

Cubitt Education  
OWCH and Pollard Thomas Edwards Architects  
Sophie Handler  
Bolder Voices  
Counterpoint Dance Company  
Moving Memory Dance Theatre Company  
Grand Gestures  
The Decorators  
Sarah Cole  
Glasgow School of Art  
Community21  
Spare Tyre Theatre Company  
The Building Exploratory  
Magic Me  
Romi Jones and Geoff Sample  
Tate

# *ageing in public*

creative practice in ageing and the public realm from across the UK  
edited by Daniel Baker



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## **Introduction**

### **Ageing and the Public Realm**

Public space is all around us: streets; roads; parks; squares; libraries; shopping centres; museums; car parks and even the internet, even though they are not necessarily publicly owned, are all part of a wide and complex public realm. Simply put, the public realm is *“a place where strangers meet”* (Sennett, 2010, p. 261). It is a place where we must negotiate wider society and also appear ourselves as part of that society. How we appear and how comfortable we feel has a marked impact on our self-image and our relationships with others.

For older people, particularly for more vulnerable, isolated or less mobile individuals, appearing in public can be problematic. No longer travelling through it with purpose and no longer able to negotiate it physically with confidence, older people may feel increasingly alienated. In 2009 and 2010 I held a series of interviews with older participants in the arts programme for local older people at Cubitt. In these interviews a high proportion of participants repeatedly identified the public realm as a space of anxiety, discomfort and fear: *“In real life, in a supermarket you can be invisible, people walk in front of you as if you’re not there at all”* Marie, aged 72 (Grant, 10 March 2009, personal communication). This sense of invisibility is common to many older people’s experiences of public spaces perhaps in part because the most visible participants in public life are those with active social and economic presence in society. *“Older people are largely overlooked in what remains a youth-obsessed consumer marketplace”* (Bytheway et al., 2007, p. 4) as media representations, advertising and retailers all largely speak to and cater for a market aged 16-45.

In recent years initiatives and policy makers have tried to find ways of enabling older people to feel more valued and more comfortable in public. Research at the Open University has called for increased numbers of accessible public toilets and increased number and quality of public benches (Bytheway et al., 2007, pp. 16-17) whilst the World Health Organisation’s *Age Friendly Cities* programme has spearheaded an international effort to involve the needs and voices of older people in planning decisions around public spaces.

However, changing the physical environment to increase access and comfort perhaps does not address the question of visibility and value: how can older people become increasingly visible in public life and how can their value as active members of society be communicated and shared? And are there deeper questions to be explored, about the nature of ageing in public and the experiences of a changing self in a changing world?

In 2010, as Education Director at Cubitt in Islington, London, I launched Public Wisdom. It began as a three-year programme of creative activities supported by the Baring Foundation, through which we are aimed to explore these questions. At Cubitt all of our work operates through and within the arts as a wide field of enquiry, expression, and dialogue. We wanted to explore the publicness of ageing and the agency of older people, through and within creative projects- through dance, through drawing, through photography, through installations and interventions. Back then it felt like we were pioneers, there seemed to be little work with ageing in the public realm that we could refer to, or be inspired by, aside from a small number of past projects such as Suzanne Lacy’s *Crystal Quilt*, which involved hundreds of older women in a stunning public performance in the 1980’s.

In 2014 Cubitt was commissioned by the Baring Foundation to produce a publication and conference on the theme of our Public Wisdom programme: exploring ageing, creativity and the public realm. The aim of both of these elements was to increase dialogue, make connections, and begin to build a 'community of practice'.

In order to further these aims, and in line with Cubitt's ethos of co-production, collaboration and peer-led learning, we decided to offer the pages of the publication as a platform for people to share their practice in the field. It had been four years since the launch of Public Wisdom and we were increasingly coming across individuals and organisations who were working in similar territory. We put together an open call out for responses that was circulated widely across the UK, and then we gathered and curated the examples that you find printed here.

Our request to individuals, organisations and partnerships, was simple: we wanted them to share their practice, in honest and open way. We were interested in people sharing the challenges and the successes, so that others could learn from the practical details of the projects and approaches.

The response to our open call was broad and diverse, and the conversations we had with people across the country often helped clarify to the individuals involved that their work might be situated in an emerging area of practice- ageing and the public realm, and to realise that there were others out there doing similar things. For us this is the crucial beginning of building a community of practice: establish the common ground on which people can develop shared goals.

The articles printed here represent a small proportion of the work taking place across ageing, creativity and the public realm. There is a huge range of activity taking place internationally, and I'm certain there is more work in the UK that has not yet come to our attention.

The publication is laid out in two parts: the first part simply presents the 'practice sharing' texts, in no particular order; and the second part features a selection of photographs and quotes that illustrate the breadth of practice in a quick snapshot. The structure has been developed to provide different ways points of access- you can quickly get a sense of the work by going through the photographs, but also begin with the practice sharing texts and follow up by looking at the images. The following introductory text also gives an overview and some other entry points into the content.

## A Brief Overview

The practice shared in this publication is rich and diverse. From small-scale projects led by one passionate individual, to large institutions exploring ageing for the first time, the projects share an energy and commitment to quality that is inspiring.

Performance is a key theme that emerges through many of the projects. From the striking images of older women transformed from 'little old ladies' into 'queen bees' in the Moving Memory Theatre Company's work (page 16); to the intimate performances about care staged by artist Sarah Cole in a decommissioned army ambulance that was parked in public spaces across North London (page 24). Performance is a method by which stereotypes can be challenged; the older body made more visible in public space (Counterpoint Dance, pg.14); and members of the public can be drawn into playful, intimate, relationships with people and stories in unexpected ways (Sarah Cole, pg.24 / Grand Gestures, pg.18).

Giving voice to older people in the public realm is also a key theme. With the older people's choir, *Bolder Voices*, it is literally the singing voices of the older generation that are raised in protest, about the closure of services and the problems of public spaces (pg.10); in Cubitt's own *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* (pg.28); *Age Friendly Angel Festival* (pg.6); and *CALLY RSVP* (pg.12), local older people are given the support and resources to make their opinions heard and seen about the public realm; and in *The Fluid Pavement*, Sophie Handler's novel, older people's experiences of the public realm are given voice through poetic, speculative text (pg.20). Continuing the theme of voice, Spare Tyre's *Roehampton Radio* occupies the public realm of the airwaves. It grew out of a series of projects with residents of the Alton Estate in South West London, and it is now an independent digital platform that supports discussion and conversation across generations (pg.32).

Despite the fact that many older people live in rural areas, the examples here are mostly urban, and much of the discussion around 'age-friendly' environments tends to focus on the urban public realm too. This is probably due to a focus of arts and built environment expertise, funding, and concentrated populations around urban centres. However, the rural environment comes across strongly in *Outer Places: Inner Voices*, a text by Romi Jones about capturing the voices of elders and their reflections on landscape in rural Northumberland (pg.38); whilst in Nick Gant's *Reminiscing the Future Village*, modern technology becomes a means to support older and younger participants in rural areas to design the future public realm together (pg.30).

The importance of designing services and a built environment that meets the needs of older people and the ageing body emerges strongly in several examples. *The Hackney Circle* was conceived as a response to local older people feeling like many of the local spaces and offers weren't 'for them'. The Circle is "a free membership scheme for Hackney's over-60s, which provides a range of special offers in cafes, restaurants and cultural venues alongside a programme of free events." (pg.22). For Pollard Thomas Edwards Architects, a group of older participants became their commissioners and collaborators on the design of new housing specifically for older women that is probably the first of its kind in the country (pg.7). Sophie Handler's *Alternative Age-Friendly Handbook* addresses ageing and the public realm at a strategic level, and includes practical and creative examples from across the arts, architecture and design (pg.8).

Interestingly we came across less work drawing on reminiscence or exploring the heritage of public spaces than you might expect. Magic Me's project described in *View from the Top* brought together 10 older people and 10 local pupils to create a design for the ceiling of the buses on the 205 route in London. They worked together to explore local heritage and create "an artwork and soundtrack which capture the diverse range of architecture and street-life, of a community with an ever-changing demographic profile, experiencing ongoing rebuilding." (pg.36) whilst the *Senior BEEs* positions older people as learners and active agents in the contemporary landscape by introducing an older generation to the built environment through regular walks and explorations of specific buildings and developments (pg.34).

Two examples from large cultural institutions demonstrate that in the past few years there has been some significant shifts in recognising the importance of not just working with older people, but exploring and challenging expectations and representations of ageing and demographic change. *Soapbox* provides a forum for older people to voice their opinions, ideas and reflections, within the public space of Tate Britain (pg.40), whilst *Live Your Questions Now* at Glasgow School of Art, foregrounded the practice of older artists within a public setting. A refreshing contrast to survey shows of younger artists, the exhibition asked what we can learn from an older generation. For mature students at the art school the exhibition "validated an older age group as being experimental in process and production." (pg.26).

The breadth and range of the projects in this publication is testament to the talents, vision and passion of countless individuals across the UK. From buses to public squares, markets to public museums, organisations and individual practitioners are thinking creatively about working with the public realm. Throughout the projects there also runs a deep commitment to collaborative practice: inviting individuals to be part of a story that they can help shape; and foregrounding the voices and experiences of older people in order to reshape the narrative of ageing itself.

Putting this publication together I have come to the conclusion that there are many questions to be explored that reach beyond hard landscaping and service design: questions about subjectivity; agency; visibility; and that the arts can offer a productive, shared space to explore these questions and interpret and translate responses reflectively and publicly.

This publication is intended as a platform, a forum, an ignition, rather than a report or evaluation. It is intended to stimulate new partnerships; new projects; new ideas; new debate and dialogue across sectors. It is intended to be a new beginning rather than an endpoint.

#### References:

Bytheway, B., Ward, R., Holland, C. and Peace, S. (2007), *Too Old: Older People's Accounts of Discrimination, Exclusion and Rejection: A Report from the Research on Age Discrimination Project (RoAD) to Help the Aged, Help the Aged*, London.

Sennett, R. (2010), "The public realm", in Watson, S. and Bridge, G. (Eds), *Blackwell City Reader*, 2nd Rev. ed., John Wiley and Sons Ltd, Chichester.

## **Age-Friendly Angel Festival** **Eleanor Shipman**

*Age-Friendly Angel* is an exciting partnership between Cubitt Education and Angel AIM, the local business improvement district, Age UK Islington, a regional branch of the national charity for older people, and Claremont Project, a local community centre for the arts and older people. *Age-Friendly Angel* aims to celebrate and listen to the opinions and ideas of local people over 55 to make the Angel town centre in Islington, London, more 'age-friendly'.

For a week during January 2015 the partnership hosted the first ever *Age-Friendly Angel Festival*: a week-long celebration that showcased a range of creative and exciting activities for local people over 55 - from salsa dancing to solid perfume making and tea at the Hilton. Each session provided a platform for people to develop their creative skills, learn something new, have a say in local decision making or enjoy discounted local offers - all of which aimed to empower local people and increase their confidence, social mobility and skills.

The overarching theme of the week was to give local people over 55 a taster of what Angel has to offer, as well as promoting local classes and opportunities. By marketing the diverse range of activities through multiple community channels we attracted a wide audience to the sessions, resulting in the discovery of local offers (such as the Vue cinema screening for older people) as well as increased attendance in existing classes.

The challenges of the *Age Friendly Angel Festival* were mainly financial: the entire project was run only on the partnership's existing resources and staff time. This meant that any additional costs, such as advertising and promotion, came from in-house supplies and facilities. The promotional flyer was designed in-house at Cubitt and shared around the partnership to print and distribute to our own client groups. Ideally we would have included physical banners, local stalls on Chapel Market and Islington Green, in the build-up period before the event with the aim to reach more isolated older people and the wider community.

The main aim of *Age Friendly Angel Festival* was to encourage local older people to share their loves, hates and ideas for their local area whilst getting out and about and trying new activities. Many participants agreed with this woman who said: "*I love Angel's atmosphere, the hustle and bustle, it's brightness and colour.*" People suggested improvements to Angel which included: less cluttered pavements; more discounts and offers for older shoppers; and better disabled access to local businesses.

We added these contributions to our ongoing survey, as well as creating a business 'wish list' that we fed back to Angel AIM to pass on to local shop owners and organisations that they will begin to action over the coming year.

Throughout the week, we found even greater evidence that local older people want to be heard in decision making processes. Our creative workshop on *Age Friendly Angel* invited our *Public Wisdom Group* and *The Building Exploratory's Senior BEEs* to share their expert views on the local area. The session was met with enthusiasm and a genuine, shared passion for local area improvements. The groups were able to connect with each other and also had fantastic suggestions for wider outreach in the area. By involving individuals in our consultation and engagement process we created a fertile platform for local older people to truly become empowered local decision-makers.

