

“It Did Get Rid of the ‘These People Are Old People’ Thing in My Brain”’: Challenging the Otherness of Old Age through One-to-One Performance

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ABSTRACT

*This paper concerns the one-to-one performance work of Passages—a group of performers aged between 60 and 90—founded to support Bridie Moore’s PhD research into the performance of age and ageing. It analyzes how these performances challenge perceptions of the old person as “other,” and uses audience feedback, together with performance and social theory to explore how the work achieves this. The group uses mask work, proximity and intimate performance as a form of quiet activism, to challenge structures of thinking in subtle and penetrating ways. The analysis refers to the performance *The Mirror Stage*, given at the University of Sheffield (UK) in September 2015, and the paper discusses the one-to-one performance form and the eight one-to-one performances that were presented in the show. It engages with de Beauvoir’s (1953/1972) and Phelan’s (1993) notions of the “other” in order to explore the way the perception of otherness*

*plays out and is disrupted by the presence of the old person in one-to-one performance.*¹ *The paper introduces the possibility that the contact facilitated by one-to-one could, as Allport (1954) argued, reduce prejudice concerning individuals who are members of outgroups such as the “old” and, by extension, to other marginalized individuals and groups.*

This paper concerns the work of Passages—a group of performers aged between 60 and 90—founded to support my PhD research into the performance of age and ageing.² Here I analyze how Passages’ one-to-one performances challenge perceptions of the old person as “other,” and I use audience feedback, together with performance and social theory to explore how the work achieves this. The group uses mask work, proximity and intimate performance as a form of quiet activism, to challenge structures of thinking in subtle and penetrating ways. The following analysis refers to the performance *The Mirror Stage*, given at the University of Sheffield in September 2015.³ At the opening of this performance each audience member met one performer in a one-to-one. For the remainder of the show, first the bodies of the company were masked in a performance in which just the hands were visible; then only the faces were masked. Finally, the company collectively revealed their faces, each delivering a frank description of their appearance to the audience. How one-to-one within this performance disrupted the othering of the old person is the subject of the following discussion.

¹ I have chosen, with Barbara Macdonald, to embrace the word “old” rather than “older. The word “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.

² This was undertaken between 2011 and 2017 at the University of Sheffield in the UK, and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

³ The phrase *The Mirror Stage* was taken from Kathleen Woodward (1991) who proposes that at the end of life there is a “mirror stage of old age,” which is equivalent to Lacan’s “mirror stage of infancy.”

ONE-TO-ONE PERFORMANCES

On the question of both being and representing the figure of the old person, old performers are what social scientist Tehseen Noorani (2015) calls “experts-by-experience” (p. 32) that is, they have experienced what it means to age and be affected by representations of old age. To acknowledge this expertise, as part of *The Mirror Stage Passages* members made one-to-one performances that held implicitly within them a sense of time lived, of studied experience and of expertise gained over a long life. These have the potential to unsettle the normative representation of the old person in the mind of a potential participant.

In one-to-one performance the performer sets up the context in which they and a single participant co-construct the piece. As Zerihan (2009) explains, one-to-one gives an opportunity for “the spectator to immerse themselves in the performance framework set out by the practitioner” (p. 3). It “focuses attention and heightens the potential of the performative meeting, activating further performance’s agency to ignite response-ability in its audience” (p. 4). We aimed to harness this potential for agency and response in *The Mirror Stage* performance.

Passages performer Shirley Simpson’s one-to-one “Hands On,” centering on narratives of the body, invites participants to draw round their hands, inscribing the tracing with words and phrases while conversing on the subject of hands. Simpson then tells the story of her own recovery after her hand became semi-paralyzed:

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.⁴

The piece communicates Simpson’s understanding of her body, gained at a point of challenge in her life. Further, it aims to help the participant overcome negative attitudes to bodily failures. This work had an effect

⁴ Taken from “Reflections re my 121” document, sent via email on 6 October 2015.

upon at least one of Simpson's participants:

one participant did tell me that [...] she would work at changing her own attitude towards her hands that were giving her some pain. Others [...] opened up with other stories about their life as they talked and traced around their own hands. People genuinely seemed to enjoy talking.⁵

The impact of this work on both Simpson as a performance maker and on her participant is evident and shows one-to-one can be mutually transformative. Other one-to-ones that opened *The Mirror Stage* are as follows:

"Resonance" (Ruth Carter)

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, connection with other cultures, intriguing places nearer to home and philosophical exploration. Carter invites the participant to choose an object that holds some resonance, and to reveal the story or thoughts that the object stimulates for them. In exchange she reveals what the object means to her. The encounter is infused with the authority of Carter's voice as she guides the participant through the process, drawing on her long experience as a counsellor and mentor.

