

Making the Time of Our Lives: Unfinished Experimentations in Performing the Ageing Identity

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This article begins with an unfinished ending. After performing their own life courses in an energetic series of extended movement signatures in *The Time of Our Lives* (a work-in-progress and their first performance), the members of Passages Theatre Group walked slowly into a final line-up downstage, each clearly stating their age:

Fifty

Sixty-three

Sixty-six

Sixty-six

Sixty-nine

Seventy-one

Seventy-four

Seventy-nine

Eighty-four.¹

The performance then ended as each individual began a yet-to-be-completed step, one left hanging in the air; an unfinished stride towards the future. This performance focussed on first memories, presenting these as foundational to identity; in it the possibility of the future was staged as continuous with the just performed, yet distant past.

I aim here at a short and open-ended history of Passages Theatre Group, beginning with an explanation of the process and theoretical underpinning of the first

¹ Nine of Passages Theatre Group's 18 members performed at this showing of *The Time of Our Lives* at The University of Sheffield's Theatre Department on 3/12/12.

phase of their work. Then in the section ‘Identities’, I detail the group’s staging of identity through a dramatisation of first memories, and examine the implications of their investigations into the performance of the significant ageing subject. Following this, I propose a notion of ‘future value’, problematising the ascription of *negative* future value to old age as a stigma borne by the older body, detrimental to the perception of the worthiness of older people. Finally, I explore the implications for the group’s future representations of the ageing subject in performance. Bill McDonnell calls for a historiography of theatre that ‘might reflect more accurately a politics of process’, which ‘could take in the making of texts, rehearsal, performance and post-performance, [...] supplemented with diaries or journal reflections’. 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’.² With this in mind, I include relevant reflections from Passages members and quotations from the academy alongside my own consideration of the work, presenting a variety of voices and opinions.³ Using these methods, I outline the ways in which the first performance enabled a ‘making visible’ of the past and consequently produced insights about specific older identities, which would otherwise have remained obscure. In addition, I argue that the negative ‘future-value’ inscribed on the older body can potentially be disrupted by staging identity through time.

Passages Theatre Group, for performers over the age of fifty, was formed in the second year of my PhD research into the performance of age and ageing. It was conceived as a practice-as-research group, which might attempt to develop new

² Bill McDonnell, ‘The politics of historiography – towards an ethics of representation’, *Research in Drama Education*, 10.2 (June 2005), 127-138 (p. 236).

³ The sources for participant quotations are video recordings of discussions, notebooks kept by participants during the devising process, and questionnaire responses on the work so far from eight of the participants; all were written and recorded between 4/10/12 and 20/12/12. Unfortunately no audience response is included in this paper.

performances of being older, ones that might challenge cultural perceptions of ageing and old age, and explore attitudes to the ageing identity. Through performance practice with members of the group, who I see as my co-researchers, I hope to address particular questions that arose from an earlier period of research; into a selection of live performances in ‘mainstream’ theatre where age was central to the drama, and into aspects of cultural ageing.⁴ Part of the purpose of the group is to investigate, through practice, various theoretical models concerning the performance of age and ageing, particularly those of Anne Basting and Anca Cristofovici, who both offer powerful models for the representation of the ageing subject. The impact of these models on the work is discussed in the next two sections.

The Depth Model

Basting develops a ‘depth model of age’, ‘a model of age that embraces change’, as a counter to the normative mask of youth in performance.⁵ In the chapter ‘The Body in Depth: Kasuo Ohno’s *Water Lilies*’, she analyses the way eighty-seven-year-old Ohno’s performance ‘entwined a series of möbius strips of culture, gender and age’.⁶ This eloquent description indicates the fluidity of effects achieved through Ohno’s metamorphoses, but for Basting, it was his performance of *age* that was most revelatory:

⁴ ‘Mainstream’ is taken to mean theatre that is offered by subsidised or commercial theatre buildings, and is defined in opposition to what might be called ‘experimental’, ‘avant garde’, ‘contemporary’, or ‘fringe’ theatre (see John Bull, ‘The Establishment of Mainstream British Theatre 1949-1979’, and Baz Kershaw, ‘Alternative Theatres 1949-2000’, both in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Vol. 3*, ed. by Baz Kershaw and Peter Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 326-348 and pp. 349-376 respectively. Relevant to aspects of cultural ageing are Stephen Katz, *Cultural Aging: Life Course, Lifestyle, and Senior Worlds* (North York: University of Toronto Press, 2009), which discusses historical models of ageing set against contemporary lifestyle models that are influenced by consumer markets, and Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged By Culture* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), critiquing the narrative of decline promulgated by cultural apparatus such as television, the press, and the education system.

