

Cultural Value

Ages and Stages: the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre making

Miriam Bernard, Jill Rezzano and the 'Ages & Stages Company'



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Executive Summary

This report details the activities and findings from our nine-month research development award exploring 'the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre-making'. Using 'Ages and Stages' as a case study, we employed an innovative participatory approach in which members of the 'Ages & Stages Company' were turned into a 'company of researchers'; conducted interviews with each other, and with family members and younger people with whom they had worked on 'Ages and Stages' productions; and co-created, with the research team, three new pieces/provocations under the generic title *Out of the Box*. These pieces were then performed by the Company as part of the concluding Symposium held at the New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme in May 2014. The report provides an account of the design and conduct of the project, presents our findings, discusses the variety of activities we have been involved in together and draws some conclusions, before reflecting on the future for the Company itself and for research of this nature. We first describe the Company's most recent intergenerational work for the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester before detailing the research skills training Company members underwent. We demonstrate that the cultural value of theatre-making for this group of older people is complex, nuanced and context-specific involving: attachment to place; the whole artistic process and opportunities other than just performing; choice and challenge; the benefits for both oneself and the group; and the fun and the fear of participating. We suggest that understanding and conceptualising cultural value needs to put older people at the centre; look beyond the benefits to health and well-being articulated in much of the existing research; and pay more attention to how the intrinsic and affective elements of experience may, in turn, have instrumental effects on older people's lives.

Key words

Ageing; older people; drama; theatre; cultural value; creativity.

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(Scenes from *Our Age, Our Stage*: New Vic Theatre, July 11th 2012)

Introduction

This report details the activities and findings from our nine-month research development award exploring 'the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre-making'. The award was funded under the AHRC's 'Cultural Value Project': a two-year national research initiative looking at the value of arts and culture to individuals and to society. It complements our linked critical review on 'Ageing, Drama and Creativity' (Rickett and Bernard 2014), and both were inspired by our interdisciplinary 'Ages and Stages' project: a continuing collaboration between researchers at Keele University and practitioners at the New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The first 'Ages and Stages' project was funded by the national cross-council New Dynamics of Ageing programme (Oct 2009-July 2012). In it, we explored historical representations of ageing within the Vic's well known social documentaries and interviewed 95 older people who had been involved with the theatre as volunteers, actors and employees, audience members, and sources for the documentaries (Bernard et al., 2014). That initial archival and empirical research was drawn together to create the 'Ages and Stages Exhibition' and a new hour-long verbatim documentary drama *Our Age, Our Stage* performed by older people (aged 59-92) interviewed for the project together with members of New Vic Youth Theatre (aged 16-19). This was followed by a year of knowledge translation activities (2012-2013) in which we were able to establish the 'Ages & Stages Company'; devise and tour a new interactive, 40-minute long, forum theatre piece: *Happy Returns*; develop, deliver and evaluate a pilot inter-professional training course; and scope out, with a range of partners, the potential for a 'Creative Age Festival' in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

Set against these developments, the main aim of this new award (Sept 2013-May 2014) was to develop the 'Ages & Stages Company' into a 'company of researchers' who would be capable of examining and interrogating their own – and each other's – experiences of theatre-making, and their understandings of cultural value. Using 'Ages and Stages' as a small case study (Yin 2013), the existing Company was to be supported by the project team to co-explore and co-research their involvement over the previous four years. The intention was for the Company to work collaboratively with the project team to identify – and to show to us and others through live performance – the cultural value of what they had been engaged in. At the close of the project, the new piece was to be performed at an invited workshop as a stimulus to further discussions about participants' experiences (its benefits and drawbacks), the nature of cultural value, and what engagement with an activity of this kind had meant to Company members.

Background

From an academic perspective, our own and others' work shows that, historically, theatre is a cultural arena in which older people actively participate as audience

members, employees and volunteers (Bernard and Munro forthcoming; Cutler 2009; Mangan 2013; Mental Health Foundation 2011). However, the Mental Health Foundation's (2011) evidence review of the impact of participatory arts on older people, highlighted only three UK-based explorations of theatre participation one of which, whilst it drew for its content on interviews with older people, was in fact a piece about ageing performed by children (Johnson 2011). It was therefore evident from the existing literature that what was less well understood or researched was what theatre-making itself was actually like for the older people who choose to get involved. In the case of the 'Ages & Stages Company', we were particularly interested in co-exploring what older members felt about their experiences – especially given the fact that, for many of them, this was the first time in their lives they had ever set foot on stage. In addition, we wanted to understand what meaning, if any, that phrase 'cultural value' had for them, and what the value (cultural and otherwise) had been to them of engaging in the variety of activities and events which had constituted 'Ages and Stages' thus far.

Our theoretical and methodological approach derives from our roots in critical gerontology and in participatory drama-based practice, and from a shared commitment to what Holstein and Minkler (2007) have termed 'passionate scholarship'. Critical gerontology, combined with passionate scholarship, provides an important corrective to the negative and ageist assumptions which pervade our society and which, more often than not, frame older people as a 'problem to be solved' rather than recognising, acknowledging and building on their skills, abilities, contributions and life experiences (Baars et al. 2006; Bernard and Scharf 2007; Ray and Cole 2008). In addition, participatory methods which involve older people in the entire research process through from initial design to execution, analysis and dissemination of findings, are increasingly common in gerontological work (see for example: Barnes and Taylor 2007; Ray 2007; Ward et al. 2012), even if they are less accepted or familiar ways of researching in other disciplines. As a consequence, and given the integral nature of the participatory methodology to the overall project, this report incorporates details of the research process into what follows, rather than consigning it to a short appendix.

Having worked closely with Company members since they first came together as group in 2011 to work with us on the final phase of the initial 'Ages and Stages' project, we have accrued a substantive body of research materials and outputs. Much of this, including of course the original interviews, the development and devising of the pieces, the actual performances, feedback from both participants and audiences in post-performance discussions and Q&As, and the evaluations/debriefing sessions with participants and performers, had all been recorded through a combination of ethnographic notes, diary keeping, film and audio recordings. Together, this provided us with a body of material we were able to look back on in the current project, and reflect further upon with the Company. In combination with the new empirical work we have conducted, the current project therefore sought to address the following questions:

- What has the experience of being involved with 'Ages & Stages' been like?
- How has participants' involvement helped shaped them as people?
- How has their involvement helped shape their understandings of ageing?
- What value/benefits have older people derived from being involved with 'Ages & Stages'?

In what follows, we provide an account of the design and conduct of the project, present our findings, discuss the variety of activities we have been involved in together and draw some conclusions, before reflecting on the future for the Company itself and for research of this nature.

The Research Design: theory and reality

Research is, of course, a messy business. Rarely, if ever, does a plan conceived maybe months in advance of a project start date work out exactly as envisaged in the original proposal. This project was no exception. Our proposal envisaged a seamless continuation of activities from the completion of our AHRC-funded follow-on project at the end of July 2013, through to the end of May 2014. As Appendix 1 shows, our intended research design pursued a logical, chronological cycle of activity and associated research and evaluation beginning, ahead of the formal project start date in September 2013, with preparatory work and research training over the summer and concluding with a workshop in May 2014 to mark the end of the project. However, professional and personal events affecting the team and Company members, including bereavements, ill health and holidays, meant that we had to make some amendments to the timetable.

In addition, it was only in the early summer of 2013, after the award of the project funding, that 'Ages and Stages' received a formal invitation from Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre to take part in their 'FutureWorlds' Festival: part of their ongoing 'Truth about Youth' programme. The invitation was to create and present a short piece to be performed in the studio at the Royal Exchange on Saturday November 16th, 2013. This opportunity, whilst it had been partially anticipated in our proposal, meant that in reality we needed to devote the summer and the initial weeks of the new project to this work: to recruiting members of our Youth Theatre; to preparing them to work together with the 'Ages & Stages Company'; and to begin the development and devising process – all in a very tight time frame. Simultaneously, instead of chronologically, we also had to begin to revisit our accumulated research materials, and plan for and then undertake research training with Company members. The research training therefore moved from the summer to the end of November, with consequent knock-on effects for the rest of the timetable. That said, such was the commitment and enthusiasm of the Company that these amendments were fully embraced. Indeed, as will be seen later in this report, we carried out more interviews than had originally been envisaged; developed three rather than just one performance piece in addition to the Royal Exchange piece; and also took up invitations to speak and run workshops at various events and conferences.

Work for the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester

Funded by the Co-operative Foundation, Manchester is one of seven UK cities who have been running the 'Truth about Youth' programme since 2009. The programme seeks to bring young and old people together to explore and discuss ideas and increase interaction between the generations. The theme for 2013 was '2020' and the invitation offered the 'Ages & Stages Company' another opportunity to work together with young people to explore and portray ideas about the not-too-distant future. Our invitation was to explore how relationships between the generations might have changed by the year 2020, what the roles of younger and older people might be, and whether we would all have a say in how society develops. Arising out of these explorations, we were tasked with devising a 20-minute pop-up piece to be performed in the theatre's studio space on Saturday November 16th, 2013.

Clearly, time was of the essence. We knew that ten members of the 'Ages & Stages Company' were available to take part from September (the eleventh member, who still acts professionally, would rejoin us in January 2014) but, over the summer, it was necessary to recruit interested members of the New Vic's Youth Theatre to help us explore and create our piece. Working with the Youth Theatre Director, we opened up applications to allow young people from the age of 13 to take part. In the event, we recruited 11 members of the New Vic Youth Theatre (aged 13-19) which meant that we were working with a group of 21 participants.

After separate preparatory sessions, the two groups came together in weekly one-and-a-half hour workshops from mid-September. Under Dr Rezzano's guidance, and using some of the previously developed materials and workshop activities we had accumulated, the groups began to get to know each other and to explore what they thought relations between the generations might be like in 2020. Participants engaged in a variety of exercises, discussions and role plays exploring attitudes; stereotypes; relationships between older and younger people; hopes, fears and expectations for the future; times they might have been in trouble; possible future scenarios (eg. in school, at work); potential legal and policy changes; and technological developments. Prof Bernard attended all the workshops, taking contemporaneous notes to assist Dr Rezzano in turning the materials and discussions into a draft script entitled *Welcome to Silence*. From mid-October, the group began blocking, rehearsing and amending the piece.

Accompanied by family and friends, the whole Company performed *Welcome to Silence* at the Royal Exchange on Saturday November 16th. The Studio had been converted into a gallery/installation space incorporating live performance, film projection, video playback, soundscapes, and 2D and 3D art. It was designed to be an immersive

experience for the visitor. The performance was filmed for us by Advisory Group member, Emeritus Prof Ray Johnson, and some members of the Company also took part in interviews for the documentary being made of the Festival. Our group were then able to watch the matinee performance of 'Sweeney Todd' on the main stage.

Feedback and Evaluation

Welcome to Silence was described by Royal Exchange Producer Chris Wright as 'warm and witty', and feedback about their experiences from both the younger and older people has been overwhelmingly positive. Early in the New Year, and for pragmatic reasons, we held two separate feedback and evaluation sessions with Youth Theatre members and with the 'Ages & Stages Company'. Both sessions adopted the same technique and format, and both were recorded and transcribed. To ensure that everybody felt able to contribute, we made use of a 'body tool' whereby participants work individually (and anonymously) to record, on post-it notes, what they thought about, loved, and would take away from the experience, and what they would discard. These notes are then attached to the appropriate parts of an outline drawing of a manikin (head, heart, hand and a separate drawing of a waste bin) fixed to a convenient wall, and used subsequently as a stimulus to group discussions.

Nine members of the Youth Theatre group and 11 members of the 'Ages & Stages Company' were able to attend the feedback sessions. The responses to the post-it note/body tool exercise can be found in Appendix 2. This exercise, combined with the group discussions, highlighted a range of reactions which shed light on the experience itself and on the value of participating in this kind of intergenerational theatre-making. [Note: in what follows, neither Youth Theatre nor 'Ages & Stages Company' members are identified by name; the research team are identified by their initials].

Motivations and the Value of Participation

At an individual level, participants had a variety of reasons for taking part in the Royal Exchange project. The 'Ages & Stages Company' were, not surprisingly, all committed to continuing with their involvement but also relished the challenge of working with a bigger and different group of young people; working to develop a different kind of performance piece to their previous ones; and to taking the piece to a different venue, space and audience. As noted earlier, the young people had been invited to 'apply' and say why they wanted to be part of this project. In the applications, and in the group discussion, their reasons divided between instrumental ones and the anticipated intrinsic value of taking part (Holden 2004; 2006). Here, one of the 'older' Youth Theatre members reflects on her motivation being primarily self-interest:

It's good to put on your CV when you're applying for drama school, because pretty much everything I've done, aside from things I've done with church or

school or college, has been at the New Vic... whereas now I've got something to talk about at a different theatre. (YT4)

By contrast, others emphasised the value of the experience itself and the potential enjoyment they might derive from it. Here, another young person lays stress on the opportunity he thought it would provide as well as the fun which, interestingly, overrode any concerns about age or age differences amongst the group:

Obviously I was interested that it was with different ages but, like, I wouldn't have been less interested if it wasn't with different ages. So it was more the fact that... it would be a great opportunity... something... in the future I can use and, like, it will help me with... the work I'm doing at school as well... But yes, I just thought it would be, like, really fun and... something I'd enjoy as well as, like, it being a good opportunity and something different. (YT6)

The value participants derived from this (short) project were many and varied: some related to the process and evolution of the project/performance piece; others to the performance on the day; and some arose from reflections afterwards. In their group discussion, Youth Theatre members spoke about overcoming feelings of self-consciousness in working with older people, saying:

YT1: At first you had to, kind of... it... felt like... a bit like you had to make an impression, kind of. [General agreement] Not all the way through, because, like, it was fine after a couple of weeks, but for the first, like two or three weeks, you, kind of... if you came in, like, being yourself straightaway, you might, like... it might make you seem a bit of an idiot. So, you had to, kind of, try and... it felt like you had to try and make a good impression.

