progressed however, I realised that such

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[8] The 1656 published edition cites Phillip Massinger as co-author however David J. Lake, in his 1975 book *The Canon of Thomas Middleton's Plays,* rates the contribution of Massinger as confined to the first half of the last act (p. 206-11).

casting, while a good idea in theory, actually requires a highly developed theatrical concept in order not to expose performers to the sort of criticism Michael Billington makes of James Earle Jones and Vanessa Redgrave in Mark Rylance's 2013, age-blind production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at London's Old Vic:

> You can't help wondering why Earl Jones's Benedick is a boon companion to the youthful Claudio or why Redgrave's Beatrice, however youthful in spirit, appears to be older than her uncle. [...] The ultimate impression is of a weird evening in which two great actors are left struggling to find their characters, and [...] the great and noble cause of age-blind casting suffers a decisive setback.
> (2013: n.p.)

Mangan has analysed the practice of age-blind casting in both this and Bristol Old Vic's 2010 production of O'Connor and Morris's *Juliet and Her Romeo* (mentioned in Chapter One). In his paper 'Much Ado about Ageing; Or "In which the Great and Noble Cause of Age-Blind Casting Suffers a Decisive Setback"' he argues that the implausibility of lines in the play referring to procreation and youth, coupled with the particular miscasting of Earle Jones as Benedict, reinforced ageist stereotypes rather than presenting disruptive performances of age.[9] Mangan's assessment of this mainstream production confirmed my own findings identifying the tenacity of age stereotypes and accompanying decline narratives in mainstream theatre (Chapter One).

In the continued pursuit of age-focused texts we looked at Vita Sackville West's 1931 novel *All Passion Spent* (a particularly decline-orientated title), in which Mr. Bucktrout, talking to the recently widowed eighty-eight-year-old Lady Slane, makes this assessment of the advantages of growing old:

> It's terrible to be twenty, Lady Slane. It is as bad as being faced with riding over the Grand National course. One knows one will almost certainly fall into the Brook of Competition, and break one's leg over the Hedge of Disappointment, and stumble over the Wire of Intrigue and quite certainly

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[9] For example Beatrice quips about a potential future husband: 'He that hath a/ Beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no/ Beard is less than a man: and he that is more than/A youth is not for me, and he that is less than a/ man, I am not for him. (*Much Ado About Nothing*, II i, 113–117) And Benedick remarks: but/ Doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat/ In his youth that he cannot endure in his age (*ibid.* II iii, 119–121). Mangan's paper was given on 11th April 2014 at the 8th International Conference on Cultural Gerontology, NUI Galway, Ireland.

come to grief over the Obstacle of Love. When one is old one can throw oneself down as a rider on the evening after the race and think, "Well I shall never have to ride that course again".
(2016: 53)

This excerpt gives further evidence of the way in which, in literary texts, other artistic products and in everyday life, metaphors are used to express – and therefore fix – conceptualisations of the lifecourse. Central to Mr. Bucktrout's comic assessment of life is the metaphor of the race; this led to questions about other metaphors that have appeared and influenced popular discourse on age and ageing and finally to what might be deemed the seminal *dramatic* text on age and ageing: 'The Seven Ages of Man' speech which appears in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (II. vii. l.137-166). The material exploring this text was presented in the second scene of *Blueprint*.

Metaphors such as 'life is a race' structure human understanding; metaphors are not confined to linguistic devices but can encompass visual or gestural signals, which construct thinking about emotions, complex and abstract concepts and experiences in an economical form. However, before I discuss this subject in more detail I will outline the structure and score of the *Blueprint* performance.

A Blueprint for Ageing: Structure and Score

Arrival (0.13–2.20)

The performance space is divided by four gauze backdrops (arranged around a central, square playing area) into three main sections connected by a 'corridor' down the length of the space. The audience/participants are welcomed into the reception 'antechamber'. Each cast member, dressed in a white lab coat, questions one or two members of the audience about what stage of life they think they have reached, and gives everyone a clip board and pen with which to engage in the central interactive process of the performance (explained below). Audience members are asked to leave a coat, bag or other token on the clothes rail, to be returned later. Clare McManus enters and asks the following question:

Is there a blueprint for ageing?
A map we're given
The day we're born
With signposts and way-markers
To tell when we've arrived
And where we're going?[10]

She invites the audience to 'see what our researchers have been finding out in Lab 1'. As they arrive in Lab 1 at the far end of the space some of the cast are writing on one of four OHP projectors.

Lab I (2.30 – 7.50)

The artifacts (a series of brightly illuminated OHPs) and the props and costumes (white lab coats and clipboards) frame the proceedings as part of a scientific

Fig. 9: Lab 1, the cast write lists of all identities they have ever had or been given and phases they have been through.

research project. I am a roaming presence as white-coated 'lead researcher', on the outskirts of the performance, observing events. The team of 'researchers' are writing lists of every stage they have ever been through, every 'identity' they have

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[10] Unless otherwise stated, I wrote all the linking text that was used in the performance.

been given or claimed. These lists are projected onto the rear wall. Other 'researchers' encourage the audience to write their own identity lists on the clipboards provided, indicating that this should be added to at convenient points throughout the performance. To understand how to complete this task audience members are encouraged to talk to those writing on the OHPs, putting the audience in the role of fellow researchers, investigating changing identity through time and, problematising the notion of fixed 'stages', through which people might universally pass as they age. After a few minutes an audio montage plays, in which members of the public, of various ages, answer questions about specific stages of life. At this point some cast members line up, facing the wall and 'identities' are projected onto their backs or above their heads, inscribing or
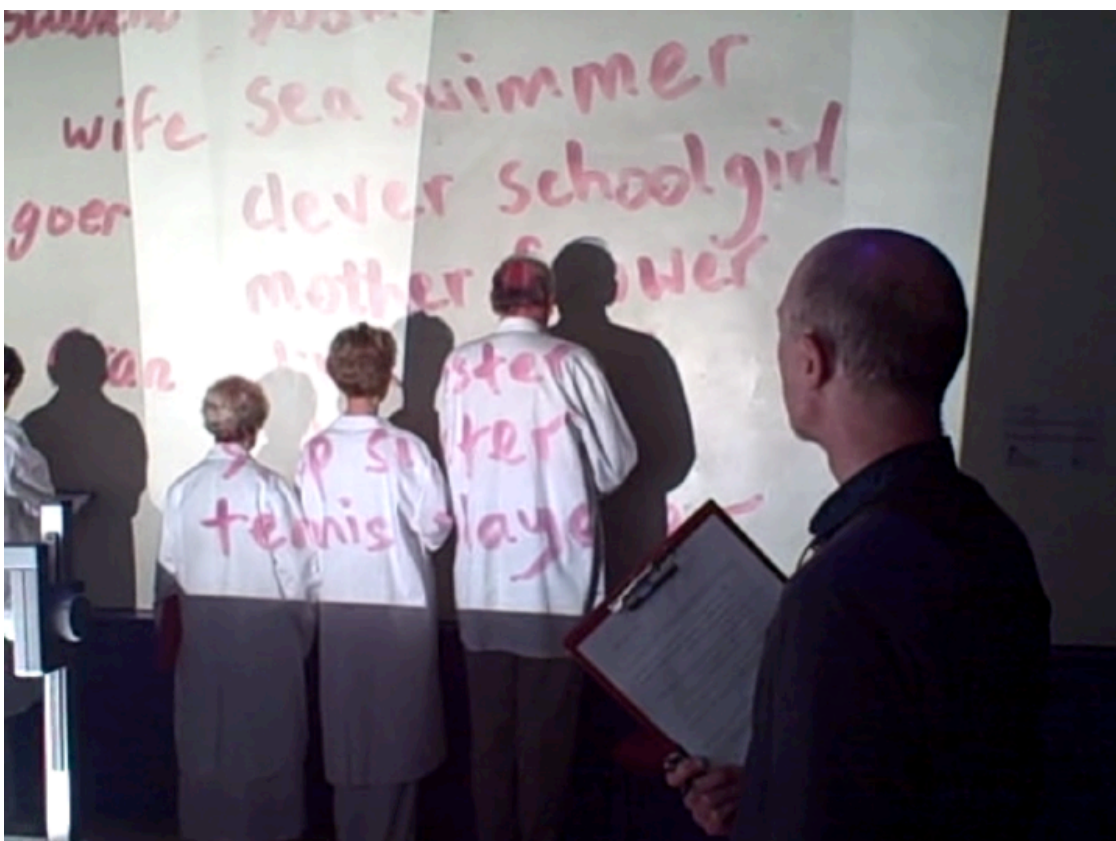

Fig. 10: Identities projected above and onto the backs of the researchers.

labeling these bodies as, for instance, 'tennis player' or Sunday school girl'. These, now partly anonymous, bodies play a solo game of 'gentleman's excuse me', performers replacing one another after a polite tap on the shoulder. At this moment each new body is anonymised as s/he turns to face the wall, inscribed with any number of identities. At this point the voices of people from outside the space are admitted through the audio montage, in which interviewees discuss ageing and the proposition that life is split up into different stages. These multimedia interjections, heard both here and later in the 'leaf-fall' section (see below), register lives outside the theatre, lives subject to the same questions about trajectories and conceptualisations of the ageing process. As the old bodies are now labeled, for example as 'sea swimmer' or 'CND supporter', vox pop audio comments are heard in which people of different ages discuss what stage of life they believe they have reached. As the audio montage plays out, the audience move into the central in-the-round playing area, in which both performers and audience sit together in the single row of seats that border the space.

Design

The central space is constructed as a white, semi-transparent box where projections can be seen on two sides. At points explanatory slides are projected, outlining for example Erik Eriksson's psychosocial development theory. Historical images of the lifecourse are also displayed, for example an early nineteenth century print depicting the 'Stages of Woman's life from infancy to the brink of the grave' (1835); in addition illustrative images are presented, such as the black and white close frame shot of a dying mother and her daughter projected during the sequence in which Liz Coatman reads her memoir of her mother's last months living with Alzheimer's disease. Alongside other considerations these illustrations admit visual representations of age and ageing into the performance, and the enclosing white box, onto which they are projected, attempts a spatial and material approximation of the conceptual framing of age in western discourse.

Fig. 11: The white box playing-space as seen from The Lab (rehearsal photo). The projection of a still life depicting the 'Seven Ages of Man' can be seen.

The Seven Ages of Man (25.36 – 30.35)

As soon as the audience and cast are seated, performer Jasmine Warwick stands and recites Shakespeare's seminal piece on age and ageing: Jaques's speech from As You Like It, which opens with 'All the world's a stage' (II. vii. l.137). One by one performers stand in response to each new 'act': 'The Infant', 'The Schoolboy', 'The Lover' etc. Yet, rather than directly enacting each of these stages, the gestural and verbal content of each player's response in some ways (though not all) contradicts the prescription of the speech. As she feels the performance diverging from the speech, Warwick's voice grows insistent about specifics, for example, she stresses the word 'unwillingly', momentarily checking the schoolgirl's progress to school; however, the schoolgirl just shrugs and carries on skipping. The speech progresses along these lines with each new 'part' diverging from the prescribed action. The women play

against type both in terms of embodiment (being distant or even opposite to that which is prescribed by the text) and in terms of their naughtiness, which counters the normative behaviour of old women. The flow of the recital is broken by more arguments with Warwick and even between performers embodying specific 'stages'; for instance, when 'The Soldier' is introduced, McManus – who has just played 'The Lover' – speaks out: 'That's rubbish! It's not honour you'll get in the cannon's mouth, it's death'. Simpson ('The Soldier') replies: 'not in the corporate world, females, have to have sharp elbows to get on.'[11] *McManus's dissent about the realistic expectations of soldiering and Simpson's insistence on the divergent context confirms that the cast are playing an alternative version of the piece, in which gender and historical position has shifted. Eventually, after Guiton's provocative question: 'where are all the women in this?' and after the whole scene has broken down, with Warwick insisting that she is 'only reading the script', Hilary Taylor Firth asks 'couldn't we think of it differently?' She then proposes an alternative, optimistic feminine-orientated vision of the 'sixth age', which at this point is under heated discussion.*

> [...]. The sixth age shifts:
> retired, well-dressed, shoes with moderate heels,
> contact lenses, rucksack on her back,
> her youthful tights, well saved, in fashion again,
> wide enough to fit her swelling calves.[12]

Jaques's devastatingly pessimistic assessment of the final age – 'Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything' (II.vii.166) is set against the last action of this scene, where the seventh player touches her toes and declares, on the collective sharp intake of breath: 'Don't worry, [...] I do this every morning, and I'm in my nineties'. After more alternative versification from Taylor Firth, Warwick asks 'Are you trying to update Shakespeare?' When Taylor Firth confirms this, Warwick throws up her arms and walks off in a huff.

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[11] In performance, 11 June 2014.
[12] This text is written by Liz Cashdan.

Under Western Eyes (30.38 – 36.06)

This sequence presents life as a binary of youth and age, one predicated on the Christian notion of 'fall' and of innocence corrupted. The exemplar for this section is Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes *(1911) in which Razumov, a hard working scholar, makes a terrible error of judgement that traps him into a life of subterfuge and ultimately prevents him from marrying the love of his life, the sister of the man he betrayed. Tricia Sweeney introduces this section thus:*

> Shakespeare had seven ages but how about just two,
> Youth and Age?
> A double-headed coin
> That flips
> At a point
> When you're not looking.

McManus takes up Conrad's tale. At the crux point in Razumov's story, where he betrays his friend, the narrative is suspended and four of the cast play out an interlude, in which they enact a silent movement sequence, depicting a pivotal transition in their lives. This brief interlude is inserted into Conrad's tale of innocence and experience as a meditation on the ways that the lives of the performers might have replicated or confounded this binary notion. Again a second 'transitions' sequence was played by a further four cast members in the hiatus where Razumov recognises the personal impact of his grave error. As the story concludes, McManus ponders the construction of life into two oppositional phases: guilt and innocence.

The Lab II (36.13 – 48.01 [audio only])

The audience return to the 'Lab' space. Here Simpson facilitates a discussion about appropriate lifestyle and clothing choices for women in different decades of their lives, which are promulgated by popular magazine and online constructions. The focus

Fig. 12 : Expectations for lifestyles of different ages.

shifts onto current discourse around age prescribed behaviour and dress, and highlights the white-ethnocentric, middle-class and gendered construction of ageing. A maximum age of readership (the seventies) is stipulated by one particular magazine and, in an online article, advising on appropriate styles of the 'Little Black Dress' for different ages from the twenties to the fifties (but not beyond), a low age and body weight is in evidence in the women modeling the chosen dresses (see Fig. 13). The way in which age figures in these articles and how it impacts on women's self image is discussed. This sequence ends with a cartoon from the fifties that constructs masculine ageing, in which the previously ambitious CEO has fallen precipitously from his stepped ascent to the boardroom and is finally depicted in retirement, under a palm tree, cocktail in hand, on a level with the redundant infant once again. This comic image ends this second 'Lab' sequence and everyone returns to the main playing space.

Fig. 13: The appropriate 'Little Black Dress' for different age groups (20s to 50s).

Erik Erikson and The Life Cycle Completed (48.34 – 1hr, 04.13)

This sequence presents Erik Erikson's proposed eight stages of psychosocial development. Drawn from observation and psychoanalytic theory Erikson proposes that key conflicts at each stage are either overcome or retained as complicating factors in the progress through life (1998).[13] Jen Creaghan, who studied Erikson when taking her first degree, facilitates this piece, in which the performers embody both the human subject and the conflicting forces at play at each stage. In each 'episode' one cast member tells a story from the relevant stage in their life, and two other members, seated diagonally opposite each other, interject with comments that express the conflicting forces at play within that state.

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[13] The chart that outlines the key conflicts and their proposed outcomes can be found in Erikson, 1998, *The Lifecycle Completed* (pp. 56–57), his discussion of these psychosocial stages then follows (pp. 58–82)

*The first stage is **'basic trust versus basic mistrust'** is illustrated by Sweeney's story of falling down the stairs when she was three years old. Thinking this had been a dream which then replayed in her imagination, her mother only told her about the fall when at the age of sixteen Sweeney was found to have a severe spinal problem. Sweeney reveals that this absence of information impacted on her sense of trust and that she traces a childhood lack of self-belief back to the falling event. This maps onto Erikson's notion of the infant conflict of trust and mistrust. Then Creaghan announces (as she does for all the subsequent stages) the proposed resolution of this stage: 'hope'.*

*The next stage **'autonomy versus shame or doubt'** is illustrated by Guiton's funny toilet story about proudly announcing to her parents' party guests that she had not done a 'number one' or a 'number two' but 'a number eight!' When this was greeted with laughter rather than the great approval she expected, a sense of shame and anger had come over her. Discussing the feelings of 'autonomy' (indignation) and 'shame' these opposing impulses, embodied by two cast members personify the dialogical interior voices of the developing child. Guiton reports that the story, which stayed with her throughout her life, could evidence a life-long unresolved issue.[14] Creaghan announces that the resolution of this stage is 'will'.*

*The third developmental conflict is **'initiative versus guilt'** and here Warwick embodies the struggle between initiative and guilt as she tells how she borrowed her brother's watch, without permission, to take to 'show-and-tell' at school. When she returned home the house was in uproar because of the missing watch but she denied any knowledge of it and made a show of helping to find it. During her 'search' she put it back on the bathroom sink and shouted that she had found it. Her mother, seeing through this lie, immediately took hold of her, shook and admonished her, not for*

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[14] The proposal that the struggle between autonomy and shame was an unresolved issue and therefore her second stage of development did not result in the development of 'will' might very well be a false supposition as Guiton is a very strong willed and autonomous person.

taking the watch but for lying about it. Erikson's resolution to this stage, as Creaghan states, is 'purpose'. [15]

*Creaghan is the central character in this example of the fourth stage: **'industry versus inferiority'**. The story, about never getting near to the top grade in maths in spite of being industrious, closely matches Erikson's proposed scheme. In this story Creaghan reports the foundationally negative influence of the teacher who displayed a discouraging attitude towards her mathematical ability. This, she now sees, is due to his poor teaching, however it manifests itself in her long-lasting sense of incompetence in this specific area. As Creaghan reports the resolution of this stage to be 'competence', her story attests to the impact of its lack of resolution on her sense of identity, resulting in a feeling of failure, in this foundational skill at least.*

*The fifth stage – equating to the teenage years – sets a sense of **'identity'** against a feeling of **'identity confusion'**. In this section Taylor-Firth tells the story of lying to her mother about going on a train; instead she hitchhiked to Cornwall with friends. The fact that her mother never found out the truth (particularly because her brother covered for her) has led to an unresolved conflict of identity. She was stuck, projecting the compliant persona her mother believed her to be, while harbouring the knowledge that she had gone specifically against her mother's wishes with regard to hitchhiking. Creaghan reports the resolution of this stage as 'fidelity', which it seems here has not been fully achieved.[16]*

*Creaghan announces that **'Intimacy versus isolation'** characterises the next stage of development, which, from the context of this story, is the point where people typically decide to marry. Elizabeth Coatman tells her story about being unable, in*

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[15] Ruth Carter originally told this story but in her absence Jasmine Warwick took on the storytelling role for this section.

[16] Taylor-Firth stepped in to deliver Liz Cashdan's story in her absence.

spite of being married, to ever give up her sense of single identity. Her partner complained that, when talking about their bedroom, she never said 'our room'; this was a problem in the marriage. Sweeney and McManus voice the conflicting impulses to unite with the loved one or preserve a sense of self by keeping distance from the 'other'. Erikson proposes here that the resolution is reportedly 'love', however, as the breakdown of her marriage attested, Coatman did not achieve this, unless it was to realise self-love.

*Erikson's seventh stage is **'generativity versus stagnation'** and here Simpson tells her story about an educational odyssey, which she began in early middle age in a quest to change her circumstances. Here Warwick and Taylor-Firth enact the conflicting voices who are warring over Simpson's future; Warwick takes the character of Simpson's enthusiastic tutor while Taylor-Firth voices the (internalised) monologue of her sceptical mother, insisting that 'there's more to life than getting a degree'. Having now attained a degree, Simpson seems to have achieved her project of self-determination and so fulfilled Erikson's prediction that the resolution of this stage is (self) 'care'. Creaghan questions Erikson's meaning and a discussion that includes audience members ensues about the accuracy of Erikson's scheme. Guiton intervenes with a proposition about the function of memory, arguing that we tend to remember things in the past only from the perspective of the present; memory may change depending on our current feelings. Sweeney counters, saying that only once she was older had she pieced together the facts and the importance of her infant fall. However, she stresses that this realisation happened without the aid of memory and so her interpretation is not specifically dependent upon her mood in the present. Creaghan announces that the exposition of Erikson's scheme has reached the stage of old age, saying, 'We don't need to rely on memory now; we're in the age of integrity versus disgust'. No story illustrates this stage as the cast take issue with the negativity of the proposal and specifically with the notion of 'disgust'. Elizabeth*

Seneveratne comments that the loose skin around her upper arms gives her granddaughter great delight as she calls them her grandmother's 'butterfly wings' (this in satisfying contrast to the misogynistic phrase 'bingo wings'). Coatman asks Creaghan 'So, what's the upshot of these two forces of integrity and disgust?' Creaghan answers 'Wisdom', adding – with a sense that Erikson was fallible in this – 'But as he aged he added a ninth stage: Gerotransendence: when we dance beyond the concerns of bodily life'.

