

**DEVOTED AND DISGRUNTLED  
NORTH EAST**

**30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009**

**What are we going to do about theatre?**

Issue number	Title
1	What happens to directors – continue to thrive and collaborate?
2	How to set up a practice based theatre network?
3	Why do we keep ticking boxes?
4	How can venues support each other, and North East touring companies and artists more?
5	How do we find the right support for new and emerging artists or groups?
6	On our own – How does an individual enter this world? Independence / community.
7	How do you define authorship in devised and collaborative theatre making: who owns the work?
8	Why are venue programmers so hard to get hold of?
9	The Edinburgh Fringe Festival – is it worth it?
10	How do we make the theatre open to all and not just a middle class enclave?
11	Booking a national tour – introducing work to new venues and audiences.
12	Are the devoted interested in seeing each other's works? How far would you / they travel to see other work? Is it important?
13	How do we stop starting work by thinking about what we can't do rather than what we can do?

Issue Number	Title
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17	New media / Technology: do we have to?
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21	Arts funding in the North East
22	Is the arts scene in the North East full of cliques
23	I think digital technology is really exciting. Why do I think it's someone else's responsibility to explore it?
24	How do we get the Arts Council to best support our needs and not just tick their boxes
25	What is the difference between: cultural diversity, internationalism and interculturalism
26	Linking dance and theatre. How? Why?
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Issue Number	Title
28	What should theatre writers be writing now in 2009?
29	Some of the best work is NOT happening in the so-called professional theatre! Discuss...
30	Do you want to work with gay men?
31	Why do actors often work longer hours for less pay than administrators?
32	Who are we doing it for?
33	Theatre should be funnier.
34	Making the break to do my own work – how do I find the time / space / money?
35	Puppetry and the devising process, getting them in from the start
36	How can we make theatre more accessible for people with disabilities?
37	Where are all the stage managers in the North East?
38	How best do we give ourselves a kick up the butt to get started? And why is it easier not to?
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40	TBC (Actors Centre)
41	Will the North East ever be more than a stepping stone for professionals to move on from?

Issue Number	Title
42	What shall we tell the Arts Council
43	Craft vs Bodging? Discuss
44	What shall we do?
45	How can we have a more honest discussion about quality?
46	The north east produces the lowest proportion of national touring theatre of any of the English regions. What's stopping us from putting our work on a national stage?
47	If there was a dedicated 'space' for theatre makers in the north east what would it look like?

**Issue number:** 001

**Issue:** What happens to directors – continue to thrive and collaborate?

**Convener(s):** Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh

**Participants:** Erica Whyman, Annie Rigby, Peter Latham, Man with the glasses interested in film and lady with blond hair...

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Associate directors – how to enable them to associate with a venue, company etc. so that it is not only about being secure financially but rather about how they can nourish the and be nourished by the experience over a set period of time and place.

Directors are entrepreneurial and because of this they take on other roles in the process such as being producers and in actual fact how many weeks do we end up in the act of directing?

Directors are cheap! In the course of 5 days there is a lot of value for money to be gained.

A space where we can as directors welcome each other during or outside of production to become familiar with one another's rehearsal processes.

Venues as hubs for directors to come together to make work and collaborate and cascade their craft and practice.

Directors often can become the point of contact for emergencies such as the set on Christmas eve – this doesn't have to be the case but can be!

Directors to engage in critical conversations without the backdrop of it impacting funding being cut or a national issue.

Time for process reflection from a peer to peer point of view not always mentor to mentee but also going the other way – for example what am I like in the rehearsal room?

The timing on feedback is not useful four days before the tech – more useful for when the visioning is happening so it can be meaningful.

Niche companies such as open clasp in niche spaces – where do we show our work, limited number of venues, actual theatre venues, looking beyond these spaces.

Being articulate about our work to fit spaces and places.

The urge to make work for a director must come from a place to have a conversation with audiences.

The lonely aspect of the work of the director in making the work you want to make for who you want to make it for as your identity shifts the audience may not be in the place that you are.

Support structures to enable directors to become invisible – to be a good director making things work.

The bottle neck of opportunity for directors in a place making it possible for directors to come from other regions to nourish the ecology of a place, making us more mobile and to also stay in a place.

We need to more open minded about success – brave to acknowledge financial loss it is about what the audience want – for example a small audience that is thrilled is better than a large bored audience.

Partnership strengths is being able to make things happen – self sufficient companies make the easier for venues but it is not the only way.

Mixing with other directors to find our artistic extremes sometimes this is our most interesting work whether it is solo or collaborative – space to acknowledge you make work in your own image and that that image is not static.

Directing new writing that is good sometimes yields a small audience how do you tell others that it is good to attract more audiences.

Small audiences engaged range of issues.

Spaces audit with a directors audit an audiences audit – this discovery of the landscape to mutually inform and create new opportunities to make work that is exciting.

Fringe theatre in Newcastle the funding will follow the work making new structures of opportunity.

Joan Littlewood is an example of not wanting the same space forever.

Buildings to endorse other spaces so directors can engage with them – it shows a confidence in the satellite space.

Star and Shadow space in Byker – Cumberland Arms socialist politicized spaces for new work and artists to collect and make work.

Spaces ranging from customs house, arc etc used in different ways by directors who may connect with a space where one director may not.

A model for directors to talk about spaces to make their work.

Directors to come together to talk about the work we want to tour and it toured in a range of spaces – making it work with the infrastructures that exist but to also challenge this structure so it can enable the work to be shared.