For some of them, this meant modifying their behaviour and how they expressed themselves, as these two Youth Theatre members explain:

YT2: Well, I think being around older people, kind of... well, for me, made me act maturer. I don't know, the discussions and stuff, I was more... I was definitely much more mature than with Youth Theatre, where it's all just, like...

YT3: Games.

YT2: Yeah, running around, just joking all the time. It felt more serious.

Both groups also discussed the challenges involved in the process of theatre-making, of the performance itself, and of the sense of achievement they felt in meeting these challenges. Two 'Ages & Stages Company' members describe it in these ways (but at different points in the group discussion):

Well, what I really enjoyed about the performance – and I didn't know this – was a total feeling of confidence that we were going to do it well. It was extraordinary that, but I just enjoyed it because I knew it was going well. (A&S1)

But also I felt a little bit out of my comfort zone because it was something so different and our group had no control over what other people were doing. So there was an edge, a fear to it that I actually quite liked – you know, pushing the boundaries or whatever you call it. (A&S2)

This 'edge' or 'fear' was exciting and, combined with the fun and enjoyment of taking part, meant that participants derived a feeling of satisfaction as illustrated in this exchange between 'Ages & Stages Company' members, some of whom (A&S3 and A&S4) had not performed up until this point:

MB: Can I just ask those of you that haven't performed before, but performed in the Royal Exchange thing, ... how it was for you? Because you hadn't...

A&S3: [Overtalking]... it was absolutely fine.

A&S4: I was nervous. A bit nervous that I went on at the right time, stood in the right place, kept still, you know. But it was, you know, a feeling of satisfaction afterwards – being part of something.

A&S5: You got a buzz. You got a buzz?

MB: You got the buzz that they get?

A&S4: Yeah, got the buzz.

A&S3: Got the buzz.

A&S4: Yes, I did.

There were also indications that expectations and attitudes of both groups towards the other group had been challenged, but not necessarily in the ways one might initially have anticipated:

A&S6: ... well, I'd binned my expectations because I thought they [the young people] just ignored us completely all the way through. But then in performance they didn't, did they? They actually communicated with us in the actual performance. Just shows, doesn't it, the prejudices that you carry... even though I've worked with young people, same as you, over the years.

A&S7: I wonder if they think that we ignored them, actually, as well. I think it was both ways.

A&S6: That's a good point, yes.

A&S5: *Yes, actually, it was... it was... when we first got together, they were that side and we were this side [of the rehearsal room].*

Amongst the Youth Theatre, some (older) members were more concerned about those who were two or three years younger than them, than about working with a group of much older people:

YT4: *I think the age gap, because it's quite a short age gap... but the difference between 18 and 15 is quite different although it's only three years, it's very different... what's the word?*

YT1: *Different.*

YT4: *Maturity levels are really... you're at totally different places in your life, so that was something that I wasn't necessarily looking forward to. It wasn't something that I'd blocked out as being awful in my mind, I just wasn't necessarily looking forward to it. I was really glad to be proved wrong, because I made some friends.*

YT2: *I think the age range was right, because I think any younger and it would have been harder, especially for the people in seniors [ie. senior YT members] to work with the younger children, rather than, kind of, trying to work as, like, a mentor... We, kind of... all of us had to adjust to work with older people – I think having to do it with younger people as well would have been too much.*

Moreover, despite the comparatively short duration of this project, both groups wrote post-it notes and spoke about its value in terms of the trust and togetherness they experienced, and the friendships they developed (within and between the two groups). One 'Ages and Stages' member thought that *'the young people really rose to the occasion on the day'* (A&S7), and another member, while he confessed to being *'very worried'* at the final rehearsal, also said:

... there was a little thought in the back of my mind... I thought, they're young people, they know what they're doing. Whereas we tend to do something and then we do it the same, or a bit more, they'll go – 'Oh, I can do that now' – and then they'll just, kind of... you've got to trust that on the Saturday... I think when we got there: the whole atmosphere of it when you saw the set... I think they just suddenly went, 'Oh, that's where we've got to be' (A&S8).

If there were any downsides to this experience, it was that both groups would like to have had the opportunity to do more than one performance, especially as some family and friends were unable to make the trip to Manchester. They were also keen to do further intergenerational work of this nature. We will return to a discussion of these findings about (cultural) value towards the end of the report but, for the meantime, perhaps the experience and value of a brief project like this is best summed up in the

words of one Youth Theatre member who expresses what seemed to be a shared feeling when she said:

YT5: I think working with different people, like, working with the older people, like you get an insight on what they think, what their thoughts are... and then you learn from their experiences as well, like. Some of them have got some really interesting things to say. And, like, because obviously they've had... well, not had... they're still living their life, but they've been through a lot of things and the things that we're going through now, they've all been there and... got advice and things like that... genuinely... towards the end of it, you could have a conversation that was like you were just friends, yes... the age had gone by the time at the end.



(DVD cover for *Welcome to Silence*)

A Company of Researchers

With this third and different kind of drama experience and project behind them (following the tours and performances of *Our Age, Our Stage* in 2012, and *Happy Returns* in 2013), 'Ages and Stages' then moved into the next part of the research development award: developing the Company into a team of co-researchers who would be able to examine and interrogate their own and each other's experiences of theatre-making, and explore their understandings of the cultural value of what they had been engaged in.

The Research Skills Training

The ten core members of the Company all attended a research skills training day held at Keele University on Thursday November 28th 2013 and facilitated jointly by Prof Bernard and Dr Rezzano. An outline programme for the day can be found in Appendix 3. Three weeks in advance, participants received a letter which, in preparation for the training, asked this:

'Many of you will have experience of undertaking interviews (and/or being interviewed) during your working lives. Consequently, in advance of the day, we would like you to think about the following and be prepared to share your thoughts when we are together:

- What makes for a good interview?
- What makes for a bad interview?
- Is there an interviewer – or interviewers – you particularly admire? If so, what is it about her/him/them you think is so good?
- What does the phrase 'cultural value' mean to you?'

The day itself was divided into six sessions. We began by providing some background information (and literature) about the overarching Cultural Value Project; revisited the aims and objectives we had set out for our own research development award; reiterated that we were working towards what we were now calling a concluding Symposium (to be held at the New Vic Theatre on Friday May 9th) where we would present our performance piece/research findings; and outlined what we were hoping to achieve by the end of the training day.

Session 2 was devoted to discussing the 'homework' we had set in the letter and led to a lively discussion of who were good interviewers and what it is that good interviewers do. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned names were familiar media (TV and radio) figures including Michael Parkinson, Jenni Murray, Kirsty Young, John Humphrys and David Frost. Company members also articulated very clearly what they thought were the qualities of a good interviewer including being well prepared and

listening; showing interest, respect and being non-judgmental; not talking too much themselves but being able to adapt and respond to what was being said; and being able to establish a warm and pleasant relationship which would draw people out. Together, we compared the Company's responses to this exercise with Kvale's (1996) ten criteria delineating what makes for a successful research interviewer, plus two additional criteria derived from Bryman (2008) which emphasise the importance of 'balance' (not talking too much and not talking too little) and being 'ethically sensitive' (ensuring the interviewee appreciates the purpose of the research and that his/her responses will be treated confidentially). Although the language used in research methods' texts may be somewhat different from everyday speech it was evident that, between them, Company members had drawn out a very comprehensive set of points, displaying considerable understanding and insight into how to go about undertaking an interview.

However, it is one thing to appreciate the theory behind good interviewing, another to be able to actually do it. In Session 3 therefore, the Company were invited to put the theory into practice. Working in threes (one interviewer; one interviewee; and one observer), and with the interview topic being 'your best holiday ever', each interviewer had ten minutes in which to try and get the interviewee's story. The roles would then be revolved around the group such that each person fulfilled all three roles at different points. Interviewers were encouraged to play with the interview strategies discussed earlier, and the observers made notes and provided feedback about the kinds of questions that worked best; what didn't work so well; and what was happening in terms of body language and other non-verbal aspects. Back in the larger group, we explored what the experience of being both an interviewer and interviewee had been like; what kinds of questions people wished they had asked but hadn't; and what they had learnt from this (brief) exercise. This enabled us, together, to begin to collate and draw up a set of pointers/guidelines for the conduct of the interviews the Company would be undertaking with each other and, potentially, with one or two family members and younger people with whom they had worked on 'Ages and Stages' productions.

In the afternoon, we turned our attention to the technicalities of constructing an interview guide and the practicalities of who was going to do what, with whom, when and where. It was important to the project that Company members would not just carry out interviews but that they would also co-design the guide and decide what questions we needed to ask. We began Session 4 by revisiting the project's four main research questions, as noted earlier in this report. To these four questions, we added two others: 'What impacts has being involved with 'Ages and Stages' had on participants (emotionally, cognitively, physically, reflexively)?' and 'What impacts has being involved with 'Ages and Stages' had on others (families, friends, the younger people you have performed with)?' Company members worked in five pairs for the first part of this exercise, looking at what detailed questions one might ask in an interview to get answers to these bigger research questions. Pairs agreed to concentrate on just one each of the first five research questions and, if they ran out of ideas, everyone was then

to look at the sixth and final question. Back in the whole group, we received feedback from each pair, discussed what to prioritise and include and, in so doing, began the process of shaping the interview schedule.

During the final part of this session, we returned to the 'homework' we had set Company members and, specifically, to a consideration of what the phrase 'cultural value' means and what kinds of questions one might need to ask in an interview to explore this with other people. We concluded the session by comparing the form of the draft interview questions we had generated with Kvale's (1996) nine types of research interview questions. This enabled participants to see something of the process they had been through to turn questions into a workable schedule and accompanying guidance, which they would then be comfortable using. The lively discussion about 'cultural value' will be returned to below when we consider the devising of the performance piece/s and the presentation of our 'findings' at the Symposium.

In Sessions 5 and 6 we explored and discussed a range of other issues and the practicalities involved in what we were proposing to do. We debated the pros and cons of being an 'insider' or 'outsider' researcher and stressed the importance of not assuming that because Company members had a shared experience of 'Ages and Stages', that they would necessarily view that experience in the same way. Ethical issues were reiterated and Company members reminded that we would need to (re) seek consent for these interviews. We talked too about how best to support each other through the process, and debrief and feedback after all the interviews were completed. Some of what we agreed was incorporated into the guidance on the final schedule and a date was fixed for Company members to get back together early in the New Year to evaluate their research experiences. All members agreed to be interviewed and, with one exception, everyone volunteered to try their hand at being an interviewer. Names were drawn to decide who would interview whom; contact details exchanged so that people could set up the interviews with each other; and details passed on of other family members who were willing to be interviewed. The research team were also to be involved in conducting these interviews. Finally, we tried out the digital recording equipment, made arrangements to send out all the final paperwork and consent forms to everyone, and agreed we would try and complete as many interviews as possible before Christmas.

The Interviews

The draft interview schedule and guidance was tidied up and finalised immediately following the training day (the schedule and accompanying consent form can be found in Appendix 4). Although our original proposal had indicated that Company members would just be asking each other about how they had found working with younger people, and how family and friends had reacted to their involvement with 'Ages and Stages', we were aware that one or two younger Company members who had worked with us on *Happy Returns*, and some family members, were also agreeable to being interviewed.

Consequently, in addition to the final schedule there are two variations for use with other interviewees.

Approval for the project had been granted through the University's Research Ethics Committee and Company members had agreed to continue with their involvement over this nine-month period. They were already in possession of the project's information sheet (see Appendix 5) but other interviewees (family members, younger Company members etc.) were also provided with this, together with the consent form. In addition, Company members were aware of, and had consented to, research discussions, workshops, evaluation sessions and performances being audio and video documented. As co-researchers, they were also in regular discussion with team members about the research process, including its ethical implications.

In total, 16 interviews were carried out: 11 were undertaken by Company members (ten with each other and one with a family member); and five by Prof Bernard and Dr Rezzano (one with a Company member; two with younger Company members; and one with a family member). The interviews varied in length between 30 minutes and an hour and a half; all were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Most interviews took place in participants' own homes, though some were carried out at the theatre when this was more convenient.

Evaluation of the Training and Reflections on Interviewing

Towards the end of January 2014, we devoted one of our regular Monday workshops to a group discussion about how Company members had experienced interviewing each other, and what they made of the research skills training they had undergone. These discussions were recorded and transcribed. In advance of this meeting, each Company member had been sent copies of their transcripts so that they could see and read their interview/s and reflect on what they had done and how they had done it.

Without exception, everyone said how much they had enjoyed the training day but their reactions and responses to the actual interviewing were very mixed: some found it hard going being the interviewer; others preferred to do that than to be interviewed, as illustrated by this exchange:

A&S2: ... I prefer to be the interviewer than to be interviewed, because I felt very hesitant every time I had to think of an answer. But listening to A&S1's answers, I could then build on that and sort of concoct my next sentence... next question to match what she'd already said, you know...