"Connections" (Elizabeth Seneveratne)

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 and shown an exhibition of photographs. These images depict various ways in which Seneveratne's hands, and those of her family, have 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 Armitage's poem. The two bodies in the long narrow space move further apart; Seneveratne reaches the far wall as she ends the poem. One participant

⁵ Taken from "Reflections re my 121" document, sent via email on 6 October 2015.

commented that “her recital of the poem had a visceral and dramatic effect on me.”⁶ Seneveratne draws on her considerable vocal skill to evoke the emotional content of this poem and themes of the piece.⁷

“Commonalities” (Tricia Sweeney)

Sweeney invites her guest to write down, on small pieces of paper, hobbies, pleasures, pastimes and/or particular details about tastes etc. She then presents these on a table, together with her own equivalent cards, making a map to see where commonalities or differences occur. This is an opportunity for the performer and participant to learn about each other. According to Sweeney, it draws on her previous work in occupational therapy and psychiatric settings; it functions to “bring people out about their concerns and enthusiasms” having a “gentle low-key, calm atmosphere.”⁸

“Lucy Chicken Soup” (Romola Guiton)

Participants are offered a bowl of soup while listening and responding to a cautionary tale of a momentary lapse of concentration. As the soup bubbles on the stove, Guiton asks the participant about similar family recipes and when her phone alerts her she serves the soup. She then reveals that it is actually the other pan 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 soup, went to sit down for a rest, only to be woken two and half hours later by the smoke alarm. She was later admitted to hospital with smoke inhalation. Guiton discusses with the participant any similar experience they may have had; one that made them re-evaluate their behaviour or strategies. Guiton has a diagnosed memory-loss condition; throughout the piece she demonstrates strategies (such as mobile phone alerts) that help her cope with this

⁶ Ruth Carter’s post-production evaluation.

⁷ She was trained in at the Central School of Speech and Drama and then taught voice at Dartington College.

⁸ This was reported at a reading and discussion of the first draft of the exegesis on 5 May 2016.

impairment, these she calls “mental walking-sticks.”⁹ The fragility of memory is implicit in the performance.¹⁰ However, this performance also demonstrates Guiton’s intelligent rationalization, fierce independence and resilience 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 strategizing the incident might have triggered social welfare interventions, compromising Guiton’s independence and self-determination.

“Wool” (Liz Cashdan)

This piece invites the participant to connect, in a tactile way, to a twentieth-century, intercontinental family history of the raw wool and blanket trade. Cashdan shows pictures and tells stories of her ancestors—Russian, Jewish émigrés—who came to the UK, escaping the Russian Revolution in 1917. Cashdan is discovered seated, knitting; she talks proudly about the sweater she is wearing, the sort fashionable when she knitted it in the 1980s, in her middle age. Via the jumper, Cashdan connects participants with thirty years ago 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 reach back to the earliest years of the twentieth century. As stories are told and photographs, books and other artefacts shown, the participant glimpses the world of disappeared generations. The participant is invited to touch 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, through socio-historically specific details, about class, longevity, generational continuity and the fibres that bind

⁹ This phrase was used in the first meeting we had about the one-to-one and I recorded this in my notes on the piece. I had to write up these notes and send a copy to Guiton, as she needed to have everything in writing as an aide memoire.

¹⁰ To be clear, Guiton did not perform this frailty it was present as part of her natural performance presence.

individuals across time.¹¹ “Wool” finishes with Cashdan reading one of her poems, written recently as part of a Yorkshire Dales arts project. She invites the participant to feel and smell the scraps of raw wool found on barbed wire fences that inspired her work. This final act locates Cashdan as a present, creative force, responding to the world, here and now. The material substance of the wool, sensually present in the room, which she is wearing and manipulating into new forms, links her implicitly with both the vital here-and-now and a world communicated from her long living memory.