Before the finance to talk about the vision of the work being informed by the venue to connect with where it will be made – relationships.

Directors are key to articulating the work to be seen by audiences not from a marketing point of view but from an audience point of view – the compelling artistic element that will make a connection.

Market informed finance success measured by the money – money being the factor for the work being a success – this should not be the only factor we need to review this.

Making work that makes you say I WILL NEVER FORGET THIS a meaningful impact.

Being canny about when to make money the balance of corporate and public sector and art – make the money when we can.

Making use of other theatre directors when they are in the region as a dialogue a mutual curiosity and welcome to share craft even when the director is from the region – opening up dialogue for creative exchange. Diversity makes for an interesting landscape so share experiences.



Small interventions a few days for directors to share their craft – practically and by means of discussion.

Informal network to create new opportunities choice of your identity as a director as it evolves – there is a need to explore this further and to establish a network. There is a need for a directors laboratory.

**Issue number:** 002

**Issue:** How to set up a practice based theatre network?

**Convener(s):** Geraldine Ling, Boo Croce - Lawnmowers Theatre Company

**Participants:** Adele Evitt, Oscar Watson, Chris Moad, Martine D'Ellard, Ann Ridley, Lucy Ridley, John Hoggarth, Ria Parry, Paul Harman, Sarah Kemp, Molly Barrett, Nazli Tabatabai - Khatambakhsh

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

- WE TALKED ABOUT SETTING UP PRACTICAL SESSIONS ON THE LAST FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH. THESE WOULD PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PRACTITIONERS TO EXCHANGE PRACTICAL WORKING METHODS AND TO NETWORK. Workshops already offered by members of this group are:

MAY 09      *MULTI SENSORY THEATRE WORKSHOP/ DISCUSSION*  
MARTINE D'ELLARD

JUNE 09      *ROBERT LEPAGE PRACTICAL WORKSHOP*  
THEATRE SANAS FRONTIERS

OCT 09      *INTERCULTURAL ARTS*  
OSCAR WATSON

NOV 09      *USES OF GAMES AND EXERCISES*  
LAWNMOWERS & ALI CAMPBELL

FEB 10      *WORKING WITH NEW WRITING DEVELOPMENT/ PRODUCT*  
JOHNHOGGARTH

MARCH 10 *TBC BOAL, THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED*  
LAWNMOWERS

**PLEASE ADD ANY WORKSHOPS YOU MAY WISH TO RUN (workshops held on the last Friday of the month)**

**July 09**

Aug 09  
Sept09  
Jan 10  
April 10

- WE TALKED ABOUT CHALLENGES WITH THE REGION BEING OVER SUCH A LARGE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA
- WE EXCHANGED EMAILS TO BEGIN THE NETWORKING -

PEOPLE WILL PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFO IN THEIR EMAILS

1. WHAT WORK THEY DO
  2. WHAT PEOPLE COULD OFFER
  3. WHAT PEOPLE WANT
  4. WHAT NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES EXIST ALREADY
- BRAINSTORMED WHAT NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES ALREADY EXIST IN THE NORTH EAST

Empty Space  
I in 3 at Northern Stage  
Arts Council (sustained Theatre)  
New writing North (live Theatre?)  
Cloud 9 Newsletter

**PLEASE ADD TO THIS**

- ***PRACTICE THAT EXISTS – PLEASE ADD ANY YOU KNOW OF***

Nationa Youth Theatre offer 12 workshare days  
Young Vic – Genesis Programme  
Actors Centre - Manchester  
ARCADEA ( disability arts regional network)

**PLEASE ADD YOUR NAME AND EMAIL IF YOU WISH TO BE INVOLVED IN THE NETWORK**

[Adele.evitt@btinternet.com](mailto:Adele.evitt@btinternet.com)  
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Issue number: 003

**Issue: Why do we keep ticking boxes?**

**Convener(s):** Jo Cundall

**Participants:** Dora Frankle, Gez Casey, Katie Hammond, Richard Bliss, Gary Kitching, Oscar Watson

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Questions raised: Do we tick the boxes for the right reasons? Should we blow them apart? Did the boxes come first, or do they stem from the general public: 'how much did that cost? We could have built a school classroom for that'

Funders should talk to the creative makers about creative evaluation. At the moment, the makers have to make the work and evaluate it – these are very different skills!

Agreement that we need the boxes too – we should be accountable, and there is only a certain amount of money out there

The boxes need to come from the grass roots, not imposed by government

Funders should take responsibility for the evaluation

Boxes can be bent! Work can tick them all, but the quality is lacking. **BOXES SHOULDN'T REPLACE QUALITY**

Boxes are often national – don't take in to account regional differences

A box can sometimes undermine an activity – seems like an artist is doing it to tick a box, not because of a genuine engagement/excitement about work. **BUT** boxes can be good to bring issues to the fore

Why can't we have a stream of consciousness evaluation process some times?

Boxes = labels. Compartmentalisation of work; can hide/reduce complexity and idiosyncrasies'

Audience feedback = anonymous boxes can promote honesty!

The ACE Grants for Arts form is miles behind the actual process of making work

We can learn from evaluation – maybe realize that we haven't created the work (or message??) that we thought we had

\*\*\*\*\*WE CAN KEEP TICKING THE BOXES, BUT LET'S COLLECTIVELY AGREE TO WRITE OUTSIDE THEM TOO! FUNDERS WILL TAKE NOTICE EVENTUALLY! ANOTATE, EMBELLISH, DECORATE, QUANTIFY!!\*\*\*\*\*

Arts as tourism: Ticking boxes ends with the bamboo bridge! Large numbers of people 'engaged' massive amounts of money spent.