'A Very Good Year' (1hr, 04.13 – 1hr, 08.44)

The cast begins a movement sequence, playing with Erikson's notion of moving beyond the body. This is performed to the nostalgic ballad 'A Very Good Year' (Ervin Drake, 1961), sung by Frank Sinatra with emotive orchestrations by Gordon Jenkins. The cast slowly remove their white coats, as if they are taking leave of their bodies and dance around the space with their coat/body in a reverential and curiously loving way. Throughout the rest of the song, of course still in their bodies, *each performer stands alone enacting their life's 'emotional journey'. This sequence was stimulated by Basting's notion of the performing body in temporal depth (see Chapter One), and the performers employ the early Stanislavskian technique of accessing emotion memory (1980: 163–192).[17] This performance is what might be termed a micro-enactment, as each performer is directed to think-through the significant moments in their life and to allow their facial expression and bodily attitude change only as little as is stimulated by the actual memory. In his way the complexity of the emotional journey as it registers in micro movements on the faces and in the bodies of the performers compels the audience's attentions. The room becomes suffused with an atmosphere of concentration as the song underscores the performers' meditation on*

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[17] This technique is also called 'affective memory', for a short explanation of Stanislavski's notion of this see Robert Gordon's 2006 *The Purpose of Playing: Modern Acting Theories in Perspective* (pp. 47–48).

Fig. 14: The 'Gerotranscen*dance*' in rehearsal

their emotional passage through life. The song uses the metaphor of life as a year and as something that should be wholeheartedly consumed. The singer is framed as a consumer of a number of varieties of 'girls' at various stages in life (at seventeen, at twenty-one, and at thirty-five) as if they are bottles of wine. Ultimately, looking back from 'the autumn' of his years, (at some unspecified age after thirty-five) he sees his whole life as a 'very good year' – a vintage wine – which he has drunk 'from the brim to the dregs'. The image of the group of old women (no longer 'girls') quietly, yet compellingly, reliving the specificity of their own emotional lives, contrasts with

Sinatra's voice singing about women as a substance to be consumed and depicting his own emotional life in simplistic terms as a digestively satisfying 'year'.

Geographical Life Journeys (1hr, 08.56 – 1hr, 18.33)

The women slowly return to their seats among the audience members. The mood abruptly changes to one of comic energy. Two cast members spring up and call out the names of various destinations, moving to different points in the space as they do so and adding details about why they moved there, naming the place and giving details of their feelings or experiences when they got there. It becomes clear that this sequence presents a spatial and audible précis of the life of these performers, who are enacting the metaphor of life as a journey in a quite literal sense on a stage, which serves as an expanding or contracting map. In addition, two 'reporters' follow each performer and at the end of the journey each asks a question about one of the destinations of their assigned performer: for example about decisions to go to specific places or about the significant life details revealed. Eventually Coatman asks if there are any audience volunteers who would like to perform their 'Geographical Journey'. Two 'performers' and two 'reporters' are chosen from the audience volunteers and the sequence is played again. As this ends Elizabeth Seneveratne asks:

> How do we really age?
> Idiosyncratic? Erratic?
> Childlike forever
> Wisdom at the beginning
> Innocence in the middle
> Tantrums at the end?

Guiton joins, proposing alternatives to the prescriptions previously explored:

> Can we progress backwards?
> Or stay in the same space
> Gathering?
> Developing sideways
> Revisiting
> Meandering?

Leaf Fall of Identities (1hr, 19.48 – 1hr, 30.56)

Most of the cast leave the space, all apart from Seneveratne, Creaghan and Guiton who, as the second audio-montage plays, begin to lay down small white pieces of paper, a 'Hansel and Gretel' trail that might help them find their way back out of the woods. On each piece of paper is written a word or phrase denoting a specific label, identity or phase of life. Slowly, as the last cast member leaves the space, similar pieces of white paper begin to flutter down from the ceiling. These reproduce individual entries on each cast member's list of 'identities'. The audience members can read these short phrases or words and as these inscribed papers mingle with each other, the recorded vox pop voices discuss varying opinions on the order of the stages of life, showing that there are differing views about what these stages are, how long they last, and even if they exist at all.

Creaghan returns to the littered stage. She sweeps up the papers, comes to a stop and recites an excerpt from her list: 'Baby Girl, Brown-Eyed Girl, Girl with Pony-Tail, Tomboy, Bossy Boots, Grammar School Girl'. Once she completes this short list she continues brushing and is joined by a second performer who eventually stops. Obeying the rules of the game Creaghan stops, and the new performer recites from her list, once she finishes, the two performers begin brushing again, to be joined by a third. Following the same pattern eventually all the cast are participating in this game of stopping, speaking their 'identities' and sweeping. Once the whole cast are present Sweeney asks the audience if they might join in, using the list they have been compiling throughout the performance. After some solo speaking, Sweeney instructs all the audience to read out their identities simultaneously, starting from the earliest and vocally projecting any that they particularly wish to be heard. The piece ends as everyone finishes their list and returns to their seat.

A Daughter's Memoir (1hr, 31.03 – 1hr, 36.30)

Coatman (pen name Liz Arden) reads from her memoir about the difficult last months of her mother's life, living and dying with Alzheimer's disease. This account of an everyday experience of dementia seems at first to confirm a decline narrative of ageing, however the mother takes control of the means of her own death by refusing food and removing her feeding tube. In one description she is described by Coatman as 'gazing longingly for two hours at a small glass of orange juice sitting on a tray in front of her' (Arden, 1996: 58). The story shows frailty reaching for agency, even through what may be perceived as the 'fog that clouded her brain' (ibid.). This metaphor of the 'fog' of Alzheimer's disease is challenged implicitly in a similar way to other metaphors associated with old age and ageing examined in this performance, as I argue below. This account was prefaced with the opening verse of the delicate folk ballad 'Rose Hip November', sung by Vashti Bunyan, which evokes scenes of approaching winter yet also implies that, by catching one falling leaf, 'fortune will surround you evermore'.

<u>Future Identities</u> (1hr, 36.49 – 1hr, 54.12)

Simpson asks:

> Is there really
> A blueprint for ageing?
> A tracing off
> Some other life
> That binds your mind
> To tread another's path.

Each performer stands and shares a short list of their projected future identities. The rail of coats and other items is wheeled in and the cast take it in turns to identify the owner of each item and ask them about their future identities. Each audience member leaves the performance space, and watches the rest of the cast and audience from behind the gauze in the 'welcoming' space. As the last audience member emerges the whole audience are thanked, signaling the end of the piece.

Examining Metaphors

In *The Oxford Book of Aging,* Thomas Cole and Mary Winkler contend that there are 'two primal metaphors that all cultures use to craft meaning and order from the chaotic events of human lifetime: the stages of life and the journey of life' and they comment on 'the remarkable historical continuity of these two overarching metaphors' (1994:13). In their important work *Metaphors We Live By* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson examine the function of metaphor in prescribing human understanding:

> Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.
> (1980: 3)

Lakoff and Johnson go on to argue that '[t]he most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture' (*ibid*: 22). Age in western culture, as this thesis has argued, is generally associated with negative concepts, such as rigidity, resistance to change, being 'over the hill', in decline, a 'bed blocker', unproductive, burdensome, narrow-minded, ossified and/or on the brink of death.[18] This negative view of old people has become more acute since the 2008 economic crisis as Gullette has argued (2011), consequently, the imperative to expose to examination the concepts that construct our perceptions of old age has become more urgent in recent years. Consistent with and in addition to Cole and Winkler's assertions, the structuring metaphors that were presented through the *Blueprint* performance variously conceptualised life as:

- A journey, in which the subject travels up to a peak of adult power and then slips over the hill (out of sight?) into declining age. This visualisation of the 'life is a journey' metaphor is shown most clearly by the projections in *Blueprint* (mentioned above).

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[18] See Gullette, 2004.

- A series of stages, as in 'The Seven Ages of Man' sequence or Erikson's developmental propositions. This concept is also discussed in the *vox pop* audio montage.

- A year, made up of four seasons, in which a melancholy autumn, followed by a barren winter, represent the third and fourth ages of life (see Gilleard & Higgs, 2011), and incorporate the bleak midwinter of death. *Blueprint* presents this in the form of Sinatra's recording of 'A Very Good Year', which accompanies the 'gerotranscen*dance*' movement sequence.

- A binary structure, dividing youth from age. This construct, in which the first part seems to be surprisingly short and the second part associated with regret and longing for return to a prelapsarian youth, is exemplified by Razumov's life in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. Here a youthful period of 'innocence' is followed by a state of 'experience'. This binary is partially reflected in the movement sequences, interludes in Conrad's narrative, however, the emphasis in these sequences is on the fulcrum between pre and post 'lapse' and when these took place in life is left indeterminate.

The performance also examines the tendency of popular discourse to see old age in terms of the very present challenges of dementia (Liz Coatman's memoir) and of magazine editors to prescribe specific types of wardrobe, attitudes and behaviour for the advancing decades (the Lab II section including the 'Little Black Dress' discussion). These ways of perceiving age and ageing are secondary products of the metaphorical constructions of age and the ageing process listed above, especially the 'over the hill' and 'stages of life' metaphors.

Ageing is what Lakoff and Johnson define as a '*basic domain of experience*', one of a group of

> structured wholes within recurrent human experiences', which is organized by language as a '*experiential gestalt*' the type of experience which, as a consequence of such organising language, will 'seem to us to be *natural kinds of experience*.

(1980: 117, emphasis in the original)

Lakoff and Johnson elaborate: 'Such gestalts [...] represent coherent organizations of our experiences in terms of natural dimensions (parts, stages, causes, etc.)' (*Ibid.*). The types of metaphors that structure thinking about ageing and being old are internalised as subjects come to consciousness, so much so that a metaphor such as 'over the hill' sanctions the disappearance of old people from the visual landscape so that it becomes 'natural' not to see images of old people, or actual old people, in the public sphere, or if we do, to see ones that are consistent with the controlling metaphor. Haim Hazan, writing on the construction of old age, argues that

> [t]he behaviour of older people and their attitudes towards themselves are shaped and reinforced by society's prevailing images of them. By adopting these images, the elderly in turn confirm and strengthen them.
> (1994: 33)

Consequently there is a circular process at play in which images are absent from the public sphere, or are present only as negative representations resulting from (among other constructions) the controlling metaphor 'Life is an up, over and then *down* the hill journey'. These notions are reinforced by the playing out of such assumptions by old people who have internalised prevalent metaphors of old age. Passages performers' presence on stage directly challenge this supposition.

The proposition that life travels through a series of 'stages', as if it were a play, presumably authored by a controlling power, is another compelling idea. The *vox pop* audio-montage shows that life is perceived by some as split into various stages, which some interviewees attempt to name. However, the stages named in the audio interviews are idiosyncratic; the categories that ordinarily appear in the constructing metaphor represented by, for instance Shakespeare's scheme, are sometimes not present at all. For example, one female interviewee sees her 'childhood and teenage years' up to her 'family years', as one stage, insisting that school and teenage years are one integral stage; bringing up her family is the next stage. For some, stages are reordered or interrupted: one young man sees his 'adulthood' as particularly short, or

even postponed by 'parenthood', intimating that 'adulthood' would resume at some unspecified time in the future once his children rely less upon him. One interviewee insists that adolescence lasts 'a lot longer than we might imagine', and another feels compelled, approaching age thirty, to enter a stage of adulthood she is not ready for. One interviewee, (evidencing the multiple ways that age can be assessed) makes the distinction between emotional and physical ageing, pronouncing himself emotionally immature, due to his mental health problems, but physically aged, because of disturbed sleep patterns and the effects of medication, which make his body seem older than his chronological age. Judging by comments about the 'stages of age' this small selection of individuals show that although the metaphor 'life is a play with a series of acts (or stages)' does construct their perception of the ageing process this is incompletely applied. Lakoff and Johnson assert that '[t]he meaning a metaphor will have [...] will be partly culturally determined and partly tied to [...] past experiences' (1980: 142); it seems that for the speakers in the audio montage the metaphor is modified by personal experience, such as having children early, or finding that married life is markedly different from carefree life before. This implies that metaphors loosen their hold on our conceptual landscape (to mix a metaphor), if other factors such as modifying life experiences are at play. This might include experiences at the theatre.

Vern Bengston, Glen Elder and Norella Putney argue that we are now living less structured lives and consequently, 'within pluralistic contemporary societies, lifecourse trajectories and transitions display considerable variability' (2012: 9). Such varied trajectories are now affected by, for instance, the rise of opportunities for women and other groups, the deinstitutionalisation of many life experiences, for example, radical shifts in Church attendance and employment structures, and also by the proliferation of new technologies. However as Bengston *et al.* also explain, the institutional structuring of lives still, to a large extent, 'define[s] both the normative pathways of social roles including key transitions and the psychological behavioural and health related

trajectories of persons as they move through them' *(ibid)*. Given this societal tension and the understanding that prevailing metaphorical constructions of the lifecourse hold up a generally negative image of ageing, *Blueprint* offers more flexible metaphors of ageing and being old, ones that acknowledge the multifaceted, material, relational and contingent nature of subjectivity across the lifespan. Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge the role of the arts in forging new 'metaphors that are imaginative and creative. Such metaphors are capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience' *(ibid*: 139). As the *Blueprint* audience became aware of (and even involved in) the discussion about the ways discourse on ageing is constructed through metaphor, one member was stimulated to adapt the prevailing 'natural' constructions in order to express a now altered perception of ageing, writing that '[t]he idea that came across most strongly to me was that "ageing" should be thought of as a stage in living, not a stage in dying.[19] *Blueprint* debates the veracity or universality of metaphorical structures such as those expounded by 'The Seven Ages Of Man' or Erikson's psychosocial developmental scheme. It also offers adaptations of – or in the case of the 'leaf-fall of identities' a replacement for – such constructions by creating different metaphorical propositions or bringing disparate images and actions into conversation with particular conceptualisations of age and ageing, as I will show.

'A Very Good Year'

The attitude to gender that is expressed in the 1961 song is obviously outmoded; 'girls' are described *en masse*, including fixed sub-categories such as 'blue-blooded girls'. This attitude would not go unquestioned today. However, the terms in which the song speaks about age and ageing does not challenge current constructions of the ageing process or being old; the singer in Drake's song is convinced that in the 'autumn of [his] years' he has drunk life to 'the dregs' and appears now a nostalgic, non-sexual being, only able to engage with his sexuality through the act of reminiscence. If similar

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[19] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014.

questions were asked about the representation of old age in this song as might currently be asked about that of gender, then offence might be taken on both counts. As it is, the song only counters the currently accepted norms of gender representation, mainly in the way it constructs the groups of 'girls' who populate the conquest-filled 'summer' of the singer's life. Commentators on cultural ageing such as Friedan assert that the sexuality of old people is still taboo in western culture and that the voices of old people talking about having sex, or even the risk of bringing to mind the image of old people copulating, must be avoided at all costs:

> *Our denial of the personhood of age* – and its very definition as "problem"
> – ensures the virtual blackout of people over fifty as sexual beings,
> especially women.
> (1993: 259, emphasis in the original)

In the action that accompanies this song the women disrobe, taking off their lab coats ostensibly obeying Erikson's injunction to dance beyond the concerns of bodily life, performing a 'gerotranscen*dance*' (1997: 127). As they do so the nostalgic song, which euphemistically celebrates a fully engaged youthful sexuality forms an accompaniment to the vision of the old female bodies, who dance with their white coats and eventually stand, almost motionless, still very much *embodied*, enacting a micro-performance of their hidden, desiring lives. This action, described as it is here, seems to risk reinforcing the prescription of the asexuality of old women by having the bodies stand, seemingly motionless, but the intensity of these women's micro-performances, which cannot be captured in any form, hints at secret lives of desire, loss and love. The juxtaposition of these performance elements brings the presence of old women into focus in a sensual and immediate way. One audience member remarked: 'some superb poetry and actions by the group. Movement and moments of stillness'. Though no

specific sense of what is being played out is noted, this comment indicates that the intensity in the 'moments of stillness' are compelling.[20]

<u>'Geographical' Journeys</u>

Blueprint modifies the 'life as a journey' metaphor by using the stage as a flexible map, simultaneously tracing the multifarious 'geographical journeys' of two cast members, juxtaposing these two lives spatially and historically so that they can reflect each other in illuminating ways. One audience member commented:

> I think the life stories/journeys showed women who had lots of experience but this didn't always make them more confident about themselves – some were positive others not as much.[21]

Another commented on her life-partner and their respective journeys:

> The Geographical journey of life. I have lived in several different locations on my journey, whereas my husband has lived in only one. Do we always make the most of opportunities?[22]

This part of the performance not only shows the lives of the performers in Basting's sense of 'temporal depth', but the entertaining, energetic and comic style of the performance contrasts with the previously slow and sensuous gerotranscen*dance* to 'A Very Good Year'. One audience member enjoyed that 'things came alive when participants whizzed around the stage in their life travels', showing that this section reveals the old performers as vital and positively engaged in their journey.[23] Another commented:

> When the performers played out the places they had lived in I realised that places = times in my life but these could all be arranged spatially, all rich resources, not chronologically. I am not a story, lost happiness, remembered failure, inevitable decline.[24]

On reflection, this scene omits a sense of future aspiration for wherever else life might take the performers. As the journeys come to a halt in the present day the performance

[20] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014. As there was no specific 'poetry' recital (unless you consider the alternative version of the last parts of The Seven Ages of Man speech as poetry), I take the word to mean action with a poetic impact or sensibility.
[21] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014.
[22] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014.
[23] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014.
[24] Audience response received as an email attachment, 13 June 14.

risks reinforcing the notion that old age is a sedentary, static experience after the excitement of movement experienced in younger days. However, the information given that Seneveratne's journey came to an 'end' only four years ago when she moved to Sheffield from Plymouth goes some way to mitigate this possible interpretation. At the end of *Blueprint* the action of one-by-one giving back the token (coat, bag or scarf) that was previously left by audience members, and asking each what their future stages might be, is also a fundamental acknowledgement that people of all ages live in *expectation of* a future, however long that may be. One audience member responded to being asked 'what [...] challenged your ideas about ageing' by writing 'it's still possible to have dreams and to get involved in new ventures'; this remark implies that metaphors such as 'she's over the hill', were implicitly challenged by the performance.[25]

The Leaf-Fall of Identities

Lakoff and Johnson argue that

> [m]etaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect – it involves all the natural dimensions of our experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape, texture, sound, etc. [...] Artworks provide new ways of structuring our experience in terms of these natural dimensions. Works of art provide new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences.
> (1980: 235)

One of the most visually distinctive sections of the performance is the trail of paper pieces, each inscribed with an identity or stage of the performer's life, followed by a delicate fall of similar pieces of paper from above. Over this scene the audio-montage plays, in which interviewees discuss their idiosyncratic notions of the specific stages of life: for example one woman's voice could be heard saying 'there's your school plus teenage years, then there's your family years and then there's your retirement years.' This aesthetically compelling combination of sound and action reinforces what Bengston *et al.* note about the 'variability' of contemporary lives (see above). The paper

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[25] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014.

pieces, denoting a multitudinous intersection of identities, roles, labels and 'stages', fall to the ground and mingle across the stage, providing a visual representation of the myriad and relational nature of such positions. This presents a metaphorical proposition of age as a layering of identities, which fall like leaves in the autumn to become humus and to fuel the fecundity of following seasons. This echoes the sort of layering that Basting notes in the embodiment of age in Ohno's performance *Water Lilies*, discussed in Chapter One and reflects Crenshaw's insight into the intersectionality of personal identity in the social sphere, explored in Chapter Two. Alternatively, this action could propose an archaeology of interpersonal, layered identity; as Basting says,

> a performative model of aging carves out a way to speak of both youth and
>
> the aged [who] exist relationally, both generationally and within their own
>
> bodies.
>
> (1998: 146)

The tokens are swept centre-stage and as the sweeping action starts performers voice short extracts from their lists in which normative choices such as Taylor Firth's 'teacher, mother (twice) 'grandmother now' or Guiton's 'student, lover, wife, divorcee, wife, mother' sit alongside the idiosyncratic or historically located. For example, Coatman concentrates on her educational and artistic identities: 'Philosophy Student, Girlfriend, Waitress, Graduate Student, Trainee Teacher, English Teacher, Play Producer, RSC Groupie', while McManus focuses on her historically situated, membership of the 'baby boomer generation' by announcing herself as 'Dope Smoker, Acid Dropper, Hippy Chick, Biba Shopper, Stones in the Park Goer'.[26] One audience member remarked:

> The sweeping up scene - made me think of the roles we had and the roles we
> now occupy. Especially around chosen/unchosen roles. I chose to be a
> mother. I did not choose to be a mother-in-law.[27]

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[26] In performance, 11 June 2014.
[27] In performance, 11 June 2014.