“Second chances, different journey” (Shirley Fox)

An autobiographical story of personal struggle, resilience and success, inviting the participant to envisage their own future goals, this piece is also a testimony to Shirley Fox’s broken identity, which fractured on emigrating from Germany to England when she was two-years-old. At the opening, Fox draws attention to the walking boots at the doorway, which frame the piece as a journey, she shows her birth certificate, in which she is named as “Utte Charlotte Kagelmacher.” “Shirley Winkley,” she explains, was the UK name given to her in 1945; “Winkley” is her stepfather’s name and “Shirley” is after child star Shirley Temple. According to Fox, this loss of her original German identity figures as a difficult rupture in her life. She then shows her naturalization papers and a wedding photo—which speaks poignantly of isolation—of her standing alone in her white gown, outside the church. Fox points out the ways in which the women’s magazines she has arranged on a desk construct the “perfect wife” and stand for a period in her life of “buns and babies.” These magazines indicate how she failed to live up to the gender-specific standards of the time; this led to her divorce in 1975. To mark this second fracture, she takes the copy of her marriage certificate and of her Decree Absolute and severs them both with a small guillotine, throwing the pieces in a nearby bin.

¹¹ 87 years old at the time of the performance, 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. These films can be seen at cinageproject.eu.

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 word or phrase that expresses this fracture is written on the wall, adding to a list signifying other ruptures. The mood brightens as Fox moves into the more positive phase of her life-story; 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 to become educated (post-divorce) beyond class expectations. This certificate, her daughter’s birth certificate (single parenthood), her naturalization papers (final split with her German heritage) and counselling qualification (professional independence), speak of her attempts to overcome the various rifts in her sense of identity, precipitated by emigration and divorce. She then turns to a display of colourful leaflets, which represent her enthusiastic consumption of educational, arts and cultural activities. Here the narrative changes to one of hopeful rebuilding, this new sense of self, growing directly from a narrative of lost agency, rupture and second-hand identity.

“Speak clearly” (Clare McManus)

This is a fun master-class in how to make a prototype message, or greeting for your answerphone. Contrary to expectations about the technophobia or incompetence of old people when it comes to digital technology, this piece relies on McManus’ skill in using recording and digital applications. The participant rings a cell phone that plays a message in which McManus tells them to knock and wait. On entering, McManus plays excerpts from a selection of YouTube tutorials about leaving voicemails, and then helps the participant, either to access their cell phone’s message recording facility, or to record a prototype message on her Dictaphone, which she later emails to the participant. McManus coaches the participant about delivery, vocal quality and taking a deep breath before starting.

The whole piece is couched in a semi-official style, including a tongue-in-cheek requirement to sign a disclaimer. The room is decorated with speech bubbles giving handy tips such as “energy is contagious,” and “have a smile on your face.” In her influential text *The Right to Speak*, Patsy Rodenberg (2015) 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 [...] have the right to control how and what we have to say (p. 2).

McManus 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. One participant reported privately to me the transformative effect of recording such a message in this piece. Although “Speak Clearly” appears light and playful, by exploring the relationship between voice and its expression of self-worth McManus attempts to reacquaint subjectivity with its right to speak.¹²

Together these pieces convey a range of approaches and themes. Some evoke a sense of personal or family history, address relationships or communicate lived experience; one is a playful piece and another a storytelling exchange. Together they speak of resilience, a lifetime of learning and understanding, a rich sense of connection to the past and a hopeful communication of this for the future. The performers’ creative autonomy has inspired pieces that are inflected with questions and insights about experience, longevity, historical positioning, cognitive and physical impairment and resilience. Collectively they counter the notion that old people are a homogeneous group and are technophobic or resistant to new ways of doing and making art.¹³

¹² “Speak Clearly” had a life beyond *The Mirror Stage* as McManus performed it at WROUGHT festival in Sheffield in April 2016.