The education/schools box needs to support teachers, not replace them

What happens when the 'world class' experts parachute in? What impact does that have on starving local artists of cash? Are the 'expert world class artists' just those with the best PR?

How do we engage with more peer to peer evaluation rather than form filling?  
Can we learn from the kind that happens in universities?

Artists won't apply for funding because of forms – 'interpreters' to work between the artists and the funders

Arts administrators' exist because of artists

Use communities and arts community to assess work, by seeing it

Without the box, how are people answerable?

Arts Council is a service – they should be serving us and the current funding process doesn't

**Issue number:** 004

**Issue:** How can venues support each other, and North East touring companies and artists more?

**Convener(s):** Helen Green, Washington Arts Centre

**Participants:**

Annabel Turpin, ARC, Stockton on Tees (Notes taken by Annabel Turpin)

Ben Fletcher-Watson, Dance Base

Mark Mulqueen, ACE

Diann Allenby, CTC

Molly Barrett, theatre maker

Helen McBride, freelance arts manager

Edmund Nicholls, Northern Stage

Erica Whyman, Northern Stage

Roma Yagnik, Open Clasp Theatre Company

Sarah Kemp, Theatre sans Frontiere

Natalie Querol, Empty Space

Phelim McDermott, Improbable

Nick Sweeting, Improbable

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

**Venue-to-venue support:**

- Venues need to share their learning – on all issues – more.
- For effective venue support, shared touring etc. programmers need to have shared belief/trust in work – this can only arise through discussion, seeing work together etc.
- To facilitate this, venues should invite each other to see work in their venues.
- A venues meeting, region-wide, should be organised to help share learning etc.
- This could – at some stage - include a ‘pitching session’ for artists and companies

- Venues could (and some do) offer reciprocal comps to encourage staff to see work in other venues.

### **Venue support for artists/companies:**

- What can venues offer artists and companies:
  - Space to rehearse/develop work
  - Networking opportunities
  - Advocacy, particularly around touring
  - Advice and support (eg utilise skills held by venue staff)
- Venues should be more transparent about how they can help artists/companies, what they can offer.
- Venues need to be open-minded about what artists and companies might want (and vice versa) – don't assume it's always about space/money.
- Venues need to know more about what kind of help artist and companies want.
- Touring theatre companies do not always get what they need from venues, eg. a warm welcome, cup of tea and cake on arrival, meeting with artistic director/programmer and feedback after the show.
- Collaborations between venues and companies in the NE are rare, but these collaborations are often about the personal relationship between the artistic programmer and the company. This relationship should continue after the show has happened, and it is useful when companies talk to venues between shows, not just when they are selling something.
- North East based artists and companies welcome venues programming work from outside the region.
- If venues are bringing companies into the region, 'conversations' or peer exchange sessions can be arranged, but to be successful, venues need to talk directly to artists and companies (an email list would be great).
- Venues can't always afford to offer arts worker/Equity discounts, but do 2for1 offers and other discounts when they can.

### **Venue/company feedback:**

- It can be difficult to feedback straight after a show – so say ‘thanks’ and follow up with feedback later on, perhaps collective feedback from all staff who saw the show, not just the programmer.
- Feedback forms from companies to venues can be quite a sterile way of feeding back on artistic quality of show.
- It is important to ensure venues understand what the feedback loop is – what do touring companies do with the feedback? (If they compile a report for themselves, ACE etc, do they ever send copies to venues?)
- Why don't more venues send feedback forms out to companies asking about how they have behaved as venues?

### **Other support for artists/companies:**

- Existing companies also have something to offer new artists/companies (eg sharing of space, resources, networks etc), as do local authorities.
- (This led to mention of theatre practice network, skill sharing sessions arising from another group – last Friday of every month).
- ACE can/should be a starting point for artists and companies, in terms of accessing information about what support is available.

### **Other support:**

- What about support networks for freelance project managers? They can get very lonely and isolated.
- There could be a marketplace for venues, artists and companies and freelancers but it would need to be well facilitated for it to work. It could also be unfocussed to have everyone together.
- Some venues felt it would be useful to have companies pitching to them at this kind of event, talking about their work – others felt this would be overwhelming and not useful.



- This could happen more informally/indirectly after something else e.g. after seeing a show in common with other venue programmers, artists, freelancers etc.

### **Climate change issues:**

- Venues should work together more to explore how they can positively affect climate change (and save money).
- Should producers, companies, venues or audiences take responsibility for the carbon footprint created when a show takes place? Or is it a collective responsibility? We need to think differently to tackle this.
- Should we 'buy local' to minimise carbon footprint? Or offer travel incentives for audiences (eg cheaper tickets if you cycle?)?