This action and image, which, in Lakoff and Johnson's terms, inhabits 'the natural dimension of experience', has the potential to institute 'new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences' (1980: 235). It forms a visual and spatial representation of the proliferation and relational nature of identity in time, and in one audience member's eyes is 'a reminder that we are always a mixture of everything we've ever been'.[28] It restructures understanding from the notion that our lifecourse is only a single trajectory (represented by either a journey or a fixed series of stages) into an understanding that collectively our lives are pathways that will intertwine, comingle and even collide with those of others. One audience member observed:

> The scattering and fluttering of the pieces of paper representing identities; when they started to fall it was very powerful and then the sweeping up into the middle altogether – we are not separate in our needs.[29]

Our identities are always already constructed in inter-relational terms throughout our lives, so that while ageing may bring particular identities into focus it does not entirely obscure others. This of course supplements and modifies the common metaphors of ageing rather than eliminating them. Yet as such it may still be said to provide 'a new experiential gestalt'.

The audience are involved in this central aesthetic, intellectual and interactive process throughout the *Blueprint* performance, beginning in the Lab I section, in which everyone is encouraged to construct their own chronological list of identities. Towards the end of the performance when audience members are invited to participate through their individual lists, the collective text, voiced person-by-person and subsequently as a whole group, on the performance in question, included the following 'identities':

    Punk
    Rebel
    War Baby
    First to go to grammar school or university in my family
    Cyclist
    Queen Anemone and Friend of Joe Cocker
    Conformist

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[28] Audience response questionnaire, 11 June 2014.
[29] In performance, 11 June 2014.

Non-conformist
Sixth Child
Shrink to my Mum
Musician
Socialist
Traveller
Miss Hot Pants
Singer
Tomboy
Ukulele Player
Feminist
Lover
Question Asker
Swot
Writer
Thinker
Dreamer
Adventurer[30]

Tim Etchells describes the fragmentary power of lists in performance as '[l]anguage, jumping you from one story, one world, one discourse to another' (1999: 100). Each of these epithets, spoken by audience-participants, conjures up a larger body of experience for each individual – a different era, another world – which, taken together, stands against such binary oppositions as Erikson's opposing psychosocial forces (within each developmental stage) and the reductive 'universal' proposals which would have life split into age-decades or consecutive 'acts'. This fragmentary approach of committing each life to a series of single words and phrases (which incorporated both the idiosyncratic and the normative) allows a multi-vocal cross-referencing when finally and collectively the performance gives way to a cacophony of voices. The collision of labels such as 'Student', 'Mother', 'Wife', with those such as 'Miss Hot Pants', 'Dreamer' or 'Shrink to my Mum' confirms what Bengson *et al.* observe about the continuing 'institutional structuring of lives' (see above) but also that metaphors are a flexible way of conceptualising the world and, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, are modified by the life experience of each individual.

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[30] A selection of 'identities' spoken by the audience-participants and the cast in performance, 11 June 2014.

This new aesthetic-metaphorical construction of the 'leaf-fall of identities', and the interactive process which grew from it within the performance, made one audience member appreciate

> the challenge to write down the various roles we had played in the earlier part of our lives – baby, sister, classmate etc. This provided a platform from which to consider ageing as a pathway of a functioning adult instead of just a deterioration process. In this "hope" appeared like a flash – it is not going under, it is living in more minor roles but emphasis on living.

The respondent's report of '"hope" appear[ing] like a flash' indicates that in *Blueprint,* the interactive arts practice it employs and this new aesthetic construction has the power to shift feeling and understanding. However, it also illuminates the realistic limits of such work. On the one hand this respondent has been stimulated to rethink his or her previously negative attitude to age as 'going under', and refigure the ageing process as 'the pathway of a functioning adult', which seems to level out the metaphorical topography that proposes the rising trajectory of youth and the falling experience of age. [31] Yet at the same time the metaphor of 'life as a series of stages, acts or roles' continues to function and prevails in the respondent's diminutive notion of the 'minor roles' in which we continue to function. However, the 'emphasis on living' comment does show that the interactive process and this new visual/performative metaphor, which might be summed up as either 'life is a pathway that intermingles with others' or 'life is a leaf-fall of relational identities', has had an agentive effect on this respondent.

Continuing the metaphor of multitudinous fragmentary and refracting identities, the performance ends with each individual being asked to look towards the future, to new possibilities. In exchange for their belongings, which have been kept on the clothes rail, audience members are asked to name their future identities. Replies during the performance in question included such bold ambitions as being Secretary of State for

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[31] The construction 'going under' is what Lakoff and Johnson would call a 'orientational metaphor' (1980: 14–21) which corresponds to the 'physical and cultural experience' (*ibid*: 14) of 'health and life are up; sickness and death are down' (*ibid*: 15, capitalised in the original).

Education, but also salutary statements such as 'I must realistically expect to be lonely'. Other participants variously thought they had 'so many' future identities or evoked an investigative ambition saying they wanted to 'keep asking questions and maybe answer some'. Others demonstrated creative or family ambitions such as becoming 'a parent grandparent great-grandparent' or by expressing the wish 'I'd like to be a writer'. Finally one audience member replied, 'after tonight I don't think there are any stages; I have no futures, just lots and lots of presents'.[32] This statement clearly shows that for this person the constructing metaphor 'life is a series of stages' has been radically shifted in favour of a more multifaceted, fragmentary and present-orientated conceptualisation of the ageing process.

The Risks and Challenges of *Blueprint*

The title of the piece *A Blueprint for Ageing* is ironic and the speeches that link the performance acts emphasise that it questions the cultural construction of age and ageing processes. While Lakoff and Johnson contend that '[n]ew metaphors have the power to create a new reality' (1980: 145), it is clear that ubiquitous structuring concepts have a powerful hold on ways of thinking, and by examining the prevailing metaphors and presenting these to the audience, the performance risks reinforcing the very constructions it hopes to challenge. For some audience members the Lab II sequence is particularly problematic in this respect; the discussion does not sufficiently challenge the images and text that are projected in this section. Audience members commented variously that

> The 'Lab' seemed to be saying that you stayed young provided you took care to look young, and I don't believe that, I believe you stay young by continuing to take part in life, and other parts of the performance confirmed that.

> The sketch with the magazine articles didn't really seem to work with the rest of the performance.

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[32] All quotations in this paragraph are audience members' verbal responses (11 June 2014).

> Looking at pictures of women of different ages – stereotypes – most looking younger than me therefore I must be old![33]

The emphasis on the word 'young' in the responses shows that the dramaturgy of this sequence does not function to combat the powerful discourse disseminated by the projected text and images. Makers of theatre who hope to challenge normative attitudes should note that such ways of thinking have a strong hold on the human psyche and a simple invitation to discuss these is not sufficient to dissipate their power. Consequently, great care and imagination must be used to create effective challenges to such foundational paradigms.

The dramatization of Erikson's model is also not sufficiently clear in its deconstructive intention, which is to use personal stories to examine Erikson's proposal that life has an overarching narrative, in which the struggle between opposing psychological propensities, once overcome, leads to progress through the lifecourse. At the end of life, in a particularly Cartesian proposal, he theorises that we undergo 'gerotranscendence' and rise above the concerns of the body. Although the performance approaches Erikson's proposal with a seeming trust in the ways in which the stories fit into the scheme, we had hoped to question how the programme forces the stories to conform to its parameters. Unfortunately we failed to do this sufficiently. At the end, on asking the audience for their opinions and opening the subject for discussion, Guiton does express her reservations about the scheme, asking if particular memories respond to the current emotional state of the person remembering. Creaghan also protests: 'I'm only telling you Erikson's theory, you'll have to come up with something yourself!' By doing this we had hoped to keep Erikson's scheme provisional and under debate but it appears to come across as endorsement rather than examination. In addition to the opinion that the theory is outmoded, some audience members found it bewildering. One person remarked 'I have always had problems of seeing [Erikson's model] as

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[33] Audience response questionnaire extracts, 11 June 2014.

useful or relevant' and another regretted that they 'did not understand some of the psychological ageing and the resolutions put forward seemed complicated and irrelevant'.[34] Even though the exploration of Erikson's developmental theory does give rise to the 'gerotrancen*dance'* sequence, which is one of the most compelling moments of the piece, the complex exploration of Erikson's scheme is at best confusing and at worst – in a similar way to the Lab II sequence – reinforces the structuralist thinking that the production aimed to bring under critical scrutiny.

Conclusion

In many respects, as outlined in this chapter, the practice component of this research has tested the possibility of defying a proverbial attitude to age, especially one which concerns the relationship of 'old dogs' to 'new tricks'. It has attempted to address fears of cultural extinction by employing the methods and styles of postdramatic performance, which is in itself a radical aesthetic choice, one that associates 'residual' performers with an 'emergent' contemporary suite of postdramatic practices such as immersive, interactive, fragmented, interrupted and montage performance techniques. While I recognise that many artists were engaging in what is now called 'performance art' long before I came to maturity in the 1980s, for reasons particular to Theatre Studies as a discipline, my own awareness of such work, or the methods of thinking and making that gave rise to them was obscured. In view of this, a central concern of this project has been to ascertain whether it might be possible for a theatre maker aged over fifty, working with performers, many of whom are considerably older, to understand and successfully employ the methods and styles of contemporary performance. In addition, the group has attempted to develop such practice in a way that challenges the way age is considered and performed on stage and, following this, in everyday life, achieving this both in and *through* the act of performance. This chapter has shown the

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[34] Audience response questionnaire.

ways in which *Blueprint* addressed these goals; inclusion of the audience responses show how it has had an impact on the thinking of some participant/audience members, acknowledging the areas in which the piece failed to do this.

Ultimately the aim of the performance and interactive process is to evoke for audience and cast members a sense of agency and self-determination in the face of strictures – delivered through the function of metaphor – that dictate conceptualisations of the lifecourse and ageing processes. It is clear from audience comments and other evidence presented in this chapter that this was effective for many of the *Blueprint* audience. Notwithstanding the reservations expressed about certain aspects of the performance, *Blueprint* has been to some degree successful in its aims. It has scrutinised popular and foundational metaphors and schemes, which have structured thinking about age and ageing across the centuries, from Shakespeare's dramatic work to contemporary magazine images and copy. It produces a series of new aesthetic/metaphoric constructions of the lifecourse, which create the potential for new ways of thinking about age and ageing. These constructions exist, necessarily, in the aesthetic realm and do not translate accurately into language but an approximation might be rendered thus: 'Life is a leaf-fall layering of multifarious, inter-relational identities' or 'life is a breadcrumb trail of chronologically accreted identities, which interacts in its meanderings with the scattered pathways of other lives'. The other representations of the lifecourse, such as the 'geographical journey' and the micro-performance of the cast members' 'emotional journeys', offers a variety of interpretations of the process of ageing, ones that reflect both the institutional/structural and the individual/contingent nature of each subject's experience of growing towards and becoming old.

Chapter Five

Anonymising the 'Other':
Disrupting Meanings of Old Age
in Passages' *The Mirror Stage*[1]

In this chapter I discuss the development and conceptual underpinning of the final practice-as-research performance *The Mirror Stage* (18 September 2015). For the majority of this exegesis I write from the position of practice-as-researcher and dramaturg. However, I supplement this, when discussing one-to-one performance, with analysis from the position of audience/participant, because for this element I occupy this, as much as a directorial/dramaturgical role. *The Mirror Stage* draws from ideas explored throughout this thesis, but also grows out of the discussion of motley and costume as mask developed in Chapter Two, and explores the motif of the mask and mirror dual-image, which proved such a potent representation in the exploratory performance *Life Acts*. In this chapter I analyse the effect of *The Mirror Stage* using cast and audience responses and set these in dialogue with notions of 'the other' (developed by Lacan, de Beauvoir and Phelan), Group Contact Theory (first proposed by Gordon Allport), Conceptual Blending Theory (explicated by Fauconnier and Turner and applied to performance by McConachie) and Bakhtin's analysis of subversion in the carnivalesque. I elaborate on the ways in which meanings of the old body are troubled, by the images, actions and episodic structure of *The Mirror Stage* performance.

The Development of the Performance

Throughout 2014/5 Passages worked towards a piece that examined marginalised age groups: youth and old age. We planned to work with a group of young people who,

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[1] Rehearsal Footage for *The Mirror Stage*, and the film of Passages with campaigners outside the student union can be found at https://youtu.be/x5pT8Tn85xc. The link for each one-to-one performance and the Performance Lecture will be given as each is covered in this chapter.

without meeting the members of Passages, would make a piece exploring stereotypes of being old and vice versa; we would then come together to each perform our pieces and subsequently to collaborate on a piece that expressed whatever understanding the two groups came to collectively. However, in spite of much effort the college with whom we originally started the project dropped out and the stage school we approached subsequently only produced three willing participants. Consequently Passages did not collaborate with a younger group. It is perhaps indicative of the way young and old are now segregated that it proved difficult to attract a youth group to work with a group of old people.

Fig. 15: The group dance to techno music as 'hoodie' figures.

In spite of this disappointment, a few key moments resulted from the explorations in Passages' workshops of what it was to 'perform youth'. Firstly, the old performers dancing to contemporary electronic 'techno' music was a revelation, with old bodies becoming compelling and exuberant in performance as they explored their body's

sensuality and rhythmicality. In these dance experiments the group wore coats and hats or hoods akin to the figure of the 'hoodie'. These helped simulate a youthful appearance (see Fig. 15) and seemed to release performers to inhabit a different kind of persona. Throughout this phase of the work however there was much debate about whether old people attempting to embody youthful behaviour would appear ludicrous. The fear that the old body could not replicate the suppleness of youth and might, therefore, seem comical or be subject to ridicule, was worrying. However, what remained potent as a stage image was the group's dancing and when at one point I introduced a toy-box that included masks and musical instruments into the improvisation, the group quickly experimented playfully with these objects. A development of the initial dancing image emerged; here the group became more confident. These experiments produced a memorable image of Shirley Simpson wearing a mask and playing enthusiastically with a pair of small hand drums, ones with

Fig. 16: The masked figures play with instruments and items from the toy-box.

a drum and corked strings at the end of a handle (see Fig. 16). This dancing masked figure, the sound of the arrhythmic drum, and the energy that was released in the other dancing figures, allowed the old body to appear both playful *and* dignified. The inclusion of the masks reintroduced the image of the mask from our first performance, *Life Acts,* where work with masks and mirrors had created an enduring stage image. Here again the mask seemed to be a fruitful device to enable the legibility of the old body in performance while maintaining its gravitas.

Another experiment fed into the final performance in an unexpected way; taking from Woodward's work on 'the mirror stage of old age' (explored in Chapter One and elsewhere) we investigated the way reflections worked to constitute identity and explored how, or if, as old people we see ourselves reflected in the visual world of the city. On a research visit outside the rehearsal studio, where the group photographed themselves in the glass surface of the Student Union building, we came across a group of students canvassing for the upcoming student elections. They had a sound system and were dancing on the concourse outside the building. As soon as Passages'

Fig. 17: Shirley Fox approaching the dancing on the SU concourse.

members heard the music they were drawn towards it, and rushed to join in the dancing (11.59–16.25). Perhaps they had been primed by the youth/dance work we had been exploring previously as they danced with excitement and confidence, taking up the desired opportunity to interact with young people. I filmed this interaction, which, however briefly, took on the character of a liminal event, the sort that Richard Schechner – drawing on Victor Turner's work on *communitas* – describes thus:

> [w]hile in a liminal state, people are freed from the demands of daily life. They feel at one with their comrades, all personal and social difference erased. People are uplifted, swept away taken over.
> (2002: 62)

The live event and resulting film spoke eloquently about the possible erasure of difference between young and old, through a common desire for playfulness, and expressive movement. [2] For a brief time, inhibitions and behavioural scripts of particular age categories fell away as young and old were united in a delightful, shared energy; all were swept up in the group response to sound and rhythm in the body. Schechner notes the difference between *transformational* performances or rituals, such as initiation ceremonies, and those that only *transport*: '[f]rom a spectator's point of view, one enters into the experience, is "moved" or "touched and is then dropped off about where she or he entered' (2002: 63). He argues however, that this experience is not entirely the same for performers, for whom 'the situation is more complex and long-lived' (*ibid*); he proposes that performers in rituals have been *transformed* at some point in the past and thereafter might 'experience *transportations* on an almost daily basis' (*ibid*: 64). It is possible that the preliminary dance work, investigating performing youth, while not itself transformational, constituted a transporting experience that was 'complex and long-lived', in that it encouraged the performers to enter into an equivalent experience, in public, in a way that they might not have done previously.

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[2] See the final comments by Passages' members in the conclusion of this thesis in which Tricia Sweeney expresses similar sentiments.

So, out of nowhere, on this winter morning the group had their impromptu intergenerational performance and the film is now incorporated into *The Mirror Stage* as a background to masked dancing figures (see Fig. 22). The interplay of carnivalesque and liminal energies that this juxtaposition affords is discussed in detail below. *The Mirror Stage* performance includes this expressive, masked dancing to electronic dance music, but the show, as a whole, comprises a suite of actions and presentations, which before any further analysis, are outlined below.

The Mirror Stage Structure and Score

At the opening the sixteen members of the audience are divided into two groups of eight; one group is taken into the theatre space to attend my performance-lecture on visibility and age (https://youtu.be/JDQUr1QAeaA*), in which I move between academic discourse, reports of mediatised cosmetic practices, a piece of facial movement work and personal testimony about experiences of ageing. The second group members are each assigned a one-to-one performance; these intimate pieces (detailed below with links) take place in smaller rooms, nearby. After the one-to-ones and the performance lecture, the two groups swap over and these performances are played again. Then the whole audience comes to the main auditorium to view a sequence, in which only the hands of the performers are visible (0.13–6.12).[3] The audience are asked to line up along one of the walls of the space facing a long table, covered with black cloth. Another black cloth hangs down, meeting the table along its length. All that can be seen on the table are twelve pairs of hands, old people's hands. They are at rest, palms down. Music plays and one by one the hands begin to perform actions; one is writing, one cooking, another playing the guitar. This continues for some time until the hands come to rest once more.[4] All at once the hands become animated again, showing reactions to an unknown stimulus. They make defensive*

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[3] This is incomplete rehearsal footage of the piece as the film that was taken was not usable due to the camera being obscured by audience members.

[4] The accompanying music (as with most of the music in the show) was made by Passages members, recorded in a workshop with Dominic Moore in summer 2013.

gestures, then soothing gestures and then seem to be filled with desire and longing;
they heal, teach and admonish by turns. Again the hands come to rest and again all
are animated, this time playing out individual sequences, which seem to tell their own
story. In fact each pair of hands is re-enacting the life story of its owner in a sequence
of gestures. At the end of the piece 'Hands', a poem by Liz Cashdan, is read and the
masked group of performers beckon the audience to move into the main playing space
where they view the final masked section of the piece (6.17–6.53).[5] This includes the
playful brightly costumed 'masks' presenting as both youthful and elderly (7.39–9.21).
At one point some have a photograph of themselves as younger projected onto their
masked faces. Finally, in a waltz sequence, masks are removed and the performers
speak frankly about their appearance. This episodic suite of experiences attempts to
unsettle the audience, never allowing anyone to relax into a comfortable (normative)
relationship to the old performer in view. The performance sequence also means that
at first the whole bodies, and then the faces of the performers are hidden from view
for most of the piece. The rationale for this particular form will be discussed below.