⁵ Ann Davis Basting, *Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 142, p. 132, and p. 184 respectively.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

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.⁷

She sees in Ohno's performance a new model for constructing age, 'using performance to imagine and embody past and potential changes across time'.⁸ This new symbolic economy honours the depth of experience of the aged body, according it the *utmost* value because it can represent the greatest sum and variety of age, whilst still accounting for the potentiality of the aged subject. Passages' work experimented with this model by attempting to stage the 'event of aging' through performance of movement signatures.⁹ These signatures were developed according to a formula that allotted each performer a quota of actions proportionate to their age. The resulting movement sequence performed key moments in each life, whilst transitions between actions existed as liminal spaces where ageing might – potentially – be seen to take place.

Employing a guiding principle of directly correlating age value with performance value (quota of time on stage) has enabled the workshops that facilitated the first performance to act as counter to those terms on which early 21st century life is usually lived, where cultural status generally diminishes with advancing age.¹⁰ This exemplifies the theory expressed by Richard Schechner and others that the workshop

⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁰ Bill Bytheway, *Ageism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), and Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

space/time can create conditions that exist outside cultural norms.¹¹ At the post performance discussion, Ruth Carter gave a clear description of the way she had understood the process:

Because we're looking at age we'd kind of 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

As can be seen from the joke at the end of this description, cultural norms were not completely subverted during this post-show discussion, but in the workshop and performance space, age correlated to positive rather than negative value. On the whole, these movement signatures offer a productive device through which to perform the actual 'event of ageing' and to overturn value judgements about age.

A Reality that Sees Beyond the Visible¹³

Cristofovici proposes 'a reality that sees beyond the visible' when examining the 1992 photographic work *The Giant* by Jeff Wall, which shows (through techniques of photo montage) the giant figure of a naked older woman on the staircase of a public library. Exploring an aesthetic of the older 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*' (my

¹¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1977]), p. 110.

¹² Post-show discussion on 3/12/12, between members of Passages Theatre Group and the University of Sheffield's Theatre and Performance postgraduate students and tutors.

¹³ Anca Cristofovici, 'Touching Surfaces: Photography, Aging, and an Aesthetics of Change', in *Figuring Age: Women Bodies Generations*, ed. by Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 268-296 (p. 275).

italics).¹⁴ Following on from this, Cristofovici develops a theory of the ‘poetic body [...] a form that ensures the connection between the physical and the psychic self, [...] [that] creates a generational continuum within the self’.¹⁵ Her ideas have provided a strong aesthetic target for the group: the movement work (described above) was informed, amongst other things, by my wish to achieve a performance of ‘significant form’ and ‘accomplished shape’. This was facilitated by a physical theatre exercise that aimed to imbue the performers with a sense of inner and outer illumination. Participants were asked to imagine a light that went on within them that they could turn up or down as they developed their sequences (see figure 1 below); they were also asked to imagine a spotlight tracking them wherever they went. When developing their movement sequences, the participants were asked to allow this idea of illumination to inform their performance. The use of this technique in the development of these sequences enabled older bodies to 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.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 290.

FIGURE 1: REHEARSALS EXPLORING SIGNIFICANT FORM AND ACCOMPLISHED SHAPE. ALL IMAGES ARE THE AUTHOR'S OWN.



FIGURE 2: LINDA EVANS (KNEELING CENTRE) TELLS HER FIRST MEMORY, SUPPORTED BY THE PASSAGES CHORUS.