(Image: pg.42)

**Eleanor Shipman is Director of something good, something useful and was Elders and Community Programme Coordinator at Cubitt between 2013 and 2015**  
[cubittartists.org.uk](http://cubittartists.org.uk)



## **Collaborative Design** **Patrick Devlin**

We had the opportunity to work with Older Women's Co-Housing (OWCH) on the collaborative design of their new homes – 25 one, two and three bedroom flats, a common house and guest flat – in Barnet. Hanover Housing bought the site and forward funded development as part of a programme of learning from older people about how they would like to live. We put a series of workshops together to give the women the tools to propose, understand and shape the emerging building form. Rachel Douglas of OWCH:

*"Taking part in workshops arranged by Pollard Thomas Edwards (PTE) in which we worked on the basic design of our co-housing complex was a huge learning curve for all of the OWCH group - and an enormously satisfying one. First of all it helped each of us clarify our ideas of what exactly it was we wanted from co-housing and to understand the limitations that cost, practicability, planning considerations and the site itself imposed on our ideals. Secondly our discussions on these topics, and the undertaking of such practical exercises as drawing what we had in mind and finding pictures of buildings we liked, were an extremely effective way of getting each of us to feel that we owned the project, and that what would be produced in the end would be uniquely ours. Thirdly the whole process was an excellent way of getting us to understand each other better and to bond as a group. Co-housing is all about creating communities which are responsible for themselves. Being so involved in the initial stages planning our project has been a hugely important part of achieving these aims."*

The themes of the workshop moved from the public to the private, finishing with the character and materials of the building. One of the big challenges for the architects was to convey the range of spatial approaches to the relationship of the development to the street, the journey from the public realm to the flat door, and how the layout of the flat would connect to this. Working in smaller groups after a visit to the site, by positioning cutouts and then making drawings, brought these choices and their consequences to life for individuals in a way that could not have been achieved by discussion.

I don't know whether OWCH or PTE learnt more. The group worked hard and brought ideas, images and, very quickly, a willingness to work together on the design of the whole, letting go of some individual preconceptions along the way. We have been told by different members of the group that the process helped develop their sense of community, and we saw this developing as they worked on the design. We had been nervous that we were asking the women to reach the level of, say, second year architecture students (in a narrow skill set). They achieved and exceeded this as a group of complementary talents in a way few student groups do. When external constraints led to design changes they reacted creatively, and the finished building will embody a genuine collaboration. It has been thoroughly interrogated at every stage of its development.

(Image: pg.42)

**OWCH is a group of women over fifty who are creating our their community in a new, purpose-built block of flats in North London**  
[www.owch.org.uk](http://www.owch.org.uk)

**Patrick Devlin is Partner at Pollard Thomas Edwards Architects.**  
[pollardthomasedwards.co.uk](http://pollardthomasedwards.co.uk)

## **The Alternative Age-Friendly Handbook**

### **Sophie Handler**

*“Is there a way of starting to define what a creative form of Age-Friendly spatial practice might be? In an area where public debate has, so far, been driven largely by social policy?”*

Sophie Handler, *An Alternative Age-Friendly© Handbook*, (Manchester; University of Manchester Library, 2014), p. 24.

The *Alternative Age-Friendly© Handbook* is a new pocket-sized reference written for the creative urban practitioner. Designed to be used when out and about in the ‘urban field’, it offers up thoughts, tools and practical tips to encourage new ways of rethinking and reshaping older people’s neglected relationship to urban space.

The primary motivation behind the production of the handbook has been to encourage the (reluctant) creative practitioner to engage with the contemporary dynamics of ageing and urbanisation. The last decade has seen enormous shifts in the demographic landscape of urban environments as cities have steadily grown and their populations aged at the same time. But spatial practitioners have been notably slow to engage with these dynamics, lagging far behind policymakers and social scientists already engaged in the spatial implications of these demographic trends.

The handbook, in drawing spatial practitioners into emerging policy debates around Age-friendly cities, tries to explore the possibilities for evolving new and creative forms of Age-friendly urban action – and developing a new kind of discourse around ageing too. What might a creative form of age-inclusive spatial practice involve? How might the sensibilities of design practice be made more sensitive to the desires and needs of an ageing society? Are there ways of translating the ‘what ifs?’ of creative practice into the co-production of Age-friendly cities?

Drawing on examples that range from storytelling and ficto-criticism through to temporary interventions and neighbourhood-led community development, the handbook is made up of a series of reflective essays, each exploring different forms and approaches to age-inclusive practice. From the basic terms of age-inclusive engagement (or how participation, collaboration and co-design inform Age-friendly urban action) through to broader ideas around ‘borrowing’ time and space (a possible form of ‘age-inclusive’ action?) these essays provide a critical space in which to think about possible forms of Age-friendly urban practice: from the tactical, small-scale and temporary to the more strategic.

The handbook sits intentionally on the borderline between policy and creative practice. This ‘product’ is meant to be read, not as standard guidance, nor as the prescriptive ‘how-to’ so familiar in the language of Age-friendly policymaking (the handbook has been called, quite deliberately, a handbook not a guide). Instead, the handbook is written and styled in a way that it is able to provide a series of playful prompts for action and debate: creating a space in which to question and rethink prevailing discussions around age-inclusive practice.

This kind of ‘playful-critical’ approach was deliberate. It represents what has been an ongoing attempt (something I have long been concerned with) to devise ways of shifting the tone and temper of public debates on ageing from an often heavy-weighted, alarmist discourse to a more engaging, creative and, ultimately, more empowering discussion on re-imagining and reshaping cities for older age.

Devised, written and designed by Sophie Handler (in collaboration with Objectif) *An Alternative Age-Friendly© Handbook* has been produced in partnership with Age UK, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the University of Manchester’s

Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA) and Age-friendly Manchester (Manchester City Council), the UK's first Age-friendly City. The idea for this handbook initially came out of a policy seminar (*The Space between Buildings*) that I organised back in October 2013, a seminar hosted by the UK Urban Ageing Consortium on behalf of the UK Network of Age-friendly Cities. The idea, then, was to produce some kind of resource that would encourage the 'socially engaged urban practitioner' to bring their creative practice to an emerging field of Age-friendly urban action.

Developed over the course of three months via a series of workshops, the handbook has drawn on the critical input of social scientists, policymakers, creative practitioners and older people's groups that have, variously, included: the Population Ageing, Urbanisation and Urban Design Research Unit (based at the University of Manchester), the Age-friendly Manchester Design Group (Manchester City Council), the Tiny Experimental University (temporarily based in and around Kilburn, north London), the RIBA's Research and Innovation Group, the Age UK Research team and an expert Age UK briefing session of invited theorists, policymakers, designers, students and practitioners working on issues around ageing and urbanisation.

The *Alternative Age-Friendly® Handbook* was launched as part of the RIBA's *Design for Ageing* Research Symposium on the 18th November, 2014. Copies of the Handbook are available, on loan, via the RIBA and the University of Manchester. A large print version of the handbook is available to download via the MICRA website: [www.micra.manchester.ac.uk/research/population-ageing/research-activity/](http://www.micra.manchester.ac.uk/research/population-ageing/research-activity/)

(Image: pg.43)

**Dr. Sophie Handler is an urban theorist currently working with the University of Manchester helping to develop 'age-friendly' urban policies with Manchester City Council.**

[www.ageing-facilities.net](http://www.ageing-facilities.net)

## **The Beginning of Bolder Voices**

### **Clair Chapwell**

*"They were saying at lunch Camden might close this place" one of my drama group was saying as I walked in. "They always say that," said another, "but they couldn't close Henderson Court, could they? Could they Clair?"*

All eyes on me. I'd just heard a frustrated diatribe from Manager Laurie White that this lively centre of older people singing, reading poetry, learning guitar, doing chair based exercise, with nary a bingo card in sight was, like every other senior day centre potentially heading for the chop. I looked around me at this disparate group, aged between 70 and 92 who had made some strange and surprising friendships. *"Could they close it?"* I asked *"They could. Camden have to make a lot of cuts. What would you do if they did?"* Long silence. *"I think we should write a letter,"* said one. And so began the creation of the song *Ain't Gonna Close our Centre Down*.

*"What happens if the letter doesn't get us anywhere?"* I asked. Someone else said: *"We should have a petition, get everyone to sign it – yes – we should have a meeting, and everyone at the meeting signs it, and hands out leaflets!"* *"And what happens if that doesn't work? They get hundreds of petitions. What if they just chuck it in the bin?"* Still another person said: *"We should go down to Downing Street!"* And so we had our song:

**I'm going to sit down and write a letter...**  
**I'm going to stand up and speak my mind...**  
**We're going to march right down to Downing Street...**

We sang it to the tune of *Down by the Riverside* and in between the choruses we detailed all the things we WEREN'T gonna do – *"ain't gonna watch tv all day... ain't gonna drink my life away"* Laurie on guitar, me on accordion, the group sang it to anyone who would listen and we decided to make a film.

Filming the trip to Downing Street was possibly the most challenging. Even though we were singing about it, I couldn't imagine our group on this trip. But filmmaker Bhavesh Hindocha insisted, and Laurie hired the van. I told everyone not to drink too much tea and to bring a sandwich in a brown bag. But would we be allowed to film? Would we be arrested? No, by the end the guards were joining in with the singing: *"We're going to march right down to Downing Street...to the government...to the government..."*

In the end the centre wasn't cut and it carries on, a joyous place for older people in the area. Which of course had nothing to do with the song. But what a diversion it became. It was a way to focus impotent rage. It was the beginning of *Bolder Voices*.

Meanwhile with my drama group in Brent I was having real trouble. I was meant to be conceiving a lively and delightful musical about traffic safety. Traffic safety! Yawn! I seemed to be drowning in statistics and dry-as-dust articles wondering what I could possibly squeeze out of this subject. Then one day I was reading yet another article and came across the following statistic: 84% of men and 93% of women over the age of 65 either could not walk eight feet safely or their normal walking speed was less than the 1.2 metres per second required to cross the road. (Asher, Dr L. (25 June 2012) "Age and Ageing", 41 (5) 690-4.) That's a shocking statistic by anyone's calculation. But there are so many numbers, it's very hard to absorb. And, like so many horrible statistics you hear it are shocked by it, then what do you do with it?

I brought it along to the Brent singing session the next day. I asked: "Out of every 5 older people, how many can't cross the road in time?" A heated, and defeated discussion ensued: "I never can cross the road in time ... Cars let me go, but the green man is always flashing by the end ... The cars usually let you go? Sometimes they let you go! ... Sometimes you're stand in the middle of the road, the cars whizzing by! ... I'm standing there with my stick and the cars still won't let me go! It's a miracle I'm still alive."

They finally decided it must be 3 out of 5 people who couldn't cross the road in time. I told them it was 4 out of 5 people. Shock. Silence. Discussion about why. Cars. Bikes. London. Everyone in a hurry. So, I said, if we are writing a song about this, who are we singing to? The Mayor of London of course! Boris! It was clear it wasn't going to be a song – it was far too angry to absorb a melody. So it became a rap:

**Hey Mr Boris! Enough with the jokes!  
Time to listen....To the older folks!  
Like me...like me...like me...like me.  
Don't you know that:  
4 out of 5 older people can't cross the road at the lights?  
4 out of 5 older people can't cross the road at the lights?  
True! Mr Boris! It's us we're talking about  
Would we lie to you?**

Despite our best efforts we have never yet met Mr. Boris. Later in the year we were invited to Parliament Square to perform for Transport for All's *GIVE US TIME TO CROSS!* campaign asking (unsuccessfully, sadly) for an extra 3 seconds on the crossing times. Since that time the two groups have merged and officially become *Bolder Voices*. We've performed a commissioned piece for Transport for All called *Waiting*, about hospital transport, we've been funded by the lottery to work in residential homes and made a film of our song *Touch Me*. We are about to start on a second lottery project creating songs in a school and a dementia care home. Last summer we had a Blue Skies day and several people said "I used to think of myself as a loner – but this feels like my family."

*Bolder Voices* sing the politics of age. One of our first songs in 2012 was *The Bankers are to Blame*. We regret to say we are still singing it! We perform in a wide variety of venues: care homes, theatres, supermarkets and conferences.

(Image: pg.43)

**Clair Chapwell is a songwriter, music director, playwright and the founder of Bolder Voices.**

## **CALLY RSVP**

### **Eleanor Shipman**

*CALLY RSVP* was a *Public Wisdom* project from Cubitt Education in which we invited local people over 55 to respond creatively to Islington Council's plans for the redevelopment of Caledonian Road, a major thoroughfare in Islington, London.

Cubitt's Elders and Community Coordinator Eleanor Shipman invited local people over 55 to a series of creative sessions to explore and share their imaginative responses to Islington Council's Supplementary Planning Document for the Caledonian Road area through talking, walking, drawing, sign-making and photography. The group also hosted a market stall where they conducted vox-pop interviews with local people as well as created temporary sign posts for real and imaginary local places. The results gathered through *CALLY RSVP* were fed back as a report to Islington Council.

The group began by brainstorming their initial thoughts and immediate responses to key points in the Council's plans. The group also considered the more ephemeral elements of public space, such as what we smell, taste, see, hear, feel and remember when we think of The Cally (the locals' affectionate term for the road). This was prior to visiting the area, to see if our memories matched present realities.

We then visited Caledonian Road to get more of a feel for the area. A mixture of local people and residents from across Islington, the group walked through the Cally with green and red cards, labelling and documenting elements which they felt 'Worked Well' and 'Didn't Work So Well'. This could mean aesthetically, practically or otherwise. We met at Caledonian & Barnsbury Station, then walked through both Barnsbury and the Bemerton Estate, and up and down Caledonian Road.

Things which 'Worked Well' for the group included the street art on the shutters on the Cally, the fruit and veg stalls and the raised planters in the residential areas either side of the main road. Red cards were given to drawn down and blank shutters, shops which spilled onto the pavement too far, untidy bin areas, lack of clear signage for the overground station, and inaccessible historical notices with very small type.

The group came up with some brilliant potential solutions for The Cally, from a new cafe outside the station, to 'Did You Know?' historical signage, more accessible street furniture, greenery and bridge lighting. Everyone was in agreement that local resources such as libraries, the station, post office, toilets, etc. were not obvious when walking in the area, so improved signage was a priority for the group. We discussed the pros and cons of different examples of creative signage and public art, and thought about how they could be applied to the area. We also considered how to engage more isolated local older people, and what might be important to them in the public realm. Of course we would ideally like to ask them ourselves, so we discussed the approaches we might take to initiating these conversations and the challenges around making the Cally a truly accessible area for all.