**Issue number:** 005

**Issue:** How do we find the right support for new and emerging artists or groups?

**Convener(s):** Leyla Asadi

**Participants:**

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

- Barriers of being a new artist- limited knowledge or guidance/time to create work alongside a part or full time job/space to create work.
- Funding-Seems that people need to know who you are or have a track record before they will fund projects.
- Events such as First In Three at Northern Stage are great but what happens after that performance? Venues who want to engage with emerging artist need to be able to give the next level of support. (More funding to venues??)
- Individual artist's anxiety about asking for facilities and space from venues-always getting knocked back.
- Pressure to start creating a finished product rather than just experimenting. Also pressure to get it right!
- Orgs/venues need to be more transparent if they have space or development opportunities-tell people about them at forum events or through websites, notification boards. Problem seems to be that it's only for people in the know already.
- Residencies-these are offered but need longer term relationship between the maker and the host. Venues should show real commitment and not just lip service. E.g. finding ways for the artists to keep developing in a small way with their organisation.
- Maybe need a space to network and collaborate with other artists-spend too much time in isolation.
- Too many artists leaving the region to go elsewhere-we need to start harnessing artists here. Also some funders aren't helping to support this as they out-source many projects to people or orgs outside the region to come in, instead of using the people here.
- There is a lack of producers-'middle men'. Need people to help emerging artists and venues/orgs join up the dots. There are still pots of funding and there are still emerging artists but not enough people dedicated to helping/supporting/administrating projects to happen.

- New work can often be shorter in length and therefore appropriate situations need to be created to show the work. Maybe think about double bills for work. Smaller fees than regular small-mid scale companies pay, ticket prices adjusted accordingly.
- Need to find ways of making new work happen with LIMITED/NO money coming from funders. Think about different ways of making something happen without money being the constant barrier.
- Venues or buildings could re-think the offer they make to new emerging artists-offering last minute space for a small fee. Often artists find it hard to fit in with a venue that are programming or being able to offer space one year in advance. Can't work on such 'grand' timescales.
- Are new emerging artists wanting/expecting too much? There may be an expectation to leave college and start up a theatre company and maybe some artists are expecting to play to the spaces that high profile mid scale companies are doing. Need to get the scale and the offer right.
- Artists are not looking for hand outs-simply needing advice or a sounding board.
- New artists/producers are exactly that-new! We should not spend too much time worrying if we are going about things in the 'right way' and just start trying things. Come up with our own ways of making projects happen or work. Try new avenues and don't feel like we're being dictated to by the experienced 'gang'. Learn to use them for their experience and knowledge base but make 'art' the way we want to. There shouldn't be any rules about making theatre or how to obtain funding or the right partners for a project.
- Look at examples of other countries creating exciting new work in theatre and dance on limited or no budgets. Refreshing and exciting work doesn't come from money! It comes from exciting minds!
- If North East arts community was linked more, we might find networking and opportunities easier to come by. Artists would like to create a 'yellow pages of Newcastle artists' so they can get in touch with the right people not always the known names.
- Artists need to think out of the box in terms of where the work can be seen-it's not just down to venues to show work. Work can be created anywhere and we need to remember that.
- Berlin group PRACTICABLE-good model. They create matches of artists that might compliment each other. Having supporting acts before the main performance. Like it works in the music scene. Both acts support each other and are supported equally through the venue.
- Apprenticeships-could be really useful for new emerging artists with not as much experience.
- Discussion around why BAC works-what other good practice models are there? Is it a combination of having space and a good ethos?

- **ACTION POINT-**To create an e-notice board/forum space like freecycle. Somewhere people can offer services or where people can offer resources. Email or numbers can be exchanged. People can say what they are working on or wanting to develop and anyone that thinks they can support or help in any way can get in touch.

**Issue number:** 006

**Issue:** On our own – How does an individual enter this world? Independence / community.

**Convener(s):** Ruth Johnson

**Participants:** Ruth Johnson rjmaryroo@googlemail.com  
Oscar Watson director@necdaf.co.uk  
Ann Ridley annyellowsocks@mac.com  
William Scott Johnson

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

- Need for us to share “confidence tricks”
- Experience sharing for “new” and “old” practitioners
- Resources that may be of use...
  - Actor’s Yearbook
  - Writer’s Yearbook
  - [www.cloudninetheatre.co.uk](http://www.cloudninetheatre.co.uk)
- Mentoring scheme would be extremely useful and beneficial – whether as a financed or “in-kind”
- A critique system / work-sharing / feedback system
- Arts Council to be approached for a training budget? To develop professional development and training opportunities within the region
- Having jointly stated aims between artists and venues
- Administrative work undertaken by professional administrators is crucial for success
- ARTS SWAP SHOP website idea (from session 1) – freecycle type of approach to advertising skills/ideas/advice on a OFFER/WANTED basis
- Artist co-operative agency – sharing resources, time and responsibilities- set standards and keep them.
- Maybe having a monthly session run by a rotating team to lead practice-based workshops
- A newbie forum with an experienced professional
- Need for an obvious source of info
- A directory
- Advice checklists to avoid people being taken in
- Apprenticeship schemes
- Partnerships with non-arts organizations – partnering with a project that has a need and working towards delivering this in partnership

- Looking at the less obvious places
- City Council website and other regional spaces – instead of just having WHAT'S ON for just tourists, try to cater for professionals within the area.

There was a definite crossover from this morning in terms of establishing, building up and developing links within the arts community. The need for a way of communicating in a way that means something was very strong.

**Issue number: 007**

**Issue:** How do you define authorship in devised and collaborative theatre making: who owns the work?

**Convener(s):** Cinzia Hardy

Others...please add....sorry!

**Participants:** Annie Rigby  
Jane Arnfield  
Abby Moffatt  
Tom Walton  
Phelim McDermott  
Cinzia Hardy  
Tom Freeth

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Questions asked...

- Who is the author?
- Does the work belong to everyone in the devising process?
- How should royalties be split?

**Defining Roles**

Forced in to defining roles by a need from the outside world/media/audience for labels- director/writer/performer, etc.