Performers' first memories were animated through solo storytelling, supported by the ensemble as a chorus who echoed, affirmed and often embodied aspects of the memory as it was told (see figure 2 above). This went some way towards facilitating a theatrical version of 'seeing beyond the visible'. Lived experience, originally undergone by bodies designated as children, was revisited in the same bodies of now-older people. Through this recreation of childish experience, the wonder, disappointment, pride, bewilderment or innocence felt by the one-time child could here be found animating the older body – indicating the presence of something glimpsed, something not normally brought into view. In this way, seventy-nine year old Frank Abel was revealed as the 'clever boy' who once attracted 'general approbation' as he managed to work the gramophone player all by himself, whilst sixty-six year old Linda Evans and sixty-nine year old Stella McKinney appeared 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. The possibility is raised that these childhood characteristics are still present and have influenced a whole life. As Linda commented, '[p]ast experiences accumulate – they do not cease their effectiveness as we age, at some level they remain with us'.¹⁶ This aim to reveal traces of invisible experience is a central political thrust of the group's work so far.¹⁷

The models of both Basting and Cristofovici, concerning respectively the content and form of a possible performance of age, offered starting points for the

¹⁶ Questionnaire response.

¹⁷ The political potency of theatre to bring into view that which would otherwise remain hidden has been pointed out by others including Amelia Howe Kritzer, who in *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), characterises politically committed work as 'making visible what has occurred but has not been fully recognized' (p. 94), and Joe Kelleher, who notes 'Something has been shown, something has been said, has been brought into appearance which might not otherwise be shown or spoken of. Let's say 'politics' begins right here', in *Theatre & Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 26.

exploratory work of Passages Theatre Group. Indeed, Basting's 'depth model of age' informed the choosing of the group's name, which plays on the notion of change, passing through, and passing as, different ages; it evokes the passage of time, the fragmentary nature of memory and alludes to an accretion of successive identities through time.

Identities

Beverley Skeggs theorises a 'symbolic economy where the inscription and marking of characteristics onto certain bodies condenses a whole complex cultural history'.¹⁸ In this section, I discuss the marking of the characteristics of the older body, its association with value, and the ways in which performance can potentially disrupt such inscriptions. It can be seen that the image of the older body carries particular cultural inscriptions associated with obsolescence, rigidity and dependency.¹⁹ The re-inscription of the older body with other, more nuanced characteristics has become a central concern of our work. As described above, we have staged characteristics, for example cleverness, attention-seeking, and innocence, which could reveal hidden aspects of identity; and through movement, have hinted at the layering of successive selves over time. It could be argued that by the end of the performance these re-inscriptions on the aged body will have imprinted themselves on the imaginations of the audience; this effect holds the consequent potential for re-inscribing any older bodies that may be encountered in the future.

Group work as a starting point for creating drama generally begins by building healthy group dynamics through the development of physical and emotional trust and through the exchange of information. In concurrence with the development of mutual

¹⁸ Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

¹⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Fountain of Age* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 50.

understanding between Passages group members, material was found that might create the same between performer and audience; this was predicated on the unmasking of a multifaceted identity. Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth develop the concept of ‘the image of ageing as a mask that 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.²⁰

We attempted to find a way to stage this tension, which stands as a barrier between the older body and its observer (of any age), through performance, and reveal the subject behind the ‘mask of ageing’. Passages member Jennifer Creaghan recorded thoughtfully, ‘What face do I put on? What life memories do I reinforce to concoct this identity and this image?’²¹ Roger Watkin reflected that ‘[f]or those very much younger, those of our group’s age range represents another distant world to which some attempt to reach out while others ignore’.²² In an effort to promote just such a reaching out between all ages, this work has unmasked characteristics that shape the complex personality embodied on stage, re-marking it – through performance – with lived experience and consequent humanity.

Any subject or group can be identified as one of any number of ‘others’: the unknown, the uncivilized, the uncanny, the savage, the unclean, the non-white, the disabled, and so on. All could be categorised as ‘the subaltern’ and are consequently

²⁰ Mike Hepworth and Mike Featherstone, ‘The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course’ in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Bryan S Turner (London: Sage, 1991), pp. 371-389 (p. 382).