The group presented these initial ideas on a market stall on the Saturday Cally Market as a platform through which to talk to local people and continue our creative consultation process. We invited passersby to contribute their ideas on improvements to the Cally. We spoke to a diverse range of people from students to traders, shop-owners, town planners, parents, children, teenagers, older people and those who are new to the area alongside life-long Islingtonians.

We also encouraged people to add local points of interest to our Cally signposts, highlighting unique elements of the Caledonian area. We collected directions and recommendations to places including Cally Pool, Barnsbury Wood, independent cafes, the Turkish deli, Meltdown – a popular local pub, and the market itself.

The group reflected on our findings, discussing how realistic we felt each suggestion was, and held votes on which should be fed back into our consultation report. We also looked ahead to think about where we would like the *CALLY RSVP* project to go. Could we propose our own public art? Or create our own signage? Perhaps holding more market stalls would help us speak to more local people? Or could we run our own pop-up shop on the Cally? And what difference would any of that make?

The challenges for the *CALLY RSVP* project were mainly in the elements we could not control. As a creative group feeding back to a local authority we were unclear as to whether any of our suggestions would be taken into account and if so, whether they would end up as a permanent change to the Cally. However, the group rose to the challenge with enthusiasm and worked very well as a team each contributing lots of ideas and opinions on the area.

The key officers from Islington Council we had been working with said they were pleased with our ideas and input to the SPD and around 8 months after the project we heard from our Council contacts that some of our signage locations and greenery suggestions had begun to be actioned. This was a momentous event for the group- they were stunned and very pleased that someone had actually listened. The *Public Wisdom Group* are keen to continue to contribute to the ongoing redevelopment, and have ambitions to create their own public art piece for the area.

Using a market stall as a platform for vox-pop interviews with members of the local community was a great way to talk to a cross section of the public and visually collate people's ideas and opinions. By facilitating the stall themselves, the *Public Wisdom Group* were empowered to talk to a diverse range of local people, empathise and encourage others to share their ideas. We learnt that immersing ourselves in an area is the key to making constructive suggestions for change.

(Image: pg.44)

**Eleanor Shipman is Director of something good, something useful and was Elders and Community Programme Coordinator at Cubitt between 2013 and 2015.**  
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## **Counterpoint Dance Company: Four Recent Projects**

### **Simona Scotto**

Counterpoint Dance Company use dance to create a vibrant new image of the older person by developing, sharing, promoting and performing the creative ideas of over 55s. In the past few years we have increasingly developed and performed work for outdoor spaces- taking our creativity out to an unsuspecting public and challenging perceptions of ageing and dance. This text highlights a few of our recent outdoor projects.

#### **Edinburgh Fringe Festival**

This project involved Counterpoint Dance Company performing in two public spaces in Edinburgh as part of the *Fringe Festival* in 2012. The company performed a section from *The Migrations Project* that had been previously performed in various theatres in London. The piece was performed in unusual spaces like a public square with the Edinburgh Castle as a background and at the Royal Circus Gardens. We performed for incidental audiences and for another group of performers and invited guests. The biggest challenges were the weather and the fact that we did not have music facilities. The group gained a lot from the whole trip, an unusual opportunity to depart from normal places and routines: *"I always have a great time rehearsing in London but often have to scoot away early to do other things, so it was a real treat to take the time out to really connect with each other on the train and in our accommodation in Edinburgh. It was just amazing to be part of an international arts festival,"* (Helen Godson, company member).

I learned that the performers as well as the piece can be very adaptable and that changing the context and the surrounding of a pre-choreographed dance piece give it a totally different feel. The audiences that are ordinarily present in public outdoor spaces may not necessarily be the same as those that come to watch a performance at the theatre therefore the reactions may be different. It was a great opportunity to show the diversity of work that can be produced and performed by mature dancers to a wider public in an internationally-recognised festival setting.

#### **N1 Centre, Islington**

Claremont Project in Islington commissioned this project, with the support of Sadler's Wells Theatre. The project involved three groups from the community: *The Choir With No Name for the Homeless*, *The White Crane Fujian Kung Fu Club Islington* and *Claremont Elders*. Counterpoint Dance Company dancers worked as dance facilitators with each group whilst I choreographed the piece as whole. The performance was created in the studio and then performed at the N1 Shopping Centre which is at the heart of Angel, Islington and is visited by thousands of people every day.

It was certainly a challenge to put the piece together with all the cast in only one day, and, on top of it all, it was pouring with rain during the performance although that didn't deter the dancers from performing! I learned that when all the participants pull together, miracles can happen! The most wonderful thing was the community spirit, people got really close to one another for me this is what made this project so successful.

#### **Nags Head Street Performance**

This performance was a great experience: the informal and unsuspecting public audiences were so responsive. Counterpoint Dance Company had been invited to take part in the Nags Head Shopping Centre's Christmas Celebrations and we performed a dance piece we created in eight hours to the music of Take That! The



performance took place on the Holloway Road, in north Islington, on the actual road!

The main challenge during the project was the placement of the audience: people had to be spread all around the dancers, along the road and on all sides. I learned is that there are certain dances that fit some performance environments better than others. The most successful elements are certainly the audience's reaction to the dancers and we had some people in tears too!

### **Routes To the River by Siobhan Davis Dance**

This project involved a series of performances that took place outdoors between Siobhan Davis Studios to the South Bank Centre in London as part of the Big Dance 2014. Henrietta Hale choreographed the piece and the dancers had a great input in contributing to the movement material. I was working as movement director. The piece was crafted in the studio following a workshop with other groups and the choreographer we then performed it in the park behind Siobhan Davis Studios to an audience that pre-booked through the Siobhan Davies Dance as well as occasional park users: *"I saw this rather than performed in it and went on to watch all the other groups. Counterpoint were one of the best groups, performing very professionally and a joy to watch, always fully engaged with the performance and in tune with the Siobhan Davies' dancers actions and sounds. It was fascinating to follow the route and to know that Counterpoint played an integral part in such a challenging and creative project."* Viv Peyton, company member.

I think the biggest challenge was the weather: it was very hot during the outdoor rehearsals and the dancers needed shade every ten minutes. I also learned that working in conjunction with an organization such as Siobhan Davies Dance is a great help; they were extremely organised so that I could get on with working on the piece. *"Routes to the River really was a journey of exploration, self-discovery and realisation. The final piece made complete sense when we moved from practising indoors to performing it in the gardens on that sun-filled Sunday in July. I felt completely at peace."* Vivienne Lynton, company member.

(Image: pg.44)

**Simona Scotto is a dancer, choreographer and Artistic Director of Counterpoint Dance Company.**

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## Cracking the Crinoline

Sian Stevenson

Moving Memory Dance Theatre Company is a well-established company that offers workshop and performance opportunities for older women. Participants (most of whom have never experienced any training in dance or theatre) have the opportunity to try out new dance-theatre based skills and make high quality performance projects alongside professional artists. Celebrating life-long creativity, the company challenges views of being an 'old' woman, and offers older women a presence in the world of performance where they are rarely offered the opportunity to participate, let alone be valued and applauded. Our work considers the funny side of things, the stuff of life, and in order to reach as diverse an audience as possible, we often perform in public spaces, such as the streets.

Our in-house company, MovingMemory is a company of women aged between 52 and 82, who have been working and performing together for the last five years. They are inspired to make work that makes the public question and look again, especially in relation to what we consider 'old', what it means to be creative, and what it means to be 'beautiful'. Very often the work is inspired by the stories the women bring with them, or their views and experiences of the world. Like the women, the content is gutsy, witty, full of passion, and because it is grounded in an authenticity, the performers are connected to the material in a way that allows audiences to relate on a very human level. This company want to dance, not for the sake of it, but in order to say something, and this is exactly what *Cracking the Crinoline* did.

The inspiration for *Cracking the Crinoline* grew from the image of the 'sanitary bag lady' as we call her, alongside queen bees, and our heroes, the Suffragettes. We wanted to subvert stereotypes, celebrate the strength and power of older women, and make a statement that made it very clear that older women have something important to add to our society. As opposed to being on the disposal heap, in 'god's waiting room', or dried-up old crones, we created a piece that celebrated the performers as they are now, very much alive, sexy, and stomping. The piece focused on cracking the surface, looking beneath the obvious, exemplified by transformations within the piece, from little old lady to warrior, enhanced by change of costume, music, and style of movement. Musically the piece moves from Gracie Fields' *Little Old Lady*, to angry techno beat music overlaid with voices of the company, distorted into dark and scary echoes. The performers morph from passive and meek 'lavender ladies' to a dangerous and dominant community expressing war-like intentions in the final section of the piece, *The Moving Memory Haka*.

Having enjoyed performing a flashmob-style dance in Canterbury with children from a local school, and wanting to perform to audiences that don't regularly go to the theatre, this 'pop up' guerilla-style performance delivered its sting to many different communities across the south east. Our 'unusual' spaces included a sports centre in Gillingham, a market square in Faversham, a plaza in Canterbury, a park in Hythe, Dreamland Leisure park and Turner Contemporary Arts Centre, Margate (Tribes Festival). The piece also travelled to traditional spaces such as Sadler's Wells London and the Brighton Dome, but it was in public spaces, where people had little sense that such an event was to take place, that the piece, and our learning, really developed. If people have witnessed 'street theatre' before, the performers they will have seen are more often than not, young, so for many of our audience, the surprise and delight of viewing old women behaving badly in crinolines, boxing boots and marigolds, was clear. The response of the audience was enhanced by the structure of the piece; once the audience had accepted that, yes,

these were old women putting themselves centre stage (and taking a great risk in doing so), the audience settled into the security and enjoyment of witnessing proper old lady activity; gentle victorian biddies on their way to church of a Sunday morning, politely curtsying to all they met. However as the music warped, the audience was presented with an alien-like transformation, a shedding of the familiar clothing of the 'old woman', a stripping of shawls, bonnets and silk handbags (which were threateningly tossed toward the audience), crinolines and bonnets turned inside out to reveal the sleek silhouette of this swarm of queen bees, topped by yellow marigolds, suggestive of hard graft and the surgical. Via their gaze, the women confronted and provoked all to bear witness to the strength of the female, and threatened to buzz down anyone who stood in the way of their world dominating quest. The women were powerful and sexy, and beautiful.

The delight of older women in the audience was tangible. By proxy, they were validated and made visible. Wherever possible, the company invited the audience to join them in the Haka causing much hilarity and a real sense of a shared mission. In Margate we worked with a found group of 'Baby Bees' extending the choreography to include this new community. They performed alongside the MovingMemory Company at the Turner Contemporary in Margate, swelling the audience with friends and family, who beamed with pride as they saw their loved ones perform with exuberance.

All of the performances demanded that the women negotiate the unpredictable happenings that can occur when making a spectacle of yourself in public spaces, and yes, every performance went wrong and right. As the outside eye, and the 'safe-guarder' of these precious women, my eye constantly saw the pending terrors of the cracked paving slab, the drunk man meandering dangerously toward the company, or worst of all, a Val or Jane or Wendy just about to trip on their crinoline, falling and breaking a limb (as had happened in rehearsal). Amazingly, none of these fears were realised, the women developing a professionalism that allowed them to juggle and adapt to any difficulties the performances threw at them.

One of my key concerns since starting the company, alongside the issue of funding, has been to convince venues to take the work. Expectations of old women dancing are low. People assume sweetness, soft shmuck, feeble audiences and performances unworthy of critical acclaim. What *Cracking the Crinoline* did was prove that a company of older women are powerful, moving and so, so worthy of a trip out. Venues and festivals have realised that old women can be vital and thrilling, and that there's a lot of older people out there who want to see themselves represented in performance. We were surprised by the impact of the piece, moved by the response, and learnt that working in public spaces threw up the possibility of special moments of intimacy that resulted from being up close with the public. This has been empowering for the individual performers, the depth of relationships between company members, development of performance skills, confidence in our ability to work difficult spaces, and empowerment for us and, I believe, our audiences, confirmed by comments such as "thrilling", "delightful and strangely moving", "inspirational."

(Image: pg.45)

**Sian Stevenson is a Director, Choreographer, Lecturer (University of Kent), and Artistic Director of Moving Memory Dance Theatre Company.**  
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## **Passing: A Public Happening**

### **The art of lingering, loitering, meandering and mingling with intent**

**Paula Turner and Trish Winter**

*Passing* is a film that Paula made with the dance company Grand Gestures. We made it during an event in a public space, Central Station; the railway station in Newcastle upon Tyne. Grand Gestures are a group of older dancers that have been working with Paula since 2011, under the auspices of a Big Lottery-funded project, *Creativity Matters*, run by the UK charity Equal Arts.

*Passing* was the first of a number of improvised events through which Grand Gestures have wormed their way into public spaces around North East England; spaces such as a wildlife sanctuary in Northumberland, a city centre seating area, a university campus and a demolition site. Through these events we subtly disrupt dominant ideas about older people, their representation and their occupation of public space, as well as subverting taken-for-granted ideas about who gets to dance and what it means to dance. We'll talk here about three kinds of disruption in *Passing*.

Firstly Grand Gestures disrupt some dominant ways of representing older people. Grand Gestures are creative individuals who refute the idea that they are necessarily sad, lonely or isolated because they are older.

Secondly, they enact quietly disruptive ways of being in public spaces. For example, in *Passing* they loiter, linger, wander and wend their way through a public space more usually occupied by purposeful journeying. By systematically pushing into the queue at the cash machine, for example, they quietly subvert its accepted etiquette. Perhaps their activity was tolerated because the offenders were older people, but it certainly has a profoundly disquieting effect.