A&S1: I was the other way round and I thought being the interviewer was very hard work. I'd looked at the sheets beforehand and I was anxious about timing, which of course I didn't keep to, but I was so fascinated by A&S2's answers that I did find asking questions possible but I'm not sure that they were as good as they

could have been. And I think on the whole I prefer being interviewed because I just rabbit on then.

Despite having all been interviewed at length for the very first 'Ages and Stages' project (2009-12), and having worked closely as a group for the previous three years, being asked by each other to reflect back on their experience was challenging. Here, Company members pick up on concerns about being the interviewee; reflect on what seeing a written transcript is like; and have a new-found appreciation for what is involved in research interviewing:

A&S2: I was very hesitant to give answers... a bit like a rabbit in the headlights and I actually kept switching off the machine because I thought I can't leave a ten minute gap while I try and think of something to say, which proved to be a bit of a problem for the little machine, but still.

A&S9: I found it more difficult being interviewed.

MB: Why was that?

A&S9: I wasn't terribly sure what I wanted to say which sounds pathetic...

A&S2: And also I didn't want to let you down by just talking drivell.

A&S1: Yes!

A&S6: That's part of it, yes... that's what I did all the time: kept going off the point and thinking out loud while I was trying to form my answers...

A&S7: I was like that. Several times I'd started a sentence and I stopped because a new idea had come into my head...

A&S6: That's right.

A&S7: And then I'd just start a new sentence half way through another one. And what I found when I read through the transcript was I didn't realise I said 'you know' quite so many times.

A&S6: Oh, we're all the same. [Overtalking].

A&S4: That was my problem when I looked through the transcript. I said 'you know' so many times it was unbelievable, you know... [overtalking and laughter]... You don't realise you're doing it... And... I mean, we were prepared and we'd read it... read the questions through...

A&S6: Yes, that's right.

A&S2: And we'd sort of thought about answers and I'd made one or two notes, but when it's the actual interview, it's a totally different experience.

For some, there were also unavoidable delays (at most a week or two) between the training and carrying out their interviews which meant that, as this Company member observes: *'by the time we came to it, I'd forgotten everything we'd done on the day... I could have done a lot better if I'd been more prepared'* (A&S7). However, others enjoyed both roles as these two members comment (at different points in the group discussion):

I enjoyed both the interview and being interviewed by A&S10. The guidelines that we had... I had them in front of me and went through them, as it were, choosing particular points. On reading the transcript, I found out I think I talked too much, that I said more than necessary perhaps. (A&S5)

I did three interviews as the interviewer and I found the first one kind of a bit dry because I was just going through it... And then as I got into the second and third ones, I found it quite relaxing... depending on who I was talking to: if they were kind of quite rolling along, led by you, you could kind of delve a little bit more whereas on others you just kind of like stuck to the set questions really. (A&S8)

Other Company members shared a belief that, given the opportunity, they would over time become more familiar, practised and comfortable, the more interviews they were able to do. Some would quite like to have gone back and repeated their interviews – especially when they saw their transcripts; others, despite their expressed anxieties about preparation, timing, unfamiliarity with digital recording machines, the need to practice, and (as they perceived it) the fairly unstructured nature of this kind of qualitative research interviewing, were very positive about the possibility of doing more in the future. As one member unequivocally said, *'Well, I'm not going to say no to anything'* (A&S7).

Finally, in terms of the actual content of the interviews, Company members also commented on how interesting it had been to hear each other talk about their experiences of the previous three years. Even where people thought they knew each other well – and one or two members had been good friends before becoming involved with 'Ages and Stages' – the interviews uncovered things they did not know and stimulated them to think in different ways about what they had been doing, as these comments (from different points in the group discussion) illustrate:

Well, I interviewed A&S11 which I enjoyed greatly... I was quite keen to know what kept him going because he's been at it [as an actor] a long time, and still is, and so we got there, and it was great. (A&S6)

I found... because I interviewed A&S7 first, that she was saying things and I was thinking, 'Oh, I never thought about that'... 'Oh that's good!'... 'Oh my God, that's intellectual'. I hadn't thought of anything in that depth. (A&S9)

Something else I wanted to say... was that during the interview an idea occurred to me that hadn't occurred to me beforehand, and I think that was part of the process: that it actually did stimulate me to put things together and have new thoughts. (A&S7)

Using the Findings: Devising the Scripts

The transcribed individual interviews, together with the discussion about 'cultural value' from the research skills training day, and the reflections on the training and interviewing experiences noted above, formed the basis and background for the programme of devising workshops which recommenced in the new year. Between January 13th and the end of April 2014, the Company and ourselves met and worked together for two hours every Monday (from 4.00-6.00pm). We were re-joined for some of these workshops by the member who still acts professionally, as well as by a 'new' member who had been interviewed for the original 'Ages and Stages' project but who had not been able to get involved up until now. Later in the spring, two friends of another member also came along to the sessions.

As with the Royal Exchange project, Dr Rezzano led the workshops with Prof Bernard taking contemporaneous notes. The workshops were again a mixture of drama exercises, debates and discussions, exploring further the Company's experiences of their time with 'Ages and Stages', and using the accumulated materials and extracts from transcripts to stimulate reflections. We were also operating under a number of imperatives for the devising. First, it was important to us to convey accurately the intentions of the original speaker in the interviews. Second, we wanted to produce pieces of theatre which were intriguing and watchable for an audience and continued our development as theatre makers. Third, amongst the members who chose to take part, Dr Rezzano wanted to have a combination of them speaking words that they had originally contributed in interviews and felt authentic to them, but also sometimes words which came from others and were not part of their own thinking or experience, in order to further develop empathy and performance skills.

Consequently, as always, we worked gently and gradually at first looking at our findings around 'beginnings' and at 'motivations' for taking part. To give one example of the process we went through, we initially selected 12 contrasting quotations from the transcripts, illustrating how people had got involved and what stood out for them. In small groups, the Company discussed which quotations struck a particular chord, and which they thought would sound best to an audience when spoken. We then 'heard' and listened to ten selected quotations as Company members 'put them on their feet' and

spoke each in turn round a circle. Together, we decided which quotations went with each other; which cut across one another; and whether any jumped out; then amended and rearranged the circle to hear them again in a different order. Our next step was to find a way to visually reflect what the Company does week-in, week-out. It was agreed that one member would come on and make a circle of chairs (reflecting what happens at the start of each workshop). Each person would then enter one-by-one, say their line, and then take their place in the circle. This scene was then rehearsed and, over successive weeks, became refined into the opening of the first script/provocation.

Bit-by-bit, the possible content of what we had now decided would be three short performance pieces/provocations, took shape this way: through the active and full involvement of everyone but facilitated and guided by Dr Rezzano, and supported by Prof Bernard. After each workshop, Dr Rezzano and Prof Bernard usually spent half an hour or more debriefing and discussing what went well; and how best to shape and present the developing pieces in subsequent workshop sessions. Our intention was to make three pieces under the generic title of 'Out of the Box' – a title which had come from a comment made by one Company member on the research skills training day. She had been speaking about how her own thinking had been altered by the experience of taking part in 'Ages and Stages', so it was a phrase which seemed particularly pertinent to a series of theatre provocations which were about challenging an audience's thinking and engaging in debate. We wanted the pieces to convey, first, something of the experience of taking part in 'Ages and Stages'; second, participants' thoughts and understandings of what 'cultural value' is; and third, the range of things Company members had been involved in, their feelings about them, and how they saw the future. Integral to the content, it was also important that we worked together to look at how we might provoke the audience to respond to what they were seeing and hearing. For the purposes of the Symposium, we wanted each piece to be shaped differently in this respect, and not just to perform each piece and then have a question-and-answer session to follow. Again, one illustration of how we did this will suffice.

Having developed a draft script for the first piece, the Company were invited to look at what they had helped to create and to think about the major themes coming from it. Here, we were borrowing from dramatic techniques but also reflecting the process of analysis we apply to qualitative research data. The Company drew out 12 key themes highlighting, for example, friendship; loyalty; surprise; challenge; feeling valued; curiosity; etc. Through a voting process, they agreed on 'challenge' as the one theme to be explored further with the audience. In order to agree on what questions to ask the audience about 'challenge', they then worked in small groups to come up with a series of questions. This led to further lively debate and discussion, ranging from the challenge of coming along to 'Ages and Stages' in the first instance; through to wider concerns about challenging conventional stereotypes of ageing and old people; and to whether and how we should be challenged throughout our lives. All the questions about challenge were gathered together and were returned to later in the rehearsal process when we firmed

up how, exactly, we intended to manage the interactions with the audience on the day of the Symposium.

Each piece – and the associated interactions with the audience – was developed, devised and shaped through this iterative process. Parts were allocated and discussed; some members chose to be in some pieces but not all; and everyone agreed to help facilitate discussions. In the run-up to the Symposium, we went into a three-day intensive rehearsal period, working from 10.00am to 4.00pm each day and marking, blocking, sorting props and costumes as we progressed. The final pieces and Symposium were to be held on the main stage; and the Company were to play on top of the set for the production in at that time. Fittingly, this was a revival of *I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire!* – one of the Vic's 16 original musical documentary dramas we had explored in the first 'Ages and Stages' project. However, it did mean the Company had to work around a large oblong 'hole' in the middle of the stage which, in our pieces, variously became a swimming pool, house and train.

The flexibility and skills of the Company were also tested when, shortly before we went into intensive rehearsals, we heard that our one member who was still acting professionally had secured a role in an upcoming production and would be unable to take part. Fortunately, one of the young people who had joined the Company for the work in 2013 was able to step in at the very last minute. She was a former member of the Youth Theatre; had been interviewed as part of the current project; and was an actor herself. She also understudied another Company member who unfortunately lost her voice and could not take part on the day. With some reallocation of lines and last minute editing of the scripts, the Company rose to the challenge – not having known that this theme would once again be so central to what they were doing!



(Rehearsals for *Out of the Box 1*)

The Symposium

The most immediate outlet for presenting the findings of the research development award was the concluding Symposium held at the New Vic Theatre on May 9th 2014 (see programme in Appendix 6). Our original proposal had envisaged a small 'invited workshop' of practitioners, policy makers and academic colleagues. The award of a linked 'critical review' also meant we were able to include findings from this in a presentation at the Symposium which, in the end, attracted a very mixed audience of some 60 people.

The three scripts/provocations for *Out of the Box, 1, 2 and 3* were developed from the research and directly convey the project's main findings (see Appendix 7). Having discussed the conduct of the research and described how we used the findings to devise the scripts, we concentrate here on the Symposium: the scripts/provocations themselves, the performances on the day, and the audience's responses to what we presented: all of which are captured in a DVD complementing this report.

Out of the Box 1

For *Out of the Box 1*, we decided to break with convention and, instead of a welcome and introduction to the Symposium, begin straight in with this provocation once audience members were seated. The piece was to be played through with the audience being engaged at the end in responding to an agreed set of questions. This piece was set up as one of our weekly workshops as we wanted to give the audience a flavour of how people came to be involved in 'Ages and Stages', what we do in the workshops, and what people's motivations for getting involved were. The entire Company participated in this piece which ends with Company members each highlighting the key themes/motivations we noted earlier as having been important to them, and holding up one-word banners, the final one of which is 'challenge'. This was the theme we had all agreed we wanted to explore further with the audience, and we had refined our original long list of questions down to three for the Symposium:

- Is challenge a natural part of living?
- As we age, do we respond differently to challenge?
- Where does challenge come from?

At the close of the piece, the Company worked in pre-arranged pairs, each with an assigned question, and each pair knowing which part of the audience they were to go to, to facilitate discussions.

These questions stimulated considerable debate amongst audience members who highlighted the different ways and directions from which challenges come: from oneself; from family members; from life itself; and from wider social, economic and political

arenas. Some of the young people in the audience were of the view that, in comparison with their situations, older people had more freedom and choice about whether to take on challenges or not. This was countered by others who pointed out that, for some older people, physical considerations might prevent one being able to take up challenges and opportunities. Society's predominantly negative attitudes to ageing were also raised, and parallels drawn between how teenagers and retired people are stifled by the same kinds of expectations in that they are often not taken seriously, are not regarded as having worthwhile opinions, and are thought not to be able to influence policy. By understanding the different levels and facets of how we view ageing, it was felt that we can be helped to understand our own ageing processes, whatever actual chronological age we happen to be. It was also stressed that groups like 'Ages and Stages' are an important means of reflecting back to others how society views ageing and older people. In so doing, this is one way of influencing policies, practices and attitudes for the better and highlighting the significant role of the arts in understanding and conveying what ageing – and relations between generations are – and could be like.

Out of the Box 2

The focus of the second provocation was cultural value. This time, the piece was framed as a quiz being watched on television by an older couple (see Appendix 7). The question, 'what is cultural value?' is clearly central to all the AHRC projects. In the context of our own project, the question seemed to lend itself to a quiz panel format not least because 'a quiz' is becoming something of a motif in the performance pieces the Company have been involved in to date. Whilst the script for *Out of the Box 2* was based on the answers and reflections we had gathered through the interviews, and through the debates we had had on the research skills training day, we also asked audience members as they registered on the morning of the Symposium to write down, on a card, what they understood by the term 'cultural value, and to post it in a box we provided for that purpose. The piece then begins with the older couple settling down to watch the quiz while, in the studio, the five contestants on the panel are arranging everything they need. The (young) host sweeps down the studio steps, box in hand, depositing it at the front before welcoming everyone to: "'Out of the Box": the quiz show that takes questions out of their box, unwraps them and then puts them away, neat and tidy.' The question she draws 'out of the box' for that day's show is, 'What is Cultural Value?'