One-to-One Performances

The failure to work on an extended performance with young people provoked a re-examination of longstanding questions about the legitimacy of a project that aimed to investigate the performance of age, yet only worked with old people. Such methodology could draw charges that the work reinforces notions of age and ageing as exclusively a matter of concern for old people; and conversely that focusing solely on age and ageing when working with old people narrowly circumscribes the meaning of the old person on stage to a concern with age. Similar criticisms are legitimately levelled at the inclusion of minority ethnic or disabled characters in dramas where their presence only signifies a particular facet of 'race' or 'disability' and not their complexity as

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[5] Again this time count refers to the rehearsal footage due to the loss of the performance documentation.

multifaceted characters. Alison Harnett writing on the representation and casting of disabled people in film and television observes that

> they are over-simplified and used not for their complexity as people but for their easily identifiable impairment which is exploited by scriptwriters for dramatic effect, for emotional appeal or for blatant symbolism.
> (2000: 21)

This practice-as-research project has, however, been set up specifically to investigate if performance can trouble the normative representation of old age and ageing, and therefore it might be argued that old performers are best placed to do this. Therefore, to mitigate legitimate concerns about old performers being associated exclusively with notions old-age and yet continue my research in the given circumstances, I offered the members of Passages an opportunity to make work that was not explicitly about ageing or age but which could, nevertheless, hold implicitly within it a sense of time lived, of studied experience, of knowledge and/or expertise gained over a long life. I suggested to the group that they each might make a one-to-one performance piece. I wanted not only to challenge the performers to make their own work (and to suspend my own authority over the meaning-making of this part of the performance), but also to explore the potential of unsettling the normative image of the old person in the mind of a potential audience/participant. Most of Passages' members had never experienced one-to-one performance; consequently they were variously daunted, puzzled, resistant, doubtful, hopeful and curious about the prospect. Most importantly, they had to be convinced that one-to-one was a legitimate performance form that could be confidently engaged in and could be ethical and efficacious. As an introduction I gave a lecture on one-to-one performance to the group and McManus and I gave performances of our previously created pieces *Tread Softly* (2012) and *The Lifecourse* (2011) (respectively).

Simpson was initially sceptical about one-to-one; in her evaluation of the process she expressed the fear that it was 'just self indulgent' and 'pretentious' and wondered if

people were 'just using 121's as therapy sessions'.[6] Simpson's words correspond to Alan Kaprow's more generous analysis of 'lifelike art' (of which I consider one-to-one performance an example):

> Consider: if lifelike art restores the possibility of the practice of art as a practice of enlightenment, it complements what various psychotherapies and meditational disciplines have always done. Lifelike art can be thought of not as a substitute for these, but as a direct way of placing them in a context of contemporary imagery, metaphor and site.
> (2008: 218).

This certainly played out in Simpson's final piece, after which she found that she had modified her negative view of the form.   Her performance 'Hands On' (https://youtu.be/8KxCAvYejD8) centering on narratives of the body – hands in particular – invites participants to choose a model hand from a number displayed hanging on one wall, then discuss their choice and finally draw round their hands, inscribing the tracing with words and phrases while conversing about their hands or hands in general. Simpson then tells the story of her own recovery after her hand became semi-paralysed:

> My story was at the heart of the piece and I wanted participants to take away with them what I had learned and I hoped it would help them with their own challenges and perhaps change their own attitude to their own bodies. […]. In my story I told the participant about how I hated my right hand that was giving me pain and was not functioning properly, "letting me down". Then how I changed my attitude and started instead to appreciate all my hand had ever done for me. I learned to love my hand, I stroked my hand kindly, nursed and supported my hand to improve and get better.[7]

The piece is thus orientated towards communicating Simpson's experience, gained at a point of challenge in her life, which has informed her understanding of her body. Further, it aims to help the participant appreciate his or her body and suggests ways to overcome negative attitudes to bodily failures, betrayals or disappointments. Simpson's testimony shows that this work made an impact upon at least one of her participants:

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[6] Taken from 'Reflections re my 121' document, sent via email on 6 October 2015

[7] Taken from 'Reflections re my 121' document, sent via email on 6 October 2015.

> During the actual performance one participant did tell me that after listening to my story she would work at changing her own attitude towards her hands that were giving her some pain. Others that came to the sessions opened up with other stories about their life as they talked and traced around their own hands. People genuinely seemed to enjoy talking about their own hands.[8]

The impact of this work on both Simpson as a performance maker and on her participant is evident in this testimony and shows the one-to-one performance form can be transformative on both sides. The other one-to-ones that open *The Mirror Stage* are as follows:

'Resonance' (Ruth Carter) (https://youtu.be/qcugGOD5DTg)

A transactional piece which invites participants to tell a story, stimulated by one of a selection of Carter's personal objects. These indicate, among other things, a life full of travel (pictures of places overseas), connection with other cultures (an African statue and thumb-piano), intriguing places nearer to home (an Ordinance Survey map of the Isle of Man) and philosophical exploration (a white pebble inscribed with the word 'stillness'). Carter invites the participant to pick an object that they feel holds some resonance, and to enter into a conversation about the story or thoughts that the object stimulates. In exchange she tells the participant what the object means to her. The encounter is infused with the authority of Carter's voice and presence as she guides the participant through the process, drawing on her long experience as a counsellor and mentor.

'Connections' (Elizabeth Seneveratne) (https://youtu.be/BYy04wF_SYI)

A meditation on the way hands facilitate the closest relationships, which uses the poem 'Mother, any distance greater than a single span' by Simon Armitage (1993) as its central text. The participant is led to a long narrow room by a tape measure attached to the wall and is shown an exhibition of photographs hanging along one wall. These images depict various ways in which Seneveratne's hands, and those of her family, have

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[8] Taken from 'Reflections re my 121' document, sent via email on 6 October 2015.

nurtured, held, released and waved goodbye to loved ones. Seneveratne then asks the participant to hold one end of a ribbon that she unfurls as she recites the poem. This piece has a distinctly performative element that replicates the subject of the poem: as she unrolls the ribbon and recites, the two bodies in the narrow space move further apart; Seneveratne reaches the end of the long room as she speaks the concluding lines:

> two floors below your fingertips still pinch
> the last one-hundredth of an inch...I reach
> towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky
> to fall or fly.
> (1993: 11)

One participant states that 'her recital of the poem had a visceral and dramatic effect on me'.[9] It is clear that Seneveratne draws on her considerable vocal skill to evoke the emotional content of this poem and the theme of the piece.[10]

'Commonalities' (Tricia Sweeney) (https://youtu.be/4OewDn3TDec)

This is a sharing game in which mutual points of contact or divergence are identified and discussed. Sweeney invites her guest to write down, on small pieces of white paper, hobbies, pleasures, pastimes and/or particular details about tastes etc. She then presents these on a table, together with her own cards, making a map to see where commonalities or differences occurred. This is presented as an opportunity for the performer and participant to learn about each other. Sweeney says that it seemed to be similar to the structure of speed dating and she also realises that it draws on her previous work in occupational therapy and psychiatric settings. She argues that it functions to 'bring people out about their concerns and enthusiasms' and has a 'gentle low-key, calm atmosphere'.[11]

'Lucy Chicken Soup' (Romola Guiton) (https://youtu.be/gmEEq8knrow)

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[9] Ruth Carter's post-production evaluation.

[10] She was trained in at the Central School of Speech and Drama and then taught voice at Dartington College.

[11] This was reported at a reading and discussion of the first draft of this exegesis on 5 May 2016.

In Guiton's piece participants are offered a bowl of chicken soup while listening and responding to a cautionary tale of a momentary lapse of concentration. As she gives the finishing touches to a bubbling pot of soup on the stove beside her, Guiton asks the participant if they have a similar family recipe and converses about the responses. When her phone alerts her that it is time to serve, she gives the participant a bowl of soup and then reveals that it is actually the other pan on the stove that contained the *real* 'Lucky Chicken Soup'. Lifting the lid of the empty pan she shows its blackened insides and tells how one evening, coming home tired, she turned on the hob to warm through the soup and went to sit down for a rest, only to be woken two and half hours later by the smoke alarm, being admitted later to hospital with smoke inhalation. Guiton then asks the participant if they have experienced something that made them re-evaluate their behaviour or strategies; they discuss this. Guiton has a diagnosed memory-loss condition; throughout the piece she demonstrates the type of strategies (such as using her mobile phone alarm to cue her to serve) that help her cope with this impairment, these she calls 'mental walking-sticks'.[12] The fragility of memory is implicit in the performance as at times she moves and speaks with uncertainty, exemplifying the betrayals of faculty – in this case memory – that human beings of any age are subject to, but which may become acute as age advances.[13] However, this performance also demonstrates Guiton's intelligent rationalisation, fierce independence, resilience and sense of hope in the face of dementia, one of the most feared conditions associated with ageing. The story of the burnt soup and the fact that Guiton names it 'Lucky' subverts the normative narrative of crisis associated with such events. Without such intelligent and independent strategizing the incident might have triggered particular social welfare interventions, which in turn might have compromised Guiton's independence and sense of self-determination.

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[12] This phrase was used in the first meeting we had about the one-to-one performance and I recorded this in my notes on the piece. I had to write up these notes and send a copy to Romola as she needed to have everything in writing as an aide memoire.

[13] To be clear, Guiton did not perform this frailty it was present as part of her natural performance presence.

 'Wool' (Liz Cashdan) (https://youtu.be/2n7Bk6UWaQk)

This piece invites the participant to connect, in a tactile way, to a twentieth-century, intercontinental family history associated with the raw wool and blanket trade. Cashdan shows pictures and tells the story of her ancestors – Russian, Jewish émigrés – who came to the UK, escaping the Russian Revolution in 1917. On first entering, Cashdan is discovered seated, knitting. The participant is invited to do some knitting of their own, however one younger participant reported that she took up the needles but had no idea how to knit. Teaching the skill is not part of the performance and this invitation revealed differences between younger and older adults (and potentially between men and women) who encounter this piece, uncovering the different skills that are appropriate for different identity positions at different times in history. Cashdan talks proudly about the jumper she is wearing, a patchwork of autumnal colours with voluminous sleeves, the sort fashionable when she knitted it in the 1980s, in middle-age. Via the jumper, Cashdan offers a link back thirty years and further back, through the family photographs of her father, mother, grandmother and grandfather. This positions her as having both extended lived-experience, and living-memory connections that, through her family experience, reach back to the earliest years of the twentieth century. As the stories of the family are told and photographs, books and other artefacts shown, the participant is given a glimpse into the world of these disappeared generations. The participant is invited to touch and feel the weight and quality of a green blanket – a family heirloom, one of the family's factory products – hanging in the performance space and Cashdan speculates that it was her governess who had edged the blanket so expertly, since it could never have been done by her mother. This performance speaks implicitly, through such socio-historically specific details, about longevity, generational continuity and the fibres that bind individuals to others across time. At the age of 87, Cashdan is almost the oldest member of Passages, yet she is vigorously engaged in her life as an artist, poet and teacher. In addition to being a member of Passages, taking part in devised performance practice, she regularly

publishes and performs her own poetry and has recently written and acted in one short film (*Swimming Pool, 2015*) and directed another (*Know Thyself,* 2015) as part of Leeds Beckett University's 'CinAge' project.[14]   This one-to-one performance is just part of a rich and current artistic output. 'Wool' finishes with Cashdan reading one of her poems, written a few years ago as part of an arts project that took place in the Yorkshire Dales. She reads while inviting the participant to feel and smell the scraps of raw wool found on barbed wire fences in the Dales, which inspired her work. This final act locates Cashdan as a present, creative force, responding to the world, here and now, *in her day*. The material substance of the wool that is sensually present in the room, and which she is actually wearing and manipulating into new forms, links her implicitly with both the vital here-and-now and a world communicated from her living memory.

'Second Chances, Different Journey' (Shirley Fox) (https://youtu.be/AdbwsyksKeE)

An autobiographical and intimate piece that reveals a story of personal struggle, resilience and success, inviting the participant to envisage their own future goals. It is also a testimony to her broken identity, which fractured on emigrating from Germany to England when Fox was two years old. As the participant enters the small room, Fox draws attention to the walking boots at the doorway, which – along with the title – frame the piece as a journey, Fox shows her birth certificate, displayed on the left hand wall, in which she is named as 'Utte Charlotte Kagelmacher'. 'Shirley Winkley', she explained, was the name given to her on going to nursery in the UK in 1945. 'Winkley', being her stepfather's name and 'Shirley' from the Hollywood child star Shirley Temple (the only English name her mother knew). Fox states that her original German identity was stolen at this crucial stage and that this loss figures as a difficult rupture in her life. Alongside the birth certificate, she shows her naturalisation papers and a black-and-white wedding photo, in which she is pictured on her own in her wedding gown, outside a church. This photo of a bride, unusually alone on her wedding day, speaks poignantly

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[14] You can see these films and find out about the project at cinageproject.eu

of isolation. Fox points out the women's magazines arranged on a desk, commenting on the ways in which these construct the 'perfect wife' and stand for a period in her life of 'buns and babies'. These magazines also indicate how she failed to live up to the gender-specific domestic standards of the time in her early marriage. She intimates that this, and her husband's behaviour, led to them separating and finally to their divorce in 1975. Here is an indication that Fox belongs to the generation of women who, although they were among the first to have access to divorce, were still subjugated to the all-pervasive and – at least in her working class milieu – unchallenged strictures of patriarchy. To mark this second fracture in her life, she takes the copy of her marriage certificate off the wall followed by a copy of her decree absolute and, placing them on the small office desk guillotine, she severs them one by one down the middle and throws the pieces in a nearby bin. At this point, Fox asks the participant to speak about any point of fracture in their life that took them on a 'different journey'. A conversation follows and a word or phrase that expresses this fracture point is written on a bright piece of paper and pinned to the wall, adding to a growing display signifying other ruptures. The mood brightens as Fox moves into the second, more positive, phase of her exhibited life-story by indicating the rear wall, where the window lets in a pleasant light. At this point she dons a purple beret with a CND badge on it – indicating her shift into political activism – and shows her degree certificate, telling of her struggle as a single mother and mature student to become educated beyond her class expectations after her divorce. This certificate, her daughter's birth certificate (representing single parenthood), her naturalisation papers (indicating her final split with her German heritage) and counselling qualification (showing professional independence), speak of her attempts to overcome the various rifts in her sense of identity precipitated by emigration and divorce. She then turns her attention to a display of colourful artefacts, including flyers, leaflets and programmes, pinned to the window frame and walls, which represent her enthusiastic involvement with and consumption of educational, arts and cultural activities. As she draws attention to each

in turn, the narrative changes to one of hopeful rebuilding. Fox communicates pride in a newly integrated and reconstructed life and recognition that this new sense of self grew directly from a narrative of lost agency, second-hand identity and rupture precipitated by events beyond her control.

Autobiographical performance can be deeply affecting for the performer as much as the audience: Dee Heddon, argues that,

> [t]he future life becomes implicated by the reporting of the life already lived and an involvement in [performance] necessarily becomes part of the life story rather than merely commenting on it.
> (1998: 38–39)

Fox's performance is, like the curated display of artefacts within it, created as much for Fox to represent herself to herself as to others. Through performance she names this self as resilient in the face of a fractured past (and uncertain future), and communicates to others a sense of hope, which she creates in the face of adversity. It is possible that this autobiographical sharing could have been overwhelming for some participants, however for myself and at least one other person who participated, this is a hopeful and encouraging encounter, in which Fox creates the context for a generous conversation between participant and performer. Towards the end of the piece Fox turns to the blackboard that runs along the right-hand wall of the room and, using the sort of visualisation techniques used in her work as a counsellor, offers the participant the opportunity to write down a description of how he or she sees him or herself both now and in the future and to say something about how these statements relate to each other. After listening and commenting she offers the participant a 'bun' and draws attention to the pair of walking boots that are now pointing, symbolically, door-ward. This sincere and challenging piece uses artefacts and movement around the room to represent a 'turnaround' in a life that could have easily gone awry and employs supportive techniques to engage the participant in imagining similar purpose and resilience in their own life.

 'Speak Clearly' (Clare McManus) (https://youtu.be/U593T6Xl6AI)

A sophisticated and fun master-class in how to make a successful voice recording, pitched someway between a consultation and a technical master-class about how to make a prototype message for someone you might want to speak to, or a greeting for your answerphone. Contrary to possible expectations about the technophobia or incompetence of old people when it comes to digital technology, this piece relies on McManus' ability to use recording and digital applications. It includes ringing a mobile phone that plays a message, in which McManus tells the participant to knock and wait. McManus plays excerpts from a selection of YouTube tutorials on how to leave a voicemail message, and then helps the participant, either to access their mobile's answerphone message recording facility, or to record a prototype message on her Dictaphone, which she later emails to the participant.

In preparation for the task McManus coaches the participant about delivery, vocal quality and the importance of taking a deep breath before starting. The whole piece is couched in a semi-official style, reminiscent of Bobby Baker's playful performance of expertise (detailed in Chapter Two), including a tongue-in-cheek requirement to sign a disclaimer and consult a risk assessment. Apart from the necessary technical equipment, the room is decorated with speech bubbles giving handy tips such as 'energy is contagious', 'have a smile on your face' and 'keep it simple'. In her influential text *The Right to Speak,* Patsy Rodenberg sees the voice as a powerful aspect of individual agency:

> As we open our mouths [...] we frequently reveal the deepest parts of ourselves. Not only do we divulge class, background and education, but our perceived status in the world [...]. No wonder it can be such a terrifying act to speak. No wonder it is a right attacked and repressed by those who think they are more powerful or articulate or have the right to control how and what we have to say.
> (2015: 2)

McManus's piece coaches the participants through this 'terrifying act', in some instances encouraging them to record a message to someone to whom they might fear to speak or need to tell their truth.

In contrast to the generally autobiographical work described above, this piece focuses on the sense of alienation people often feel on hearing the sound of their recorded voice, and attempts to intervene in that relationship. According to McManus it allows individuals to compose messages to people with whom they have disagreements, or offers them a safe space in which to broach difficult subjects, enabling them to hear the resonance of their own words, not only acoustically but also emotionally. Although on the surface this performance is light and playful, by exploring the relationship between voice and its expression of self-worth, McManus attempts to mend the rupture – for these participants – between subjectivity and the right to speak.[15]

This suite of pieces convey a range of approaches and subjects. Some evoke a sense of personal or family history ('Wool', and 'Second Chances, Different Journey'); some address relationships ('Commonalities' and 'Connections'); some communicate lived experience ('Hands On' and 'Lucky Chicken Soup'); one is a playful piece ('Speak Clearly'); another a storytelling exchange ('Resonance'). Together they speak of resilience, of a lifetime of learning and understanding, of a rich sense of connection to the past and a hopeful communication of this experience (from which the performers still benefit) to others who might remember these encounters in future. In this sense the performance as a whole benefits from a diversity of creative choices that are fuelled by and demonstrate the collective life experiences of the eight women who made the works. The performers have had creative autonomy and have made pieces that are not directly focused on issues of age and its representation but which, nevertheless, are

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[15] 'Speak Clearly' had a life beyond *The Mirror Stage* as McManus performed it at WROUGHT festival in Sheffield in April 2016.

inflected with questions and insights about experience, longevity, historical positioning, cognitive and physical impairment and resilience, and which also counter notions that old people are technophobic or resistant to new ways of doing and making.

In these intimate encounters the performer is the guide, expert, facilitator and creator of the context. One-to-one performance provides the opportunity to change the normative relationship of the audience-participant to the notion and image of the old person. In such a relationship, in the majority of cases, the old person is situated in the position of 'other' (notwithstanding the possibility that the participant might actually be an old person themselves). One-to-one offers an opportunity to interrogate the position of 'the other' in performance relationships and, by extension, in any human encounter. Rachel Zerihan, when describing one-to-one performance, often names the participant 'the other'. For example, when writing about her experience of Adrian Howells' *Foot Washing for the Sole,* she describes 'the subtle yet firm structure of the performance piece, bound by moments of shared embodiment that Howells had created for me, his "other".' (2009: 37). Moreover she uses the term 'other' to describe both parties in the performance, where each is the mutual 'other' in the encounter:

> One body to an-other. Spanning time, sharing space, marking place, blending breath, sensing touch. An emerging inter-face addresses both parties in this mise-en-scene of togetherness.
> (2006: n.p.)