Thirdly, they counter dominant notions of 'dancing in public, particularly the form of the flashmob, which typically prescribes movement, often rehearses it and usually has music played at the event as accompaniment. A flashmob is designed to make people stop and look. In contrast, *Passing* doesn't insist on asserting its presence through spectacle. Rather, it gently rides the waves of what the geographer David Seamon calls the 'place ballet' of the station; the everyday choreography of people and things through which places come into being. The dance, which consists entirely of pedestrian, vernacular, movements sometimes becomes visible and sometimes disappears into the everyday rhythms of the station. In this way, *Grand Gestures* make themselves visible and remind us that they, as older people are an ordinary part of that place ballet. And their performance implicitly reminds us that we're all passing through; that ageing is movement through time and it isn't the preserve of the old.

We have learned a great deal from *Passing*, mainly to trust in the group and our collaborative democratic processes which place the incidental centre stage and ask questions about how we view, interpret and compartmentalize age.

*Passing* served to give the group a distinct identity and a set of protocols about their representation, about what they would welcome and what they would resist. Maintaining a practice that depends on the cultivation of this present moment has meant that we remain proudly unidentifiable, hard to explain or identify. This fluid-like existence which shifts and attends to what is happening has been a source of strength and independence for Grand Gestures and has enabled them to be quietly defiant to stereotypical views of age and dancing. We see ourselves as part of a growing trend away from selfies to groupies! Grand Gestures delight in the community they have created and the democratic experience of improvising dance together. Furthermore the group has sought to find ways of taking their philosophy

to people living with dementia and to care staff. This has reinvented their role as volunteers and sees them taking their improvisational and often subversive dance skills into hierarchical institutions with energising and empowering results

Two pieces of research informed this account. Firstly, Paula's Churchill Fellowship (2013) *The Democracy of Dance*, which helped her to crystallize much of Grand Gestures' practice, and Secondly Trish's Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project *A Somatic Ethnography of Grand Gestures Elders Dance Group*, (2014) with partner Equal Arts, and her ongoing research with the group. Paula and Trish's research partnership is helping Grand Gestures to formulate their ideas about who they are and what they do. *Passing* was filmed and edited by artist Frances Anderson, who continues to document the group and to contribute to discourses on the representation of age.

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(Image: pg.45)

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## **The Fluid Pavement (and Other Stories on Growing Old in Newham)**

### **Sophie Handler**

*The Fluid Pavement* is a large print psychogeographic novel on ageing that began its life back in 2005 as a way of addressing older people's neglected relationship to public space. It was a first attempt to question the ways in which older people become, progressively, less visible within the public realm, with age. But it was an attempt too to confront the spatial marginalisation of interest in ageing more generally: the ways in which the discourse around ageing was – and to some extent still is – itself marginalised; the way in which discussions around ageing have, traditionally, been contained within age-segregated settings (sheltered housing complexes, retirement homes etc.) to the point where the subject of ageing itself becomes set apart from the life of the public realm. With its narrative set in the public realm, *The Fluid Pavement* was an attempt to confront these literally containing dynamics and, by extension, open up the geography of ageing.

Set in post-industrial Newham, 'one of the least old boroughs in London', *The Fluid Pavement* is a story of ageing told in a particular kind of place. Newham is a place that was, and still is, undergoing rapid regeneration. Older people, here, represent, demographically at least, an already heavily marginalised group (Newham has one of the smallest numbers of older people as a proportion of its total population). In a sense, youthful Newham was the wrong place to be thinking about ageing. But there was a certain logic to working here. At the time, back in 2005, I'd been working on a feasibility study in Newham with muf architecture/art where we'd been commissioned by one of the borough's neighbourhood renewal programmes to look at how small pockets of leftover public space could be better used by its younger residents (those under 25). Those were the terms of the brief. But it was the youth-focused bias of that brief that made me question the spatial politics of the borough and that prompted, in turn, a series of 'what ifs?'. What if the generational dynamics of a borough were turned on its head? And a place aligned with the regenerative prospect of youth were mapped out through its older population instead?

Produced over the course of eight months, *The Fluid Pavement* was written out of a series of 'ordinary encounters' with older people across Newham, the by-product of a pseudo-ethnographic research process of wandering across the borough: following the trail of the housebound library service, through hospital wards, sheltered housing complexes, pairing up with Edith on her shopping trip (down to Rathbone Market), signing up for Barry's weekly tea dance classes in Canning Town (returning to the class week after week), visiting the borough's designated warm zones (for the over-50s) in winter, watching and listening, following, taking part... sitting with Zina on her bench in the park ...all the while, 'investigating the spatiality of ageing' from Plaistow to Canning Town.

The novel became the device for weaving together these found stories collected over the course of those eight months. An open-ended exploration of how relationships to public space start to alter over time, in different ways, with age – but with a specific agenda too. There was a deliberate attempt within the story to move beyond the stock/stereotyping narratives around ageing as a condition of mounting need, dependency and loss and to move beyond those other narratives of ageing that carry an overly-retrospective focus- valuing older people's experience of a place as-it-was to the exclusion of their experiences of places now, or as they might be.

Instead, *The Fluid Pavement* provides a playful counter-narrative, introducing other kinds of stories that draw out what is overlooked, unspoken, half-said: those longings and frustrations that define people's relationships to urban space; the

everyday urban tactics and creative practices that exist alongside the small pleasures of living in a particular kind of place, replaying the physical and emotional geographies of older age and, via the fictional landscape of the novel, making space for fantasy too. The novel culminates with ten spatial propositions 'from the sublime to the absurd': playful extensions drawn out of the storyline itself, that offer up ways of laying claim to the public realm 'even in older age'.

I had the novel printed as a large print book, to 16 point type standard, and deposited in the local mobile library as a 'fully accessible' product, leaving it to circulate via the same housebound library service that I'd been shadowing months before. This was a deliberate decision: ensuring that the story would find itself back in the landscape out of which it had emerged with the subjects of the story itself become its active, critical readers in turn...

On the morning of Wednesday 21st March 2007 we launched the book on the mobile library bus, with *The Fluid Pavement's* main characters sitting at the back, winding our way across Newham through the storyline of the book, past Joan's low wall, Zina's bench, ending up at that 'double avenue of trees gone missing'. The launch, like the book, served as a way of prompting discussion, and an opportunity to vote on the book's concluding fantasy propositions that became, in turn, the basis for a series of real-world interventions in the public realm: the fictional components of the story that turned into acted-out briefs, two, three years on.

These real-world interventions - *Civil Twilight*, the *Resistant Sitting* project, *Audio Aid* - are the tangible legacy of the novel: the concrete outcomes borne out of the book. But the novel too, the reflective space that the novel opens up has, I think, proved to be its more enduring aspect: as a critical lever exposing ways of thinking about people's neglected relationships to public space (still all too easily overlooked) making this somehow more visible, in a sense 'making space for older age.' And through the curious device of the part-fictional large print novel, having this as something that is readable not only for a local audience but for an external readership too coming new to a subject that is still all too easily overlooked...

(Image: pg.46)

**Dr. Sophie Handler is an urban theorist currently working with the University of Manchester helping to develop 'age-friendly' urban policies with Manchester City Council. Her practice-based work operates under the platform Ageing Facilities. [www.ageing-facilities.net](http://www.ageing-facilities.net)**

## **The Hackney Circle**

### **Carolina Caicedo**

The Decorators are a multidisciplinary design practice that works with local authorities and public institutions to design, produce and deliver place-making and community building interventions in the public realm. We do this through community participation, place activation and cultural curation projects. Alongside physical infrastructures we design participatory events and processes which build on local assets, resources and skills to help re-imagine the relationships between people and places. In August 2012 we were commissioned by Lucy McMenemy, a Cultural Programme Officer for the London Borough of Hackney, to develop a project in Dalston Square for the residents of Keswick and Parton Lodge, a sheltered housing block for the elderly on the edge of the square, and other older residents of Dalston. The project was commissioned as a result of feedback Lucy received about Dalston Square from a resident at Keswick Lodge, who felt the square was a cold, hard space that was not for her. The project brief was therefore to identify obstacles to the participation of older residents in the social and cultural life of this new public square and explore potential solutions.

In spending time with the residents of Keswick and Parton Lodge we realized that there is a great dependence on activities at the lodges for socialising. These activities are very dependent on funding and if there are no activities the residents can go a long time without seeing each other, despite living side-by-side. There also seemed to be a loss of communication at the lodges of the many activities for older residents in Hackney. Residents wanted to be involved in more mixed-age events but did not know how and finally there was very little interaction between the older residents and the new community of residents and businesses of Dalston Square. This dynamic between the older residents and newer residents of Dalston Square is representative of a dynamic across Dalston, with the growing social and cultural life of the area geared mainly towards the young and those who can afford it. It was clear that the obstacles to the use of Dalston Square by older residents were more than physical, and predominantly about issues of accessibility and communication.

In a rapidly developing Dalston, we wanted to figure out how to keep Dalston's older residents involved in the social and cultural life of their neighbourhood.

This research and these considerations led to the development of the *Hackney Circle*, a free membership scheme for Hackney's over-60s, which provides a range of special offers in cafes, restaurants and cultural venues in and around Dalston Square, alongside a programme of free events in these mixed-age high street venues.

The nine-week pilot programme of events included an outdoor launch in Dalston Square with tea and coffee, inaugural speeches and a brass band, a special screening of the *Fabulous Fashionistas* at the Rio Cinema, a Garden Party at the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden with a cooking demonstration from Café Route, breadmaking with Latto, and live radio from Open School East, a performance by Arcola 60+ at the Arcola Theatre, a folk singing workshop at Dalston CLR James Library and four weeks of archive preservation workshops at the Hackney Archives. These special offers and events were aimed to introduce members to spaces they may have never visited before and the people running them, connecting members to the day-to-day life around Dalston Square.

The membership scheme operated through a network of local businesses and organisations that wanted to work together to make their businesses more accessible to older residents. The partners of the project included the Dalston CLR James Library, the Library Café, Café Route, Le Ziz Restaurant, Smooth You Town



Spa, the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, Arcola Theatre, Rio Cinema, the Hackney Befriending and Volunteer Service (HBVS) and Hackney Goodgym. The partnership with local volunteer organisations, HBVS and Goodgym, was to try and provide signposting to assistance for members who might need help attending events.

A big challenge for the *Hackney Circle* was to provide targeted communication with limited resources and budget to the diverse older population of Hackney, without being able to resort to far reaching and cost-effective methods of communication like social media. Exploring ways of communicating more broadly what is going on to an age group where only a quarter of the population is connected to the internet. The *Hackney Circle* scheme and its offers were communicated via the local press, with features in Hackney Today, which goes out to 108,000 Hackney households every week, and through targeted older people's interest groups as well as large format posters in the foyer of Dalston CLR James Library, and smaller posters in the participating businesses. Businesses that were part of the scheme displayed *Hackney Circle* window stickers and some introduced re-upholstered *Hackney Circle* chairs to make visiting and socialising a more comfortable experience for older residents.

The *Hackney Circle* pilot launched on 17 September 2014 and ran until 12 November 2014, with 252 registered members. Between December 2014 and January 2015 we carried out a survey with members to understand their experience of the *Hackney Circle* pilot. The top three reasons given for joining the scheme were to meet and socialise with people with similar interests, to find out what is happening in Hackney and get involved in local activities and to learn something new. The *Hackney Circle* uses the high street and everyday shared public spaces such as cafes, restaurants and theatres for these activities to happen to enable and support intergenerational interaction. The most successful events were those that took place in spaces visited by all ages such as the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, the Arcola theatre bar or the Rio Cinema, compared to the events that required booking of rooms which kept the group separate. Developing the future programme of events with partner interest groups and organisations would also help bring their often hidden activity to the high street and public spaces of Dalston. Building the project on a network of local businesses encourages more awareness, offers, and collaborations between organisations, helping improve the offer for older people in not just one place but across Dalston.

We realise the *Hackney Circle* needs to offer a varied programme of activities and offers to cater for the heterogeneity of interests of its members and to avoid age-based stereotyping, so in the future we would want to get members involved in the programming of events and offers, giving them room to shape the programme and in particular male members as participation in the *Hackney Circle* was overwhelmingly female. For us there also remains a tension in the communication of the scheme about age-related language and this remains unresolved and perhaps just needs further consultation.

The short 9-week pilot of the *Hackney Circle* saw a shift in members' perception of Dalston Square. Involvement in the *Hackney Circle* helped members feel that Dalston Square was more accessible, which shows the potential this kind of initiative has to help build relationships and connections between older residents and the social and cultural spaces of their neighbourhood.

(Image: pg.46)

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## In-Kind

### Sarah Cole

One of my intentions as an artist is to give myself and my collaborators the time and space to critically consider our situations, and to use creative tools to give these thoughts expression. Making work that is personal and intimate takes time, and in making the work public there is a risk that people can feel exposed or misunderstood. The commissioning agenda for *In-Kind*, a project funded by Islington Council over two years, was therefore crucial in that it allowed me time to develop complex relationships with unpaid (or 'informal') carers across the borough. During an interim reflection, one carer commented that "*this project felt like it touched my soul...stuff I have kept boxed up for years. My creativity that I haven't felt for a long time was given a place to come out.*"

One of the difficulties in making this work was accessing carers, who are often unable to leave their homes, keep appointments or allow themselves the 'indulgence' of taking part in an art project. What I learnt from working with these carers was about living with care rather than simply experiencing it on an occasional basis; how private yet political this role is; how the carers wellbeing changed and mostly deteriorated over time and how seldom carers were able to live a life outside of the (sometimes self-imposed) shackles of their role. Or as one carer expressed, "*I have to go to the moon and back before I can leave the house.*"

As an artwork, *In-Kind* developed into a one-to-one performance in the back of an ex-military ambulance. The ambulance toured throughout February 2014, with carers, health professionals, politicians and general public invited to spend twenty-five minutes in the back of the ambulance with performer Erika Poole, herself a carer and local resident. During the project I worked with a small group of collaborators on a regular basis but also led workshops, screenings and events with wider participatory audiences. Most of the people I worked with were women aged over fifty, long-term carers looking after elderly parents, disabled, mentally ill and/or dying partners and/or children.