²¹ Notebook reflection.

²² Questionnaire response.

seen as existing outside the normative model of subjectivity.²³ Old age in western culture can be marginalised by media representations; as many commentators have noted, ‘a great deal of our culture is frenetically oriented towards youth – notably in entertainment and marketing’.²⁴ Older people can also be the object of press criticism: Linda Evans remarked that ‘[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 personal comment echoes Pensioners Campaign UK’s reaction to the BBC article ‘Care costs could close libraries, say councils’.²⁶ 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 seeing as most are now private businesses and run for profit not for care.²⁷

Both reactions exemplify the way older people can feel marginalised or blamed for the ills that are suffered by the whole community. The sense that this political development may be related to the post-2008 economic situation is hinted at in these reactions. Tremmel, writing for the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations

²³ See Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C Nelson and L Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271-313. For a definition of ‘Otherness’ see *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. by Derek Gregory and others, 5th edn (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

²⁴ Hansard HL Deb 14 December 2012, col 1262
<<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/121214-0001.htm>> [accessed 18/12/12].

²⁵ Alongside this quote, Evans enclosed a newspaper clipping: Nicholas Hellen, ‘Oldies live it up as young feel the pinch’, *Sunday Times*, 9 December 2012, p. 16, in which graphs and statistics supported the claim that ‘[t]hey have already bagged the wealth, now the baby boomers are having all the fun’.

²⁶ James Gallagher, ‘Care costs could close libraries, say councils’, *BBC Online*, 27 April 2012
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-17868598>> [accessed 16/3/13].

²⁷ Pensioners Campaign UK, *Care Costs Could Close Libraries, Say Councils* (2012)
<<http://www.pensionercampaignuk.webspace.virginmedia.com/page211.html>> [accessed 16/3/13].

(FRFG), argues that ‘some nations are entering an era of intergenerational disputes which are reminiscent of historical class and industrial conflicts’.²⁸ It seems that the economic crisis has served to exacerbate existing intergenerational divisions: the FRFG notes that ‘[i]n the last decade the number of books and articles referring to justice between generations [...] has soared’.²⁹ This surge might be exemplified by a divisive *Sunday Times* article from 2003, where figures showing an increase in pensioners per one hundred working people between the years 2003 and 2040 were depicted within a cartoon bomb.³⁰ Point three of the Pensioners Campaign UK 2013 Manifesto states the wish ‘[t]o put a stop to emotive and discriminatory references used to describe the elderly and create resentment in the younger generations’; an indication that a sense of injustice over such negative coverage is keenly felt by some older people.³¹ It is hard to refute the impression that the media (alongside marketing and entertainment) generally ascribes a negative value to age.³² Skeggs notes:

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.³³

²⁸ Jörg Tremmel, ‘Intergenerational Justice’, *FRFG*

<http://www.intergenerationaljustice.org/images/stories/publications/elderly_client_adviser.pdf> [accessed 17/3/13].

²⁹ FRFG, *Rationale* (2011)

<http://www.intergenerationaljustice.org/index.php?Itemid=223&id=161&option=com_content&task=view> [accessed 17/3/13]

³⁰ Peter Conradi, ‘Pension revolt simmers amongst Europe’s young’, *Sunday Times*, 29 June 2003.

³¹ Pensioners Campaign UK, *The Manifesto of Pensioners Campaign UK* (2013),

<<http://www.pensionercampaignuk.webspace.virginmedia.com/page15.html>> [accessed 17/3/13].

³² For examples of negative values of age and ageing, see Sally A. Gadow, ‘Frailty and Strength: The Dialectic of Aging’, in *What Does It Mean to Grow Old? Reflections from the Humanities*, ed. by Thomas R Cole and Sally Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 235-243.

³³ *Class, Self, Culture*, p.14.