'Co-author' has been used as a description for people's collaborative input. It can be a fair way to satisfy the collaborator's need for being duly accredited.

Standard contracts for writers etc... do not always appropriate for their role in collaborative theatre. How do we approach offering a new kind of contract without coming across like we may be trying to 'rip them off' and keep their trust?

What rights does each member of a collaborative group have?

-for example; in a devised collaborative piece with 2x devisers & 1 Composer, legally the composer was top of the hierarchy in terms of pay.

In this situation each member was paid equally.

-political and legal framework is not up with modern practices and processes.

-some participants had experience whereby handbook is given out to actors alongside their contract. This explains that the devised work remains the property of the company by which they are employed.

-Who owns your input/ideas in a collaborative process?

-What should we be accredited for?

-Hypothetical situation....

5 collaborators/devisers create a piece of theatre... 4 want to develop it... 1 does not. What are the rights of each party....

-It was discussed and decided that, morally speaking, anyone should be able to continue the work in the direction they want provided the original creators of the work are duly accredited. N.B. this calls for a generous attitude and open dialogue with all parties.

- If a deviser is employed, it is commonly acknowledged that they cannot veto the progression of the project.

- There should be a responsible balance in all theatre between taking ideas and accrediting, e.g. if someone leaves a devised piece, they should be accredited for their original role, similarly, if someone leaves to continue development on an aspect of a devised piece, the original inspiration should be accredited.

At What point can ownership be defined in devised theatre? Writers in the devising process...

- Writers could be classed as devisers. Do they become owners when they shape the text?

- This could depend entirely upon the piece. Sometimes the piece of theatre is shaped as much by the designers as by the writers.

- It is possible for a writer who shapes impro/devised text into a piece of writing to copyright that text, however, if it became successful, the devisers used would have a strong case for royalties. Unless contracts have been agreed.

Can you take ideas from a collab. piece and develop those ideas without other devisers?

- If the ideas are specific to you/created by you in the original process e.g. character.

- If the work is developed in a different direction.

- Provided the necessary people are accredited!



## THINGS TO BE DEVELOPED AS AN ARTISTIC COMMUNITY!

### Ironing out conflict before it happens...

What has become clear through discussion is that this issue only really becomes relevant where success is involved and that initial small grievances can become blown out of proportion if the issues are not addressed. So, we should make an effort to reduce the likelihood of future conflict as early in the devising process as possible.

Issues of ownership/copyrite and future development etc.. should be spoken about at the earliest possible stage in the devising process/company set-up. This should be followed up with clear and regular conversations within the group. There should be an agreement that sits comfortably amongst all members.

There must also be an understanding between all artists that we all use different methods and that one set of rules does not suit every process. These rules should be made clear at the start of the devising process.

As a side issue it is also important that there is a mutual understanding of the 'sloppiness' of newspapers and the media. They will not always accredit appropriately. There should also be dialogue between the devisers themselves if there are problems in this area.

### In order to do this we need...

- we need to develop a culture of Generosity; allowing people to use ideas/continue to develop ideas provided the appropriate credit is given.
- we need to develop a culture of genuine collaboration, not competitiveness.

-A DEVISER'S HANDBOOK may also be very useful with laying out generally accepted guide rules that takes in to account the varying different roles that artists can take in different collaborative processes and an appropriate accrediting system.

..... It may be useful to look at band's contracts as a guideline. This might also address different levels of input?

### Website suggestion...

[everybodystoolbox.net](http://everybodystoolbox.net)

**Issue number:** 008

**Issue:** Why are venue programmers so hard to get hold of?

**Convener(s):** Annabel Turpin

**Participants:**

Jo Cundall, Julie Ward, Katie Hammond, Helen McBride, Mark Mulqueen, Sarah Kemp

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

There is a responsibility to talk to artists

Programming is not an exact science!

Programming doesn't happen at a certain time each week – but sometimes in the gaps in the middle!

Perhaps argument to change way we work – more companies working in rep?

Timing: everyone works to different schedules

Sometimes actively looking for work, sometimes responding to stuff that comes in

People should work harder to make genuine connections to venue/work eg. 'I see you've had this and this company and actually ours connects to a similar audience etc'

What is the expectation of the artist who sends enquiries? A RESPONSE!

Small companies do not have the staff to specifically target/market work – lots of different hats!

Value in using independent tour bookers? Perhaps dilutes message

Seeing work – showcases give value for money

There isn't enough time to watch all the DVDs received, let alone travel to see work

UK Trade and Industries – untapped source of funding

Differing years adhered to by venues: financial, calendar, academic and seasons!

Important to be open about programming cycles

Discussion about using social networking sites to discuss work

Long term relationships to aid audience development

Wider residencies, workshops and partnerships to assist in audience development

Regional venues should promote regional artists and companies

Venue managers to advocate for companies

**Issue number:** 009

**Issue:** The Edinburgh Fringe Festival – Is it worth it?

**Convener(s):** Ria Parry

**Participants:** Adele Euitt, John Hoggarth, Peter, Helen Green, Leyla Asadi, Gez, Natalie, Bernie, Helen, Katie

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Is it worth it financially, emotionally, creatively?

Why do we do it?

Are those dreams / aims / objectives ever achieved?