Intimate, emotionally challenging, melancholic as well as absurd, inside the old ambulance the performer danced with an inflatable zimmerframe, played a musical saw, applied sudocreme 'war paint', balanced on balloons and tried to organise medication whilst wearing boxing gloves. Every day the van went to a different location and part of the work became about caring for its curious position in these public contexts. A small, incongruous green ex-military vehicle, many people stopped to ask us what was going on inside. Standing outside the ambulance in the sleet and wind throughout February, we met many people who wanted to talk about their own care roles. The work and the performer needed looking after, as did the audiences and so did we, those who had made it and felt responsible for it. Aside from the weather, we also had to deal with marauding football fans, Landrover enthusiasts, Valentine brides and many other curious people who felt compelled to question what it was doing in their locale. One audience member commented that it was like discovering "*a whole life in a room parked at the end of Hargrave Road*", and another said it was "*not like the day in the life of a carer, but the life in the day of a carer.*"

According to Carers UK it takes about five years for someone to recognise that they have become a carer. The process often happens slowly, the workload and sense of responsibility increasing as the washing becomes cooking becomes regular medical checks and constant emotional support. Although everyone's situations were different, many shared common experiences of being over-whelmed by paperwork and anxiety. I overheard one woman asking "*I am eighty and I just want*

to know who will look after my son, who has schizophrenia, when I'm gone?" and all the carers I worked with had become increasingly ill themselves from the financial, emotional and physical stresses of their work-load and isolation. One carer commented "my life is ruled by alarms now, I haven't realised this until just now. I am on tenderhooks most of the time, especially at night." Although I was initially resistant to notating a public record of this work, it became a useful tool to collate the many contributions and ideas. Thoughts and images from the project can be accessed at: [www.amillionminutes.org](http://www.amillionminutes.org) along with the twenty-three other projects commissioned around Archway and Finsbury Park over this period.

*In-Kind* coincided with the introduction of the government's Bedroom Tax which reinforced our idea that the performance needed to be within a 'spare' confined space as well as able to travel to people who found it difficult to come to us. On seeing the performance, artist Becky Shaw reflected "we [audience and performer] are almost on top of each other in the van so perhaps I am trying to occupy less space so I can give her more. The performance is for me, but I am uncomfortable at how hard she must work on my behalf." Becky went on to reflect how "in the past, we are told, we would have looked after our loved ones or relatives without being a 'carer'. Care would have been just one part of the flow of family life. We imagine somehow that in the past 'caring' was less burdensome. This is unlikely, but perhaps in the past you were less likely to 'care' on your own- facing the desperate binary interchange of 'you' and 'me'. Perhaps in the past the carer didn't sit on an uncomfortable perimeter between professionalised 'carer' and loved one. Or maybe care is harder now because in the past there was less notion of a 'personal life' to lose." Many of the carers I met spoke of losing time, having got old and not known how they got there. This idea of time well spent, and how subjective this notion is, was a pertinent question throughout the project.

The early stages of the project were based at Islington Carers Centre, where I took up residence every Friday afternoon, where we ate lunch, talked and tried out ideas. The project had to be flexible, and the facilities and goodwill of ICC meant that we could explore a broad range of ideas and processes, with an open brief that could go off at tangents to follow the ideas wherever they took us. The first phase of the work was entirely speculative, although we did have a public sharing hosted by ICC in January 2013, with the staff as well as carers taking part.

For an artistic enquiry to become something meaningful for everyone involved I have found it is important to take small steps, to try out ideas with supportive audiences before testing them more publicly. It goes without saying that the infrastructure of this project was extremely important, with the staff at ICC, Carers UK and Islington Mind being key to making the work happen in the way that it did. Making work with people about something as everyday as care isn't glamorous and yet as an artist this idea of what we care about, how and for whom we care, is at the very heart of what I am interested in. Or to quote Stephanie Smith, "this concerns us all, but is hidden; swept away - hoovered away - we don't like to look at it or contemplate (understandably) mortality and responsibility."

(Image: pg.47)

## Live Your Questions Now

### Jenny Brownrigg

The survey show is recognised as a way to frame the works of wide range of artists in terms of age or geography. Increasingly, many survey shows predominantly focus on emergent artists in their 20s and 30s. Examples include: *Nought to Sixty* (2008), the survey show celebrating the ICA's 60th anniversary, presented work of emerging artists over Great Britain and Ireland; and *The Generational: Younger than Jesus* (2009), the New Museum in New York, exhibiting work of 145 artists who were under 33 years old.

What can we learn from an earlier generation of contemporary visual artists? *Live Your Questions Now*, in the Mackintosh Museum, The Glasgow School of Art in 2011, was a unique survey exhibition of Scottish, UK and international contemporary artists aged over 60 years old. The venue itself was 102 that year; sited at the heart of an arts and crafts inspired building designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

*Live Your Questions Now* co-occurred with Glasgow's hosting of the 7th British Art Show, *In the Days of the Comet*, curated by Lisa Le Fevre and Tom Morton (2011). Looking at the age range of the latter exhibition, over three quarters of the artists were in the 31-45 age range, with twenty one born in the 1970s. The exhibition title came from a quote from a letter Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to a young poet who had asked him for criticism on his poems and advice: "Live your questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." (*Letters to a Young Poet*, 1903)

By looking at the motivations of contemporary creative practice through the longevity of a career, the show demonstrated the work ethic of the artists where questions rather than answers drove them forward.

Sam Ainsley's (b. 1950, lives and works Glasgow) *Untitled* wall work doubled the outline of the map of Scotland, to form two shapes she saw as potential metaphors for lungs or wings. The words that hugged the contours of the shore became, when viewed from a distance like tributaries, echoing Madeleine de Scudery's map *Carte du pays de Tendre* (1654) - a map of the land of tenderness. For me, it was important that the map was painted directly on the walls of the Mackintosh Museum. Ainsley, now retired, was Head of MFA Programme at GSA over a formative period and had contributed much to the institution. It seemed right that her work was part of its very walls.

Helena Almeida (Portugal b.1934) has represented Portugal twice at the Venice Biennial, in 1982 and 2005. Her first major UK exhibition of work from the last 40 years took place in 2009 in Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. She is quoted as saying: "It is about getting beyond the limits of the body. We look at the body and see that it ends abruptly and the feet and the hands. It finishes there. There's nothing more – it's like the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea." Nearly all of Almeida's artworks both in photography and video, depict herself over her 40-year career. Many of her experiments have taken the form of private performances, which her husband, the architect Artur Rosa, photographs. The two photographs from the larger series, *BAÑADA EN LÁGRIMAS*, explore how her body's boundaries can be extended, through reflection of water on the floor. We showed her latest video work *Untitled* (2010) in the Mackintosh Museum and it was the only work to visibly give away the age of the artist. In the video work, she uses a black wire both as a restriction of movement and to extend her body to that of her husband. The couple then walk a line, backwards and forwards, until the wire falls off.

Throughout Alasdair Gray's (Glasgow b.1934) career, his art and literature has been interwoven paths, overlapping in form and content. He has worked as a teacher, painter, illustrator, playwright, scene painter, essayist, poet, novelist and

muralist. This exhibition offered the opportunity for his work to be viewed in the context of national and international peers.

Joan Jonas's (New York, b.1936) experiments and productions in the late 1960s and early 1970s were essential to the development of the genre. As part of *Live Your Questions Now*, we showed a small video work which initially looked to be playing with the saying 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'. In *My New Theater IV – Dog Hoop*, Jonas' own white dog, is put through its paces jumping through a hoop. The film plays with the speeds of the dog's movements, slowing the action of jumping. The dog, at first appears controlled by the hoop and the person in command then returns to nature in the final shots, wildly barking.

Ana Jotta (Portugal b.1946) lives and works in Lisbon and has had a significant impact on a younger generation of artists in Portugal. She made her career as an actress (1969-1980) then returned to making contemporary art in her fifties. Jotta has built her practice as an artist through creating sequences of works where she attempts to dismantle the idea of a coherent style by superseding each previous body of work with a new format. This approach may be one frowned upon by traditional art school education, so it was refreshing to have it in this environment.

Běla Kolářová (Prague b. 1923, d. 2010) trained in photography but from the 1960s onwards, turned her attention to the experiments with collages and assemblages from everyday found objects. The exhibition included more explicitly feminist work, *Enlivening Palette*, (1986) in which Kolářová has used make-up to draw onto paper.

Lygia Pape (Brazil, b.1927, d.2004) was active in both the Concrete and Neo-Concretist movements in Brazil and exhibited in Venice Biennale 2003 and 2009. Her series of works called *Ttéia* began as experiments in the 1970's, for both gallery and outdoor spaces and were inspired by spiders' webs. In the '90s she revised and refined these structures of gold thread. A series of *Ttéia* works now exist as a set of instructions, following the artist's death, to be assembled in perpetuity. One of her smaller webs was assembled in the Mackintosh Museum.

Michael Kidner (UK b. 1917 d.2009) was a pioneer of Optical Art. His interests in mathematics, science and the theories of chaos informed an art that is at once rational and playful. For this exhibition we showed five works he made in the last year of his life when he was 92 years old. Although each work exists within a geometrical grid, reminiscent of children's colouring-in books, this sequence illustrates there are endless possibilities to be explored. When he could no longer draw the straight black lines of the grid, his assistant did, with Kidner colouring in.

An unexpected outcome of the exhibition was the response from mature students at The Glasgow School of Art. In the year 2011 when the exhibition took place, from a total student community of 1,941, 32 undergraduate students and 22 post graduates were 40+. Undergraduates in that age bracket made up 1.9% of their community; 9.9% of 40+ made up the post-graduate community. They reported that the show was inspirational as they were seeing practitioners of similar age or older having a viable contemporary art practice. Until that point, a number of the students felt that they might be considered too old for being part of a contemporary art scene on graduation. They felt that the exhibition *Live Your Questions Now*, through its location in a public gallery setting, validated an older age group as being experimental in process and production.

(Image: pg.47)

**Jenny Brownrigg is Exhibitions Director at The Glasgow School of Art. [www.gsa.ac.uk](http://www.gsa.ac.uk)**

## **Public Wisdom TAKEOVER**

### **Eleanor Shipman**

*Public Wisdom* is Cubitt Education's creative programme for local people over 55, the aim of which is to nurture an active interest in public space and the local area. We have a core *Public Wisdom Group* of around 12 local people who run and participate in creative workshops in and around public space, facilitate thought-provoking public consultation around urban regeneration projects, and attend council consultations on changes affecting their local area.

We have heard time and again that older people can feel 'invisible' in public space: "People tend to ignore you in the street and you have to walk on the edges of the pavement close to the buildings to avoid someone running into you." (Rose, 80yrs). *Public Wisdom* aims to get local people over 55 heard and seen in the public realm, and the *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* on Islington Green in September 2014 sought to spread that message further through empowering older people to explore creative ways to interact with public space and reclaim their public realm.

Part summer fete, part anarchic protest, the *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* used a soft approach to tackle some tough questions around the perception of older people in the public realm: How are older people perceived by the general public? How do older people perceive themselves? How would older people like to be treated in public space? How would older people like to interact with public space?

We invited a diverse range of artists to host creative workshops with a rebellious twist, enabling local older attendees to have their say through making protest-style banners and creating urban interventions with guerilla knitting and chalk-walking. Our creative interventions were fuelled with a free organic buffet and cake, encouraging more participation and helping to engage less confident attendees.

Each creative activity interacted with the public realm in a different way. The banner-making used print and embroidery to enable attendees to say and display whatever they wanted, guerilla knitting encouraged participants to interact with street furniture and make a visual impact on their immediate environment, and chalk-walking invited people to draw directly onto urban surfaces, provoking playful exchange and initiating dialogue with onlookers of all ages. We also shared our 'Words of Wisdom', leaving tear-off sheets of advice and encouragement on bus stops and fences for passers by.

The *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* aimed to give attendees new skills and increase their confidence in doing creative activities in public space. This included drawing from life, urban photography, performative dance interventions and even accessible parkour for all ages. All of these activities were programmed with a confident legacy in mind - for example participants could later take a sketchbook out with them and draw from life, photograph their local area or just feel more confident moving through public space.

With over 150 local older people in attendance the *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* illustrated the real need for accessible, creative, fun and playful opportunities for older people to feel confident, accepted, seen and heard in the public realm. Feedback from attendees further cemented this need: "It's so playful - I feel like a child again" and "If your next event is as crazy as this one I'll be there!"

The challenges of events such as this are ensuring they are accessible and make a genuine offer of something for everyone. By being visible in a well-known local area we were able to reach some of the most isolated older people, including homeless older men who may not be accessing other local services. We also invited a range of artists to run activities which would appeal to both women and men,

especially as older men are less regular attendees at our creative events.