In *The Second Sex* (1953) De Beauvoir employs the term 'other' when arguing that the male is constructed as positive and as essential, in opposition to the female, who is negative, inessential or 'other'. Later, in *The Coming of Age* (1972), de Beauvoir incorporates the phenomenon of ageing into her definition of 'otherness', arguing that

> for the outsider it is a dialectic relationship between my being as he defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him. Within me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself.
> (1997: 284)

De Beauvoir attempts to define here the complex and reflexive nature of ageing subjectivity, concluding that the old person is both subject to 'othering', and finds

within herself her own 'otherness'. Taking this, together with de Beauvoir's analysis of femininity *per se*, one could say that an old woman is twice 'othered', both as a female and as old, and that the interplay between these two effects of 'othering' are particularly powerful in achieving the marginalisation of old women. Simon Biggs – discussing Baudrillard and Butler – voices a similar analysis, arguing that for women

> old age encompasses a double absence, that of being "not male" and of being "not young." From being only too visible, one becomes invisible, as the attention of a masculinised and youth-obsessed society ebbs away.
> (2004: 49)

So women in old age struggle to remain visible, moving during the transition from late youth to early middle age, from a position of hyper-visibility to one of invisibility, a rapid process of secondary 'othering'. [16]

The *relational* nature of 'otherness' is useful to note when analysing one-to-one performance; for women and old people, de Beauvoir proposes, one is both in the presence of, and finds within oneself, the image of the 'other'. Phelan, in her discussion of representation and visibility in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, expresses it thus:

> [i]dentity is perceptible only through a relation to an other, which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other.
> (1993: 13)

Summarising Joan Copjec's and Jacqueline Rose's analysis of Lacan's concept of 'the other', Phelan states that

> the fertility of Lacanian psychoanalysis resides in this psychic paradox: one always locates one's own image in an image of the other and, one always locates the other in one's own image.
> (1993: 18)

I take this to mean that each, when looking at the 'other', perceives an image of herself as this might seem to the observer. Within that idea of *oneself as the other sees us*, we

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[16] The point at which youth ends, according to an average of popular opinion, across Europe is at around 40 years and old age at 62 (see Dominic Abrams *et al, A Snapshot of Ageism in the UK and across Europe* (2011: 2).

find an image of a nominal 'other' (that is actually oneself). Phelan develops this notion further: '[s]eeing the other is a social form of self reproduction. For in looking at/for the other, we seek to re-present ourselves to ourselves' (*ibid*: 21). One-to-one performance utilises this socially reproductive function, and if, as in *The Mirror Stage,* the one-to-one performance is created and performed by an old person, this forces the participant-self to identify an idea of themselves within the mind of the *old* 'other'. The performer-self correspondingly imagines herself re-presented in the mind of the participant-'other'; who she knows has a notion of her as 'other'. Thereby both come to a relationship, through an understanding that they are reflected and reflecting.

Phelan argues convincingly against 'representational visibility' as a route to power, by quipping: '[i]f representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture' (1993: 10). Writing, as she does, from a psychoanalytical perspective, Phelan describes the split subject as suffering a lack and loss of the unified self, of seeking but never finding (*ibid*: 23–27). However, if, like Butler (1990), one refutes the notion of any realm preceding that of the Symbolic, and consequently argues that subjects are always already constructed by language and exist within culture, then representational visibility, through the relational act of seeing the 'other', can be shown to impact on relations of power. A face-to-face relation creates conditions where, as one looks to find the self in the 'other', one seeks *sameness*, while simultaneously acknowledging the presence of difference in the 'other'. Following this argument, the intimacy of a one-to-one piece, which performs relational identity, is transformational, if only in the smallest degree. One-to-one has the potential to mount a challenge to normative perceptions of the figure of the old person as 'other', even in the mind of an old person themselves. This is brought about during the performance as each one sees him or herself reflected in the 'other', and this motivation can be heightened by a context designed to promote mutual seeking and discovery.

At the opening of *The Mirror Stage* audience members encounter their 'other' – the one-to-one performer – face-to-face. Thereafter they do not see the eyes or face of this performer or any of the performers, until the end of the show. In the next section almost the whole figure of all the performers is obscured from view, as the company perform an ensemble piece in which only hands are visible (see Fig. 18). By engineering an intimate face-to-face encounter between one and an 'other' and thereafter first obscuring the figure and subsequently the face of all performers, the aim is to encourage audience members to search for their original one-to-one 'other' (and consequently, following this analysis, for themselves), first among the visible hands and then among the figures of the chorus of performers. The aim is not only to spark a search for and potential recognition of each 'other' but the masking of the whole company up until the end of the performance is designed to trouble the assumptions that might spring from the image of the old person and especially her or his face. The face is the area of the body (along with the hands) that holds the most potent meanings associated with age; the theatrical technique of 'the reveal' at the end of the piece, where the performers' unmask themselves, brings into focus the meaning and value attached to the old face, which up to this point is unseen and, according to at least one audience member, to some degree forgotten.

One-to-one performance is, in live artist Kira O'Reilly's words '[a] highly stylised, highly structured, heightened social interaction' (in Zerihan: 2006, n.p.). This type of social interaction, which constitutes – as Kaprow puts it – 'lifelike art' (2003: 201) is transformative. Kaprow claims that

> of all the integrative roles lifelike art can play […] none is so crucial to our survival as the one that serves self-knowledge. […] Lifelike art […] is a training in letting go of the separate self.
> (*ibid:* 217)

Kaprow's use of the word 'self' as it applies to one-to-one performance, I propose, includes both the artist and the participant, who co-construct the work. So a developing understanding of the self and the 'other' and of how these understandings

play out in the relational nature of selfhood is where the transformative power of one-to-one performance resides. Offering the members of Passages the opportunity to make their own one-to-one pieces, was prompted by my hypothesis that by making and performing these pieces in the context of the performance of *The Mirror Stage*, de Beauvoir's notion of the old 'other within us' would be challenged in the minds of both the performer and the audience-participant. If, as I have argued above, this is indeed the case, the form has the potential to extend to old people outside the one-to-one performance space. One participant discussed how the piece 'Connections' had caused her to consider her relationship with an older 'other':

> The performer held one end of a ribbon and I held the other. We were connected, if either let go of the ribbon, we would lose the connection and the ribbon would drop. Yet we were also separated. This [made] me think about how as I grow older my relationship with my mother changes, we continue to be connected and separated.[17]

This sense of both connection and separation is echoed in accounts of one-to-one performance more generally: Heddon, Helen Iball and Zerihan contend that '[o]ne to one performance is employed as a tool for claiming and proclaiming individuality' (2012: 121), and yet Zerihan also argues that '[t]he function and development of the encounter is reliant upon shared economies of exchange, identification and understanding' (2006: n.p.). Both the participant and the performer can belong at once to a demarked group category (for example old people) and simultaneously to a subset of one, which opens the potential for – in Phelan's terms – a self-reproductive relation, each to the other. As the participant (quoted above) described, the performance helps to bring this duality into focus. It is this tension between membership of a specific group – in this case the marginalised group named 'old', 'older' or even (pejoratively) 'elderly' – and the paradoxically universal experience of individuality that was brought into play in *The Mirror Stage,* both in the one-to-one encounters and in the production as a whole.

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[17] Email questionnaire, received 5 October 2015.

Martina Von Holn, discussing her one-to-one *Seal of Confession* (2006), argues that

> a possibility arises for a different kind of encounter which is based on an
> exchange between two individuals and challenges both the performer's as
> well as the audience's perception of self and the other.
> (In Zerihan, 2009: 79)

Intergroup Contact Theory is useful in supporting this contention. First formulated in the post-war period and investigated in detail by, amongst others, Gordon Allport (1954), Intergroup Contact Theory contends that the greater the contact between particular social groups, then the less those groups will display prejudice or negative bias towards each other. Deployment of intergroup contact is therefore useful in combating the social exclusion of marginalised people or outgroups. Whilst this theory most commonly proposes efficacious contact between groups rather than individuals, political scientist H. Donald Forbes (1997) contends that intergroup contact also combats prejudice between individuals. Creating a context of one-to-one interaction potentially fosters intergroup contact between a series of individuals within the performance. The theory suggests that participants can develop a degree of understanding with one member of the outgroup (old people) and that this contact and proximity (even if participants themselves are old) will diminish prejudice. Furthermore, Allport postulates that there are optimal intergroup contact conditions that lower prejudice between groups and can be particularly transformative of the way marginalised or outgroups are seen; these are: 'equal status between the groups in the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom' (in Pettigrew & Tropp 2006: 752). Testing these precepts, it is clear that the one-to-one form fosters mutual goals and has the support of the overarching authority structure of the performance venue and event. One might argue that equal status in a one-to-one performance is doubtful because the performer originates and controls the context and conditions for the encounter and because the participant is often in an unfamiliar setting, however the work in the *Mirror Stage* is highly interactive and follows the type of co-constructional model exemplified by performers

such as Howells and Rosanna Cade, creating contexts that foster a collaborative

relationship of mutual trust and exploration. As Heddon et al. argue:

> [t]his relation-ship – this performance of the between one and another – is
> intertwined with and inseparable from the sensitive, generous and
> demanding work of collaboration; collaboration makes the work.
> (2012: 121)

So, following Allport's findings, the conditions for lowering prejudice in the

relationships between groups – in this case between old people and participants – have

been significantly met and potentially challenge the prejudice with which audience

members might view these particular old people, and therefore others they encounter

subsequently.

Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp in their article 'A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup

Contact Theory' state that the effects of contact have been underestimated:

> Not only do attitudes toward the immediate participants usually become
> more favorable, but so do attitudes toward the entire outgroup, outgroup
> members in other situations, and even outgroups not involved in the
> contact.
> (2006: 766)

Over and beyond the one-to-one performances in *The Mirror Stage*, this

understanding of the efficacious nature of contact could be extended to apply to all of

Passages' theatre work, and furthermore to forms, such as interactive and immersive

theatre, which provide structures within which meaningful contact can be made

between individuals and groups. Phelan's notable distrust of the *specular* as an

efficacious instrument to alter power relations (see her comment above about semi-

naked, young white women) can be mitigated by this notion of contact. The sort of

contact effected in a one-to-one performance can include hearing and touching, even

smelling, as well as seeing, and it certainly includes proximity. Moreover, in *The*

Mirror Stage contact took place in a context that was designed carefully and sensitively

by each old performer, one that showed an aspect of expertise, experience,

understanding and/or skill. *The Mirror Stage* performance as a whole could be said to

foster involved and complex levels of contact between the outgroup known as 'old' or 'elderly' and those who (while counting themselves part of any number of different groups) at that moment, made up the group called 'the audience'.

Performance Lecture (https://youtu.be/JDQUr1QAeaA)

At the outset of this doctoral study I argued for the value of including my subjective reactions in the analysis of age performances and yet, initially, I decided not to appear in the Passages' research performances; that held until this final piece. Central to this practice-as-research is the theory that performativity, as Butler defines it, pertains to age as well as to gender, therefore it follows that, as I have decided to situate my ageing subjectivity at the centre of the study, my specific performances of age in everyday life should be scrutinized in an act of autoethnography. This is especially important when such an act can expose the, usually hidden, ways that I (and possibly others) think and feel about age, thereby bringing into appearance something of the cultural pressures on an ageing subject. So, as a practical exploration of how cultural notions of age impact upon my own daily micro-performances – that is, the menu of bodily attitudes, positions, gestures and postures that I might adopt – I created a short solo performance lecture that would be embedded within *The Mirror Stage*.[18] The performance lecture also explained the thinking that underpinned other elements of *The Mirror Stage,* enabling the audience to access the meanings of the piece more readily. The episodic structure of the performance aims to destabilise the ways in which old people are represented and therefore perceived. One audience member, when asked what was resonant about the piece, put it thus:

> The movement throughout the experience from personal to impersonal.
> From the intimacy of the 1:1 performance, through the lecture which shifted

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[18] The one-to-one performances played simultaneously with my solo performance lecture and consequently each piece was given in two sittings, the lecture performance had an audience of eight and there were eight one-to-one performances these two performances can be seen by clicking on the YouTube link, a further two performances are included on the DVDs.

backwards and forwards between academic discourse and first person narration and finally into the ensemble piece in which at first the bodies and then the faces of the performers were hidden until the very end. This contrast seemed to give the impression that aging (*sic*) is both something that is personal and generic; that it is possible to find commonalities, but that these will always be challenged by the individual.[19]

The performance lecture holds within it a refusal to draw conclusions or prescribe strategies for the ways in which as ageing subjects we should encounter our ageing subjectivity or the wider society which constructs this as problematic. This performance lecture also owes a debt to Terry O'Connor, who, when I answered her call for performers to work on a piece exploring the word 'no', worked with me to begin the process of bringing my research into performance lecture form. The piece is therefore inflected to some degree by this word 'no' and is compelled by the sense of resistance that was the initial spur to this PhD study.[20]   In a later iteration of this performance lecture, at the 2016, Buzz Cut Festival in Glasgow, I articulate the way in which the word exposes the paradox in which ageing female subjectivity is caught:

> I am caught between two 'nos', I want to say 'no' to the disqualification of age that others impose upon me; but I also want to say 'no' to the process of ageing, because of that disqualification.
> (Moore, *No Performance III*: 8th April 2016)[21]

I originally embarked upon this research in an effort to think around and work with the performative possibilities of a resistance to age-categorization, as well as to find performative solutions to the disqualification ageing brings. This performance lecture crystalises and communicates some of these desires, furthermore some of the research evident in previous chapters in this thesis – which has further clarified the paradoxes of ageing femininity – was offered for consideration and discussion.

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[19] Email questionnaire, received 5 October 2015.

[20] The influences for the piece also include the solo performance by Paris Opera dancer Veronique Doisneau, which was conceived and directed by Jérôme Bel in 2004.

[21] *No Performance III* was created with Laura Murphy and Moe Shoji under the direction of Terry O'Connor. Versions of this piece were performed at the Buzzcut Festival in Glasgow, on 8th April 2016, and at the TaPRA Postgraduate Conference at the University of Sheffield on 6th February of the same year.

Acknowledging Woodward's examination of the practice of masquerade in old age (discussed in Chapters One and Two), the lecture examines how the appearance of the face (and body) can be manipulated to obscure old age in an attempt to remain meaningful in the face of an age-averse society. As Woodward argues, however, the mask as it functions in a masquerade of youth 'does not hide old age but [...] makes it more visible' (1991, 154). Simon Biggs, explaining the paradox of the 'Mask of Ageing' which Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth propose (see below), elaborates thus:

> It becomes [...] increasingly difficult to "recycle" the body through cosmetics, surgery, props, and prostheses and an endgame emerges in which older women and men are at war with themselves, engaged in a battle between the desire for self-expression and the ageing body. Ageing, as a mask, thus becomes a nightmare, reversing the libertarian possibilities of the consumer dream. The mask emerges as a contradiction between the fixedness of the body and the fluidity of social images.
> (2004: 52)

Apart from introducing the notion of the mask of ageing, the performance lecture explores the dilemma outlined by Biggs, and the function of these parallel and contradictory meanings of the mask. It demonstrates ways in which masquerade and 'passing' plays out performatively in my own life and therefore in the way I 'do' age. Juxtaposed against references to Woodward's work on the masquerade of ageing and Featherstone's and Hepworth's comments about 'the mask of ageing [being] a mask that is hard to remove' (1991: 382), I perform my habitual passing strategies, such as straightening the angle of my neck when having my photo taken, in order to smooth the sags in my neck and jawline. These micro-performances are reproduced in the lecture; gestures such as standing up straight, lowering my shoulders and 'pulling up through my core' are all demonstrated. These reproduce an everyday action acquired to counter the discourses of power, as they impact on old age, by actively trying to reproduce a more youthful body appearance and style of presentation. Butler – here addressing gender – explains such embodiment thus:

> To do, to dramatize, to reproduce, these seem to be some of the elementary structures of embodiment. This doing [...] is not merely a way in which embodied agents are exterior, surfaced, open to the perception of others.

> Embodiment clearly manifests a set of strategies or what Sartre would perhaps have called a style of being or Foucault, "a stylistics of existence".
> (1988: 521)

These strategies extend also to the manipulation of everyday scenography that might enable one to pass as younger, specifically control of the lighting conditions. I indicate the conviction that one should always contrive to be lit from the front, replicating the way confidence-boosting light in my car sun-flap mirror lights my face in the morning. A slideshow is then projected of a montage of stills, taken with direct sunlight falling on my face from different angles, in order to prove my point. The success or failure of this strategy is left to the audience to decide; as one audience member put it: '[I e]specially liked the "avoid being lit from the side" bit whilst you were being lit from the side'.[22] This unintended consequence produced by imagining the lighting conditions yet not being able to see oneself from the outside, replicates a universal situation, where the success or failure of such everyday performative and scenographical 'passing' strategies are necessarily unknown.

Whether or not these tactics are successful in troubling a particular age status, the desire to mitigate or mask the signs of ageing is understandable in the context of the negative and exclusionary discourse evident in popular media representations of elder subjectivity.[23] The performance lecture includes an anecdote about hearing a presenter on the BBC's early evening magazine *The One Show*, (September 2015), who (unwittingly) excluded old people as subjects of her address with the statement (I paraphrase): 'Now, when our elderly relatives get older, they all need a little looking after'. I comment that, possibly contrary to expectation, I am not alarmed by the contention that old people need a little looking after; rather, what concerns me is the

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[22] Email response, received 30 September 2015.
[23] See Naoko Kishita, et al: *Future of an ageing population: evidence review* [Future ageing attitudes], which cites Martin *et al.*, 2009, concluding that, '[m]ost articles (64%) on older people published between 1997 and 2008 portrayed older people as a "burden on society" and as "frail non-contributors"' (www.gov.uk 2015: 14).

question: who is the 'we' in this statement? And how is a legitimate category of viewers being constructed here? I point out that, whatever our status as 'cared for', or 'carer', when we are old we are not included here in the general category indicated by the word 'our'. This discourse might prompt us, with Foucault, to ask: '[w]hat are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects?' (1984: 120). The answer might make clear that this discourse excludes old people from address and representation, obscuring those named as 'elderly', from the category of 'possible subjects'. One might ask therefore how much is the sagging, collapsing and bending that we are subject to as we age as much a result of the defeat of the spirit due to such exclusion, as it is the musculoskeletal changes that come with age. The strategy of 'pulling up through my core' therefore defies both the physiological and the social consequences of longevity:

> Experiences weigh you down, people's expectations – or lack of them – weigh you down even more. It takes a constant effort to pull up, re-establish your core. One has to struggle to become illuminated.
> (Moore, *The Mirror Stage*: 18th September 2015)

Towards the end of the performance lecture I ask questions about the expedient strategy of 'masking the mask of age' in a culture that 'others' and/or disappears all of us, progressively, as we grow older. My question resonates with Bridget Garnham's study, in which she argues that

> the practice of cosmetic surgery by "older" people constitutes a cutting critique of the limits of "older" and an experiment with the possibility of exceeding and ultimately transforming those limits.
> (2014: 1356)

Finally, by manipulating my face with my hands, as this process is projected live onto the rear wall of the theatre, I present a performance that reproduces the activities that I – and possibly many aged women and men – engage in privately when at the mirror, that is, holding up parts of my face that have sagged, to restore the smooth line of cheek or jaw, to remember the contours of my younger face and rehearse the possible effects of cosmetic surgery. While manipulating the flesh of my face, a recording is played of me reading the text of an absurdly enthusiastic Internet advert for a duet of anti-ageing cosmetics: 'AIMÉE Age Correction' and 'Eye Lift by AIMÉE'. My facial manipulations

contemplate first a moderately, then a radically, then an obscenely altered face. As this

facial choreography reaches ever more ridiculous extremes it presents a different kind

of mask – a grotesque image of anti-ageing intervention – and attempts to critique the

violence enacted by the AIMÉE face cream advert:

> It felt like every last pore on my face was being tightened and pulled by a
> gigantic vacuum cleaner [...]. I've never felt or seen anything tighten my
> skin with this kind of force before, no matter how expensive the product!
> (themediasharp.com)

Here the ubiquitous Internet pop-up adverts that prey, in an age-averse culture, on the

vulnerability of ageing subjects are exposed as fostering a grotesque form of self-hatred.