So the problem of the inability to identify with the ageing subject derives from a question of *worth*, asked when any subject initially encounters an older body. In the 1970s, Butler and Lewis defined ageism as allowing ‘the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves, thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings’.³⁴ This is an issue that can be addressed through performance, whether ‘ageism’ is present in audiences or performers. As we age we face a common dilemma: understanding our chronological age but struggling to identify as ‘old’ because of the negative values ascribed to age. Attempting to pass as younger forces a state of age-denial, but whatever strategies we employ, people still face a conflicting and ambivalent attitude to the advancing years.³⁵ Passages member Trisha Sweeny acknowledged this common age-denial, saying ‘[a]s I get older the age threshold for old people rises’.³⁶ Roger Watkin stated: ‘Sometimes our experiences, rich though they are, aren’t tapped by the young.’³⁷

If our work can help its audiences identify with the older body in the performance space, seeing the older subject revealed as fully human with a complexity of experience, then this may go some way to enabling a pan-generational dialogue and exchange. The performance *The Time of our Lives* attempted this: through acquainting its (younger) audience with a brief historical map of the identities embodied on stage, the group aimed at affecting a subtle shift in the value the audience may ascribe to an older body.

³⁴ Robert N. Butler and Myrna I. Lewis, *Aging and Mental Health* (St Louis, MD: C.V. Mosby, 1973), quoted in Bytheway, p. 30.

³⁵ Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, ‘Introduction’, in *Images of Aging: Cultural Representations of Later Life*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-16 (pp. 10-12), and Thomas R. Cole, ‘The “Enlightened” View of Aging: Victorian Morality in a New Key’, in *What Does it Mean to Grow Old?* ed. by Thomas R. Cole and Sally A. Gadow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 115-130 (p. 29).

³⁶ Questionnaire response.

³⁷ Questionnaire response.

Future-Value

The length and therefore the *value* of all our futures are always in doubt: it is as yet unperformed and fundamentally unquantifiable. The young are, however, imagined (rightly or wrongly) to have more future-value than the old. In this next section, I consider the marks of negative future value that the older body carries, and the potential disruption of this inscription in performance. In *The Time of Our Lives*, the statement of chronological age made by individuals, before their step into the unknown, posed a question about the extent of that possible future – how much of it can you have left at eighty-four? This *imagined* limitation to one's future, directly proportional to the expansiveness of one's past, could be called 'negative future value', and is one reason that we lose social status as we age. In capitalist societies the ageing person becomes progressively excluded from prevailing models of the productive citizen. Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick note:

[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.³⁸

The lived past has lost its value in favour of the potentiality exemplified by productive youth, and so older subjects have lost status. As people age, we are judged to have increasingly less future-value than more youthful and therefore more 'productive' citizens; our powers are regarded as diminished and the productive time left to us is perceived as limited. By standing at the edge of the stage, confronting the audience and stepping boldly towards an unperformed future, Passages' performers potentially opened a territory between themselves and their younger audience, symbolic of the unknown and *unquantifiable* future that is consistently opening up for all, young and

³⁸ Featherstone and Wernick, p. 7.

old alike. The task of the work from this point onwards is to move forward in this vein and stage a clearer negotiation between future and value. Leading on from the first performance, the edge of the playing space could act as a metaphorical and unifying ‘future-space’, indicating the edge of all our experience; this staging might be harnessed to further disrupt the negative future-value inscribed on the older body.

Looking Forward to Staging our Futures

Having mined the past for foundational memories and key life-events during this first phase, a question is now posed about the future of our work; this next section considers of what that might consist. The project was always conceived as existing alongside, but alternative to, the type of ‘reminiscence theatre’ that has been so successfully accomplished by many theatre companies, most notably by Pam Schweitzer and her colleagues at Age Exchange.³⁹ It seems that memory and past experience are rich seams that will continue to yield material in support our aim of subtly shifting the future status of older people through nuanced and multifaceted representations of the individual. Alongside continuing work on the past, we will also address aspirations for the future. When asked which areas she would like to explore in the next phase, Clare McManus replied ‘definitely more about the future’, also saying ‘I once read a definition of being old as when you have more memories than aspirations. That’s definitely not me’.⁴⁰ Hilary Taylor-Firth expressed a desire to explore the specific concerns over the current, lived experience of older people:

Yesterday the Archbishop of Canterbury took part in his last debate in the House of Lords [...] I have enclosed a printout of his speech.