¹³ Initially one of the group (Shirley Simpson) was skeptical about the one-to-one performance form, seeing one-to-ones as “therapy sessions.” However, when she saw the effect that her piece had on the participants she came to realize one-to-one’s potential for raising questions, stimulating debate and giving interrelational opportunities. On the whole the group embraced the work as a new challenge, even though they were unsure of this new type of performance. Some of the one-to-one performances turned out to be highly sophisticated works of art, (‘Wool’ for example) and some were beautifully simple offers, sharing aspects of the life of the performer and participant (‘Resonance’ for example).

ONE-TO-ONE PERFORMANCE AND OTHERNESS

One-to-one interrogates the position of the “other” in performance relationships and, by extension, in any human encounter. In *The Mirror Stage* it 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 the old person is generally situated in the position of “other” (even if the participant is also old). Zerihan (2009), when describing one-to-one, often names the participant “the other.” For example, having experienced Adrian Howells’ *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008), she describes being “bound by moments of shared embodiment that Howells had created for me, his ‘other’” (p. 37). Moreover Zerihan (2006) 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” (n.p.). In *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir (1953) employs the term “other” when arguing that the male is constructed as positive and essential, and the female as negative, inessential or “other.” In *The Coming of Age* (1972/1996), 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 (p. 284).

de Beauvoir defines 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.” Considering de Beauvoir’s analysis of femininity *per se*, an old woman is twice “othered,” both as a female and as old.

The *relational* nature of “otherness” is also pertinent when analyzing the one-to-one form; Peggy Phelan (1993) argues that:

[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 (p. 13).

Summarizing Joan Copjec's and Jacqueline Rose's analysis of Lacan's concept of "the other," Phelan (1993) contends 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 (p. 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 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. p. 21). One-to-one utilizes this socially reproductive function, and if the 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 each exists as "other," and is reflected and reflecting. So, a participant in Guiton's one-to-one might well conceive of the way they are being imagined by the server of the "Lucky Chicken Soup" as a person with what could be termed "normal" memory lapses. Correspondingly, Guiton understands that she is both being understood as and representing herself as a resilient and independent person but one living with memory loss.

Phelan (1993) 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" (p. 10). Writing 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. p. 23–7). However, if, like Butler (1990/2006), 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. For example, Simpson’s performance “Hands On” leads directly to the identification of one with another through the almost universal notion and material reality of the hand and thus promotes a simultaneous understanding of sameness and otherness in both performer and participant. Through this mutual understanding, where the performer creator is an old person, one-to-one has the potential to mount a challenge to normative perceptions of the figure of the old person solely as “other,” even in the mind of an old participant. This can be heightened by a context promoting mutual discovery, as do many of *The Mirror Stage* one-to-one pieces.

At the opening of *The Mirror Stage*, one-to-one audience members encounter their performer “other” face-to-face. Thereafter, performers are fully or partially masked until the end of the show. This encourages audience members to search for their original one-to-one “other” (and consequently, following the above analysis, for themselves), first among the performers where only the hands are visible and subsequently among the figures of the masked chorus of performers. Masking the whole company until the end of the performance disrupts assumptions that spring from the image of the old person, especially her face. The face is the area of the body (along with the hands) that holds the most potent meanings associated with age; 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, who emailed me, is to some degree forgotten:

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.¹⁴

¹⁴ Email response, received on 30th September 2015.

The audience member has previously encountered one unmasked member of the cast and seen all their hands revealed, so he simultaneously knows and forgets that “these are old people.” This implies that the normative figure of the old person has been fundamentally disrupted in the mind of this particular participant.

One-to-one, in live artist Kira O’Reilly’s words is “[a] highly stylized, highly structured, heightened social interaction” (in Zerihan, 2006, n.p.). This type of social interaction, which constitutes—as Alan Kaprow (1993/2003) puts it—“lifelike art” (p. 201) is a form of quiet activism that transforms relationships. Kaprow claims, “lifelike art [...] is a training in letting go of the separate self” (p. 217). Kaprow’s use of the word “self,” as it applies to one-to-one, includes both the artist and the co-constructing participant. An understanding of the relational nature of selfhood helps explain the transformative potential of one-to-one. In *The Mirror Stage*, the notion of the old “other within us” is challenged in the minds of both the performer and the audience-participant and this disruption can potentially extend to old people outside the performance space. One participant discussed how the piece “Connections” had caused her to consider her relationship with an older “other,” her mother:

The performer held one end of a ribbon and I held the other. We were connected, [...]. 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.¹⁵

This sense of both connection and separation is echoed in accounts of one-to-one more generally: Heddon, Iball and Zerihan (2012) contend that “[o]ne to one performance is employed as a tool for claiming and proclaiming individuality” (p. 121), and yet Zerihan 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 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, this duality is brought into focus. It is this tension

¹⁵ Email questionnaire, received 5 October 2015.

between membership of a specific group—in this case the marginalized group named “old”—and the universal experience of individuality that was brought into play, both in the one-to-one encounters and in the masked production as a whole.

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, p. 79).

Intergroup Contact Theory supports this contention. First formulated in the post-war period and investigated in detail by, amongst others, Allport (1954), Intergroup Contact Theory contends that the greater the contact between social groups, then the less those groups will display prejudice or negative bias towards each other. Intergroup contact is therefore useful in combating the social exclusion of marginalized people or outgroups.¹⁶ 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. One-to-one 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” and that this contact will diminish prejudice.¹⁷ Furthermore, Allport postulates that there are optimal intergroup contact conditions that lower prejudice and can be particularly transformative of the way 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, p. 752). It is clear that one-to-one

¹⁶ This can include both verbal and physical (non violent) contact. Contact can have emotional, intellectual and or political dimensions, and can be of an everyday or more formal nature.

¹⁷ Outgroups can consist of marginalized or minority subjects, but the term “outgroup” can also be defined in relation to the “ingroup” in question in any study or discussion. Therefore notions of “ingroups” and “outgroups” could describe a wide variety of groupings of people. In this article I use the term “outgroup” to denote the marginalized category of “old.”

fosters mutual goals and has the support of the overarching authority structure of the performance event. One might argue that equal status in a one-to-one is doubtful because the performer originates and controls the context and because the participant is in an unfamiliar setting, however Passages' work is highly interactive and follows the co-constructional model exemplified by performers such as Howells, fostering a collaborative relationship of trust and exploration.¹⁸ So, following Allport's findings, the conditions for lowering prejudice have been significantly met and can potentially challenge the way audience members might view these particular old people, and therefore others they encounter subsequently.

CONCLUSION

Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) 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 (p. 766).

Such understanding of the efficacious nature of contact applied to Passages' work could be extended to apply to all interactive and immersive performance forms, which provide structures within which meaningful contact can be made between individuals and between groups. Phelan's notable distrust of the *specular* as an efficacious instrument to alter power relations is mitigated by this notion of contact, which, in one-to-one, can include hearing, touching, even smelling, as well as seeing, and it certainly includes proximity and relational self-reproduction, as discussed above. In *The Mirror Stage* contact took place in a context designed carefully and sensitively by each old performer, one that showed expertise, experience, understanding and skill. This performance fostered involved and complex levels of contact and conceivably a reduction in prejudice between the outgroup "old" and those who (while part of any number of different groups) at that

¹⁸ Howells used the term "audience-participant." See Heddon and Johnson (2016), p.10)

moment, made up the group called “the audience.” This work performs a quiet activism that can change structures of thinking and ways in which groups can relate to each other. Further research with members of any outgroup might confirm the assertions made above about the potential for one-to-one and other intimate forms of performance to effect a social change in understanding of outgroup identities.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Bridie Moore is a Lecturer in Performance at the University of Huddersfield. She recently completed her AHRC funded PhD at the University of Sheffield, researching the performance of age and ageing in contemporary British theatre. Before lecturing Bridie was a theatre director and facilitator in mainstream and community theatre, working for, amongst others, Liverpool Everyman and Battersea Arts Centre. Her PhD incorporated performance practice-as-research and to facilitate this she formed Passages, a group for performers over the age of fifty. *Life Acts*, was staged at Sheffield University Theatre Workshop in April 2013 and went on a public engagement tour. Subsequently Passages have staged three interactive performances: *A Blueprint For Ageing* (2014), *The Mirror Stage* (2015) and *You Need Hands* (2016).