Panel members try, in vain, to answer the question – their answers never being quite what the host has on her card. In this instance, part way through the piece rather than at the end, our aim was to engage the audience by having the host pass over the question to them, to see if they can 'beat the panel with your thoughts'. Should the audience be reluctant to respond to such a direct question, as they initially were on this occasion, the host had also pre-selected some of the answers which had been written on the cards and posted in the box. These were then used to stimulate further discussion and, once it had run its course, the Company returned to the script. At the end of the

piece, we asked the audience if what they had seen and heard had stimulated more thoughts.

The ensuing discussion was wide-ranging and, at times, quite heated. Some of it reflected the definitions and debates we had tried to distil from the research and encapsulate in the script: notably how difficult a concept cultural value is to grapple with; whether and how we distinguish between 'cultural value' and 'the value of culture'; the necessity to look beyond economic value and embrace a broader understanding of what culture consists of and what cultural value is; the importance of trying to capture how engagement with a cultural environment (or cultural experience like 'Ages and Stages') makes us feel, and how it changes and evolves us as people. Our piece also wonders aloud what it would be like if, instead of automatically going to the sports' desk at the end of every television news bulletin, there was a regular round-up of what is happening in the arts. In addition, it deliberately revisits that age-old chestnut: 'high art' versus 'popular culture', juxtaposing theatre/the arts with football, and asking why it seems that theatre is not valued as much, culturally, as sport. This led to a lively exchange about the two: their similarities and differences; their aims; the dangers of making simple binary distinctions; and the money, or lack of money, in each/at different tiers (eg. Lads & Dads and big money football clubs; subsidised and small repertory theatres, and the big money touring shows/commercial theatre).

The discussion with the audience, together with the cards they had written about cultural value, ranged widely around the transformative power of the arts; flagged up issues of access and barriers to engagement which, in the context of our work, are especially important where older people are concerned; reiterated the positive impacts that the arts can have on people's well-being and how it brings out the best in, and can give meaning to, individuals, groups and communities; emphasised the importance of valuing and experiencing other cultures; highlighted the role the internet now plays in altering our ideas of how culture is constituted and reaches people; and, linked with this, how our understanding and conceptualisation of cultural value needs to credit the extent of social change we have experienced over the last 50 years. For us, discussing and conveying our findings about cultural value in the form of a quiz, was a way of suggesting that there are no simple answers to this question; even having debated and discussed it over very many weeks, the Company still had more questions than answers. The audience too seemed content not to have been provided with pat answers; some in fact commented that it was a question they did not want answering, and that they were comfortable to find that their understanding of it kept shifting, even during the course of the Symposium.

Out of the Box 3

Although a well-worn metaphor, the third and final provocation was framed as a (train) journey because it enabled us to highlight the range of activities, events and places the

'Ages & Stages Company' had travelled to, and participated in, over the previous three years. This piece was also about conveying what these experiences and opportunities had meant to them, both individually and as a group, before reflecting on what the future will, and might, hold. Stoke, and Stoke station, had been important to, and featured in, our first documentary (*Our Age, Our Stage*) and we were keen to re-emphasise the importance of 'place' – and our local community – in the current piece. One Company member was also able to reprise one of his earlier roles as the guard at the station.

The piece (see Appendix 7) opens with six of the Company at the station, about to board a train for Manchester. The audience are taken with them to London, Birmingham and Crewe; we see and hear how they travel light: 'Light on set, light on props'; and how 'flexible' they now are in comparison with the early days. After brief reminiscences about those 'early days', we are given insights into the things they have done and the opportunities for people 'who don't want to perform'. We see and hear about the 'Ages and Stages Exhibition' at the theatre in 2012; the performances of the first documentary, *Our Age, Our Stage*; their participation in the concluding conference of the New Dynamics of Ageing programme in Oct 2013, in London; and the work with the Youth Theatre for the Royal Exchange in Manchester described earlier in this report. Towards the end, the dialogue returns to a consideration of the future and a determination that 'this isn't the last stop, you know'. They debate the importance of opening up the Company to 'new blood', wondering how best to do this and whether, in the doing, it might lose something. Funding and affordability is considered before we come full circle, at the close, as the Company again raise the question of why people would get engaged in an activity like this, turning to the audience to ask what it is that has motivated them to come along to today's event.

The audience was asked a simple question: 'What interested you about coming today?' and invited to write their answers on cards before swapping what they had written with others they did not know. In addition, they were asked to hold onto any cards they particularly liked with the promise that, at the end, they might be able to find out who wrote what. Our aim with this provocation and exercise was not just to stimulate debate and discussion again, but to begin to connect people. Everyone, including Company members, participated in this activity and the swapping of cards was accompanied by animated discussion and much laughter.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Company members' motivations for becoming involved with 'Ages and Stages' echoed some of the words on the banners in *Out of the Box 1*, and included learning, wanting to be challenged, and wanting to 'keep on growing in old age'. Audience members too wrote comments about, and discussed with us the importance of coming 'to learn about other people's experiences'; to see how this kind of work might translate into other contexts and be taken to, for example, people in care homes; to find out how working with an older generation might benefit their own work in other

theatres; and how theatre might bring about conversations between generations. Some were particularly interested in finding out how the Company felt about their experiences and were intrigued to see how the findings were going to be presented theatrically; some also wanted, not surprisingly, to hear the other Symposium speakers as well.

Feelings about what the experience of 'Ages and Stages' has meant to Company members are captured in the script, and graphically illustrate the cultural value of what they have been engaged in: anxiety, nervousness, exhilaration and satisfaction accompanied the early days and the first performances of *Our Age, Our Stage* in equal measure; the 'Ages and Stages Exhibition' 'was one of the best experiences of my life' offers one person; while participating in the big NDA event in London 'was beyond my expectations... it was electric' says another; and 'what I like was the feeling that I was part of something bigger, something much bigger'. Others relished the work with the Youth Theatre: 'sharing and talking with the young people' and 'the energy and perspective they gave'; while others recognised and acknowledged what involvement had done for their own identity and sense of self: 'the most positive experience was for myself: I found that I was able to interact with others... and my confidence completely changed'; it has 'contributed to the enhancement of my life'; 'it's like a huge battery: it charges you up and you keep on running'; and, 'I've learnt to listen a bit more too'.

The comments cards and discussions with the Company in the concluding session of the Symposium also emphasise, as one person wrote, 'the sheer enjoyment of participating'. This has been central to everything we do whilst, at the same time, addressing what we perceive to be important and challenging issues around ageing and intergenerational relations. This 'enjoyment of participating' is not confined just to the performances but extends through the whole process of the way we make theatre including, through this research development award, the doing of the research. As one Company member remarked:

I'm not the actor [although she did take part in Out of the Box 1], that's not what I enjoy the most... for me, doing that research was another dimension of Ages and Stages.

The Company also concurred that it was important to feel at the heart of what was generated; it was, as one person said, 'enriching for our relationships' and, as another member wrote, 'it is a dream come true'. These findings, we suggest, highlight well the interplay between the intrinsic, affective dimensions of older people's experiences of theatre-making, and the instrumental value they derive from such participation. They point too, to the necessity for a more nuanced and encompassing understanding and conceptualisation of cultural value, an issue we return to below when we revisit and discuss the main findings arising from our work.



(Rehearsals for *Out of the Box 2 and 3*)

Discussion

Since 'Ages and Stages' began in 2009, a lot of documentation and research materials have been gathered together, all of which provided the context for this research development award. The award itself has enabled us to treat 'Ages and Stages' as a case study and to illuminate three key aspects: what the actual experience of participating in theatre-making has been like for this group of older people and what it has meant to them; what their perceptions and understandings of 'cultural value' are; and, methodologically, what is involved in undertaking co-created and co-operative research with older people. Each of these aspects is discussed further below before concluding the report with some reflections on the overall project and the future for the Company.

A small case study such as this does, of course, have certain limitations and we make no claims here for the generalizability of what we have done, or what we have found and presented in the preceding pages. However, it is evident from our linked critical review (Rickett and Bernard 2014) that, to date, there is comparatively little work on older people's participation in theatre and drama that explores some of the things we have touched on here – notably the cultural value of that participation from the perspectives of the participants themselves; or which has been carried out as we have done – through a participatory research methodology. Nor, with very few exceptions, has the particular artistic medium itself – in this instance theatre and drama – been used by participants to convey the research findings which they themselves have helped generate.

Experiences of Theatre-making

Drawing from all our sources of evidence about 'Ages and Stages' (the accumulated materials from the earlier projects; ethnographic notes and observations; the interviews, both individual and group, held with Company members; the feedback and evaluations of each project; and the current work), it is evident that the value of theatre-making for this group of older people is about:

- **Attachment to place:** participation in 'Ages and Stages' is intimately linked with people's feelings about, connections with, and affections for, this particular theatre. Its position in the history of British theatre-making through the social documentaries pioneered by its founding artistic director, the late Peter Cheeseman, and its unique place in reflecting and portraying the history and key events of the industrial community of the Potteries, mean that members of the 'Ages & Stages Company' began with this shared interest in common and a commitment to particular ways of theatre-making. They feel a strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging (Bernard et al. 2014). These feelings, together with the importance of presenting local stories and the intimate format of theatre-in-the-round, have also influenced us

as researchers and practitioners, in that many of our working practices have mirrored and reflected the values and practices of the original company.

- **More than performing:** for the 'Ages & Stages Company', and for us, it has been important to think about theatre-making in broad terms and to provide opportunities for different forms of participation. Whilst these opportunities are clearly connected with theatre and drama in general, and the New Vic Theatre in particular, the value of this kind of theatre-making is not simply about the final performance or performances. When 'Ages and Stages' first started, we deliberately avoided asking people to come and perform. Instead, we invited them to get involved in looking at the original interviews and archival materials which we were hoping to put together into a new documentary piece. As we worked together through the workshops, some people gravitated towards performing, others were more comfortable contributing to things like the exhibition and some, without realising, 'just slide into it', in the words of one character in *Out of the Box 1*. The key here is about choice and the importance of the whole artistic process with its associated activities and outputs, not just the performance.
- **Choice and challenge:** choices about how and what aspects of theatre-making one participates in, is also linked for Company members – and us – with the ability to opt in and out as necessary. Theatre-making of this nature has to accommodate to other aspects of peoples' lives because, inevitably, things intervene and happen to people. We indicated the impact of some of this earlier in the report when writing about the run-up to the intensive rehearsal period ahead of the Symposium. Other members have also had periods when they have been unable to participate. At the level of particular performances, we have indicated how not everyone wanted to perform in all three provocations but, instead, participated in other roles such as leading and facilitating discussions with the audience. Part of the value has also been to set the Company different challenges with each new project: be that different forms of theatre-making (documentary; forum theatre; pop-up theatre; short provocations); engaging with different audiences in varied venues (from a full house on the main stage at the theatre to small audiences in intimate spaces in residential homes); discussing, debating and shaping how we address issues connected with ageing and intergenerational relationships which have been at the centre of our work; participating in presentations, workshops and conferences; and, latterly, becoming co-researchers.
- **Self and group:** the intrinsic and instrumental value of these experiences is seen most clearly in the benefits Company members have identified, both for themselves and for the group. These subjective and social aspects manifest themselves in a growing self-awareness of how participation has, and is, continuing to develop them as individuals whilst, at the same time, strengthening pre-existing relationships and

forging new ones amongst group members. Our participant observations over the past three years confirm the 'findings' captured in the scripts for *Out of the Box 1, 2 and 3*: in our roles as researcher and practitioner, we have watched, seen and documented members' growing self-confidence; the awakening of old, and the acquisition of new, skills and abilities; and the mutual support and encouragement which has enabled people to take risks and meet the challenges they have set themselves, or we have set them. These findings echo other studies (Rickett and Bernard 2014) but their particular importance here lies, we would suggest, in countering and challenging ageist stereotypes which tend to depict older people as incapable and unable of continued development, learning or creativity.

- **Fun and fear:** above all, these experiences of theatre-making have been about much more than the benefits to older people's health and well-being, contrary to what much of the existing research tends to emphasise. Whilst Company members have spontaneously spoken about well-being in terms of things like improved confidence, vitality and self-esteem, 'Ages and Stages' is, at heart, about the ability to have fun: to feel excited, to free the imagination, to play and enjoy the experience, to broaden one's horizons, push the boundaries and, as the cast urges each other in *Out of the Box 3*, to 'get out of your comfort zone'. We noted earlier in the report, in the presentation of the Royal Exchange work, that fun and enjoyment are also juxtaposed with fear and risk: a combination that many Company members now seem well able to hold in creative tension. It is these emotional and affective dimensions of participation that theatre and drama seems to bring out in individuals and, because of theatre's inherent ability to share, it is also well placed to convey these aspects to an audience.

