Paper: New Tides conference: University of Malta, 2015

**‘A Marvelous Experiment’:[[1]](#endnote-1) Exploring Ideas of Temporary Community in Intergenerational Performance Projects in East London**

Over six years, I and a group of artists all connected to the London arts charity Magic Me, led four performance projects that brought together older people aged over 70, local school children aged 9 and 10, and Drama students in their early twenties. Crucial to the project was the intention that all participants would have equal access to the creative activities, and that the act of bringing together different generations would disrupt age definitions and assumptions.

Important to the context of the project is the multi-cultural multi-faith city of London, what Peter Hall, Professor of Planning and Regeneration, describes as a ‘dynamic polycentric city region.’[[2]](#endnote-2) This dynamism is revealed through energy and inventiveness but also through tensions and anxiety about social cohesion. The understanding and experience of community is inevitably both crucial and contested in such a city. Through a close reading of moments within these projects, I argue that it is in the detail of the interactions between all the people involved in these projects that we can see the enacting of connectivity that is the fabric of community. I propose that these temporary groupings, the chunk of time, space and place that we call ‘a project’, is a temporary community. Though living in close geographical proximity, the participants had very few places in which they, Jewish elders, Bangladeshi origin children and students from across the UK could meet. Through the project individuals had the chance to play with identity, not aiming for homogeneity or perfection, but for a chance to see each other beyond the narratives dominant outside the room.

 I suggest that it may be that the very temporariness of a project encourages the individuals within it to experiment with connecting to people who look and sound different, who move differently, have different histories; it is a place to learn to be more mobile, more able to move beyond the front door of one’s habitual identity to discover who else you might be, who else you might meet.

1. A participant, commenting on the project, described it a ‘a marvelous experiment’. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Peter Hall, *London Voices, London Lives*: *Tales from a Working Capital*. Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007, p. 8

Sue Mayo

s.mayo@gold.ac.uk

www.magicme.co.uk [↑](#endnote-ref-2)