In the performance lecture I also explore the notion of an *iconic image of the self*. This

notion linked intrinsically with photography is discussed in Chapter One in the analysis

of *The Last of the Duchess*. Referring to Woodward's proposal that we reject our

mirror image during the 'mirror stage of old age' (1991:67), I attempt to answer the

question that she asks about where – if we reject our image in old age – we might then

be located.   Woodward diagnoses that we would be 'caught between the double' (our

mirror image which we reject) 'and the absent' (an absent image that could more

'truthfully' represent us). In response to this I propose – as above – that we might then

exist in an 'acceptable' historic image of the self, one which could be called an 'iconic

self', one that exists outside reality and is imaginatively located in the past.   In the

performance I describe the iconic self that I hold as a psychologically defining image,

replacing one image, which depicts me in Greece at the age of twenty-four, slim, tanned

and holiday relaxed, (which I quickly labeled 'not right'), with another: a high-contrast

black and white image in which I am forty-two. In this image, as I describe, I am on the

Rose Granite Coast in Northern France, and I am gazing and smiling off to the right of

the picture with my hand on my lower chest. These images both exist as an internal

notion of my own appearance. The fact that the mental image of me at twenty-four is

discarded as 'not right', replaced by one in which I am forty-two, speaks of the sort of

lag that might happen when one's sense of self moves forward after having remained

fixed by an attachment to an historical photographic image, which then gives way to another later image as the first loses touch with the present-possible self. The question that is implicitly posed by this section of the lecture is whether this 'iconic' sense of self can move forward, given the negative societal and internalised attitudes to the aged face and body that are outlined in the rest of the piece.

The final statement is an admission of fear, the fear of walking towards what I describe as 'an ever-darkening tunnel, one that leads towards ever-increasing invisibility' and there, on the lit stage, I state my desire to remain visible, to 'remain in the light'. The performance lecture thus juxtaposes propositions from the academy with my own subjective experiences and performances of age. I share and perform coping strategies and play with ideas of optimum lighting conditions and fantasy alterations of the appearance of my face. This exploration demonstrates the age-effect of current western cultural discourse, and allows acts of resistance to be contemplated within a discussion of the power structures that construct and disqualify the ageing subject.

Hands

In this sequence the hands are animated by a myriad of different stimuli, producing gestures that instruct, defend and point out; they perform tasks and react to emotional cues. They often appear to show desire and longing, and finally play out idiosyncratic sequences, reenacting the life story of the individual in a sequence of gestures. Here the company employ the 'body in temporal depth' technique, inspired by Basting's analysis of Ohno's performance of *Water Lilies* (see Chapter One), used in rehearsal to generate material for each of the three Passages performances.[24] As each life sequence

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[24] In *Life Acts* (2013) the group made a series of actions that described their lives, which were played in front of a projected sequence of photographs of the lives of each of the performers from childhood to the present day. In *A Blueprint for Ageing* (2014), against the soundtrack of the Frank Sinatra song 'It was a Very Good Year', the group became still and silent, each performer consciously re-experienced the events of his or her life and let the affect of these memories play out in his or her facial expressions and bodily attitude, subtly externalizing emotions generated in response to personal life narrative.

comes to an end the pairs of hands slowly withdraw behind the cloth and Cashdan's

amplified voice is heard reading her poem:

> Hands
> In their time these hands have gone through a lot –
> itched with chilblains, thrummed with pins and needles
> gripped the dentist's chair-arms, then relaxed
> into the creeping freeze of gum and lip
>
> sifted sand drifts on the beach
>
> torpedoed through breaking seas
>
> played the piano stretched beyond octaves
>
> memorising the shape of sounds
>
> reached for hidden blackberries, got scratched
> morphed into spiders, praying parsons, comforters
>
> kneaded dough, plasticine, unknotted muscles
> grabbed a child back from a cliff, a kerb, a swimming pool
>
> they've waved to the wrong people, been sat on, shaken
> done their bit of wanking, washing up, wringing out
>
> they've been held up, caught red, been one over the other
> and under
>
> when all they wanted was to be asked for, lent and given.
> (Cashdan, 2014: 57)

Fig. 18: The hands sequence in rehearsal.

The poem speaks, through the image of the hands, of the material and psychological details of a long life and ends with a melancholy sense of missed opportunity. It charts the emotional and relational significance of hands. Hands are emblematic of being human; we are taught as children that our unique, opposable thumbs distinguish us from apes and other animals.[25] The hands, isolated and engaged in action or at rest, even thought they are visibly aged, signify that humanity. One aim of this piece is to show hands at work, in order to indicate specific skills, honed over time. The focus on the performance of everyday actions articulates the sort of quotidian and tacit knowledge that, in Michael Polanyi's terms is not 'explicable' (1966: 34). This sort of knowledge, which takes years to acquire can go uncelebrated. It is associated with old age and, as sociologist of science Harry Collins explains, has three dimensions, including the social/relational (2010: 3). These skillful hands, sewing, cooking, writing, administrating or fixing, perform age as expertise and, set adjacent to the recited poem, these actions intimate the social and relational dimensions of the lives of individuals.

Hands also figure in popular age-mythology as they are widely thought to be a failsafe way of telling a person's age, exposing the masquerading effects of facial cosmetic surgery or youthful wardrobe.[26] In the 'Hands' sequence, therefore, we are, arguably, unmasking the general age of the group as a whole, while anonymising particular individuals. The 'Hands' piece also encompasses other effects; it is aesthetically compelling, some say uncanny, and for others emotionally moving. One person commented: 'I found this moment to be very powerful and I became unexpectedly emotional. The "age" of the different hands, the life, history and texture visible was so

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[25] One of, if not *the* earliest member of the genus 'homo', was an early tool maker named by the archaeologists Mary and Louis Leakey as *homo habilis,* nick named 'handy man' who appeared between 2.4 million to 1.4 million years ago (humanorigins.si.edu)

[26] This from the *Huffington Post* is a typical example of how hands and ageing are viewed in popular culture: 'Always exposed to the elements, your hands probably give away your age more than any other body part [...]. Even though hands usually start looking older in one's 20s, most people don't recognize the signs of aging until their 30s or 40s.' (www.huffingtonpost.com). Though not widespread, forms of anti-ageing plastic surgery on the hand have been developed in the last decade, for example see: Klox Technologies Inc.; Patent Application Titled "Oxidatitive Photoactivated Skin Rejuvenation Composition Comprising Hyaluronic Acid, Glucosamine, Or Allantoin" (www.epo.org).

very beautiful'. [27]   Another, in response to the question 'What, if any, parts of the performance challenged your ideas about ageing, or being older?' replied: 'The hands, their experiences and uses. The ageing of hands'.[28]   Another person was touched by the way the piece intimated mortality, commenting: 'When I watched the hands, I thought that people are born, people grow up and die, this life is not durable'.[29]   These responses show that the hands sequence prompts intimations of mortality and fragility as well as generating respect for the experience, skill and responsiveness of individual performers.   One of the early dramaturgical inspirations for the 'Hands' sequence was the old age of the Butoh performer Ohno, who began his professional career in 1949 at the age of forty-three, making his most influential works in his seventh and eighth decades, continuing to perform up to his death at the age of one-hundred-and-three.[30] Jennifer Dunning, in her obituary on Ohno's death in 2010 described his last years: 'Past his 100th year, he sometimes "danced" with his hands alone or crawled on all fours to communicate with his audience, making use of the working parts of a body ravaged by illness and age' (2010: n.p.). The 'Hands' sequence utilises the expressive longevity of the hands but is also a respectful acknowledgement of Ohno's indomitable spirit.

Masks

In the final section, the masked performers produce a multivalent performance of the aged body; in the words of one audience member they are 'anonymised' by their masks and costumes.[31]   The age of the performers is troubled by this guise, as can be seen from the following incident. When I was showing the rehearsal images to a friend on

[27] Audience questionnaire response, returned on or shortly after 18 September 2015.
[23] Audience response questionnaire, returned on or shortly after 18 September 2015.
[29] Audience response questionnaire, returned on or shortly after 18 September 2015.
[30] Ohno was born in 1906 and his major pieces included *Admiring La Argentina (1977) My Mother* (1981), *Water Lilies* (1987), and *The Road in Heaven, the Road in Earth* (1995). (Kazuo Ohno and Yoshito Ohno, 2004: 309–321).
[31] The impetus to dress up in playful, fancy dress, and to wear a version of motley, was inspired by Weaver's ironic hyper-feminine performance of Tammy WhyNot, detailed in Chapter Two. The masked performers were offered a dressing up box in the form of a trunk of costumes, which each had actually chosen from the costume store some days before.

my phone, he got to the image that showed Fig. 19, (below), stopped scrolling and said 'oh no, these are your young people', thinking these were students I had been teaching at a summer school a month before. Further scrutiny, especially of moving images,

Fig. 19: The masks in fancy dress.

might have confounded this assumption, however, the incident indicates that the use of masks has potential to suspend comprehension of these bodies as old.

The audience are led by the cast into the main performing space and invited to sit and witness a series of ludic actions that present the masks in various situations and guises. In an ironical nod to the earlier performance lecture – which had advised against being lit from the side – the masks first introduce themselves by moving into and out of a beam of sidelight. As the music plays, each mask comes forward, one at a time, looking directly at the audience and expressing some aspect of the performer's personality as

Fig. 20: Masked performers appear to the audience.

Fig. 21: The masks look out at the audience and are lit from the side.

each appears out of the darkness (7.00 – 7.34). At a certain point – reiterating, in a playful way, Woodward's notion of the mirror stage of old age – the mirror that each holds is brought into play and the masks appear shocked by meeting their own reflection. The following sequence stages the search for a playable identity (given the absence of the subject in the mirror, addressed in the performance lecture), and incorporates carnival elements of subversion, parody and the uniting of youth and age through action and projected images. The lights brighten and the masks, discovering a dressing up box and discarding their mirrors, excitedly pull out costumes and dress up in outlandish outfits.

Proud of their new attire and personas, the brightly dressed, masked characters play a childish game in which they entertain each other with tableaux from Shakespeare, depicting iconic scenes such as Bottom and the Fairies, the Three Witches, Hamlet holding Yorick's skull and Romeo and Juliet. The sequence expresses a playful desire to embody and subvert classic Shakespearean roles, some of which, with the exception of the Witches and Prospero, are now beyond the normative age range of these performers, especially the iconic Romeo, Juliet and Hamlet.[32] As the sequence ends with Prospero breaking his staff, the group respond by making a transformational circuit of the costume rail that is now centre stage. In a carnivalesque 'turnaround' they change their costumes for those of stereotypical old people. Donning dowdy coats, hats and scarves – a contrast to former colourful attire – they present what is, in the light of their former playfulness, an ironically subversive parody of the abjection of old age. Variously using walking sticks and chairs (representing Zimmer frames) to support themselves, they shakily or cantankerously move to sit in a configuration typical of a nursing home lounge. There is a pause as the masks look out at the audience. Quietly at first and then louder, music begins to play, a 2007 electronic dance remix of 'Moan'

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[32] Hamlet has, however been played by a series of actors who are well beyond the normal student age range, for example in 2000 Simon Russell Beale played Hamlet at the age of 39 (www.theguardian.com)

by Trentemøller. The 'elderly people' surreptitiously begin tapping their feet and walking sticks to the compelling beat and, as the track progresses, they begin to really catch the music. This propels them, one by one, off their seats into an exuberant and – in the words of one audience member – 'sexy' freeform dance. Confirming this 'sexiness', the masks discard their old people's clothes and the remainder of their carnivalesque costumes in a playful striptease, returning to the all-black costume in which they began the scene (7.39 – 9.21). All, that is, apart from one mask that refuses to take off her gold lamé hot pants. The masks dance, enjoying the way their bodies respond to the music and losing themselves in the beat. Film is projected behind the dancers showing members of the company (without masks) with the Student Union election campaigners, dancing on the concourse outside the Student Union building (described above, see Fig. 17 and 9.37 – 10.33). The video of the company is seen, behind the live dancers moving enthusiastically, learning the campaigners' dance and

Fig 22: Rehearsal of the masks dancing in front of the projected film.

waving placards. The combination of these figures, both live and recorded, evokes, briefly, a carnivalesque moment of 'second life' (Bakhtin, 1984: 9) in which all 'for a time [enter] the utopian realm of community, freedom, quality and abundance' (*ibid*). Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque can illuminate the ways in which this section of

the *Mirror Stage,* through both the on-stage and filmed moments, could stand outside and 'parody the extracarnival life' (1984: 11). The staging of the parodic version of abject age (described above), together with the gentle mocking of Shakespeare, might be a very tame version of Bakhtin's idea of the Feast of Fools or *Mardi Gras* events. However, the live and recorded micro-carnival does perform – to some degree – Bakhtin's 'peculiar logic of the inside out [...], of "turnabout", of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear' (*ibid*). By coming together with young people in a communal act that defied normative age barriers and by transforming from a parody of abject age to a body style usually demarked for youthful dancing, the company, evoking the spirit of Bakhtin's Medieval carnival,

> celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; [they] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions [...], free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste property, profession and *age*.
> (*ibid*: 10, my emphasis).

Bakhtin enlists the image of the Kerch terracotta 'hags', figures of old women depicted giving birth (1984: 25), in order to argue that in canonical works of the Middle Ages, 'the *age* of the body is most frequently represented in immediate proximity to birth or death, to infancy and old age, to the womb or the grave (1984: 26, my emphasis). In the case of the 'hags', both birth and death are present simultaneously. In contrast, according to Bakhtin, in the canonical works of subsequent eras '[t]he age represented was as far removed from the mother's womb as from the grave, the age most distant from either threshold of individual life' (*ibid*). In other words, art is concerned with individuals who inhabit anything from late youth to the end of the middle years. This is also a phenomenon of current media discourse, as the performance lecture argues. Bakhtin proposes that in medieval carnivalesque, representing the body as incorporating both infancy and extreme old age, proposes the body as 'the ever unfinished, ever creating body' (*ibid*: 26). While the company do not push these age categories to the limits of 'infancy'/'senility', they bring into appearance both youth and

age within simultaneous and proximate actions and images and thereby challenge the 'strictly completed, finished product' of the modern understanding of the body, in which, according to Bakhtin, the 'completed' body is 'isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies' (*ibid*: 29). While the carnivalesque encounter is only brief, there is potential in this unconventional, liminal space – where the intergenerational group convened – for the old body and the young body, set in proximity to and interacting with each other, to bring into appearance the phenomenon of radical 'incompleteness' in a way that complements Basting's 'depth model' of age performance as a strategy for troubling the normative performance of 'completed', age-static bodies.

Fig. 23: Still from the film of Passages members dancing with campaigners.

The Reveal.

The film, projected on the backcloth, is the first time the whole company have been seen without masks. This is one of a series of actions that prepares for the live 'reveal' of the performers' faces. Firstly, as the dance ends, the film fades and four photographs

of young faces are projected onto the backcloth. The masks, now in dimmer light, choose which face belongs to which mask, and the group of four chosen masks stand with each young face – these performers pictured as children or teenagers – projected directly onto each of the corresponding masks.[33] For a brief moment each mask is overlaid with a young face, presenting again Bakhtin's radical incompleteness and hinting at what, over sixty years ago, lay beneath the individual mask of ageing, covered here by a theatrical mask.[34] After this brief mirage, where youth appears, the lights brighten and it disappears; all the masks then return to the upstage line-up that started the piece. The performers begin peeping carefully from behind their masks, showing an eye here, a nose or a chin there, but they do not take off their masks. Rather they return, in the final sequence, to begin dancing with their mirrors to 'The Anniversary Song', in a romantic and melancholic waltz with their own reflection.[35] When the music fades the dancing stops and, in a unison gesture, all fully reveal their faces. One-by-one each performer looks at their reflection and speaks directly to the audience about what they see, unmasked in the mirror.[36] Some performers describe the changes that have been wrought on their faces by time; others note aspects of their appearance that remain constant such as the 'Irish red hair' that McManus mentions in her final statement. This is the first time that the audience have not only seen the faces but also heard the voices of the whole company. Until now – apart from the one-to-one performances – the company have, aided by the masked appearance, presented the old body as a visual representation, an image of an old performing body to which sometimes subversive, sometimes normative, meanings are attached. Once the masks

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[33] Unfortunately no footage or images are available for this section.

[34] The original aim was to have the whole company take part in this sequence, however the lack of suitable photographs and the technical restrictions of projecting so many individual faces meant that we could only produce a series of 4 images.

[35] The first manifestation of this sequence was in the *Life Acts* performance, described in Chapter Three.

[36] Again no footage or images exist for this section but see The Mirror Stage of Old Age section in Life Acts (Chapter Three) for a much earlier and slightly different version of this piece.

are removed, the performers claim some agency over the meanings that they embody through their spoken words.

The music resumes and the performers continue the dance with their mirrors, this time unmasked but with the masks held somewhere beyond the mirror, directed out to the audience. The words of the song are nostalgic, predicated on the passing of time:

> Oh how we danced on the night we were wed
> We vowed our true love, though a word wasn't said,
> Could we but recall that sweet moment divine,
> We'd find that our love wasn't altered by time.
> (Al Jolson & Saul Chaplin: 1946)

In the context of each performer's dance with their mirror image, the lyrics reinforce hope that time might not alter the relationship each has with their own reflection, even though this is something which the performance lecture throws into doubt.   As they come to the end of this last waltz, the performers bring up the masks to hold them directly next to their heads, presenting two faces: the blank white masks that the audience have associated with the company for most of the piece, and the individually aged faces, inscribed with the socio-cultural and historical meanings that attach to old age. The lights fade and the performance ends.

I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis the ways in which the image of the mask, while also being emblematic of the fields of theatre, performance and drama, is a potent symbol in age studies. [37] This performance aims to use the mask to both reveal and challenge meanings that attach to the ageing body. Jacques Lecoq claims that

> beneath the neutral mask the actor's face disappears and his body becomes far more noticeable. [...]. With an actor wearing the neutral mask, you look at the whole body. The look is the mask, so the face becomes the whole body. Every movement is revealed as powerfully expressive.
> (2002: 39)

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[37] The Mask of Ageing theory is based on the sense that 'a distance or tension exists between the external appearance of the face and body and their functional capacities, and the internal or subjective sense or experience of personal identity which is likely to become more prominent in our consciousness as we grow older' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991: 382). In addition Woodward (1991: 147 - 165) and others speak eloquently about the masquerading practices of characters in fiction and people in everyday life who attempt to obscure ageing bodies beneath the mask of youthful costume, cosmetics and the use of plastic surgery.

This obscuring of the face – the physical site where age is primarily detected – throws a kind of neutrality or anonymity over the old performing body. French dramatist Jacques Copeau, who advanced the use of masks in actor training, argues that when performing in mask the wearer 'acutely feels his possibilities of corporeal expression' (qtd. in Callery, 2001: 48).[38] Copeau saw the face as 'tormenting', arguing that the mask 'saves our dignity, our freedom', intimating a sense of the handicap to performance (in all its forms) that is felt as the face is scrutinised for its cultural and historical meanings. The mask throws off this constraint. Dymphna Callery, writing on physical theatre, claims that actors using mask in training take more risks and '[i]nstead of imitating life in behavioural terms, [...] begin to find dramatic expression'. Similarly the masked performers in *The Mirror Stage* step outside the bounds of normally accepted behaviour for people over the age of 60, dancing, interacting with the young and generally being playful. The effect on audience members of such dramatic corporeal expression is detectable in the following comment:

> It made me aware of the constant, powerful tendency that we (or at least I) have to assume that older people don't like to do anything active or mischievous or subversive. I'm intellectually aware that this assumption is stupid, but it still surprised me to see sexy dancing from the women in the show.[39]

It is possible that Passages performances could shift this understanding from the merely intellectual to the more generally acceptable, even if only in the mind of this person.

Another member of the audience commented some days after the show that during the section where the ensemble was in full view, yet wearing masks, *he kept having to remind himself that these were old people.* His email feedback added:

> It did get rid of that automatic "these people are old people" thing in my brain – they could have been any age while they were anonymised with the costumes and masks.[40]

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[38] I am using the term 'dramatist' to encompass all of Copeau's many activities; he was variously an actor, director, literary critic, writer and performance coach.

[39] Email response, questionnaire attached, received 4th October 2015.

[40] Email response, received on 30th September 2015.

Keith Johnstone in his book *Impro* speaks of the trance-like state that can be induced by wearing and/or being *in the presence of* masks (1981: 143-192), and it is possible that this is what the audience member felt. However, in his verbal remark (in italics above) this person had reported a feeling of oscillation between realising and forgetting the age identity of the people wearing masks. This destabilization might have happened because in *The Mirror Stage* masks are *not* primarily the means of accessing the state of 'possession' Johnstone names. Rather, masks function as a means by which a more deep-rooted 'mask' – that of the aged face – can be momentarily dislodged. The audience member's (italicised) comment seems to confirm my intuition that the choice to use masks and to only reveal the faces of the whole company at the very end of the piece, has the potential, not so much to obscure for the audience the age of the bodies, but to allow the audience to perceive beyond the 'thing in [the] brain' that limits the capacity of the old body to evince a wide variety of meanings.[41] By 'anonymising' the faces in terms of age, the masks might be able to effect a suspension of discriminatory judgments that would ordinarily be made about the old performer, or mitigate consequent feelings of audience alienation from the bodies on stage. The comment also reveals that this audience member at least is holding in tension the act of forgetting the age of the bodies on stage with the act of remembering what is 'really' the case. Feeling this tension of forgetting and remembering brings into focus and unsettles the meanings that attach to the quality of age. Lecoq argues that 'the neutral mask in the end unmasks' (2002: 39).[42] Following this contention one could say that the presence

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[41] It is important here to note that my aim was not to obscure the age of the bodies (so the hands were shown and one-to-one encounters were experienced in the first part of the performance) but to discover techniques that would temporarily shift the perception of what the old body can mean in performance, and therefore, by extension, in everyday life.