Cultural Value

Our exploration of cultural value from the perspectives of older people involved in 'Ages and Stages' has, as noted earlier, provided more food for thought than simple answers or neat definitions. That said, we draw together three sets of observations here:

- **Older people at the centre:** to our knowledge, older people themselves have rarely if ever been asked about their perceptions and understandings of cultural value, let alone been asked to consider it in respect of the cultural activity in which they might be participating. This is despite the fact that 'cultural gerontology', and research on ageing with an Arts and Humanities focus, is a growing field (Baars et al. 2013; Cole, Kastenbaum and Ray 2000; Katz 2005; Rickett and Bernard 2014; Twigg and Martin in press). Likewise, the potential impacts of an ageing population are just beginning to penetrate the consciousness of key institutions like Arts Council England (Mowlah et al. 2014). The findings discussed above and encapsulated in our second provocation – *Out of the Box 2* – represent our contribution to conveying some of the

ways in which this particular group of older people are thinking, talking about and showing to others, the cultural value of what they have been engaged in.

- ***Beyond health and well-being***: our findings strongly suggest that cultural value as perceived and understood by the members of the 'Ages & Stages Company', is about much more than the instrumental elements noted in a great deal of the existing research and literature. 'Ages and Stages' was never set up with the aim of improving participants' health and well-being; and this has never been an explicit focus of the research we have carried out. Whilst not wanting to minimise the health and social benefits, not everything to do with older people and ageing is about health and well-being: rather, it is the transformative effects of participation in theatre-making on people's lives, and the subjective feelings and responses it engenders, which are as valued and valuable.
- ***Conceptualising cultural value***: the observations above, and the findings in this report point, in turn, to the need to conceptualise cultural value in a more nuanced and inclusive way and 'explore how the intrinsic and affective elements of people's drama experiences may also have instrumental effects on their lives' (Rickett and Bernard 2014: 45). We heard and saw, at the end of *Out of the Box 2*, that cultural value was '... the question that just wouldn't go back in its box'. However, our examination of cultural value shows that, for this group of older people, it has to be contextualised in terms of place, and has to address both 'cultural value' and 'the value of culture' if it is to have any meaning and relevance. After, but not before the discussions on the research training day, we shared with Company members some of the ways cultural value has been written about. In terms of what we have found, John Holden's (2006: 23-24) discussion about what it is that the public value about culture, perhaps resonates most closely with the range of definitions, debates and discussions we had with the Company and with the audience at the Symposium. He writes (our emphases):

'The public primarily values three things about culture. The first is all those wonderful, beautiful, uplifting, challenging, stimulating, thought-provoking, terrifying, disturbing, spiritual, witty, transcendental experiences *that shape and reflect their sense of self and their place in the world...* The second thing the public values is being treated well, and honestly, by the cultural organisations that they choose to engage with... They want information and comfortable seats, and *more and more they want participation of some kind*. The third thing of value to the public is the *rootedness* that culture provides. This can play out in two ways – in *a sense of place* and geographical location, where cultural infrastructure can anchor local identities, and in *a sense of belonging* to a community, either a geographical community, or a cultural community of interest.'

Participatory Research

We noted in the background section to this report that participatory research involving older people as co-researchers is increasingly accepted in gerontological work. Discussion of the risks and benefits associated with this kind of research is not our focus here but can be found elsewhere (see for example, Barnes and Taylor 2007; Bindells et al. 2014; Carter and Beresford 2000; Walker 2007); rather, we concentrate on what we regard as the innovative methodological aspects of the approach we took in this project and the gaps we have identified. Again, we make three points:

- ***An innovative approach***: in addition to our observation that older people have rarely, if ever, been asked to reflect on cultural value, most existing research and evaluation studies of older people's theatre-making have been undertaken by practitioners or, less frequently, by practitioners and academics in partnership (Rickett and Bernard 2014). Where older people have been involved, it has been predominantly as respondents to surveys and interviews about participation levels (as opposed to actual experiences); about instrumental benefits in terms of mental and physical health, well-being and quality of life; and about barriers to participation. Although our research development award project was driven by pre-set research questions, these had been derived from the collaborative work we had done with the Company over a number of years. In this sense, older people's experiences, and the limited understanding from the existing literature about what participation meant to them, was the basis for this project. We also knew, from the start, that we wanted to see if we could transform the theatre Company into a 'Company of researchers', if only for a while. The project and the research we undertook as an integral part of it, was therefore co-constructed, collaboratively undertaken, co-produced and co-evaluated.
- ***Arts-based research methods***: using the artistic medium in which we were working – namely theatre and drama – to 'show' rather than just describe the research findings about the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre-making was, for us, a logical approach to take. 'Showing' the results of our research in this way is, after all, what we had been doing since the initial 'Ages and Stages' project. What we had not fully appreciated though was that this was unusual to say the least. Our linked critical review, which began half way through the research development award, only found two other examples which explicitly used arts-based methods (Rickett and Bernard 2014). One is an evaluation of Anne Basting's 'Penelope Project': a devised theatre project set in a Wisconsin nursing home in the United States (Mello and Voigts 2013); the other is an evaluation of a 10-week drama intervention for older people in Coventry in the UK, delivered by a theatre company (Savin-Baden et al. 2013; Wimpenny & Savin-Baden 2013). Perhaps not surprisingly, we believe arts-based research methods such as these have much

potential for capturing and conveying some of the less tangible aspects of experience and participation, and for showing audiences something of the actual creative process, what happens 'in the moment', and how participants feel and respond.

- ***Suggestions for further research:*** our linked critical review makes a number of suggestions for further research on theatre-making and drama with older people, based on a synthesis and examination of over 70 published and unpublished research studies, evaluation reports, and descriptive overviews (Rickett and Bernard 2014). In addition to highlighting arts-based methods and the collaboration of older people themselves in such research, our use of participant observation throughout 'Ages and Stages' is a further method we believe is worthy of wider application. It has been particularly useful in informing the devising process in this current project, as well as enabling us as both researchers and practitioners to reflect on and discuss with each other and the Company what happens, as it happens, rather than relying on retrospective evaluations of the process and the products. To a certain extent, this has only been possible because of the now well established relationships and trust between us. Without this, it is perhaps much harder for academic researchers and practitioners to work in these kinds of ways. Lastly, an area which both we and others have yet to explore in any depth, concerns the aesthetic quality (its intrinsic cultural value) of what we have done, and the contribution this might make to understanding the cultural value *provided by* older people, rather than just the value they derive from their participation (Rickett and Bernard 2014: 45).



(Scene from *Out of the Box 2*)

Conclusion

The genesis and evolution of 'Ages and Stages' and of the Company has been driven by research council funded projects and the imperative to explore and answer research questions about representations and understandings of ageing, older people and intergenerational relationships within the context of a particular art form (theatre and drama), in a particular place (the Potteries), and over a particular time period (the past 50 years). Looking to the future, there are many potential avenues which the Company might now pursue, particularly once the constraints of research council funding no longer apply. Some of the deliberations about the future were trailed in our final provocation, *Out of the Box 3*, and picked up in the discussions with the audience at the end of the Symposium.

For the immediate future, the Company is exploring ways of becoming financially independent whilst continuing to be physically hosted at the New Vic Theatre. They are interested in moving the work on in Stoke-on-Trent, both in terms of the issues they might want to address and the creative possibilities afforded by working in different settings and with different collaborators and audiences. In the autumn of 2014, we will be relieving *Welcome to Silence* with members of the Youth Theatre and showing it at the planned 'Live Age Festival' taking place on October 1st and 2nd. The Company have also been invited to do further work with the Royal Exchange in Manchester who have very recently established their own 'Company of Elders'. The 'Ages & Stages Company' will be hosting a shared workshop in the autumn and the two groups hope to work together on a joint project to be performed in the summer of 2015. Whatever the Company takes on in the future, and however it may evolve and be refreshed in terms of membership, they are agreed that the heart of what they do is about thought and debate; ongoing challenge and opportunities; and the continuing need to anchor its work to the local community, so that 'Ages and Stages' might itself eventually become part of the cultural story of this area.

It seems fitting therefore, to leave the last word – or words – to one of the members of the Company. Every time we get towards the conclusion of a project, Colin pens a poem for us all. This project was no exception and, as he cogently suggests at the end, while we clearly value what we have been doing, the final judgement of the value of work like this lies with the audience – whether that audience be in the theatre; when we are out on tour in schools, residential homes, retirement villages and other settings; seeing the DVDs; or reading this report and other articles about our work.

Etruria Rd. 598a

Colin Ramsell
Ages & Stages Company member
May 2014

Curious:
Well that's why we're here.

An invitation to talk
Is where it began.
Memories of theatre shared
And views expressed,
Their words taken down
verbatim.

Would they come to a workshop?

Not a place where materials,
Clay or metal, wood or cloth
Are thrown shaped or formed.
The materials here are words,
Ideas, expressions, which are
Woven, cast or hammered into
shape.

Another challenge

Share with a younger generation!
It took some time
Finding what makes them tick,
Their reaction to us,
Their energy and perspective.
But together we worked it out.

Then by request to Manchester
To strut the Royal Exchange.
[Well it was in the Studio at least]
And weren't we chuffed.

Cultural Value:
Discuss.

Oh dear what's this,
Semantics and philosophy.
But by degrees we ventured
Into the *unknown*.
And past *experience*
And the *loyalty* of the team
The words and ideas
Gained form and shape.
With a nudge from Jill
And a prompt from Mim
A scenario emerged
And tackled with *enthusiasm*
Our theatre making
Does have a cultural value.

Can we convince an audience?

In anticipation
We await your verdict.

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Appendix 1: Project Timescales and Activities – proposed and amended

Date	Activity	Amendments
Aug 2013	Preparatory groundwork with Ages & Stages Company to equip them with basic qualitative research skills and ideas relating to 'cultural value'.	<p><i>Company kept in touch by letter/email with plans.</i></p> <p><i>Formal invitation received from the Royal Exchange, Manchester. Performance date to be Saturday Nov 16th 2013.</i></p>
Sept 2013	<p>Formal start of project. Begin secondary analysis of existing research materials.</p> <p>Ages & Stages Company begin to engage in research discussions around 'value of involvement in theatre-making'; select a topic/issue as basis for new piece.</p>	<p><i>Company reconvenes on Sept 9th 2013 and commences weekly workshops. Company joined by Youth Theatre members on Sept 16th.</i></p> <p><i>Earlier materials and workshop activities drawn on as groups get to know each other, begin to explore commonalities and differences, and think about and explore the future in 2020.</i></p> <p><i>Intensive rehearsal dates fixed for Oct 29, 30, 31st.</i></p>
Oct 2013	Devising workshops for new performance piece.	<p><i>Workshops continue. Draft script entitled 'Welcome to Silence' put together and shared.</i></p> <p><i>8 members of Ages & Stages Company attend closing conference of the NDA Programme with the research team: London, Oct 22nd.</i></p> <p><i>Visit to Royal Exchange on Oct 29th; all day rehearsals Oct 30th and 31st.</i></p>
Nov - Dec 2013	Performance piece goes into rehearsal; 'show back' at New Vic Theatre and, potentially, the Royal Exchange, Manchester.	<p><i>Research team and 4 Company members run invited workshop at 'Coming of Age' conference: Manchester Town Hall, Nov 5th.</i></p> <p><i>Workshops continue; final rehearsal Nov 15th; performance of 'Welcome to Silence' at the Royal Exchange, Nov 16th.</i></p> <p><i>Research Skills Training Day, Nov 28th; Company begin interviews in December.</i></p>
Jan 2014	Recorded evaluation sessions with Ages & Stages Company focusing on how they have experienced entire 'Ages & Stages' project.	<p><i>Interviews continue; most completed and transcribed by mid-late Jan.</i></p> <p><i>Jan 9th: feedback and evaluation session on Royal Exchange work with YT; Jan 13th: feedback and evaluation session with Ages & Stages Company.</i></p>

		<p><i>Jan 13th: weekly workshops recommence; Company make use of interview transcripts from Jan 21st onwards.</i></p> <p><i>Jan 27th: recorded group discussion with Company about their research experiences.</i></p> <p><i>Interim report produced.</i></p>
Feb-Mar 2014	Continued secondary analysis; analysis of research materials/process (from Aug-Dec); analysis of evaluation sessions. Draft outline of final report and share with Advisory Group; select date and prepare for workshop.	<p><i>Weekly workshops continue; including visit from PI on Canadian partner project (Feb 24th).</i></p> <p><i>Three performance pieces/provocations take shape; date and outline programme for Symposium to be held on May 9th agreed.</i></p>
Apr-May 2014	Writing up of analyses into final report. Hold workshop to feed back key findings (including a performance; and/or findings from the linked Critical Review). Upload report and materials to Ages & Stages website.	<p><i>8 Company members and research team run invited workshops at West Midlands Later Life Forum, Birmingham, Apr 2nd and for drama students at Manchester Metropolitan University, Crewe, Apr 3rd.</i></p> <p><i>Apr 7th: 5 Company members meet with research team to explore future funding possibilities</i></p> <p><i>Apr 10th-12th: Research team attend and present Ages and Stages work at 8th International conference on Cultural Gerontology, Galway, Ireland.</i></p> <p><i>Intensive rehearsals for 'Out of the Box 1, 2 and 3' held May 6th, 7th and 8th.</i></p> <p><i>Concluding Symposium at New Vic Theatre, May 9th; performances and discussions filmed.</i></p> <p><i>May 12th: feedback and debrief with the Company, including possible future developments/projects.</i></p>
June 2014		<i>DVD from Symposium finalised; analyses of all materials completed; final report drafted.</i>