- The fringe has expanded more and more over the last few years... Easy to get lost... Comedy dominating?
- What happens to shows after the fringe? Even shows / companies with fringe firsts have disappeared after the festival...
- Reasons to go... Exposure? Experience? To be part of a community? To be with your contemporaries and to see what everyone else is creating? Opportunities post Edinburgh – touring, reputation, work...
- Finances: Who is making the money? Is it only the venues who are benefiting financially? Ticket prices are rising.... Is this because it is costing the venues more to hire their spaces? Are the costs of the fringe justified?
- It is a TRADE FAIR – Are promoters easier to get hold of at the fringe? Edinburgh is a good advert for your show / company.
- It is possible to get reviewed in Edinburgh in a way it might not be elsewhere... How do you get reviewers in? Bribery... Or an interesting HOOK.
- Which venue do you choose? (If you have the ability to choose) – Reputation or BUZZ. Which venue makes you feel like you are part of a community? Which venue will you get reviewed at? Which venue will the audience come to?
- There is a fringe of the fringe developing.... The free fringe... The cheaper, less commercial venues...
- Alternatives... Manchester, Brighton, Buxton...
- We say the Edinburgh Fringe Festival is very risky financially – but is a north east tour just as risky re getting in audience numbers etc?
- The best marketing in Edinburgh is word of mouth...
- Reviews... If you don't get reviewers in early, however good your reviews are they will not help you sell the show...

- You need an interesting HOOK (eg Bird and the Bee last year used same company for 2 shows with interweaving storylines showing at different times at the Underbelly), or a killer 2 lines of blurb to get the reviewer to come along...
- An Edinburgh 'hit' might be seen differently outside of the Edinburgh Festival environment...
- Do you want to take a show to Edinburgh so you can get promoters in to see it? E.g for a national tour... Or do you just want as many new audience members as possible to see it? Or do you just want to go to the festival to have some fun? (which could be expensive)
- **WORK OUT WHY YOU WANT TO GO THE FESTIVAL** – Once you've been honest about this, you will be able to work out if it is achievable.

**Issue number:** 010

**Issue:** How do we make the theatre open to all and not just a middle class enclave?

**Convener(s):** Jo Macpherson

**Participants:** Geraldine Ling, Becky, Peter Lathan, Erica Whyman, Caroline Rath, Gillie Kleiman, Gary Kitching, John Hogarth

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We talked about preconceptions of the theatre and how this might stop people going to the theatre. This led to a discussion of whether a class divide still existed in the same way that it might have done in the past. We questioned whether this really mattered anyway, after all no one is really concerned if 'posh' people don't go to the football or horseracing! The people who liked the theatre will go anyway and people who don't have every right to stay away. We talked about why the middle classes go to the theatre – for intellectual status or for sheer enjoyment???

All of us seemed concerned that 'mediocre' performances were often full whilst 'good' performances are often half empty and that people were put off the theatre by bad experiences and negative perceptions.

All of us wanted to see theatre that was "fun and intelligent" (Gary says go to The Suggestibles every other Friday night!) and that we should sell the positives of theatre as a "special" shared experience not offered by film and TV.

Some ideas for how we should make the theatre more open:

- Create a sense of shared experience – we're all in this together, part of something – not just buying a ticket and getting what you paid for.
- Exploit opportunities for participation (the school play mentality) and bring an audience in with the participants
- Do Shakespeare (every child in the country has to study Shakespeare and it is a crime to make them hate it!) – but do produce it locally and with a regional voice – don't let RSC monopolize this market – spotlight on the north east as a region
- Forge links with festivals and holidays and create a sense of belonging and community as well as knowingly going for the commercial – create a sense of it being an event
- Make food and eating a part of the theatrical experience – make it earthy and unpretentious
- Take theatre out of theatre venues – into pubs etc to engage wider audience

- Create theatre with a sense of real engagement rather than just something proper or worthy
- Make theatres flexible spaces that can be adapted to different performances and audiences
- Defy old rules/ conventions/ expectations about what the theatre is and make it more human
- Have welcoming front of house teams to make audiences feel special
- Joined up approach between venues in the region
- Theatre where audiences have a real sense of connection and how it makes them feel. Good stories will always engage no matter how old.
- Don't create a sense that you are thick if you don't get it (especially in contemporary dance) and that everybody else in the audience does get it. It is ok to not understand everything and it could be that the performance is not very good not that you are stupid!

At the start of the discussion there were only two of us in the group but by the end we had quite a big crowd and most people stayed until the end. This is clearly an issue that many people are concerned and passionate about. There was a real sense that everyone was frustrated with some perceptions of the theatre but also determined to make it more open and accessible with a focus on entertainment and quality. It turned into a really positive discussion of how we might achieve this rather than a rant against the middle classes!

**Issue number: 011**

**Issue: Booking a national tour – introducing your work to new venues and audiences**

**Convener(s):** Roma Yagnik Open Clasp Theatre Company

**Participants:** (Sorry I didn't get everyone's name – please add yourself on if I've missed you out). Diann Allen, Geraldine (Lawnmowers), Bernie Byrnes, Helen Green, Leyla Asadi, Jo Cundall, Edmund (Northern Stage),