[42] Claiming that the masks that we have chosen are 'neutral' (Lecoq's terms) could be seen as problematic, as the claim of neutrality for the sort of masks we use may be perceived as reproducing a Caucasian, and Western notion of youth and beauty and claiming this as 'neutrality'. Though any mask will convey meaning of one sort or another, these plain, white masks, some petite, sculpted and approximating an ideal of feminine beauty and some larger, flatter and less conventionally beautiful, are employed specifically to challenge the meanings that attach to the aged face, rather than to project a specific meaning or identity. Further research to experiment with more effective types of mask, which might produce more subversive age-effects

of the mask brings about these two states of knowing and forgetting, allowing a dual state of perception in the audience member, both of identification with and distance from the body on stage. This oscillation seems to amount to more than a suspension of disbelief and has the potential to simultaneously disrupt and reveal meanings that attach to old age. Masks can reveal doubleness, blending and merging identities and meanings. Richard Schechner, describing the Elema, New Guinea *Hevehe* mask ritual claims that

> neither the performed (masks) nor the performers (villagers) is absorbed into each other [...]. It is not that one reality reflects, represents, or distils the other: Both move freely through the same time/space. The realities confront, overlap, interpenetrate each other in a relationship that is, extraordinarily dynamic and fluid.
> (2003: 44)

Bruce McConachie focuses on such a blending phenomenon when, drawing on Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's 'conceptual integration' or 'conceptual blending' theory (2002:18), he explains the neurological process of 'blending' or 'conceptual integration' with respect to performance. He contends that, as actors or spectators, people are able to hold the understanding of the actor/character duality in their minds by blending seamlessly between the actor and character facets of the body on stage. He comments that: '[t]he activities of the theatre encourage its participants to think about the inherent doubleness of all theatricality' (2013: 25). The audience member, reported above, evidently noted this sense of doubleness as he moved between multiple understandings and/or readings of the bodies on stage.

Given the audience's likely prior knowledge that this is a company of old people and given their one-to-one encounter with a company member, which takes place before the masked piece, it seems safe to assume that the age of the performers is not hidden.

would be beneficial. I had wondered about producing masks that presented a stylised version of the face of the wearer, possibly painted in the performer's own skin tone and taken from a mould of their face, however, I rejected this idea before I ever tried it out because of the implication that this mask would attempt to erase the facial indicators of age of this *specific* face and present a youthful version of this *particular* wearer, which wasn't my aim. The white masks that performers do wear are chosen for their anonymising quality. They are slightly luminous under stage light, and are sufficiently uncanny to draw the attention, yet at the same time ensure that, as Lecoq puts it, 'the look is the mask' (2002: 39).

This understanding is then blended with a perception of the mask as a non-aged, fictional role. [43] In line with Fauconnier and Turner's theory the aged body of each performer is blended with an age-disrupting neutral mask (role) and both perceptions are kept simultaneously, in what Julia Walker calls the 'oscillating dynamic' of a conscious, integrated blend (qtd. in McConachie, 2007: 557). Audience comments show a blending of the multiple identities held by the masked figures, with one observing that 'The reversion to youth in the final section of the performance was beautiful', and another – expressing the way the performance made him or her focus on the representation of old people – describing the impact of 'the young in costumes becoming old in the typical "old person" clothing'. These respondents seem to identify the roles as variously young and old while temporarily suspending their undoubted knowledge of the performers' age identity. They appear to be taken up with the meaning ascribed to the clothing (youth or age) and it seems safe to assume that the masks enable this blending of ages to take place. According to McConachie, the audience can assimilate make-up, props and costume (including, presumably, masks) into what they think of as reality:

> theatrical viewers do not parse the differences between actual and fictional props, scenery, and dialogue when living in the blend of a performance. Rather than considering the fictional part of a play performance unreal, it makes more sense to acknowledge that it is make-believe [...] but to insist that this make-believe can be a part of reality. When spectators blend together actuality and fiction, the blended images they produce in their minds retain their reality for them.
> (*ibid*: 561)

McConachie's argument suggests that what is seen as make-believe and assimilated when viewing a theatrical performance might be taken as part of an understanding of

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[43] The mask may have the same effect as the sort of distancing produced by a large theatre and heavy costume and make-up, which enables actors such as the fifty-four year old Sarah Bernhard to successfully play the teenager Joan of Arc (in Henri Auguste Barbier's 1898 play), or the seventy-four year old Carol Channing to revive her Broadway hit performance in the title role of *Hello, Dolly!* thirty years after the original 1964 production. However, the masks are in no way attempting to symbolize or reproduce the appearance of a younger character rather they are only employed to shift the meanings that attach to the marks of age on the face of the performers; indeed they are worn when the performers are embodying both young and old personae.

reality that audience members carry with them beyond the theatrical experience. It seems clear however, that the age identity of the actual performer is never fully forgotten; the same respondent who describes the 'reversion to youth' as 'beautiful' also states: 'The anonymity of the masks reflects the idea of the 'non-person' in old age'. These comments taken together hint not only at the anonymity that comes with age, but also that the masks could be seen as a neutral ground on which other identities can be written. Fauconnier and Turner assert that '[h]uman beings are exceptionally adept at integrating two extraordinarily different inputs to create new emergent structures, which result in new [...] ways of thinking' (2002: 27). It seems likely that the multiple levels of age identity that audience members are able to ascribe to the performers, result from wearing the mask; this mask, attached as it is to the face of the old performer, might be deemed a *multivalent mask* that allows the mimesis of youth and of age to be integrated with meanings stimulated by the knowledge of the performer's longevity. In this way the audience might have been 'made to believe' in a different way of conceiving old-age identity. If we agree with McConachie's assertions about the reality of performance remaining with the spectator, then the perception and understanding stimulated by viewing a piece of theatre can, conceivably, be blended into the perception of a particular (old) subject in everyday life, outside the theatre space.[44] In a lasting way then the audience might be *made to believe* in something beyond the normative construction of the aged subject. As Fauconnier and Turner assert:

> Blends may or may not have features of impossibility or fantasy. Many blends are not only possible but also so compelling that they come to represent, mentally, a new reality, in culture, action and science. (2002: 21)

As can be seen from the audience members' reactions their integrated knowledge of the performers' oldness are blended with the attributes of 'activity', 'mischief', 'subversion',

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[44] McConachie's assertion answers Butler's argument (discussed previously) that theatrical performance is distinct from every-day performance and outlines a process whereby the theatrical can be used as a tool with which to alter perceptions of the every day. This is the very research question with which this thesis is concerned.

'infirmity', 'frailty', 'youth' and 'sexiness' that the masks are liberated to embody; this, arguably, shifts the post-performance imaginary of some audience members with regard to conceptions of the old person, ideas about the old body, *and* what the old body is capable of meaning.

Fauconnier and Turner draw the distinction between form and meaning when explaining why a formalist approach to neuroscience only took scientists so far in seeking to explain how human beings think and perceive the world. They cite the story of Patroclos stealing the armour of Achilles and going out to fight the Trojans; at first the Trojans cowered, thinking Achilles was on the battlefield but when the deception was revealed they fell upon Patroclos unmercifully. Fauconnier and Turner use this to illustrate the distinction between form (Achilles' armour) and meaning (Patroclos) and to argue that 'form does not present meaning but instead picks out regularities that run throughout meanings. Form prompts meaning'. (2002: 5). My practice attempts, through the device of the mask, to insert a space between the form of the old body and the meaning associated with this form, to interrupt the 'regularities' that flow from the form toward the meanings ascribed to it. The mask here allows the aged performing body to become multivalent, capable of simultaneously holding a complex of meanings. Some of these, such as sexy, subversive, or mischievous challenge the normative construction of old age while some, such as cantankerous, infirm, or hesitant play out, in an exaggerated form, the common meanings that attach to the old body. This holds the potential to militate against the normative disqualification of the old body and render the performer open to a liberating legibility.

Writing on 'The Seductiveness of Agelessness', Molly Andrews critiques Featherstone's and Hepworth's 'mask of ageing' theory, addressing the fallacy that there is a youthful self beneath the mask of age, which obscures our 'real self'. She argues that '[t]he concept of the mask only works if one presumes a dichotomy between what is shown

and what lies beneath the skin' (1999: 304). Discourse and power structures reinforce a Cartesian sense of interior/exterior splitting and in her discussion of this subject Andrews notes that

> depressed, disengaged old people are described as old, while those who defy this stereotype, who retain a passion for life, are considered young, if only in spirit.
> (*ibid*: 305)

So the terms 'old' and 'young' are inflected with value judgements and appropriated by the dominant discourse, influencing notions of our own and other's experience and manifestations of age. Although audience members identify points in the performance where the masks appear either youthful or old, many comments suggest that the normative designation of 'old' is suspended, at least for a time, and by wearing a (second) mask – like the practice of motley described in Chapter Two – the performers in *The Mirror Stage* potentially disrupt the youth/age representational and cognitive binary that Andrews identifies. This therefore holds the possibility that the old subject in performance has been glimpsed, even if only for a moment, as one divested of the value inscriptions that are associated with marks of age on the body.

Conclusion.

Some weeks after the performance an audience member emailed me saying:

> It's over a month since I experienced the piece now, and I have realised that it has made me more attentive to the issues that were raised [...]. I have just finished reading Woolf's *The Waves*, which follows the characters as they age and realised that I was picking up on themes that your piece had addressed. I'm not sure that I would have done this, had I not experienced your piece.[45]

It is encouraging to think that *The Mirror Stage* has refocused the thinking of even one person about the meaning and representation of old age. The actions, scenes and style of presentation of *The Mirror Stage* draw on a wide range of theoretical and practical research undertaken throughout the doctoral process. In this performance elements

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[45] Later feedback email, received 21 October 2015.

are combined that emerge from works of social and cultural gerontology, most notably the images of the mask and the mirror, but also the action of the aged performing hands; this led to potent stage images and actions that stimulated different ways of seeing in some audience members. Seemingly spontaneous happenings, such as the celebratory coming together of old and young people, and the carnivalesque playfulness of the masked characters – actually the product of many years of experimentation – were developed into compelling theatrical moments. By utilising an episodic structure the performance kept audience members in a state of constant movement and disruption, preventing them relaxing into a comfortable, normative mode of encountering the old body on stage, or in proximate performance. The search for agency over the ways in which old people are represented underpinned this practice-as-research project and the mode of one-to-one performance gave the performers total agency over at least one small section. The one-to-one performances, while speaking implicitly of a full and long life, sidestep the question about the legitimacy of a project about age and ageing that only focuses on old people, by making at least part of the work not exclusively concerned with age and ageing *per se*. This experimental performance exposed the cast to risk of failure and embarrassment, as all experimental work does; by embracing this risk, and through both the form and content of the work, the cast challenged normative conceptions of age and confounded expectations of what old performers can present and embody on stage. Lastly, I placed my own personal age-performance in the piece, as a performance lecture that indicated some of the terms through which the performance should be considered. This set my age-aware gestures and bodily stylistics in dialogue with theories and questions about age identity and the representation of old people. Audience questionnaire and email responses confirm that the aim to trouble the meanings of age and to challenge the normative expectations of old age identity were at least momentarily successful for some spectators. Taking this evidence together with – in Allport's terms – the efficacious contact made in the one-to-one performances, it is clear that *The Mirror Stage*

achieved its aim to question the meanings that attach to the old body and to trouble the position of 'other' that old people occupy, both in performance and in everyday life.

Conclusion

At the outset of this project I declared that I was personally embroiled in my own research, that I undertook an investigation into the performance of age and ageing partly in an effort to maintain psychic and social health and that my admittance to the academy in my middle age was permitted, in my mind at least, by the fact that I was researching the very subject that differentiated me from most other postgraduate students, that is, age. I conclude, not only with comments on the findings that my practice with Passages and readings of performances in mainstream and alternative theatre settings have produced, but also with testimony as to how these new understandings – arrived at through considering what Lipscomb calls the 'multiple realities of performance' – have shaped my own middle-aged, female subjectivity at this age-sensitive moment in life.

This study has spanned six years, during which I have passed through a watershed point in any woman's life – menopause. I have also separated from my partner of 32 years and my children are now young adults. In this respect my life has followed a normative pattern when it comes to contemporary sexual and family relationships: middle age, children grown to independence, the end of reproductive capacity, divorce. The irony of this classic scenario happening to someone who wishes to challenge cultural blueprints for ageing is not lost on me, however, I believe that my research has enabled me to navigate this passage with a firmness and resilience that I would not have had were I not engaged in it. This has had an intellectual dimension, in that awareness of ideas such as Gullette's narrative of decline, of Skeggs's notion of inscription on the body, Woodward's insight into the impact of cultural age-representation on personal identity and Basting's perception of the body in temporal depth have aided me in resisting the feeling of disappearance and redundancy that De Angelis showed Hilary as prey to in *Jumpy*. This firmness and resilience has also been

accessed through a physical understanding and practice, inspired by the concept of performativity that Butler outlined almost three decades ago but which has only recently been applied to age. I am now aware, observant and thoughtful about the ways normative constructions of old age have an impact upon my physique. By searching out strategies that might disrupt this effect in Passages' performances, I have myself adopted a pursuit of significant form and accomplished shape in the physical sense that Cristofovici identified in Wall's photomontage (see pp. 126–128). This has informed my embodied understanding of physical presentation and posture, which I alluded to in my Performance Lecture in *The Mirror Stage* (see pp. 216–222). I now practice an everyday performance of open posture when in public, creating a high-status body language and sense of physical significance which I have to recreate consciously every day and which I often fail to achieve. I make this strategic physical effort in order to combat the diminishment and disappearance that my body *takes on* due to the impression I receive from cultural messages that my presence should not unduly disrupt the visual field. I pull up through the core of my body, relax my shoulders and face the world at eye level rather than casting my face to the floor and collapsing my core in the hope that my presence and most pertinently *my sexuality* will be obscured. For a woman to present with an open, high status posture is a sexual signal, it exposes the genital area, the stomach and, most particularly the breasts, which are thrust upwards and outwards as the shoulders extend and the neck lengthens. As women age beyond youth this sexually confident presentation becomes even less acceptable than it is in our younger days and consequently a collapse in posture – which is partly associated with biological phenomena such as loss of bone density and muscle strength – generally results. Consequently, some conclusions to this thesis are borne out in what Philip Zarrilli would call my 'bodymind' (2004: 655), that is, in my every day performance-practice-understanding, something that I can only speak about here but which I endeavour to demonstrate on a daily basis. This is a conclusion, made at the end of six years of practical and thoughtful study, one that opens the possibility

of new research into the performativity of age. Further investigation into how awareness of cultural messages about age impact upon the body could be interdisciplinary, involving medical researchers, psychologists and social scientists and its results would have real-world implications.

Undertaking this research has had other effects upon my sense of age-identity. As a consequence of this PhD project I have realised some long held ambitions. Firstly I have gained permanent employment in higher education, a distant hope when I began my MA studies over a decade ago (see Chapter Two). More significantly for me, I have come a long way on my journey from drama to post-drama (my practice now incorporates both styles of performance), from a theory-free to theory-rich understanding of drama, theatre and performance. This is clearly a narrative of progress. Finally, I have realised a life-long artistic ambition: I am the director of a theatre company, Passages, with whom I make work in a postdramatic, intimate and participative style, something I would have been incapable of a decade ago. This research project, on a personal level, in its very process and completion, is evidence of midlife growth, change, acquisition of new skills and development of new understandings; and as such it counters the normative account, which would be one of midlife feminine decline, diminishment and disappearance.

The above autoethnographical account addresses the last of my stated aims in this thesis, that is to research the potential of performances and performance making to change ways of thinking about and doing old age. Below, this and the other aims will be addressed one by one, in order to assess in what ways they have been met. During this discussion attention will be drawn to what methods and approaches might be useful to other practitioners/researchers and where research might be taken in the future. The thesis will conclude with testimony from the members of Passages themselves.

However, before this I will discuss the ways that the project may have been more successful and one way in which it did not fulfil a particular expectation. One way in which this project might have been even more successful in challenging normative constructions of age and ageing could have been if Passages had not been populated generally by amateurs but had been made up of professional, retired or semi-retired performers. There may have been ways that the performances could have been more risky, confrontational and or challenging. For example the materiality of the ageing body could have been explored in a way that was more exposing for the performers on stage. The experience of the participants could have brought a greater presentational expertise to performance, possibly making the shows more compelling, bringing the content in sharper focus and its performance more controlled. Having said this, the performers had a delicate, open touch, which often evinced fragility and they were in command of the improvisational and participative style of the performance; many audience members commented on how these aspects were compelling. Also this research might not have evolved in the way that it did with professional performers, who may have been more fixed in their sense of performance technique and ways of presenting. Furthermore, the audiences that the amateur performers encouraged to see the work, and – given the voluntary nature of their participation – that the work was able to reach, possibly represented a more diverse range of people than if professional performers had been involved.

The main way in which the practical project departed from the original PhD proposal, submitted in January 2011, was that it did not produce any intergenerational performance. This was particularly my aim when preparing for what eventually became *The Mirror Stage*. As discussed in Chapter Five, there were three different attempts at making contact with a group of young people with whom we might investigate age as understood by people in the marginalised age categories of 'youth' and 'age'. I hoped that bringing both groups to a more nuanced understanding of the

individuals who belonged to each of them would explicitly question the representational stereotypes that each group had of the other, and might even unite these individuals in a shared understanding of how their respective age category is constructed by cultural apparatus. While working with these specific age groups might have risked reinforcing the binary of youth and age (erasing the continuum towards older adulthood, then into and out of middle age) it might have brought a recognition that the demarcations of youth and old age can exist both to marginalise these age-categorised people, and as categories against which the age-normative citizen can be defined. As one-by-one our potential young partners declined to participate, practical and time considerations meant that this was eventually shelved as part of the project. This was a shame as much could have been discovered about the way each group viewed the other and about potential resulting relationships and how they impact on the sense each individual has of the 'others'. The 'othering' of old people may well have been the very reason that we couldn't find a group of young people to work with, though there is no way of knowing this for sure. There is more work to do on the integration of young and old people and all ages in between in this time of intergenerational strife. Performance is best placed to effect such change, as it is a strongly interrelational art form. The field of age-critical performance studies could advance if methods were found to promote this sort of contact and exploration between and across the generations to achieve something like a pangenerational, participative project that might promote intergenerational understanding. My future research is strongly inclined in this direction (see below).[1]

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[1]Actually, in the Autumn/Winter of 2015 Passages *were* involved in an intergenerational project with the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield AHRC funded INTERSECTION research, which was led by Prof. Jane Plastow. Three different generations in Jinja (Uganda), in Nanjing (China) and in Sheffield (UK) were involved in a series of theatre workshops which explored 'attitudes towards environmental conservation across time and space' (https://vimeo.com/177615603) and facilitated their responses to the theme of sustainability. Short and longer films of the project can be found at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/intersection/theatre/films and https://vimeo.com/177615603 respectively.

The rest of this conclusion will address the project's other aims, how it met them and the learning and questions that resulted. Alongside this assessment, indications will be made of the ways the work could be used by other practitioner/researchers and/or taken forward to develop age-engaged performance and/or the field of age-critical performance studies.

My first aim was to '*To focus on the ways that contemporary British theatre represents the lives of old and ageing people, and, where such representations are present, to question the ways age and ageing is framed in the multiple realities of performance and the possible "age-effects" this framing might have on the ways subjects – including myself – "do" age in their everyday lives*' (p. 41). Throughout this thesis I have uncovered new insights into the way age is played out on the British stage in the early twenty-first century.