Appendix 2: 'Welcome to Silence'- Feedback and Evaluation

Youth Theatre participants – 09.01.14	Ages & Stages Company – 13.01.14
<p>THOUGHTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entire process was fun • It was a good experience that I will remember for a long time • It was an experience that I will remember and I enjoyed Sweeney Todd afterwards • It was interesting to work with people of different ages • I thought that I wouldn't enjoy working with younger teenagers but I'm so glad I was proved wrong! • Performing outside the New Vic was exciting and nice to have a change of scenery! • Had a chance to meet with the other groups at the Royal Exchange • We could see the structures in the performance space before • If we did a similar project it would be nice for some improv/unscripted work to be in the piece • It would be good to have performed more times • I would like to have shared the performance with members of our community (in more locations) • Would like to have started rehearsing and devising the final piece a bit sooner so we feel a little bit more prepared • Don't end 'Ages & Stages' – meet up and do more performances if possible 	<p>THOUGHTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surprised at the contrast between members of the younger age group: super-confident to complete shyness • The older young people had some great ideas • Don't underestimate young people's capacities to 'get it right on the day' • That we wouldn't get it (the performance) as good as it turned out • Don't be negative about stuff (I was at first); we all pulled together to make it work • I should make more effort to interact with the young: perfectly affable when spoken to but rarely the first to speak • Very interesting seeing Youth Theatre on mobiles, their views and on and off 'Facebook' – so different to 1950s teenagers! • We looked at contemporary issues and concerns • They were very welcoming at the Royal Exchange • What would people of 100 years ago make of our contribution (in that Royal Exchange building) • Brilliant set and display in the Studio at the Royal Exchange; very interesting seeing the other group (before us) acting
<p>LOVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of it  • Making new friends (x5) • Meeting new people (x3) • Working with new people • Mixed ages worked really well, it was a refreshing change! • The people; chance for trips; it was a great opportunity • The workshops at the start of rehearsals (eg. performing stories; arms superglued together!) • The workshops • Sharing experiences • The discussions: hearing other people's opinions on topics • Taking the trip to Manchester • Performing in a different place/at 	<p>LOVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with young people as well as people of my own age • The whole process, especially the transformation of workshop stuff to 'performativity'? • The whole rehearsal process and performance • The whole experience of the Royal Exchange venture • Sharing in the event • Feeling confident that the show would go well when on stage • The visit to the Royal Exchange and taking part • The fact that it was a new experience, the FEAR of it was powerful; the feeling of exhilaration afterwards

<p>Manchester (x2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watching Sweeney Todd (x3) • Biscuits! – they brought us together/tea and biscuits (x2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The actual performance – the tense atmosphere created by us and the audience felt it too • The total informality of the experience at the Exchange and the respect shown by the audience during each performance • That the young people were very focussed in the performance • The whole atmosphere in the Royal Exchange bearing in mind its history • The way I still was able to be involved even though I couldn't guarantee being at all rehearsals and the actual event • That I could still go to the actual event at very short notice, and see Sweeney Todd • The text of the 20 minute piece
<p>TAKE AWAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship/friends (x5) • I am taking away a lovely group of friends who I will keep in touch with outside of the theatre • Friends and biscuits • The experience of working with older people • Working with different ages • The experience of performing in a different kind of stage/atmosphere • Memories (x2) • Thoughts about the future and how it differs from what the different generations think • Confidence • It helped with my uni applications and interviews • Something great to put on my CV! 	<p>TAKE AWAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What a lot of hard work goes into even a small production • How Jill picks up on ideas to devise a script: I never thought 'providing opportunities' would end up the way it did! • The interaction between A&S members and the younger members after a spell of uncertainty • Being more understanding of young people • The feeling of reciprocal interest and pleasure in audience and actors • A warm feeling of achievement: that we mattered in the whole picture of life • That a good performance can come after 'bad' last rehearsals • How young people can rise to the occasion! • My surprise by the venue and the event • The congenial reception from our hosts • The warmth of strangers
<p>BIN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time spent on rehearsals • Last rehearsals were rushed and it was bundled together too fast • The time of the rehearsals (NB: this participant sometimes had some difficulties with school/teacher about getting to the Vic for 4.30pm) 	<p>BIN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile phones! (no, don't mean that) • Feeling of being ignored by youth • Fast food!

Appendix 3: Programme for Research Skills Training Day



Ages and Stages: Research Skills Day

Thursday 28 November 2013
Room CM0.012, Claus Moser Research Centre, Keele University

Outline Programme

10.00-10.30	Session 1: Coffee and Introduction
10.30-11.30	Session 2: What makes a good interviewer/interview?
11.30-12.30	Session 3: Doing interviews – practical exercise
12.30- 1.30	Lunch and 'Welcome to Silence' DVD
1.30- 2.45	Session 4: Constructing the interview schedule/s
2.45- 3.15	Session 5: Other issues to be considered
3.15- 3.45	Session 6: What happens next?
3.45- 4.00	Tea and depart

--00--

**Appendix 4:
Final Interview Schedule for Company Members and Consent Form**
[Note: the original schedule was in 14 point for ease of use by Company members]



Ages and Stages: the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre making

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR COMPANY MEMBERS

Aims of the interview

- To explore each other's experiences of being involved with *Ages & Stages*.
- To explore each other's understandings of 'cultural value'.

REMEMBER – this schedule is a guide: how you ask the questions and in what order is up to you; it will depend on how people respond and what they say.

REMEMBER TOO – we agreed that the role of the research interviewer is to: listen actively; not talk too much, but probe and prompt appropriately to draw people out; be non-judgemental; manage the pace and flow of the interview; and manage the time well.

--00--

PLACE THE DIGITAL RECORDER BETWEEN YOU AND THE PERSON YOU ARE INTERVIEWING; CHECK THAT IT IS RECORDING!

Beginnings (guide time: @ 10 mins)

- How, and when, did you get involved with Ages & Stages?
- In what way/s have you been involved? (the following list is a reminder):
 - Interviewed for first 'Ages & Stages' project;
 - With devising workshops for 'Our Age, Our Stage';
 - Performing in 'Our Age, Our Stage';
 - With the 'Ages & Stages Exhibition';
 - With the follow-on project/'Happy Returns';
 - With the Royal Exchange project/'Welcome to Silence';
 - At conferences/events;
 - Other.
- What have you enjoyed most; what has stood out in your memory?
- Any bits you haven't enjoyed; that could have been done better?

- Looking back, what was it that motivated you to get involved?

About you (guide time: @ 15 mins)

- What impacts has being involved with A&S had on you?
 - Mentally (eg. energising the grey cells; stimulation; challenge; learning lines; etc.)
 - In terms of how you think/feel about yourself (eg. confidence; sense of self; well-being; coping with difficult times; how you approach things; etc.)
 - Physically (eg. positively? negatively? in terms of your health?).
- What, if anything, have you learnt about yourself through being involved with A&S?
- What, if anything, have you learnt about others? (not just about Company members but family/friends/young people/wider society)
- Has being involved with A&S made any difference to your feelings about:
 - Trying something new?
 - What ageing is about/what might be possible later in life?
 - How theatre works?
- Have you tried anything for the very first time through being involved with A&S? If so, what?
- Do you think being involved with A&S has changed you? If so, in what ways/how has it changed you?
- What has being involved meant to you?

About others/your relationships with others (guide time: @ 15 mins)

- How did you find working with (older) people you perhaps didn't know initially?
- How did you find working with younger people?
- Have your views about young people changed in any ways since being involved in A&S? If so, in what ways?
- What impacts do you think A&S might have had on the young people with whom you've worked?
- How have family members reacted to your involvement?
- How have friends reacted your involvement?

Cultural Value (guide time: @ 10 mins)

- Since we discussed it in the research skills workshop, what are your thoughts now about what the term 'cultural value' means?
- What does it mean to you personally?

- Do you feel A&S has been a 'cultural' experience? Can you explain how/why?
- What value would you place on your experience of A&S?

About the future (guide time: @ 10 mins)

- How do you feel about continuing to be involved?
- How might the group be further developed/refreshed?
- Would you recommend getting involved with A&S to others?
- Who would you like to see benefit from groups like A&S?

Endings (guide time: @ 10 mins)

- Did A&S turn out as you expected?
- Were there any surprises?
- Have you surprised yourself?
- Can you sum up what A&S has added to your life?

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW, CHECK BACK TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE COVERED THE MAIN AREAS.

--00--

AT THE END

KEEPING NOTES – YOU MIGHT LIKE TO CONSIDER WRITING DOWN SOME BRIEF NOTES STRAIGHT AFTER THE INTERVIEW/S TO RECORD HOW YOU THINK IT WENT; WHAT STOOD OUT FOR YOU; IF YOU THINK IT'S ANSWERING THE PROJECT'S RESEARCH QUESTIONS; ANY SIGNIFICANT NON-VERBALS. OR, YOU COULD SPEAK THESE THOUGHTS DIRECTLY INTO THE DIGITAL RECORDER.

REMEMBER – WE DON'T EXPECT YOU TO TRANSCRIBE THE INTERVIEW/S! BUT, PLEASE MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO RETURN THE DIGITAL RECORDER TO JILL, MIM OR TRACEY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, SO THAT WE CAN DOWNLOAD THE INTERVIEWS AND GET THEM TYPED UP.

SUPPORT – IF YOU RUN INTO DIFFICULTIES, PLEASE CONTACT MIM OR JILL SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.

DEBRIEFING - IF YOU ALSO WANT TO TALK WITH MIM OR JILL ABOUT HOW THE INTERVIEW/S HAVE GONE, THEN PLEASE DO. REMEMBER, WE ARE ALL GETTING BACK TOGETHER ON MONDAY JANUARY 13TH AT THE NEW VIC (4.00-6.00PM).



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

Ages and Stages: the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre making

Name of Principal Investigator: Prof. Miriam Bernard

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| box | Please tick |
| 1 I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 I agree to take part in this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 I understand that the data collected about me during this study will be anonymised. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 I agree to the interview being audio taped. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 I agree to allow the data collected to be used as a resource for a theatre production and to be used for other future research projects. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of participant	Date	Signature
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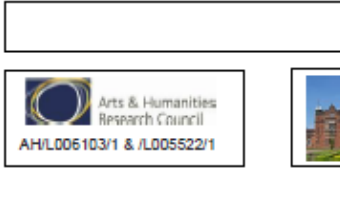




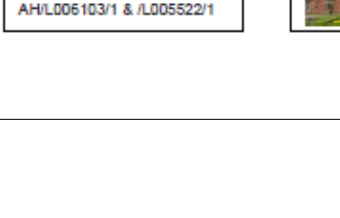






Researcher	Date	Signature
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**<http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages>
Enquiries: 01782 733845 or e-mail t.l.harrison@keele.ac.uk**

Appendix 5: Project Information Sheet

	<h3>Ages and Stages: AHRC cultural value projects 2013-14</h3>	
<p>Ages and Stages: the cultural value of older people's experiences of theatre making</p> <p>Framed by a critical gerontological perspective, this Research Development Award (Sept 2013-May 2014) aims to develop the <i>Ages & Stages Company</i> into a 'company of researchers' who will examine and interrogate their own - and each others' - experiences and understandings of cultural value. The existing Company will be supported to co-explore and co-research their involvement with <i>Ages and Stages</i> over the last four years. They will work with the project team to identify - and to show to us and others through live performance - the cultural value of what they have been engaged in. The new piece will be performed at an invited workshop in May 2014 as a stimulus to further discussions. Findings from the linked Critical Review on 'Ageing, Drama and Creativity' will also be presented.</p>	<p>Ageing, Drama and Creativity: a critical review</p> <p>Our research, and that of others, leads us to conclude that whilst we know quite a lot about the practice of undertaking creative drama-based projects with older people, our conceptual and empirical understandings of how cultural value is viewed by the participants in these projects is much more limited. This <i>Critical Review</i> (Jan-May 2014) builds on the findings, experiences, learning and networks established through <i>Ages and Stages</i>, and will examine both the published and 'grey' literature in this area. It aims to provide a more nuanced assessment of the existing research in order to aid our understanding of the components of cultural value as they relate to theatre; its theoretical and conceptual dimensions; and the methods used to generate evidence.</p>	
		
<p>These new awards are inspired by our interdisciplinary <i>Ages and Stages</i> project: a continuing collaboration between Keele University and the New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme. To date, <i>Ages and Stages</i> has consisted of two phases. The first phase (2009-2012), funded under the national cross-council New Dynamics of Ageing programme, explored the place of the theatre in representations and recollections of ageing in North Staffordshire. Archival and interview material was drawn together to create the <i>Ages & Stages Exhibition</i> and the new verbatim documentary drama <i>Our Age, Our Stage</i> performed by older people (aged 59-92) interviewed for the project and members of New Vic Youth Theatre (aged 16-19). The second phase (2012-2013), funded by the AHRC follow-on scheme, focused on translational work. We established the <i>Ages & Stages Company</i>; devised and toured <i>Happy Returns</i> - a new interactive forum theatre piece; developed, delivered and evaluated a pilot inter-professional training course; and scoped out, with a range of partners, the potential for a Creative Age Festival in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.</p>		
<p>Research Team - Miriam Bernard (PI), Jill Rezzano (New Vic Theatre), Michelle Rickett (RA), Tracey Harrison (Project Administrator). Enquiries: 01782 733845 or e-mail t.l.harrison@keele.ac.uk</p> <p>Advisory Group - Anne Basting, Jo Blagg, Janet Fast, Susan Feldman, Ray Johnson, Anne Kinnaird, Teresa Lefort, Chris Martin, Alan Hatton Yeo, Mo Ray, Pam Schweitzer, Elizabeth Slater, Mark Webster.</p>		
<p>http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages</p>		
 <p>Arts & Humanities Research Council AH/L008103/1 & /L005522/1</p>		
		