The legacy of the event is also part of the challenge. To truly change perceptions of older people in public space by the wider public these large-scale visual events need to be repeated, promoted, showcased and widely publicised to local people, empowering those who attend to improve their confidence and skills and encourage them to spread the word further.

The *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* was an incredible afternoon spent re-claiming our space: we danced like water, knitted fences and trees, shared words of wisdom and took chalk for walks. We drew, sewed, photographed and ate to our hearts content and – for the afternoon at least – the space was ours.

(Image: pg.48)

**Eleanor Shipman is Director of something good, something useful and was Elders and Community Programme Coordinator at Cubitt between 2013 and 2015.  
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## **Reminiscing the Future Village**

### **Intergenerational exchange for better communities.**

**Nick Gant**

Whilst getting old is a fundamental, natural and defining part of life itself, the idea of being old can often appear alien to young people and conversely older people can feel disconnected from young people. In both cases this can breed misunderstanding and even fear or distrust between different generational groups despite the unifying fact we are all young once and might all be old too. This situation is highlighted when we consider the politic and process of planning the places in which we live. Localism legislation and radical changes in planning policy have seemingly afforded local people greater rights and statutory processes which might enable them to have a say in how the places they live develop in the future. But who possesses the knowledge required to act upon this? Older people possess experiential knowledge and lived, tacit comprehension of a place, affording great insight. However when considering planning for 20, 30 or even 50 years time surely young people need to be engaged in the discussion as they will live the consequences of decisions in the future? Additionally, how might young people benefit from the knowledge and wisdom of those older than themselves and could this lead to shared visions for the future of neighbourhoods?

The *Community21* project developed by The University of Brighton and Action in Rural Sussex works with communities to collaboratively design and use 'accessible technology' in ways that help to unify and exchange ideas and experiences between young and old people in inclusive and engaging ways. This results in relevant and meaningful co-designed visions for liveable places in the future. Equally these processes have demonstrated the power to elicit empathy in young people of what it is like to be old and what their lives might be like in the future when they are older too.

By involving older people (in their eighties) and young people (in their early to mid teens) from the community of Heathfield in East Sussex project leaders Nick Gant and Zoe Ganderton encouraged older people to think back 50 years in the past and tell stories about this time in the to young people from the community. The young people helped capture these stories using modern media tools such as digital video as a part of their citizenship lessons at school. Young people also reflected on the present and both parties shared and compared their experiences. These included issues relating to isolation and the geographic separation of parts of the village, changing economic fortunes of the community over time and the need for places to meet and socialise. A lack of work opportunities and appropriate housing also meant both older and younger people leaving the community.

One key method involved using 'ageing apps' on smart phone and tablet devices. The young people photographed their faces and applied an ageing effect using the apps. The funny and engaging process of ageing themselves so they looked 50 years older was not only quick and good fun but it provided striking images of the young people that united them with their older collaborators. Recent developments of this method used in the County Town of Lewes as part of their neighbourhood planning includes reanimating the young people's older personas to tell their stories in uncanny, moving video clips. By imagining and visualising their lives in 50 years time, the young people adopted some of the views of their older collaborators and they empathised with the issues of their older neighbours, relating this to their own lives in the future.

Both groups combined their views into coherent visions and ideas that responded to the collective concerns and ideas for the village. With the help of students from the University and some photo manipulation and 3D modelling apps, the participants were able to subvert recognisable images of places in the



community and augment them to illustrate their visions for the village in 2061. Examples included a vision for the local supermarket, identified by the older participants as being one of the only places to meet their local peers. Their collaborative design added laybys and places to stop and talk but without annoying other shoppers – something the older members often experienced. The supermarket also has local fruit and vegetables grown by the community as part of an integrated social-economy that reflected historical experiences. Local, 'traditional' materials were applied to affordable housing with integrated work units and water conservation features – all identified through the shared experiences from the past and present. Young people imagined their lives as older people working as farmers or café owners that seek to utilise local, indigenous meat – something older people routinely ate in the past but younger people had never even considered as an abundant, sustainable food resource. Collaboratively they envisioned and depicted images of the community where once plentiful species of wildlife have returned due to the communal actions of the village.

These processes that utilise contemporary technology, offered new insights into how older people's experiences could inform younger people's expectations, needs and understanding of their futures. Equally the visualisations of places augmented to represent shared visions provide a motivating and dynamic voice and locally authenticated steer for action and development in the communities. Parish and Town councils have engaged in these processes and *Community21* and *Action In Rural Sussex* lead community development exercises utilising these tools as a way to engage formerly disconnected generations. Technology is often considered the domain of the young, 'digital natives' but these approaches demonstrate that they can be a unifying force in helping utilise and share the valuable experience of older people. It also reinforces the fact that the quality, value and meaning of digital content is still defined by the people who create and use it – regardless of age.

This design and community research was undertaken with the support of the Gulbenkian Foundation, The Nominet Trust and Arts and Humanities Research Council.

(Image: pg.48)

**Nick Gant is Assistant Head of School, School of Art, Design and Media, University of Brighton, and Founder of Community21  
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## **Roehampton Radio**

### **Arti Prashar**

Spare Tyre is a leading UK participatory arts charity with 40 years experience in *“using and making theatre that enables voiceless communities and individuals to share and celebrate their untold stories, challenging prejudice and transforming lives.”*

During 2012/13 Wandsworth Council commissioned a consultation for an extensive regeneration programme for the post-war Alton Estate, in South West London (also known as the Roehampton estate). The following quote is from the Alton Masterplan Executive Summary (September 2014): *“The Alton area holds a special place in the history of housing development in the United Kingdom, based on its highly influential post-war concept of large residential buildings in a parkland setting. However over recent years the estate has been exhibiting signs of stress as anti-social behaviour increases, a sense of isolation grows and signs of physical decline become more evident.”*

In late 2011 we were asked by Wandsworth Arts (a department of LB Wandsworth) to work on the estate. The intention was to reach out to isolated older people and enable their voice to be heard in a rapidly changing community, environment and landscape. The project has developed in stages over 3 years and involved honest evaluations after each stage to inform the next steps, deepen meaningful engagement and develop partnerships and funding.

We have been required to be inventive and innovative in our approach and creativity to make best use of funding that has come from different sources: local authority, public health, community funds, and from business. We have negotiated and networked with several different local authority departments and officers as well as specialist organisations and businesses on the estate.

Stage one was called *Wandsworth Whispers*. We investigated various ways to reach older people living on the estate and eventually worked with LB Wandsworth’s housing department, ran taster sessions for older people and then set up regular workshops to create and collect stories over a couple of months. We captured the recorded voices and stories of older people. The stories were both fictional and nonfictional with many telling risky, dark, funny stories. We took the recordings out onto the streets of the estate to reach a wide audience as well as two other areas within the borough: Putney and Clapham Junction. We stopped passers-by and asked them to listen to the recordings and then either write a comment, write or record their own story or to add to an existing story. The overwhelming response was how amazing it was to hear an older voice as that voice is/was missing in most peoples’ lives.

Spare Tyre responds to need when considering participatory arts projects. We very quickly realized that any future engagement on the estate needed to assist whole community cohesion, providing fora to have difficult conversations around end of life and disenfranchisement. Our primary participants were older people but we were also encountering diverse people, languages, cultures, religions, gender and age: traveller families, Somalian community, young families, people with addiction and mental health conditions, single working people, young and old. Any future creative engagement had to be inclusive of these communities.

We had made good relationships with older peoples’ club rooms/centres and organisations, the local library and the housing department during stage one. We discussed future options with Wandsworth Arts to achieve the aim of cultural regeneration, with older people at the heart of the project. Alongside cultural regeneration we based the project around health, wellbeing and end of life.

From stage one we learnt that the Alton community is very complex and segregated and this is reflected in how buildings and open spaces on the estate are accessed and used. Therefore we decided that future engagement should take place in open spaces and on the street if we were to reach the 'hidden' people of the Alton. We maintained a neutral presence in the role of facilitators, thereby winning the trust of residents on the estate. We were the interested outsiders wanting to enable a community to become more resilient and for it to acknowledge the skills available to ensure its future resilience.

Stage two was called *Village Green – where strange and magical things can happen*. The aim was to discover skills in the community that people were willing to share or exchange. We set up a gazebo on a patch of green outside the older people's club room. Alongside one side of the green older people lived in sheltered accommodation. Under our gazebo we offered tea, cake and plants to the older people and passers-by in exchange for a conversation. People were very generous with their time. They brought us homemade cakes, helped us set up and take down the gazebo, and took ownership of the project engaging with their community by engaging in conversation with each other. Their responses to our questions were written on coloured paper and hung from wire across the gazebo. *Village Green* became a site-specific live art installation where the older people and wider community came and interacted.

Throughout this stage we wondered how we could honour all that we had experienced, seen and heard. Our solution (stage three) was to set up a radio station as an accessible platform/resource for the Alton community. It fulfilled lots of needs: a source of information, exchange of ideas, debate on sensitive issues, music, plays, stories. *Roehampton Radio* was born. It is a digital platform, with its own domain name, that is currently aiming to become a live radio station and independent company championed, run and programmed by the residents of the Alton estate. It is a potentially powerful, independent and enabling platform for the community crossing barriers and boundaries of age, culture, gender and language. It offers opportunities for outdoor 'open mic' events, recorded episodes, champions and employment. It is available on: [www.mixcloud.com/RoehamptonRadio/mixcloud](http://www.mixcloud.com/RoehamptonRadio/mixcloud)

This participatory arts project has to date required £45K of investment and has engaged 900+ people. Monitoring and evaluation are essential and have to be embedded in the practice. We used NEF's Five Ways to Wellbeing as a way of capturing the wider impacts of the work, and we had to negotiate with our public health funder and make the case that it was a valid way to measure health outcomes. The lack of new technology and transport infrastructure hindered this project but our evaluation added to the regeneration debate and both of these key areas are now being addressed in the regeneration programme. Participatory arts has a valuable role to play in building resilient communities as we have the ability to be effective connectors, take risks and innovate.

(Image: pg.49)

**Arti Prashar is Artistic Director of Spare Tyre Theatre Company.**  
[www.sparetyre.org](http://www.sparetyre.org)

## Senior Building Exploratory Explorers

**Karen Elmes**

The Building Exploratory has been at the forefront of built environment education since 1998. We are a learning and engagement organisation which specialises in creating opportunities for people to learn about architecture and the built environment. In doing so we aim to raise the aspirations of communities and help them develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to participate effectively in local decision-making.

The Building Exploratory's roots are in Hackney, where since 2006 we have been running a group for older people called the *Senior Building Exploratory Explorers (Senior BEEs)*. The *Senior BEEs* come together every two weeks to explore the rich variety of buildings and spaces of East London. We established the group to develop a unique method for involving older people in their local area through social learning activities. These aim to open doors to new experiences but also inspire adults in later life to be involved in influencing and shaping the built environment.

Every year we run three terms of activities for the *Senior BEEs* through which the group engages with themes of interest including: heritage, housing, regeneration and contemporary architecture and design. Themes are explored during specially selected building visits, guided walks, illustrated talks and debates with invited speakers. Over the last nine years the *Senior BEEs* have participated in over 100 visits, tours and discussions. They have experienced local historic buildings, new housing developments, places of worship, schools, theatres, parks and public spaces, galleries and studios, local estates and architects' offices. Recent activities have included a walking tour around a conservation area 'at risk' in Shoreditch to see how new developments impact on heritage; an architect-led tour of the redeveloped St Mary of Eton Church where opinions were divided about the striking tile façade of new housing built alongside the church; a tour of the sports facilities housed within the metal-clad Hackney Marshes Centre, where the group enjoyed learning about the design features of an award winning building they would probably not have visited independently.

Alongside the traditional building visits we look for activities that give the *Senior BEEs* a chance to see the built environment from a different perspective. The group has thus met with local artists whose work is inspired by east London; a wild flower expert who led a walking tour through Hackney Wick and an urban geologist who explained the origins of the stones used to build the City. The emphasis on discovery-based learning underpins the *Senior BEEs'*, they really value having a chance to see new places and meet new people – and these experiences fuel their desire to explore and learn about architecture and the built environment independently.

Although the *Senior BEEs'* main focus is on the built environment in Hackney and East London, their enthusiasm to learn and see more has taken them further afield to experience brutalist architecture at the Barbican, art deco at the Royal Institute of British Architects and modernism at the Royal College of Physicians. London's built environment has proved to be an endless source of inspiration for the group.

The *Senior BEEs* are very aware of the need to develop London's public realm. Walking tours and building visits enable the group to experience the built environment with their peers and this experience has led the group to take a closer look at their surroundings, to articulate how places make them feel and to question how effectively it works or in many cases does not.

The combination of knowledge and an enjoyable group experience helps people to feel better connected to their local area and increases their ownership of the public realm. According to one member of the group: *“It changes your perception of the area. Normally you don’t look at the place you’re in. It’s only when you start looking that you start seeing what’s there.”*

Our activities bring the *Senior BEEs* face-to-face with a host of built environment professionals including those who shape the public realm such as architects, town planners and policy makers. These opportunities not only allow the group to better understand how their area is changing but also give them a chance to take part in the decision making process. They have commented on Area Action Plans in Hackney town centres, joined debates at the GLA about housing for older people and taken part in consultations surrounding the development and legacy of the Olympic Park. In doing so the group is able to voice the perspective of older people and contribute to the shaping of new parts of the city. Taking part in these consultation activities helps to develop members’ confidence to participate in consultation exercises in their own neighbourhoods. A *Senior BEE* told me: *“It’s so much better than some groups for older people because they’re so passive – this is an active group, not just entertainment for a group of oldies.”*

The challenges of running the *Senior BEEs* have changed over the lifespan of the group. The initial challenge of getting the group up and running and attracting participants has become a challenge to accommodate up to 30 regularly participating members. New challenges emerge as group members age, some of our members, for instance, are becoming less mobile which means planning activities that allow everyone to participate.