Part I concentrated on reading professional performances, the first chapter detecting a clear focus on age and ageing in plays produced in the first decades of the new century on the mainstream British stage. This research showed through the survey of the 2011/12 season that the stigma of ageing femininity was exposed by some dramas, for example *Jumpy* and *A Round Heeled Woman,* however, the only drama I witnessed that offered a subversive performance of age was one of empowered middle aged masculinity (Johnny Rooster Byron in *Jerusalem*). The analysis also showed that drama could reinforce the binary of youth and age, by casting two different bodies to play the youth and old age of one character (*Lovesong*) or blur this binary to some degree by showing ageing as an event (*One Day*). Problematic age-effects resulted when old relationships were not drawn in the same emotional detail as those of younger characters and old age was identified with decline, disease, euthanasia or suicide (*Lovesong* and *Salt Root and Roe*) or portrayed as profligate after the 2008 crash (*The Last of the Haussmans*). Casting decisions, highlighted in the analysis of

Jumpy showed how age plays out in the multiple realities of performance, in which the menopausal female body represented by the character Hilary was obscured by the younger pre-menopausal body of actress Tamsin Greig. In Chapter One I also recorded my assessment of the personal impact of these dramas and their casting on my own sense of age-identity and reported one overheard comment that indicated a generally negative age-effect produced by the drama *Lovesong*. The implication of this snapshot survey for theatre makers is that when they – commendably – create dramas in which old people are in central roles, they need to pay more attention to the detail of the age politics they are reinforcing. The perception of an increased presence on stage of elder actors is a subject for further study and if this perception were borne out by quantitative research then this developing situation is commendable.[2] However the age-narratives dramatised by such plays should also be scrutinised for their potential age-effects. For example, the presence of exemplary, vital old characters in *The Last of the Duchess* was certainly undermined by the representational 'obscenity' of the frail fourth age in the same drama.

Continuing the search for a troubling performance of ageing femininity, not conclusively found on the mainstream stage, Chapter Two showed that the form of multifaceted, postdramatic, autobiographical performance was more effective in unsettling the identity position of the old woman than the mainstream dramas explored in Chapter One. Here I discussed the ways Houstoun's *50 Acts* revealed, through stage image and action, the discourses that pertain to ageing femininity, and how she challenged these through a claim to a future in art and through her very presence within experimental dance-theatre practice, beyond the usual retirement age for a dancer. This chapter also showed how Baker's strategy for wellbeing in *Mad Gyms* was

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[2] In her 2016 *Performing age in Modern Drama* Lipscomb asserts 'The popular interest in age and aging has burgeoned in concordance with the growing number of older adults, and much of that interest addresses age as a performance' (2016: 5). Though concerned with American experience, this supports the possibility that there are indeed more dramas centering on the experience of old age than were in evidence before the Baby Boomer cohort reached their later middle and old age.

shown to perform her tacit self-knowledge, and stage the embodied techniques that address discourses that would construct her medicalised, ageing bodymind. It also analysed how Shaw's presence in frailty in her assisted performance *Ruff* explored the creative possibilities of experiencing a stroke but also confounded expectations of what it is to labour as a performer on the threshold of the fourth age. In addition I showed how Shaw's insight into her queer identity revealed the complexities of the intersection of this with age and gender and how her epic, interoceptive 'journey inside' disclosed a physical interior that equates with a notion of inner identity. I discussed how this sense of inner identity is thought to be obscured by the surface of the ageing body and is argued to be phantasmagorical in Butler's reading of gender performativity. This supported my argument that Shaw's performance *Must: The Inside Story* unsettled the meaning of age as a surface signification, through her interoceptive technique and the projection of age-obscure archive images of cells onto Shaw's aged female flesh.

In the exploration of Weaver's character Tammy WhyNot the image of the mask – which is contested in age studies and was to prove so fruitful in the practice (*Life Acts* and *The Mirror Stage*) – came into play. Here I showed how the myth of Tammy Wynnette, sublimated into the comic-ironic figure Tammy WhyNot, enables Weaver to continue to perform as hyper-femme beyond her sexually reproductive years. I proposed the notion of 'motley' as a concept to describe Weaver's practice, through which – extending Griffin's application of Barthes to autobiographical performance – she enables normative meanings of age to fall away between considerations of the multiple personae present on stage. Part I concluded that the use of the postdramatic form is a flexible way of facilitating non-normative readings of age and showed how Baker, Houstoun, Shaw and Weaver use this multifaceted form to expose the discourses pertaining to age, achieving this through their acknowledgement of the body's materiality and their manipulation of the sensual and subversive possibilities of performance.

My second stated aim: '*To assess the meanings that are attached to the figure of the old person on stage and what it is possible for the figure of the old person – especially the old woman – to represent in performance*' (p. 41) was also addressed by Part I as you can see in the summary above, but the second part of this aim: '*what it is possible for the figure of the old person to represent in performance'*, is one of the main concerns of the three chapters that explore the practice. My research with Passages explored the way old bodies carry negative cultural inscriptions, associated with decline, obsolescence, rigidity and dependency, and it attempted to *re-inscribe* the old performing body with alternative and more nuanced meanings and to shift value assumptions. The indication that such re-inscription had taken place was shown by (among others) one audience member who reacted to *Life Acts* by saying that it had confirmed that 'older people can have ideas, dreams and can move gracefully'. Other reactions showed that audience members acknowledged a shift in thinking or perception, for example about fixed stages of age (*Blueprint*) and that the meaning of the body of the old person on stage had been disrupted by the use of masks and costumes (*The Mirror Stage*). As well as proposing these more positive or disruptive performances of old age and ageing a recognition of frailty as performance was found in the production of 'considered attending' in *Life Acts*, and was present as an authentic aspect of Guiton's one-to-one performance 'Lucky Chicken Soup' in *The Mirror Stage*. The practice also acknowledged physical impairments through the self-descriptions that the performers voiced in the 'Mask and Mirror' sequences (*Life Acts* and *The Mirror Stage*). Basting's notion of the body in temporal depth – which shifts the perception of the old body to one which can encompass all the ages it has ever been – was achieved in the same performances in the sequence 'Moving Through our Lives' (*Life Acts*) and also inspired elements of the Gerotranscen*dance* and the 'Hands' Piece (*Blueprint* and *The Mirror Stage*). This went some way to giving a nuanced performance of age across the practice. The implication for other practitioners and/or theatre scholars is that it is possible, through detailed experimentation and applied

critical thought, for theatre makers to shift perceptions of the figure of the old person. This thesis asserts that theatrical methods *are* capable of shifting perceptions of specific categories of subjects and to challenge the stereotypes that other forms of cultural apparatus reinforce. This possibility could extend to categories other than age and also to performative art forms such as film and performance art. The question remains however, as to how this might be effected in mainstream commercial theatre production and the wider media in general. Can artists and researchers, primarily working in the academy or niche performance fields such as autobiographical performance, influence age-critical change across the more popular production of media and performing arts? And if so, how?

The third aim was *'to bring age-theory and other categories of theory together with performance analysis and performance practice, in order to investigate how such ideas might illuminate and shift the representation and conceptualisation of age and ageing'* (p. 39). The practice and its exegesis (chapters Three to Five) has explored and been informed by (among others) the theories of Basting, Butler, Cristofovici, Gullette, Skeggs, Woodward, Hepworth and Featherstone, Schneider, Lakoff and Johnson, Fauconnier and Turner, Williams, Phelan and McConachie, as well as Crenshaw and Allport (see pp. 34–40 for a summary of how these theories have informed the work). Many of these thinkers (Butler, Basting, Cristofovici, Gullette, and Woodward) both informed the analysis of performances in Part I and inspired the practice and its exegesis (Part II). As the methodology section in the introduction intimates, certain ideas such as Woodward's have consistently informed the practice and have also been used in the exegesis. Some have influenced thinking and practice across the whole thesis; for instance Cristofovici's work on the photographic image and its power to evoke memory, presence and identity across time (1999: 270). Her insightful proposal that the photographic representation of the old person should evince a sense of 'accomplished shape' and 'significant form' (1999: 275) illuminated the intersection of

gender and middle age in the plays *Jumpy* and *Jerusalem* (Chapter One) and this idea has driven the self-presentation by cast members in all the performances. Exercises and performance inspired by her ideas are outlined in Chapter Three but Cristofovici's notion of significance and accomplishment and of the 'poetic body' was a regular point of reference in all Passages' rehearsal processes. This method of using theory from multidisciplinary sources to initiate, inform and/or explain practice is not at all new, however, the methodology, the performance footage and the exegesis of practice offered in this thesis, is good case-history evidence to recommend and outline such an approach to practice-as-researchers within a similar project or more generally.

The fourth aim: *To use practice-as-research methods to find new performance theory, practice and/or forms that address the representation of old age and ageing and might produce counter-normative, age-critical performances that both acknowledge and trouble common conceptualisations and understandings of the aged subject* (p. 41) was addressed through specific performance techniques and processes that were discovered or adapted and were informed by the ideas surveyed in the paragraph above. This praxis enabled a shift in perceptions of ageing, at least in some audience members (see below), and a presentation of new images and considerations of old age. Combining Cristofovici's and Woodward's ideas of the photographic and psychic representation of age, I proposed the notion of an 'iconic self' which informs the analysis of *The Last of the Duchess* in Chapter One and is also a central concern of my performance lecture (Chapter Five). This notion of the iconic also inspired the live feed filming in *Life Acts* (Chapter Three) in which the image of the aged performer is elevated to iconic status. The notion of an 'iconic self' identifies the presence of a fixed sense of self in the imagination of the subject and shows how to some degree that might shift over time. It also encompasses the idea that an iconic status might be created for the present image of the self through performance techniques such as live feed. This technique might have the power to dislodge the previously established iconic self-image

and replace it with something more in line with contemporary reality, though more research needs to be done here. Drawing on Skeggs I have offered the notion of negative 'future-value' as a stigma borne by the old body; the analysis of *Life Acts* and the dramaturgy of *The Mirror Stage* were driven by this understanding. Out of my analysis of Weaver's performances of Tammy WhyNot I proposed the notion of 'motley' as a concept, through which normative meanings of age are able to fall away between considerations of the multiple personae present on stage. In a simplified form I applied this to the carnivalesque work in *The Mirror Stage*. These notions, of an 'iconic self', of 'negative future-value' and of the performative powers of 'motley', might inspire performances of age and ageing in other projects and (particularly 'future-value') could inform work by other researchers (not exclusively performance researchers), into the stigmatization of old and other types of people. More work needs to be done on the ways iconic images of self might be analysed, used and shifted both in and through performance and on the ways motley might be a potent technique for disrupting the normative perception of any category of subject.

As for producing new performance forms, the projections of photographs on to the masked faces of the performers in *The Mirror Stage*, though not entirely successful technically, presented the possibility of a device that could, given time and resources, be developed to stage ageing as an event and experiment with notions of an 'iconic self'. Projecting the film behind the live dancing in *The Mirror Stage* showed old people in an everyday (if carnivalesque) setting, unsettling the normative figure of 'old'. Bringing this film into the performance space enabled the disruptive potency of this action to be revealed, especially when it was used as a backdrop to live masked dancing of the 'anonymised' old performers. This technique and the live-feed technique which helped elevate the image of the old person to iconic status (*Life Acts*), when applied to the work of old performers has the potential to challenge the invisibility of both third and fourth age participants who may be 'present' in future performances through film or

live feed, even in advanced states of frailty.[3] In addition, bringing the image of the mask and the mirror together with the performers' self-descriptions – in both *Life Acts* and *The Mirror Stage* – created a piece which gave agency to old performers and presented '[o]lder people taking ownership of how they are viewed' (p. 140). The power of masks and their potency to both disrupt and retain understandings of the performer's identity was acknowledged by this work, and masks proved particularly useful in troubling the figure of the old person on stage; further experiments to find more effective types of mask might produce more subversive age-effects.

Blueprint developed Passages' experiments with postdramatic, intimate and participative performance, which, by its very nature as an 'emergent' form, confounded normative expectations of what elder theatre can be. The development of techniques to facilitate the performance of accomplished shape and significant form, described in Chapter Three, is applicable not only to work with aged participants but can be used with all sorts of marginalised groups. The 'Geographical Journeys' piece also performed in *Blueprint* has proved an entertaining icebreaker with many groups and moreover it values the longer life intrinsically in its performance. This, coupled with the 'Leaf-Fall of Identities' piece, form a duet of exercises that I have used in many different contexts.[4] The 'Leaf Fall' piece is a new performance and visual metaphor, which presents ageing as a multifaceted, accumulative and inter-relational process.   It is adaptable to many situations but is particularly revealing of the body in temporal depth that Basting conceives; the older people become, the richer and more varied are their possible identities *and* the interrelationships between them and between them and others.   Given the establishment of sufficient trust, this technique can reveal

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[3] Of course ethical considerations of dignity and consent would have to be taken into consideration.

[4] I have used this piece to forge connections between Passages and the 'Ages and Stages' group whom we visited at The New Vic Theatre on 18 February 2016. I also adapted the piece with the help of Dr. Rachel Van Duyvenbode to facilitate the opening of the inaugural SEED Project (which explores diversity of all types within the university) at University of Sheffield (13 January 2015). I have used it to model the use of lists in performance and to facilitate group dynamics in teaching at the University of Huddersfield. This piece will undoubtedly be part of my ongoing practice.

hidden experience, skill and understanding in individuals and forge strong connections within groups and between members of different groups as surprising coincidences are revealed. This piece can be adapted to facilitate all sorts of groups and themes; for example it might be used to generate dialogue as well as lists on a number of topics and it might be used to think through the lives of fictional characters in the exploratory process of rehearsing drama. This thesis therefore can be drawn on as a resource for those practitioners who are looking for methods and pieces to use when working with old people and other groups.

New narrative resources were found and offered within Passages' performances; these took the form of 'John's Philosophical Question' in *Life Acts* and the one-to-one performances 'Lucky Chicken Soup' 'Different Journey' and 'Hands On' in *The Mirror Stage*. The principle of proximity was also used as a disruptive technique in Passages' 'Where do you Stand' piece in *Life Acts*, and the one-to-one performances, in *The Mirror Stage*. I set out how this practice speaks to Schneider's call for an alternative to the occularcentric focus of western theatre and Allport's theory that group contact can reduce discriminatory feelings between categories of individuals. New research could spring from these findings about the efficacy of proximity to illuminate and trouble the cultural construction of age. This could facilitate the intergenerational understanding that is so needed in today's post-referendum, post-crash Britain and which this project failed to do. At the time of writing I intend to investigate the possibility of a post-doctoral practice-as-research project, which will ask questions about the relationship between prejudice and proximity through intergenerational one-to-one performance.

On the whole, all of the above ideas, methods and forms can be used and adapted by practitioners – not only those working on the subject of age or with old people – to create new work and to facilitate different types of groups. The project shows that such an undertaking can generate the production of a rich repertoire of performance practice

and this knowledge should serve as encouragement for other practitioner/researchers to experiment in ways outlined in this thesis.

Finally, my fifth aim was '*to research the impact that performances have upon subjects (including audience members, performers and myself), focusing particularly on the potential of performances and performance making to change ways of thinking about and "doing" old age*' (p. 41). I have found that new considerations of age were detectable in the responses to Passages' performances, gathered through questionnaires and email/online comments. The performance of *Blueprint* meant that for one audience member '"hope" appeared like a flash' (p. 185) and *Life Acts* helped another to recognise that 'older people can have ideas, dreams and can move gracefully' (p. 111 and above). One *Life Acts* audience member felt that he or she had understood how the 'mass media try to set conflict between the elderly and the young' and that this performance had shown how 'the notion is wrong' (p. 134). The aim of *The Mirror Stage* to unsettle the meanings that attach to the old body in performance did bear fruit, at least for one audience member who asserted that '[i]t did get rid of that automatic "these people are old people" thing in my brain – they could have been any age while they were anonymised with the costumes and masks' (p. 234). These and many other comments quoted in this thesis demonstrate that the practical performance element of the research has produced age-effects that trouble perceptions of the old, of the normative ageing process, of the marginalisation and fixing of particular age categories, and therefore how age might be 'done' both on and beyond the stage.

More work has to be done on how the professional stage might be encouraged to take such a transformative approach to the representation of old people, in a way that some producers are currently doing with the representation of disabled and d/Deaf people.[5]

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[5] For example the consortium of six producing venues that come under the umbrella name of Ramps on the Moon (including Sheffield Theatres, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Nottingham Playhouse) are collaborating with Graeae to produce an annual tour of a classic play that

As we all age and hopefully grow old, and as ageing and the passing of time is so often the subject matter for drama the responsibility for representation of these processes and the subjects/characters that undergo them must be taken seriously by major producing companies. The potential for the types of participative, intimate and postdramatic performance described in this thesis to disrupt the normative representation of age, ageing and old people should be taken into consideration by producing companies, if they wish to change common cultural constructions of age and serve the ageing population by representing aged/ageing people in ways that speak responsibly to our lived experience and value. Questions remain about how such companies can be encouraged to concentrate on such issues and how research in the academy can influence such change.

Many people have participated voluntarily in the practical element of this study, mostly as my co-researchers into the performance of age and ageing. As well as evidencing the age-critical impact that performance making has had on the performers, it seems appropriate at the close of this thesis, and in modest reference to McDonnell's call for an ethical historiography of participative group practice (2005: 136), to leave the last words to those, without whom the practice element of this research would not have been possible: members of Passages Theatre Group.[6]

> Despite the fact that we're all white, basically middle class, relatively professional, generally there is quite a range in [the] group.[7]

> The style has been very, very new for me […] quite eye opening.[8]

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integrates disabled, d/Deaf and non-disabled performers. I saw their performance of Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* at The Crucible on 14 April 2018. In this piece actors signed their words as an integral part of their performance and some actors were spoken for by other members of the cast in a way that completely integrated disability and d/Deafness into the show.

[6] This testimony has been taken from audio interviews conducted at two points during the process (July 2013 and July 2015), not all members were interviewed due to availability.

[7] Ruth Carter, 8 July 2013.

It's a different way of looking at things for me because it isn't linear but it's also not from a script, it's about my innermost thoughts and feelings.[9]

With Passages I think I feel less as if I'm being caught by old age [...] its as if it's got less of a grip on me [...] as if it's loosening it. Part of it is the actual activity of doing different, experimental things.[10]

It can reaffirm you in who you are because a lot of difficulty about getting older is you're not doing a valuable thing at the moment, you're not contributing to society [...], and people treat you like that [...], almost like you're a waste of space [...]. It's remembering who you are and what you've done and being confident in that.[11]

It's made me see that I'm a life long learner, I already knew that but it's been totally confirmed by some of the work we have done.[12]

After the first year of retirement I had that sort of rocking-chair mentality. So I think it has changed my perspective on my own ageing.[13]

There's been times when I've been missing for months, but you and the group just slotted me in. Well that was one of the most enriching experiences for me. [14]

Being part of Passages has enabled me to tap into this creative side that I didn't know was there and also I've let it reflect in other aspects of my life [...]. It's being amongst people who are so willing to think outside the box

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[8] Shirley Fox, 28 July 2015.
[9] Shirley Fox, 28 July 2015.
[10] Ruth Carter, 8 July 2013.
[11] Tricia Sweeney, 29 July 2015.
[12] Shirley Fox, 28 July 2015.
[13] Ruth Carter, 29 July 2015.
[14] Shirley Fox, 28 July 2015.

because that doesn't come easily to me [...]. That's what I've got [...] that's my mantra, to be willing to look at things differently.[15]

So yes [it has been] terrifying, challenging but in the end really sort of meaningful and very worthwhile.[16]

It's made me more aware and more understanding, so that maybe, hopefully, I'm more likely to reach across the generation levels than I was before.[17]

It's made me slightly braver to challenge people when they start stereotyping older people. So that's been really helpful, and got me in a few states [arguments] as well.[18]

Much of what we were challenging ourselves within the process and performance challenged the audience.[19]

I remember there was a group of younger people who were just in that square and they were playing music and they were dancing and we quite naturally just started dancing with them and that was almost a breakthrough, because you could tell they were surprised and they enjoyed it and we were just taking part and hopefully it brought the generation barriers down just by doing that.[20]

I've been very surprised by how much it has got through to the audiences [...]. What I was extraordinarily pleased, and I think surprised by, was how

[15] Shirley Fox, 28 July 2015.
[16] John Evans, 30 July 2015.
[17] Tricia Sweeney 29 July 2015.
[18] Shirley Fox 28 July 2015.
[19] Jasmine Warwick, 8 July 2013.
[20] Tricia Sweeney, 29 July 2015.

many people told me how moved they were by it. […] Because it made them think, was what some people said.[21]

It's like looking in a mirror and seeing who you are. In the studio where we've been working there's been that big mirror on the wall. You can sometimes get lost in who you are, and how you're perceived, and I think I've never really been one to look at myself in the mirror before, and it's almost like a search to find who you are, and then stand on who you are.[22]

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[21] Romola Guiton, 29 July 2015.
[22] Tricia Sweeney, 29 July 2015.

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