³⁹ For a comprehensive account of the work of Age Exchange, see Pam Schweitzer, *Reminiscence Theatre: Making Theatre from Memories*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007).

⁴⁰ Both questionnaire responses.

[...] [T]he A of C sums up far better than I could my own views on ageism and combating it.⁴¹

Her highlighted sections of the printout at the end of the speech include this:

The extremes of human life – childhood and age, when we are not defined just by our productive capacity and so have time to absorb the reality around us in a different way – are often hard for our society to come to terms with. Too often, at the one end of the spectrum, we want to rush children into pseudo-adulthood; too often we want older citizens either to go on as part of the productive machine as long as possible or to accept a marginal and humiliating status, tolerated but not valued, while we look impatiently at our watches waiting for them to be “off our hands”.⁴²

The idea that ‘childhood and age’ are times when we can ‘absorb the reality around us in a different way’ holds dramatic promise; it may be that *Passages* can stage this separate reality, thereby opening up a way of seeing for audiences of all ages. The inclusion of such a radical text in Hilary’s reply indicates a passionate desire that we address the marginalisation of older citizens.

The movement signature sequences will provide fruitful ground for further experimentation; for instance rolling time backwards and forwards (as Ohno did in *Water Lilies*) could stage a liberating sense of time/memory fluidity. Exposing the ‘event of ageing’, as Basting suggests, could be achieved by focusing more carefully on – and extending – the time/space between specific actions. This fluid continuum could be extended beyond the present, and beyond the edge of the stage, in the performance of a series of possible futures.

⁴¹ Questionnaire response.

⁴² Hansard, 14 December 2012.

Answering Linda Evans' request '[t]hat we move 'out' from ourselves, we look forward not just back', the work must move towards staging the potentiality of older people, perhaps by exploring possible futures.⁴³ Ultimately, Passages Theatre Group's task mirrors that bequeathed to all human beings: we must confront the inevitable subject of death. Jen Creaghan said 'I'm very aware of not having a long future ahead of me, as when young' and Ruth Carter stated:

I do think we are leaving out important areas such as: loss of function/anxiety re health and independence/the theoretical/factual proximity of death/what the hell is life all about ... and seem to shy away from anything negative. Yet these are the issues that give life challenge and bite'.⁴⁴

This willingness to explore our finite existence, in effect the end of the future, will give 'bite' to Passages' ongoing work. Finding ways to stage this sensitively, with an eye to a nuanced approach that avoids reinforcing the normative inscription of old age, will be challenging.

Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined the theoretical foundation and early strategies of the first phase of Passages Theatre Group's unfinished work; an attempt to explore and stage the performance of age and ageing by uncovering hidden aspects of early and changing identity. I have explained how this work was undertaken with the intention of effecting a re-inscription of the older body with characteristics other than those associated with the normative image of ageing. In addition, I have put forward the concept of future-value, problematising it as a stigma borne by the older body; one which functions to alienate older bodies in a system predicated on the notion of

⁴³ Questionnaire response.

⁴⁴ Questionnaire responses.

potentiality and productivity. I have worked towards a description of how this was and might be further explored through performance. I have also attempted throughout to interweave the voices of the members of Passages Theatre Group with my own and with those from the academy and elsewhere in a multi-vocal examination of both the work and of the cultural, economic and political position of older people. This multi-vocal examination suffers from the absence of an audience voice and could be enhanced by collective editing processes. In an attempt to mitigate these shortcomings, this article will end with a voice from Passages' first performance, which speaks of the continuum of past and future. Towards the very end of the performance, after performers stated their ages but before the final step into the unknown future, the youngest member of Passages recited his own poem:

In time all things must come to pass

Must pass all things in time to come

All things in time must come to pass

All things must pass in time to come

To pass all things must come in time

To pass all things must in time come

To come in time all things must pass

All things pass in time must to come

In to time come things all must pass

All things to pass must come in time.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Andy Dancer, *Labouring the Pain* (unpublished poem, 2012).

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