Securing ongoing funding for the *Senior BEEs* has also been a challenge as funding bodies are not always willing to fund existing activities. As a response we are currently looking at ways to develop the work, building capacity and encouraging members to take on more responsibility for running the group. This is a challenge in itself as there is a reluctance amongst members to pick up the mantle.

Through the *Senior BEEs* the Building Exploratory has learnt about the power of engaging older people with place and the difference it can make to the way people feel about where they live: *“I used to look at the dog shit on the pavements but now I look at the buildings.”* Or in the words of another *Senior BEE*: *“It improves mental health – to be inspired by surrounding.”*

We have learnt that our approach to engaging older people in the built environment is unique and has significant impact on people – their confidence, health, identity and their connection to their community. We have also learnt that our approach has great potential, we have successfully established a new group for older people in Islington, and we are looking at vehicles to extend the reach of our work to empower more older people to help shape the future of the public realm.

(Image: pg.49)

**Karen Elmes is Lifelong Learning Officer at The Building Exploratory, London**  
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## **View From The Top**

### **Susan Langford**

Iconic red London double-decker buses on the 205 route were transformed for the Olympic and Paralympic Games with a vibrant artwork and soundtrack depicting life on *High Street 2012*, the route from the City to the Olympic Park. From June to September 2012 over 2.3 million passenger journeys were made on 205 buses. Untouched by graffiti, the artworks remained up through 2013; millions of people saw them.

*View From The Top* was produced and led by intergenerational arts charity, Magic Me. Based in Tower Hamlets, one of the five Olympic Boroughs, our aim was to share the area's rich history and diversity with visitors and locals, as the East End prepared to greet people from all over the world.

124 children and older adults worked with printmaker Janet Brooke and storyteller/group facilitator Surya Turner over five months from late 2011. Three groups of older people joined forces with three school classes. In each partnership 10 older people and 10 pupils met weekly, at the adults' venues, for five weeks, to explore and record in words and images, local places and people past, present and future. 20 other pupils per class visited workplaces on the High Street interviewing staff, including retired staff who returned to give a historical perspective.

Older participants and pupils worked in school to make printing blocks, from photos and drawings, creating 96 individual prints of a building or object. They then made cut-paper people: historical characters, local celebrities, friends and family. Pupils wrote poetry about their workplace visits. Surya worked with sound artist Dan Scott, creating a soundscape of poetry, street sounds and the tales behind the images, available on [www.magicme.co.uk](http://www.magicme.co.uk)

Pupils measured a bus ceiling and decided minimum font sizes for the artwork. Designer John Wallett created one 9.5 metre panel combining the 96 prints in correct order, with named bus stops to orient passengers. Artworks were printed and installed on 27 buses on the 205 route, in early June 2012.

In total 46 workshops and events involved 95 pupils, 29 older people, 10 business volunteers, 3 Magic Me volunteers and 22 staff in local workplaces, creating a mini-community of participants.

In this way we collaboratively created an artwork and soundtrack which capture the diverse range of architecture and street-life, of a community with an ever-changing demographic profile, experiencing ongoing rebuilding. We aimed to encourage local people and visitors to notice and enjoy the rich detail and historical clues of former uses, in local buildings, as they rode on the first storey on the top of the bus.

We chose our partner organisations deliberately, to include people of many ages, faiths and experiences within the white East End, Jewish, Black British, Bangladeshi, Somali and east European communities. Our partner schools and workplaces were spread along the entire High Street, reflecting the different identities of Aldgate, Whitechapel, Stepney, Mile End and Bow.

A key challenge was scheduling the workshops and visits with such a range of partners. We did this by sheer persistence and great flexibility from all concerned. Once schools saw the benefits to the children's learning and their enthusiasm and hard work on the project, teachers' flexibility and engagement grew.

London 2012 was seen quite negatively by many local people, as a costly, disruptive event with little benefit to them. *High Street 2012*, originally designed as the marathon route to the Stadium, was later rejected as 'not photogenic enough

for television'; Tower Hamlets felt left out. This project enabled participants to think more positively about London 2012; attitudes changed amongst the group as the artwork came together.

Working within bus dimensions and strict fire and safety standards was another significant challenge. Stagecoach managers and drivers were fantastic partners, open to all our requests, however artworks had to be printed and installed by an approved specialist firm. The printer liaised closely with Bus Station managers to schedule installing artworks on 27 buses, without disrupting the 24/7 service. Stagecoach offered us use of the upper deck ceiling to display the artworks, giving a clear run down the central aisle. We explored downstairs spaces, to reach all passengers, but there was just no appropriate place; some older participants could therefore not see their work in situ. A full size version was exhibited at the launch and other venues, and smaller versions distributed to all involved.

The experience of printmaker Janet Brooke was essential to co-ordinate the creation and drying (on washing lines) of 96 prints. To ensure that the prints worked well in combination, we set a limited palette (the five Olympic colours). Everyone chose two background colours and printed in black.

We learnt that businesses can be very generous when you ask them to join in a community activity, with flexibility around timing and lots of notice. Six local workplaces hosted pupils' visits; Allen & Overy volunteers visited the schools helping pupils hone and rehearse their interview questions.

The success of the project led to further exhibitions of the artwork in Allen & Overy's reception, at Rich Mix cultural centre and by invitation at Europe House, Westminster, home of the EU Commission in London, to mark EU Year of Older People 2012.

The intergenerational, cross-cultural participant groups were facilitated by experienced Magic Me artists. Activities brought together people who never normally meet; pupils of Osmani School, with a 95% Muslim intake, partnered Jewish Care's Stepney Community Centre, exchanging stories and skills. 40% of older people 60+ in Tower Hamlets live alone; many older participants experience some social isolation. The project needed their skills, knowledge and creativity and brought new engagement: *"I know when I go out I feel better, but sometimes I just can't get myself together. On this project I have committed to the children, so I make myself go and I am so pleased when I get there and we do things together."* (older participant).

We met our aim of celebrating and introducing participants to the range of opportunities, activities and work available on the High Street. One of the young people involved said: *"At HSBC I met Arif. His job is getting mortgages for people. The bank is stylish, huge and smells nice. To work at HSBC you need to have very good manners"* And another: *"The best thing was going through the bus wash. When a bus goes through, a professional who has done a special test needs to drive it"* And a third: *"The most important thing I learned was how to feed a carrot to a horse so it doesn't eat your fingers off"* (Pupils who visited HSBC, Bow Bus Station and the Police Stables)

(Image: pg.50)

## Outer Places: Inner Voices

Romi Jones

Geoff Sample and I had been plotting a joint project for some months, keen to know how a sound artist and a writer could work together on shared interests: we both live in rural Northumberland, both have a passion for the natural world, both have an interest in the local ageing population (oh, we are getting older too). Then in November 2014, thanks to a partnership with a local charity, Bell View, Belford, we were able to develop a credible project plan that resulted in part-funding from Arts Council England.

If the headlines are to be believed, older people feel isolated, remote and disconnected from their communities with an increasing dependence on the state. We wanted to collect their words and voices in ways that would give a wider audience an insight into the emotional landscape of ageing in a rural, northern landscape; to identify a sense of belonging or an experience of isolation.

Exploring the theme of 'where we belong' during the nine-month project with fifty older people led to conversations about home, ageing, community, birds, landscape and the sea. For many, their love of the hills and the sea is a silent backdrop to the social connections with family, friends and community which is of the greatest importance in their daily lives.

*The Sea? I never give it much thought.*

*The sea is always there. It just belongs to you, doesn't it?*

Some people articulated these themes in poetry or prose, some through stories of growing up or working as shepherds up on the hills, farm workers and fishermen. Others had more recent narratives of moving to Northumberland for a renewed later life and attachment to its history and natural world. Words and sounds collated during the development phase of talking, listening, writing and recording were then crafted into two parts for the final installation: the soundscape and the printed words. We wanted the words to be alive in sound and print- not tucked away in a pamphlet or a book - so eventually we chose to print the words onto Japanese plywood plaques. These were hung on a wooden structure based loosely on the design of an 'ema' – traditionally a shrine for Japanese prayers and aspirations. This allowed space for the forty-five-minute soundscape to drift between the print.

One of the biggest challenges was enabling participants to articulate their emotional response to the landscape or seascape. People who have lived here over eighty years clearly don't need to express this in emotional terms- but do so in the stories they tell or the lives they have lived.

*I worked on the farm and with sheep in the hills,  
but I always liked to see the wildlife – foxes, deer, hare.*

One of the most productive and successful elements of the projects has been in its limitations. With minimal resources we created something out of almost nothing except the wide range of words and voices of older people and the sounds of Northumberland, which included woodpeckers, boats in Craster harbour, words written from the frustrations of ageing, stories from the beach. Collaborating across different art forms has been interesting as we familiarised ourselves with other ways of working.

The final installation *Outer Places: Inner Voices* was shown in both community and arts venues in autumn 2015 and attracted significant publicity. Audiences came from three sources: firstly families and friends of participants and the local community for the initial installation at Bell View Resource Centre. Secondly, the North East has a vibrant arts and literary community who attended the three week display at The



Watchtower Gallery in Berwick-upon-Tweed. Thirdly, national and international interest from 'Arts and Health' networks and from the international community of acoustic ecologists who followed the project blog. From across the world, responses to the blog have been 'Wow- love those voices'. It is so gratifying to find that connection on a common theme: [www.fragmentsne70.wordpress.com](http://www.fragmentsne70.wordpress.com)

How lucky were we to work with people with such acceptance of us with our weird sound equipment and bags of writing prompts such as fragments from the beach. How amazing to find a 96-year-old retired miner who had just started painting and writing poetry about his experience in the pit:

*Step into a big iron gage,  
Then down, down, down,  
To the black earth below*

and a woman who had started writing poetry in later life:

*When I turned 80 I became poetical.  
I met a man, fell in love with him, then I fell in love with poetry*

Geoff and I learnt from the participants too- how they accept the things they cannot change, maintain friendships over decades, have little material ambitions, respect family, feel a sense of belonging to Northumberland. We are confident that the project fostered a sense of achievement and recognition for each of the participants, acknowledging older people as creative individuals able to contribute to the culture of the county; challenging myths and stereotypes of elders as passive dependents.

*The breeze blows,  
It cannot blow my dreams away,  
My dreams are here to stay,  
In my Northumberland.*

(Image: pg.50)

**Romi Jones is a prose writer with extensive experience of combining creative writing with community involvement.**  
[www.fragmentsne70.wordpress.com](http://www.fragmentsne70.wordpress.com)

## **Soapbox**

### **Michele Fuirer**

SOAPBOX; *noun* - a box or crate used as a makeshift stand by a public speaker: a soapbox orator; with reference to a situation in which someone expresses strong opinions about a particular subject.

Soapbox at Tate Britain is a space for debate and discussion on life and art for people near or beyond the age of 60. The project started in autumn 2013 and was inspired by, and came out of *Silver Action*. Hundreds of women over the age of sixty participated in artist Suzanne Lacy's performance *Silver Action* in The Tanks at Tate Modern. The women all took part in activism and protest movements, from the Greenham Common Peace Camp to the Miss World demonstrations, and Lacy invited them to share their stories in a series of workshops, culminating in a day-long public performance. The artist described it as being "a project about discrimination and inequality".

Following this inspirational event we wanted to continue to make time and space to listen the voices of older people as valued, active and critically engaged citizens using the gallery as public space. Soapbox is situated within a range of opportunities to take part in debate and discussion within the Public Programme at Tate. However, it has the specific intention of being driven by and for the participants themselves. The structure of the project is responsive to the participants, subject to change and in this form Soapbox represents an impulse towards an imaginative redrawing of civic space.

Each month a different topic is presented for debate, with suggestions generated from within the ideas and interests of the group. Topics have included: Does charity begin at home? What's British about Tate Britain? The ideal and the real: can we have positive representations of aging in portraits and the media?

Our meetings start in a studio space for tea and introductions and then move into the gallery where it becomes a 'live' event. The discussion takes place in different areas of the collection displays at Tate Britain, with the selected artwork acting as a provocation and a way of opening up and expanding ideas around the topic. "There's something very special about talking in the space with the art, right next to the art." (Soapbox participant)

The live aspect and the blend between structured topic and informal debate seems to work well for the participants: "Oh my word! Just up my street! I was wary of joining an established group, but by 12.30 pm I was relaxed; with new friends; new visions coming from a healthy to and fro. Great venue too! We were all fired up and quite noisy by the end of it." (Soapbox participant). The sense of working live in the public space of the gallery creates a dynamic to the discussion: "I think it's great the way people's ideas come out so quickly." "Those who wanted to speak were listened to." Since the structure of each session can be different, one of our challenges is to balance between openness and structure.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. As the museum faces up to the challenge of playing a more dominant role in the public sphere, new forms of participant involvement emerge, an example of which is Soapbox. As one participant told us: "In the last ten years it's all opened out – because there's more on offer now. Where I was growing up in East London seventy years ago no one ever went to an art gallery – it was for 'them up there.'"