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

- Important to let venues/ programmers see your work. If this isn't possible, send them DVD or link to clips of your work on YouTube/ Google video/ vimeo. Discussion took place at end of session about quality of the video footage with general consensus being that if the quality of the video isn't great it can be detrimental to the process but that if you have footage where the quality isn't brilliant but your audience are seen to be enjoying the show than that could outweigh...
- CTC (Soon to be Hullabaloo) did a promotional DVD which they have found really useful – showing performance, workshops, comments from children they've worked with etc.
- Good to use references – if you've got good relationships with venues, see if they can share that with venues you want to work with.
- If issue based, do an education pack and try to include some kind of workshops or post show discussions in the package. Open Clasp usually do post show workshops of around 1 hour but this may be difficult to offer to all venues so it was suggested that an extended Q and A with actors in character may be a good plan (lasting around 20 mins). Later in the session a discussion about whether holding workshops in the afternoon before the show was a better way of doing it consensus was that this may be seen as a difficult sell for the venue (finding an audience for that too).
- Venues suggested for issue based piece: Contact (Manchester), Kneehigh (new venue based around mental health), festivals such as Buxton Fringe, Square chapel – Halifax, Lowry, Okay to be (mental health specific)
- Timing discussed – worried that tour set to take place in June and July (when mainstream venues can go dark) and whether need to start later. Feedback from CTC that it can go in your favour to run into the childrens' holidays – end of July.
- How to get the booking done. Can we hire anyone to help us book a tour? 2 different ways – can use producer who we would pay a fee to book in dates on the tour with venues. Good if can find one with good



- relationships with venues. Also, could go down the route of Rural touring networks (lots of different networks) where the company does not pay them but then doesn't make any money from the shows which they book.
- Two main things that came across was that touring is about RELATIONSHIPS and that you need to provide an attractive package of work to the right venues so that your work is relevant to them. When marketing, contextualize the piece of work and find your selling point.
  - Some discussion of ITC/ Equity contracts – don't get too hung up on the guidelines for working hours etc as it is not always possible to work within these parameters in touring theatre although always work towards best possible working conditions. Always make sure at audition stage that the people you are casting are aware of the demands of the tour and committed to working as is required of them.
  - Risk assessments – make sure you are fully prepared for this as you organize a national tour to mainstream venues as they will need this to be in place (things like ensuring fireproofing etc is as should be). Geraldine recommends looking at the risk assessment forms for the Edinburgh fringe as they are really comprehensive and stringent.
  - The geography of national touring... Try to plan so that traveling is logical and cast and crew are not nipping from one end of the country to the next over night however be prepared that this is usually incredibly difficult to manage especially if it is proving difficult to get venues interested in your work and you are early in the relationship building process.
  - The timing of programming – venues have very different timescales when it comes to programming, sometimes a year in advance, sometimes a few months so need to be prepared for that.

**If anyone has any further hints or tips for booking a national tour please add them below and thanks to everyone who took part!**

Issue number: 012

Issue: Are the devoted actually interested in seeing each other's work? How far do you/they go to see other work? Is it important?

Convener(s): Julie Ward

Participants: Natalie Querol, Caroline Roth, Becky Jameson, Alison McGowan, Gary Kitching, Helen McBride, Lucy Ridley, Molly Barrett, Christine Coles, Fiona McKeown, Katie Hammond, Diann Allenby, Jo McPerhson, Edmund (from N Stage)

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

The discussion began with one person (the convenor) writing a personal statement about theatre and travel –

"I like to be transported or moved when I see theatre and I don't mind the travelling (or pilgrimage) to get to a venue where that might happen to me. There is no substitute for 'being there' (like going to a football match) – hearing about it from a third party after the event and wishing you had bothered to make the effort is NOT devoted behavior!

A long time ago theatre did the travelling – troupes went from village to village being hosted by different communities all eager to be transported. Now the majority of theatre product and theatre-going is concentrated in the urban centres. City-dwelling theatre-makers and funders seem incapable of making the journey outside of their own narrow world. It is us country-dwelling theatre practitioners and audiences who are the cosmopolitan people!"

The devoted practitioners who came to join my discussion felt that seeing other people's work should be at the heart of our practice but readily admitted that other things often got in the way of good intentions to get out there and see more stuff.

We agreed that seeing other people's work can help us to know our own work better, and also to understand the market – trends, gaps, innovations, etc.

Seeing interesting work can inspire us, give us greater resolve to continue, make us more aspirational in our practice. It provides a context for us.

I have done and will continue to travel miles to see shows that interest me. I wondered if my behavior was abnormal – was I suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder?

What about organized coach trips of the devoted to come and see the exciting work that is happening out in the sticks? (I bring huge coach parties of devoted people from the far-flung villages of Co Durham, bolstering the earned income of the urban regional theatre venues. Let's do things in reverse!)

No, my colleagues in the discussion group thought not but many admitted to being so bored and disappointed by the work that they had seen in the recent past they had given up attending other theatre events. Regional theatre in the north east seems full of stereo-typical flat-cap, whippet-racing, old coal-mining characters. We have to look deeper to find work that goes against this grain and will excite us enough to make us go and see other work.

People felt that they wanted to know more about the small theatre projects that were happening around the region – these always seemed more exciting than the big projects with lots of flash marketing – but communication is an issue.

Theatre that is being made for non-mainstream audiences (eg. Early Years, Teens, schools work, foreign language work, work for BME, work in prisons) is often far more exciting to see than highly subsidised work targeted at adults in big venues.

It was noted that unfunded companies working at the sharp end often make the most interesting work. How can we ensure that the 'imperative' to create is enshrined in all our work – audiences can tell when the creative team don't give a fuck!

We discussed initiatives such as "Go & See" grants and how these encouraged a habit of seeing other work. For example, I now regularly take a week out of my busy schedule to go to the London Mime Festival, knowing that I cannot easily see any of that programme elsewhere in the UK. It began with some paid Arts Council CPD money!