Appendix 6: Symposium Programme

	<p style="text-align: center;">Ages and Stages Symposium Friday May 9th 2014 New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme 10.30am-3.30pm</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY:</p>
	<p>10.30 Arrival and coffee</p>
	<p>11.00 'Out of the Box 1': talking about older people and theatre in new ways – a series of provocations Introductions and welcomes</p>
	<p>11.30 'Ageing, Drama and Creativity': findings from the Critical Review Dr Michelle Rickett and Prof Miriam Bernard</p>
	<p>12.00 'Out of the Box 2'</p>
	<p>12.30 Lunch</p>
	<p>1.15 'Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything': Theatre and the Cultural Stereotypes of Old Age Professor Mick Mangan, Professor of Drama, Loughborough University Author: <i>Staging Ageing: theatre, performance and the narrative of decline</i> (Intellect Books, 2013).</p>
	<p>1.45 'We are not invisible': Personal, Interpersonal and Community Benefits of Intergenerational Theatre Prof Janet Fast Professor of Human Ecology, University of Alberta, Canada Project lead: <i>Health and Creative Aging: Theatre as a Pathway to Healthy Aging</i>.</p>
	<p>2.15 'Out of the Box 3'</p>
	<p>2.45 Discussion with <i>Ages and Stages Company</i> and speakers</p>
	<p>3.15 Concluding remarks Dr Iona Jones Member, New Vic Board of Trustees; Director, Imagine Associates; Co-founder, the West Midlands Diversity Practitioners' Network.</p>
	<p>3.30 Close</p>
<p>Research Team: Prof Miriam Bernard; Dr Jill Rezzano; Dr Michelle Rickett</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages</p>	
 <p>Arts & Humanities Research Council AH/L006103/1 & /L005522/1</p>	
	
	

Appendix 7: Scripts for *Out of the Box 1, 2 and 3*

[Note: original scripts were in 14 point for ease of use by Company members]

OUT OF THE BOX 1

JUDY IS ASSEMBLING THE CHAIRS INTO A CIRCLE, READY FOR A WORKSHOP TO TAKE PLACE. WHEN EVERYTHING IS IN PLACE, JUDY SITS AND IS JOINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY WHO ENTER, SPEAK AND TAKE THEIR OWN PLACES.

[REST OF CAST ENTER FROM VOMS 2 AND 3/SOME FROM FRONT ROW]

[NOTE: IN JUDY'S ABSENCE ON THE DAY, CHAIRS WERE SET OUT, STEVE ENTERED WITH LAST CHAIR; PAM TOOK JUDY'S LINES]

STEVEN: I was asked to do an interview about my time at the Vic, then I was invited to come along to a meeting, by the third time, I was hooked.

FRANCES: I didn't know anybody – and that was quite interesting.

PAM: It was just a very good mix of people...it didn't matter if you were good at it or not.

JULIA: I'm not quite sure how to describe it really.

KATHLEEN: It was like a little oasis, the theatre was like someone's front parlour, it was just the intimacy. Wonderful.

COLIN: I like doing new things and I like having activities to do. So I was up for it, yes.

MICHAEL: I think you just sort of slide into it, because they'll say, can you just stand there and you realise you're in it.

BRENDA: I wasn't nervous at all. I never thought about being nervous about performing. My only problem was trying to remember the lines.

JACKY: At first I thought 'What on earth am I doing here?

BARBARA: I've decided that I'm not going to say 'no' to anything.

THE COMPANY IN THE CIRCLE TURN TO THE PEOPLE BESIDE THEM AND BEGIN TO CHAT ANIMATEDLY TO EACH OTHER. THIS IS AUDIBLY LOUD AT FIRST, THEN JULIA STANDS AND LOOKS AROUND AT THE GROUP. AT THIS THE GROUP CONTINUE TO BE ANIMATED, BUT THE SOUND GOES.

JULIA (STANDING): I'm not sure how to describe it really.

PAM: It was just a good mix of people.

JULIA: I'm not sure how to describe it really.

FRANCES: I didn't know anybody.

BARBARA: It was like a little oasis.

MICHAEL: I think you just sort of slide into it.

PAM: And it didn't matter if you were good at it...

ALL: ... or not.

EVERYONE TAKES THEIR CHAIR AND MOVES IT INTO A SPACE OF ITS OWN ON THE STAGE, SITTING DOWN OR STANDING THE COMPANY SHOW ACTIVITIES THAT THEY MAY BE INVOLVED IN THROUGHOUT A NORMAL DAY. THEY MIGHT ALSO CHANGE THE POSITION OF THE CHAIR, FOR EXAMPLE, TO INDICATE A DESK, GARDEN BARROW OR SUPERMARKET TROLLEY. WHEN NOT SPEAKING, EVERYONE CONTINUES WITH THEIR ACTIVITY.

[NOTE: PLAYING ON TOP OF SET FOR 'I DON'T WANT TO SET THE WORLD ON FIRE!' MEANS THE HOLE IN THE CENTRE OF THE STAGE CAN ALSO BE USED – PAM USES AS SWIMMING POOL]

STEVEN: I think it was about 4 years ago...

FRANCES: ... Gosh, it must have been 3 years ago...

BARBARA: ...2005 ...It was just called Stages then...

JACKY: ...I started after everyone else...

STEVEN: ...I would have known that it was some years ago, but looking through the notes, I think that it is about 4 years. I had a telephone call...

KATHLEEN: ... a letter...

STEVEN: ... and then an interview at my house. **THE COMPANY MEMBERS AND THE CHAIRS BECOME THE SETTING OF THE LIVING ROOM; JACKY THE INTERVIEWER.** And they asked a lot of questions and I did a lot of talking about the Vic and my long experience of it. The Vic were doing a 50th anniversary celebration of the theatre, it must have been the 50th...

COLIN: ... How time flies.

STEVEN: ... And I responded positively to being interviewed and then they said...

MICHAEL: Would you like to come along to a group to do more...?

JACKY: ... And it was...

STEVEN: ... Curiosity...

FRANCES: ... the challenge...

STEVE: I suppose, just pure curiosity, what was it all about?

KATHLEEN: I just felt that it was something I could be a part of, that would challenge me a bit.

BARBARA: As you get a bit older... well, as my daughter would tell me:

ALL: 'You need to get out of your comfort zone.'

COLIN: ... I was up for it, yes!

JACKY: ... It was Judy who said to me: 'You must come along to this.'

AT THIS POINT, THE COMPANY MOVE AROUND THE STAGE AS THEY SPEAK. THEY SAY THEIR LINES AND THEN EACH DISPLAY LARGE CARDS WITH WORDS THAT RELATE TO THE EXPERIENCES THAT WE HAVE HAD, BY PARTICIPATING, SUCH AS: *friendship, curiosity, communication, surprise, anxiety, loyalty, experience, challenge.*

MICHAEL: I had no idea what I was letting myself in for, so I don't particularly think I was motivated in that way. **[*experience*]**

PAM [JUDY]: If I'm asked to do something, I tend to do it, even if it's wildly beyond my capability. Not that it was difficult, but it was surprising. **[*surprising*]**

STEVEN: I thought we were just going to talk about old memories of the Vic Theatre and I don't think I really thought beyond that.

FRANCES: No, I didn't think twice about it, but I was slightly startled when I went to the first workshop, at how few people I knew... **[*curiosity*]**

BARBARA: When I saw you do *Our Age Our Stage* I thought I could never do that in a million years because you did it in this theatre and the pressure on you was tremendous. **[*communication*]**

KATHLEEN: They were all from different parts of the Vic, not fundraising volunteers... as I had been for many years. **[*loyalty*]**

JACKY: I came along to the New Vic ...in fact, a friend said 'You must come to Ages and Stages' so I did, and I really liked what happened here and then I carried on going. I

didn't think oh, I must go to that. I kind of, went along to see what happens and thoroughly enjoyed it. So it's something quite different, I think. **[anxiety]**

BRENDA: What impressed me was how quickly we all got along with each other. It's such a pleasure to meet people from the workshops, and we, kind of, look out for each other. **[friendship]**

PAM [JUDY]: But also I felt a little bit out of my comfort zone because it was something so different ... so there was an edge, a fear to it that I actually quite liked – you know, pushing the boundaries or whatever you call it.

STEVEN: I think you call it 'challenge'. **[challenge]**

AT THIS POINT, THE LAST CARD IS DISPLAYED/HELD HIGH BY STEVE. IT READS 'CHALLENGE'. THE COMPANY THEN COME FORWARD; JILL WILL WELCOME EVERYONE AND EXPLAIN THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THIS IDEA OF 'CHALLENGE' AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN PEOPLE'S LIVES WITH THE AUDIENCE AS THIS HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF WHAT WE HAVE ALL BEEN DOING TOGETHER. FOR THIS, WE WILL BE COMING TO SPEAK TO SMALL GROUPS OF THE AUDIENCE AND THEN SHARE OUR THOUGHTS TOGETHER.

THE COMPANY WORK AS PAIRS AND GO INTO THE AUDIENCE TO TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS AROUND CHALLENGE, WHICH WE WILL HAVE AGREED.

NOTE: THE QUESTIONS AGREED BY THE COMPANY ARE:

- **Is challenge a natural part of living? (Colin/Barbara; Judy/Naomi)**
- **As we age, do we respond differently to challenge? (Frances/Brenda; Steve/Michael)**
- **Where does challenge come from? (Kath/Jacky; Pam/Julia)**

JILL WILL THEN THANK EVERYONE AND INTRODUCE MIM WHO WILL TALK ABOUT THE CULTURAL VALUE PROJECTS AND THEIR ORIGINS IN THE 'AGES AND STAGES' PROJECTS; BEFORE INTRODUCING MICHELLE TO TALK ABOUT THE CRITICAL REVIEW.

OUT OF THE BOX 2

FRANCES IS ALREADY IN PLACE, MAKING HERSELF COMFORTABLE TO WATCH HER FAVOURITE QUIZ PROGRAMME.

THE CONTESTANTS ENTER THE STUDIO BRINGING WITH THEM A TABLE, CHAIRS AND BELL. NAOMI – THE HOST - ENTERS DOWN THE STAIRS AND DEPOSITS A LARGE BOX ON THE STOOL AT THE FRONT – FREEZES.

COLIN: You're here. Oh, you're not watching this are you?

FRANCES: Sssh, it's starting.

NAOMI: Welcome to 'Out of the Box', the quiz show that takes questions out of their box, unwraps them and then puts them away, neat and tidy. With us this evening we have the Ages and Stages team from Newcastle under Lyme and they are...

THE TEAM INTRODUCE THEMSELVES AS THEY WISH, IN THE FOLLOWING ORDER (FROM RIGHT TO LEFT AS AUDIENCE FACES THEM): MICHAEL, STEVE, JACKY, BRENDA, BARBARA.

NAOMI: So, without further ado, let's go to our question. Ready, team? What is... Cultural Value?

THE QUESTION HANGS IN THE AIR, AS THE PANEL LOOK DEEP IN THOUGHT, LOOK AROUND AT EACH OTHER AND FINALLY TWO PEOPLE WHISPER A POSSIBLE ANSWER.

NAOMI: No conferring! Come along...what is Cultural Value?

MICHAEL BUZZING IN: (TENTATIVELY) A very good thing.

NAOMI: Yees...

BARBARA: BUZZING IN: I'm thinking about arts and theatre and stuff...

NAOMI: Good... but, not precisely what I have on the card.

BRENDA: BUZZING IN: Experiences... different experiences that broaden your mind or open up doors to things...

NAOMI: Fascinating, but...

JACKY: BUZZING IN (CONVINCED) It's to do with upbringing and education... where you're from and your ethnicity too. All that affects what sort of value you place on arts and crafts and spiritual things...

STEVEN: BUZZING IN AND TAKING OVER: It's the feeling that you get from looking at art or watching theatre or...

NAOMI: Anyone else want to come in...?

BRENDA: Could you be a bit more specific?

NAOMI: Specific? About what?

BRENDA: Well, do you mean how culture is valued?

NAOMI: Tell me more...

BRENDA: Well, it's different isn't it? Like you said, it depends on what you think is valuable.

NAOMI: Have to hurry you.

BRENDA: Football or Opera!

JACKY: Yes! High or low. One inspires you to be better, think finer thoughts and one well, one is about a crowd mentality...

STEVEN: Which one?

JACKY: You know what I mean.

STEVEN: Not necessarily...

NAOMI: I can pass it over to the audience...anyone like to come in on this one? What is Cultural Value...What is Cultural Value?

IF ANYONE IN THE AUDIENCE HAS AN ANSWER THEY WOULD LIKE TO OFFER THEY CAN INDICATE BY RAISING THEIR HAND. IF THE AUDIENCE NEEDS SOME ENCOURAGEMENT, THE HOST CAN KEEP THE BANTER UP.