(Image: pg.51)

**Michele Fuirer is Curator of Public Programmes at Tate. [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)**

## **A Journey Through the Projects**

*Age-Friendly Angel* aims to celebrate and listen to the opinions and ideas of local people over 55 to make the Angel town centre in Islington, London, more 'age-friendly'. For a week during January 2015 the partnership hosted the first ever *Age-Friendly Angel Festival*: a week-long celebration that showcased a range of creative and exciting activities for local people over 55 - from salsa dancing to solid perfume making and tea at the Hilton. **(Page 6)**



Age Friendly Angel Workshop  
2015  
Photographer: Eleanor Shipman



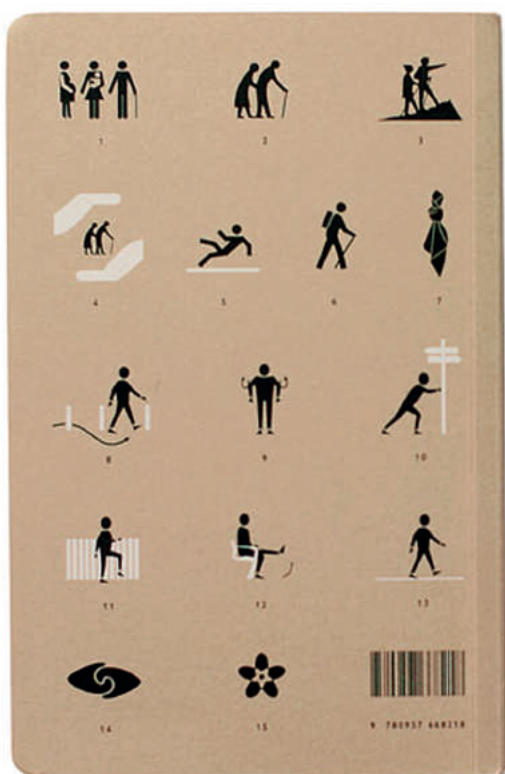
Pollard Thomas Edwards & OWCH  
Workshop  
2011  
Photographer: Rejash Bhela/PTE

We had the opportunity to work with Older Women's Co Housing (OWCH) on the collaborative design of their new homes – 25 one, two and three bedroom flats, a common house and guest flat – in Barnet. We put a series of workshops together to give the women the tools to propose, understand and shape the emerging building form. **(Page 7)**

“What happens if the letter doesn’t get us anywhere?” I asked. Someone else said: “We should have a petition, get everyone to sign it – yes – we should have a meeting, and everyone at the meeting signs it, and hands out leaflets!” “And what happens if that doesn’t work? They get hundreds of petitions. What if they just chuck it in the bin?” Still another person said: “We should go down to Downing Street!” **(Pages 10-11)**



Bolder Voices- Ain't Gonna Close Our Centre Down  
2013  
Photographer: Bhavesh Hindocha



The *Alternative Age-Friendly® Handbook* is a new pocket-sized reference written for the creative urban practitioner. Designed to be used when out and about in the ‘urban field’, it offers up thoughts, tools and practical tips to encourage new ways of rethinking and reshaping older people’s neglected relationship to urban space. **(Pages 8-9)**

An Alternative Age-Friendly® Handbook, back cover  
2014  
Copyright: Sophie Handler / Objectif

Counterpoint Dance Company performed in two public spaces in Edinburgh as part of the Fringe Festival in 2012: *"I always have a great time rehearsing in London but often have to scoot away early to do other things, so it was a real treat to take the time out to really connect with each other on the train and in our accommodation in Edinburgh. It was just amazing to be part of an international arts festival"* Helen Godson, company member. **(Pages 14-15)**

Counterpoint Dance Company  
Grass Market Performance,  
Edinburgh Festival  
2012  
Photographer: Liam Morgan



We invited local people over 55 to a series of creative sessions to explore and share their imaginative responses to Islington Council's planning document through talking, walking, drawing, sign-making and photography. The group also hosted a market stall where they conducted vox-pop interviews with local people as well as created temporary sign posts for real and imaginary local places. The feedback and results gathered through CALLY RSVP were fed back as a report to Islington Council. **(Pages 12-13)**

Lene West, Public Wisdom Group, CALLY RSVP  
2013

Photographer: Eleanor Shipman

As the music warped, the audience was presented with an alien-like transformation, a shedding of the familiar clothing of the 'old woman', a stripping of shawls, bonnets and silk handbags (which were threateningly tossed toward the audience), crinolines and bonnets turned inside out to reveal the sleek silhouette of this swarm of queen bees, with a sting in their tail, topped by yellow marigolds, suggestive of hard graft and the surgical. **(Pages 16-17)**



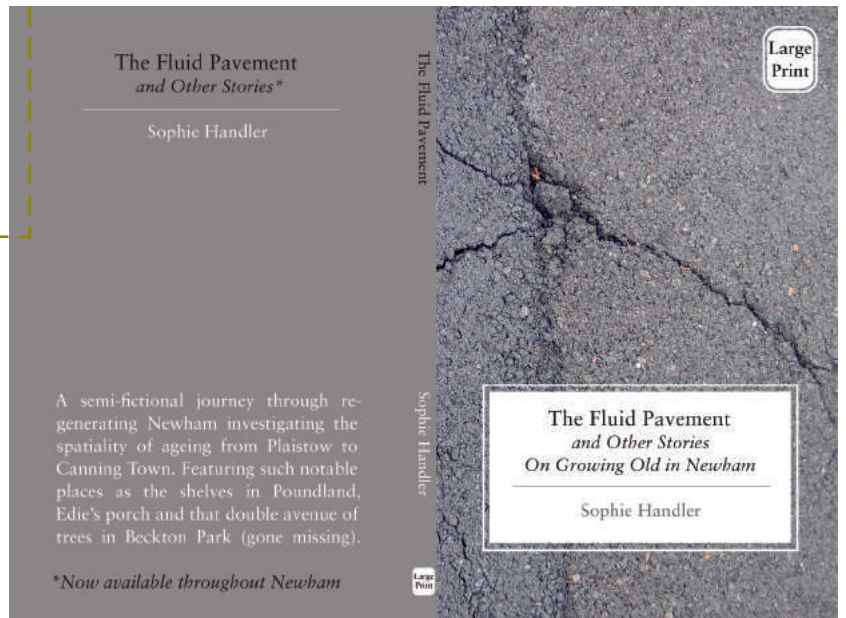
Cracking the Crinoline: Faversham Marketplace  
2015  
Photographer: Agnes Evans-Forrest

Through improvised performance events in public spaces Grand Gestures subtly disrupt dominant ideas about older people, their representation and their occupation of public space, as well as subverting taken-for-granted ideas about who gets to dance and what it means to dance. **(Pages 18-19)**



Grand Gestures Dance  
Company  
Remembrance-  
film still from Dwell  
2014  
Photographer: Frances  
Anderson

*The Fluid Pavement* is a large print psychogeographic novel on ageing that began its life back in 2005 as a way of addressing older people's neglected relationship to public space. It was a first attempt to question the ways in which older people become, progressively, less visible within the public realm, with age. **(Pages 20-21)**



The Fluid Pavement  
Sophie Handler  
2007

*Hackney Circle* is a free membership scheme for Hackney's over-60s, which provides a range of special offers in cafes, restaurants and cultural venues in and around Dalston Square, alongside a programme of free events in these mixed-age high street venues. **(Pages 22-23)**



Hackney Circle:  
Cooking demo at Dalston  
Eastern Curve Garden  
2014  
Photographer: Heather  
McDonough



*In-Kind* developed into a one-to-one performance in the back of an ex-military ambulance. The ambulance toured throughout February 2014, with carers, health professionals, politicians and general public invited to spend twenty-five minutes in the back of the ambulance with performer Erika Poole, herself a carer and local resident. During the project I worked with a small group of collaborators on a regular basis but also led workshops, screenings and events with wider participatory audiences. Most of the people I worked with were women aged over fifty, long-term carers looking after elderly parents, disabled, mentally ill and/or dying partners and/or children. **(Pages 24-25)**



*In-Kind*  
Performance documentation  
2014  
Photographer: Sarah Cole



'Bañada en Lágrimas #14,' Helena Almeida, (2009), framed black and white photograph, 175 x 114.4 x 4.7cm  
'Bañada en Lágrimas #15,' Helena Almeida, (2009), framed black and white photograph, 175 x 114.4 x 4.7cm  
Untitled, Helena Almeida (2010), video, b&w, sound, 18', edition of 5  
Photographer: Alan Dimmick

What can we learn from an earlier generation of contemporary visual artists? *Live Your Questions Now*, in the Mackintosh Museum, The Glasgow School of Art in 2011, was a unique survey exhibition of Scottish, UK and international contemporary artists over 60 years old. The venue itself was 102 that year: an arts and crafts inspired building designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. **(Pages 26-27)**



The *Community21* project works with communities to collaboratively design and use 'accessible technology' in ways, which help to unify and exchange ideas and experiences between young and old people in inclusive and engaging ways. One key method involves using 'ageing apps' on smart phone and tablet devices. The young people photographed their faces and applied an ageing effect. The funny and engaging process of ageing themselves was not only quick and good fun but it provided striking images of the young people that united them with their older collaborators. **(Pages 30-31)**

Using Apps to Create Empathy  
Community21  
2014  
Image: Nick Gant / Community21



Collaborative Banner Making  
Public Wisdom TAKEOVER  
2014  
Photographer: Eleanor Shipman

Part summer fete, part anarchic protest, the *Public Wisdom TAKEOVER* used a soft approach to tackle some tough questions around the perception of older people in the public realm: How are older people perceived by the general public? How do older people perceive themselves? How would older people like to be treated in public space? How would older people like to interact with public space?

**(Pages 28-29)**



Roehampton Radio Roadshow  
2014  
Image: Spare Tyre Theatre Company

*Roehampton Radio* was born. It is a digital platform, with its own domain name, that is currently aiming to become a live radio station and independent company championed, run and programmed by the residents of the Alton estate. It is a potentially powerful, independent and enabling platform for the community crossing barriers and boundaries of age, culture, gender and language. It offers opportunities for outdoor 'open mic' events, recorded episodes, champions and employment. **(Pages 32-33)**

The *Senior BEEs* come together every two weeks to explore the rich variety of buildings and spaces of east London. We established the group to develop a unique method for involving older people in their local area by providing social learning opportunities; which not only open doors to new experiences but also inspire adults in later life to be involved in influencing and shaping the built environment. **(Pages 34-35)**



Senior BEEs Tour of the Barbican  
2010  
Image: The Building Exploratory

View from the Top: Launch Event  
Magic Me  
2012  
Image: Helen Jermyrn



Iconic red London double-decker buses on the 205 route were transformed for the Olympic and Paralympic Games with a vibrant artwork and soundtrack depicting life on High Street 2012, the route from the City to the Olympic Park. *View From The Top* was produced and led by intergenerational arts charity, Magic Me. Based in Tower Hamlets, one of the five Olympic Boroughs, our aim was to share the area's rich history and diversity with visitors and locals, as the East End prepared to greet people from all over the world. **(Pages 36-37)**

Hill Sheep in Northumberland  
2015  
Image: Geoff Sample



If the headlines are to be believed, older people feel isolated, remote and disconnected from their communities. We wanted to collect their words, emotions, voices that would give a wider audience an insight into the emotional landscape of ageing in a very rural landscape, to confirm either a sense of belonging or an experience of isolation. **(Pages 38-39)**



Soapbox group at Tate Britain discussing a work by Mark Wallinger 'Where There's Muck', 1985.  
Photo Dominique Chan

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. As the museum faces up to the challenge of playing a more dominant role in the public sphere, new forms of participant involvement emerge, an example of which is Soapbox, a space for debate and discussion on life and art for people near or beyond the age of 60 at Tate Britain, London. **(Page 40)**

## **About Cubitt**

Cubitt is a small arts charity in Angel, Islington. Consisting of studios, gallery and an education programme, Cubitt is a unique, artist-led organisation that provides opportunities for emerging curators, artists and local people.

Cubitt Education, our local community programme, was established in 2007 with the aim of developing long-term projects that meet local needs. Cubitt Education now operates a large network of regular artist-led activities in local schools, community centres, and youth centres. Our work aims to support social cohesion whilst enabling individuals to live culturally rich and socially fulfilled lives. We are funded by, and work closely with, Cripplegate Foundation and Islington Giving, whilst also carrying out our own participatory research.

## **About the Public Wisdom Programme**

*Public Wisdom* is an action-research programme at Cubitt, exploring productive connections and relationships between older people and the public realm. *Public Wisdom* was launched in 2011 in response to a series of in-depth conversations and discussions with local older people. One issue kept returning throughout these conversations- a sense of being invisible in public spaces and public life.

In the past four years we have: brought together a *Public Wisdom Group* of local older people who are consulted on major planning policy in the local area; held outdoor events and takeovers led by and for older people- reclaiming public spaces for leisure, entertainment and social interaction; led a variety of educational activities and projects for local older people around regeneration, commissioning public art and the built environment; and initiated a campaign to transform Angel into the UK's first 'Age Friendly Town Centre' in partnership with Angel AIM (the business improvement district), Age UK Islington, and Claremont Project. The first three years of the programme were funded by the Baring Foundation, and it continues with support from The Monument Trust and Arts Council England.

<http://cubittartists.org.uk>

## About the Editor

Daniel Baker is an independent artist, anthropologist, writer and educator, he is a Winston Churchill Fellow and in 2013 was awarded a Mayor's Civic Award for his contribution to the local area of Islington. He led the development of a large-scale local grassroots education and community programme at Cubitt between 2007 and 2016. Daniel is currently developing an interdisciplinary studio in Hackney, London, that will bring together the arts, education, anthropology and social action:

[www.socialmaterial.org](http://www.socialmaterial.org)

## Special Thanks To

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In memory of Deirdre Weir, who was an active and passionate member of the *Public Wisdom Group* at Cubitt.

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