



Thoughts for would-be performers of *Man with Mirror*. Film performance by Guy Sherwin. First made and performed in 1976.

To whoever likes the idea of making your own version of this film performance. A few notes to help you understand my thinking – then and now.

The initial idea was to record film of me moving a mirror in an outdoor space (e.g. a rural landscape) and to project it onto me moving the same mirror in an indoor space (e.g. a cinema or theatre space). It was to take those illusory images from one space and to play with them in another, by alternately disrupting and re-making the illusion, while drawing attention to the space of the performance – a kind of dialogue between exterior / interior, as well as illusion / material.

However, since that time I have also performed it several times in an outdoor space: on a beach with my back to the sea; in a long London garden with trees some distance behind me; even in a prison exercise yard in A Coruña, Spain. Also in an unusual indoor space – a small shop, with my back to the street-level window. And each time I'm aware that the space might be having a considerable effect on how the piece is understood.

So it occurs to me now that many other approaches are also possible, for example to record in an urban space, such as a street or car park; alternatively an indoor space – such as a shopping mall, or even a bedroom. And then to project it in some very different kind of space, or perhaps in the same space in which it was filmed.

So, all those things are possible, and untried. It is completely your choice how to approach it.

All this leads to another set of possibilities, that of the identity of the filmed performer and of the live performer. Lucas and Louise have established a lovely precedent here, i.e. working with father or mother as the filmed performer with a view to a performance at some time in the future when they will be the same age as father or mother. And why not try it on grandmother too?

There is also the possibility that someone might want to perform with the original film of me, if I were to produce an extra print with that in mind.

Bear in mind that these thoughts have come a long way from my original intentions as an artist, when the idea that I might still be performing it in my 70s was seen as a rather sick joke.

After a recent performance of *Man with Mirror* in Zagreb a young woman approached me and asked, "But why on earth did you film it in the first place?" After some thought I realised that she was seeing the performance entirely in biological terms, as a reflection on ageing. It's true that I'm interested in time in all of its aspects, but a reflection on ageing wasn't on my mind when I made the film.

The film was recorded silent and has since been performed silent, except for the very first performance made in the year it was shot, at the London Film-Makers' Co-op, when the LFMC was at the piano factory in Chalk Farm. Here I performed with an ambient soundtrack, taken on the same London heathland as the film was

recorded – and played back through a loudspeaker placed at the bottom of a deep flower pot and pointed from the ceiling down towards the mirror – an ad-hoc directional speaker. This had the aim of bouncing the sound off the mirror/screen and around the space, in parallel with the movements of reflected light.

You are welcome to try that, perhaps using more advanced technology. However I draw the line at performing to music, although I must confess I have even done that once, in Vienna when I was accompanied by Kaffe Matthews on electronics. But best to perform it silent, or with an ambient track taken from the same space.

Now to the question of medium. The original film was made with three cassettes of Super 8. Nothing was thrown away. My partner Anna Latimer helped me line up the camera – thanks! and then must have magically disappeared as I haven't yet seen her in the footage. The Super 8 film was later enlarged to 16mm, courtesy of a grant sourced by Hang Jun Lee who planned to show it in a large space in Seoul. 16mm projection puts out a lot more light.

However I am not a purist about the medium being used – all have advantages – since the idea isn't really about the medium in the sense of its physical material. The main focus is on the screen. Hence it would be possible to shoot the

piece on video. However the disadvantage here comes at the point of projection since it's important that I turn on and off the projector (activating myself as it were) and this action on a film projector is far more satisfying than activating a video clip. Also a video black is never black, but grey, and video projection is boringly ubiquitous. By contrast a super 8 projector is quiet and gives a feeling of intimacy. A 16mm projector feels like it has more serious intent.

So, dear performer, these are the many variables for you to consider in the re-making, or development, of this piece.

A couple of thoughts about the performance. I used to wear a white T-shirt, thinking it would act as a kind of second screen. Around 2006/7 (?) I switched to wearing a black T-shirt, being obviously cooler.

And when lining up the film you don't even need to hold the mirror. Just hold your hands the width of the mirror and make sure the projection light covers the top of your head. Any fine adjustments about lining up can be made during performance. The performance also works better (I am told) when there is a deep space behind me as performer, so that

the parts of the image not caught by the mirror/screen fall some way off and out of focus (such as in the long garden). Use the mirror to gauge from those clues which movements to make.

How do I feel about you performing this work and your own variation of it? I'm happy that you want to give it a go. Incidentally, you get more mileage out of it if you start young.

I do like to be informed if you are planning a performance. It's nice to know. My email is [guy.k.sherwin@gmail.com](mailto:guy.k.sherwin@gmail.com) So just let me know where and when it is happening. Also if you write to me I can answer any questions you might have.

Also of course, please credit me as the originator of the initial idea. You are the interpreter, and have the freedom, as Malcolm LeGrice put it so well, to perform it in the spirit of jazz.

– GS September 2026 (50 years on)