NAOMI: I do happen to know that we have a particularly intelligent and well informed audience with us this week... Still time to beat the panel with your thoughts...cultural value...probably one of our knottier topics....cultural value...

IF THERE ARE ANSWERS IN THE AUDIENCE, NAOMI CAN APPROACH THE PERSON WHO WISHES TO SPEAK. SHE CAN COMMENT POSITIVELY AND ASK IF ANYONE ELSE AGREES OR DISAGREES. SHE MIGHT SAY THAT THESE ANSWERS CAN BE ADDED TO THE DEFINITIONS SO FAR, BUT ISN'T QUITE THE RIGHT ANSWER YET. IF THE PANEL TRY TO JOIN IN OR INTERJECT, NAOMI MAY REMIND THEM THAT THEY HAD THEIR CHANCE. IN ADDITION, AS PEOPLE REGISTER FOR THE SYMPOSIUM THEY WILL HAVE BEEN GIVEN A CARD AND

ASKED TO WRITE ON IT WHAT THEY UNDERSTAND BY THE TERM 'CULTURAL VALUE' AND POST IT IN THE BOX WHICH NAOMI HAS NOW BROUGHT ONTO STAGE. SHE WILL HAVE SELECTED SOME INTERESTING COMMENTS WITH WHICH TO STIMULATE THE DISCUSSION. WHEN THIS DISCUSSION WITH THE AUDIENCE HAS RUN ITS COURSE:

NAOMI: All superb thoughts, but we're still looking for that elusive correct answer. Join us after the break to see if we can crack it and get it back in its box.

PANEL AND HOST FREEZE.

COLIN: Well, that's fifteen minutes I'll never get back. **NO REPLY...**I said...

FRANCES: I was just thinking about what they were saying before about the football or going to the theatre.

COLIN: News on next...back in the real world.

FRANCES: Imagine, just imagine if after the news, instead of the sport, why aren't we seeing ten minutes or so of what's going on in the theatre and the art world?

COLIN: What for?

FRANCES: Well, when it's the Olympics, sport again. Everybody backs that because it's everywhere. You could get more people involved with theatre and art if you did the same with that. It's all to do to how it's shown to people and how much of it...

COLIN: But that's not what people want.

FRANCES: How do you know?

COLIN: Well, because they follow sport and they want to know what's happening.

FRANCES: That's because it's everywhere, it looks so normal and everybody knows about a football match and how to do that. If they did the same with art ...and things like that, it wouldn't look so different. Like it was nothing to do with them...

COLIN: But, it's not for everyone is it?

FRANCES: But if people had the chance to see more of it...

COLIN: Oh, it's the Emperor's new clothes, half of it. People say they like it because it makes them look clever. And it costs a fortune too.

FRANCES: But, football's not cheap.

COLIN: No, but you know what you're getting and you know that you'll like it.

FRANCES: But, why always do the same thing?

COLIN: Because it's where you feel comfortable. You can't enjoy something if you don't feel comfortable, like in a theatre, how do you know what to do?

FRANCES: Wait a minute, it's starting again.

NAOMI: Welcome back. Well, there was certainly plenty of food for thought in the first round. Let's see if the break has given our panel any more inspiration.

THIS TIME, THE PANEL MEMBERS LEAVE THEIR SEATS AND ADDRESS THE AUDIENCE DIRECTLY.

MICHAEL: I wouldn't want to define cultural value... It's about getting my brain engaged and getting more interested in things... I think that I heard someone say that everyday life was the black and white, and a bit of culture is the colour on the palette.

BARBARA: Sorry everyone, I'm not sure that I've ever heard of it before...

BRENDA: I struggled with it... I guess culture is specific to a time and place. It can't stay the same, because it's different all over the world... and the world changes anyway.

BARBARA: Sorry, did they mean the value of culture? Because, that's not just about you and what you're doing, that's about what the public want too... and what the government thinks about it.

JACKY: The whole thing's mind boggling really...

MICHAEL: Mind boggling yes, but culture... well, it's a way of taking a messy life, real life, and being involved in theatre, or music, or what have you, gives it shape.

STEVEN: It's what makes you and what you are, and the community you live in and what it is. It's not really an arty thing... well, not just an arty thing, you know.

MICHAEL: I know!

STEVEN: Scientists use the term as well. A culture is just an environment in which things grow.

JACKY: Agreed. But art, music, theatre, all of that helps you to reflect on life, your own life... and if that's not 'culture' I don't know what is.

SILENCE

BRENDA (TURNING TO REST OF PANEL): So, has Ages and Stages been a 'cultural experience' then?

STEVEN: Yes, I suppose it has... it's almost like someone's unlocked a door and let me into a new space. I do feel switched on, enriched...

BARBARA: So, what's the answer then, 'Cultural Value'?

BRENDA (TO MICHAEL): You should say all that stuff about community and environment.

THEY GO BACK TO THEIR POSITIONS ON THE PANEL.

NAOMI: I'll have to press you for an answer...what is it, this slippery beast, cultural value?

MICHAEL (ON BEHALF OF THE PANEL): I'm not sure that I want to define cultural value... it's different things to different people!

NAOMI IS MOMENTARILY LOST FOR WORDS.

NAOMI: Well, there you have it... the question that just wouldn't go back in its box. Thanks for joining us and see you next time.

THE VIEWERS FLICK THE SWITCH AND THE SCENE BREAKS UP.

JILL THANKS EVERYONE FOR PARTICIPATING AGAIN IN THE DISCUSSIONS OF WHAT HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT TOPIC FOR US IN OUR PROJECT, AND INVITES EVERYONE TO JOIN US FOR LUNCH AND TO CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION.

OUT OF THE BOX 3

THE COMPANY ENTERS, AND STAND IN PAIRS (IN THE HOLE ON STAGE), WITH AN AISLE IN BETWEEN TO REPRESENT A TRAIN.

COLIN (AS STATION ANNOUNCER, OFF TO SIDE): Stoke-on-Trent.

MICHAEL: Where we started.

COLIN: This is Stoke-on-Trent.

MICHAEL: Have we got everyone?

COLIN: The train standing at platform 2 is for...

STEVEN: Manchester!

NAOMI: London!

EVERYONE CHANGES PLACES, AS THOUGH ON A NEW JOURNEY.

JACKY: Birmingham!

EVERYONE CHANGES PLACES AGAIN.

MICHAEL: Crewe!

BARBARA: Oh, are we changing?

MICHAEL: No, we're doing a show here too.

EVERYONE SITS AROUND THE EDGES OF THE HOLE.

COLIN: Please remember to take all your luggage and personal belongings with you.

EVERYONE TAKES OUT A SCRIPT FROM A BAG OR A POCKET. AS THEY DO, THE DIALOGUE STARTS.

NAOMI: SHOWING THE SCRIPT: Our belongings!

STEVEN: We travel light, light on set, light on props...

BRENDA: ... We're flexible.

JACKY: We are now. Some of those early workshops took me right out of my...

ALL: Comfort zone?

JACKY: Yes... thank you.

BARBARA: I felt able to join in because I knew someone else who was coming along.

COLIN: Safety in numbers.

BARBARA: Exactly.

JACKY (STANDING): I think I've been involved in everything we've done from the start, but not on the acting side. There should be a place for people who don't want to do the performing, like when we did the exhibition for the 50th anniversary of the Vic.

NAOMI: The exhibition. **ALL MAKE THE EXHIBITION** That was wonderful: it was one of the best experiences of my life, that exhibition. And once I got involved I knew that I'd want to go on with it.

BARBARA (ADDRESSING BRENDA): You were always very enthusiastic. Had you acted before?

BRENDA: No, before that first performance, I'd never acted before. But, it was a joy to do it. I just loved being on the stage.

BARBARA: I was nervous, a bit nervous that I went on at the right time and stood in the right place. But there was a feeling of satisfaction afterwards.

STEVEN: You got a buzz.

BARBARA: Yes a buzz.

STEVEN (ADDRESSING JACKY): Did you go to the conference in London?

JACKY: I did, I did. I went to London and that was beyond my expectations. I expected it to wash over me, but it was electric.

BARBARA: What I liked was the feeling that I was part of something, something bigger.

STEVEN: Then there was the Manchester show at the Royal Exchange.

JACKY: I couldn't do that one.

STEVEN: When we had the last rehearsal, I was worried. I thought it wasn't hanging together but, when we got there and saw the set, and I think it was just: that's where we've got to be. The change was incredible.

BRENDA: I think because we didn't know the space, it gave us an extra... I don't know... we didn't know the space, so we really concentrated on the performance.

JACKY: I was so proud of you all.

NAOMI: I was so pleased with myself for actually having done it.

STEVEN: The whole event on the day, sharing with the other people in the space and talking to the young people too.

BRENDA: I like their energy and the perspective they bring.

STEVEN: They're a new generation, it's good finding out what makes them tick and how they react to us.

NAOMI: It's wonderful, but the biggest difference is for myself. Being a part of this has had a very positive influence on how I feel about myself and my confidence, being able to interact with others.

JACKY: And I think I learnt to listen a bit more too.

BACK ON THE TRAIN

MICHAEL: Is this us?

COLIN (WANTING TO JOIN IN): Yeah... I mean Stoke-on-Trent!

MICHAEL: Where we started.

COLIN: This is Stoke-on-Trent. All change.

MICHAEL: And keep changing.

STEVEN: I think absolutely the best thing - and this wasn't a surprise - was meeting all the people that we've been working with, and it's been a real privilege.

NAOMI: Yes, I'll always remember the people who have contributed to my enjoyment, to the enhancement of my life.

BARBARA: Mondays wouldn't be the same without that two hours at the New Vic, learning and working as a team.

MICHAEL: But this isn't the last stop.

BRENDA: Oh no, I hope not. I'm looking forward to many more Mondays. I think of the New Vic as a huge battery: it charges you up and we go on running.

JACKY: So, where do we go next?

STEVEN: We need new blood.

BARBARA: But, would it lose something if a lot more people came?

NAOMI: It's a tough balance. You want more people to get the benefit but...

MICHAEL: Then there's the funding. It needs to be free so people can come.

STEVEN: It might not just be the money though that stops you coming.

JACKY: INDICATING THE AUDIENCE. Well, they all came along today. You could tell us why.

BRENDA: Or, tell each other why you came. Write it down on your cards, what interested you about coming today?

STEVEN: Then, swap it with someone else. Someone you don't know.

BRENDA: And, when you've read theirs, pass it on.

STEVEN: Unless you get one that you really like, then you can keep it and maybe find out who wrote it at the end.

JILL REITERATES THE INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AUDIENCE WHO EACH HAVE A COLOURED CARD IN THEIR PACKS. THE AUDIENCE – AND COMPANY MEMBERS – WRITE DOWN THEIR THOUGHTS AND THEN SHARE THEIR CARDS. AFTER SOME TIME, THE SWAPPING STOPS. WE ASK PEOPLE WHICH CARDS THEY HAVE KEPT AND FIND OUT WHO WROTE THEM, ASKING PEOPLE TO EXPAND ON WHAT THEY HAVE WRITTEN, SHARE THEIR INTERESTS AND CONNECT IDEAS.

WE WILL THEN INVITE ALL SPEAKERS/ALL COMPANY MEMBERS TO JOIN US ON STAGE FOR A FINAL DISCUSSION AND TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THE AUDIENCE MIGHT HAVE ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD AND PARTICIPATED IN TODAY AND/OR ABOUT THE DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to all the people who have been involved in 'Ages and Stages' since 2009, including everyone who has so generously given their time and allowed us to interview them and use their words in the compilation of our various performance pieces. We would also like to thank those colleagues at the New Vic Theatre and at Keele University who have supported us throughout.

Over the years, the 'Ages and Stages' research team has also included our colleagues David Amigoni, Ruth Basten, Tracey Harrison, Lucy Munro, Michael Murray, Jackie Reynolds and Michelle Rickett. Your continuing contributions – both intellectual and practical – are much valued by us all.

We have benefitted greatly from the support of an experienced and enthusiastic Advisory Group which includes a number of overseas members. Details of the Group (present and past) can be found on the 'Ages and Stages' website: www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages/

We have also been fortunate to work with a partner project in Canada, led by Professor Janet Fast. *Theatre as a Pathway to Healthy Aging* is a collaborative project between 'GeriActors and Friends', an intergenerational theatre company in Edmonton AB, and researchers at the University of Alberta and Trent University. It has been exploring older adults' participation in theatre and research, and its effects on health and wellness.

We thank the various funders of our research: the New Dynamics of Ageing for the original 'Ages and Stages' project (2009-2012: RES-356-25-0005); the AHRC for the follow-on project (2012-2103: AH/K000764/1); Keele Key Fund for contributions to both projects; and the AHRC for funding this research development award (Sept 2013-May 2014: AH/L006103/1) and our critical review on 'Ageing, Drama and Creativity' (Jan-May 2014: AH/L005522/1).

A particular thank-you goes to Advisory Group member, Emeritus Professor Ray Johnson, who has generously filmed all the Company's performances and turned them into DVDs.

Of course, none of what we have achieved would have been possible without the members of the 'Ages & Stages Company'. In this current project, participants, performers and supporters were: Angela Alcock, Pam Beech, David Bowen, Jacky Carter, Frances Evans, Naomi Felton, Steven Granville, Brenda Hennessey, Michael Lewis, Colin Ramsell, Julia Stanway, Judy Tindall, Kathleen Webb and Barbara Williams. You are all wonderful!