We discussed how we perceived the act of going to see other work? Was it indeed yet more work or was it play? Either way, we could fabricate a plausible excuse for not bothering. Equally, we could use either argument to justify such time well spent.

Are we supporting each other genuinely or do we inhabit a world of suspicion and envy and protectionism? Can we build a social network of the devoted who want to see other people's work. Can we find ways to discuss the work and always find something positive to say even if it is not our cup of tea?

Can we find ways to see each others' work at different stages in the creative process – not always as an end result? This would add depth to our experiences as audience and elongate the pleasure (or the pain!) Either way theatre should move us, provoke us and we should be brave enough to articulate this and open enough to listen. This idea of audiences seeing different stages of the work happens in some areas of work already – with some companies inviting in teachers to see work in progress.

Production diaries posted on the web with open invitations to view could be instituted.

We remembered more exciting vibrant times in the past history of regional theatre-making. For example, the local colleges and universities used to promote events by radical, experimental companies, linking them in with college residencies and opening the doors to the wider theatre community. Now local colleges are full of theatre students who seem totally uninterested in seeing theatre. We have lost a generation of possible devotees!

The general public as audience needs to be more au fait with the practice of theatre – understanding the process (and the cost and the resources needed) is something we all need to understand. Revenue funded companies do not often understand how unfunded companies work, how entrepreneurial they have to become to survive and unfunded companies can labour under a misapprehension that revenue funding is the best thing since sliced bread!

More improved, shared resources and marketing needed.

**Issue number: 013**

**Issue: How do we stop starting work by thinking about what we can't do rather than what we can do?**

**Convener(s):** Annie Rigby

**Participants:**

Matilda Leyser

Cinzia Hardy

Jo Cundall

Nazli

Leyla Asadi

Abby Moffatt

Billy

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The thing that frightens me most about downturn and recession is that it will close down our sense of possibility. That we won't believe there is space enough for big ideas.

BUT – recession in some ways has encouraged more dreaming. People are less cynical now than they were in more optimistic times.

Cinzia said she is an eternal optimist, even when people come and ask her sensible questions and explain why something can't happen. Isn't that what makes art happen – the driving force of optimism and positivity? Self belief.

But sometimes restriction can be useful. It can act like a creative springboard. It gives you something to push against.

Cinzia talked about Phelim as a young actor noticing when people were blocking possibilities that emerged in improvisation. Perhaps they did it because if you haven't got an answer for something it's easier to block it than to carry on.

We need to open up space. Dare to say "I don't know".

So, what does it take to be trusted?

We often buy into not being trusted before it actually happens. We listen more to our inner critic than to external real voices.

We need to learn how to work with our inner and outer critics. We go into defense mode too quickly, and don't get to the bottom of what they're really

saying and why they're saying it. When we really listen then we can have a proper dialogue.

What do we want from producers/administrators/production managers?

To be listened to.

We thought about it and realized they are all people who want to make things happen.

We have to allow ourselves to dream.

**Issue number:** 014

**Issue:** How and why do adults make theatre for children?

**Convener(s):** Alison McGowan

**Participants:** Ben Fletcher Watson; Paul Harman; Sarah Richards; Molly Barrett; Edmund Nichols; Mark Mulqueen

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The low status of children's theatre in this country reflects the low status of children in our society in general.

In other cultures access to theatre from a young age is regarded as a child's cultural entitlement.

Theatre for children in this country happens in a troubled context – children cannot come to theatre by themselves and many adults don't value the theatrical experience beyond pure entertainment, if even that.

In this country we have historically put content at the heart of theatre for children where other countries accept theatre making for children as a valuable experience in its own right. Should we be receiving money to make something beautiful or to provide for a particular audience?

The children's theatre that is created reflects the social and political values and attitudes around at the time – these influence distribution of funding and resources.

Dedicated children's theatre venues reflect a desire to elevate status of children's theatre but even they struggle without the wider support of a culture which values theatre for children.

How to get the bum's on seats? No easy answers unfortunately.

It's very much cheaper to take the theatre to the children in schools. It was felt that we have quite a lot going on in this country in terms of touring theatre to schools, however we are up against it as children's theatre makers, when many young teachers these days have no understanding / appreciation of theatre in schools. There is no provision for theatre and theatre skills in current teacher training.

Working in school environments we become acutely aware of the types of values being imposed on young audiences. We forget that some children never see adults in a playful light. Engaging children in the moment is a powerful experience which can be very memorable and inspiring for them. We shouldn't forget what a privilege it is to play and perform with such an open and honest audience.

As an adult, one of the rewards for working in this field is having access to seeing the world from a child's perspective. Making theatre allows us to take this on and reflect positive values back to them in a language they can appreciate.

In this country we have historically put content at the heart of theatre for children where other countries accept theatre making for children as a valuable experience in its own right. Should we be receiving money to make something beautiful or to provide for a particular audience?

(My apologies if anyone's views have been misrepresented. Thanks for an interesting and enlightening discussion)



**Issue number:** 015

**Issue:** How do you keep your nerve in hard times?

**Convener(s):** Gez Casey

**Participants:** Ruth Johnson, Annabel Turpin, Bernie Byrnes, Abby Moffatt, Rana Yaguik.

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

How hard are the times?

Have the times always been hard?

Are hard times merely relative to individuals?

Perceived consequences:

Are venue programmers playing it safer?

Are they becoming more reliant on established names and unthreatening texts?

Is there a danger a creating a vicious circle: if you have a less interesting programme, will less people come?

Is there a really reliable way of judging/evaluating an audience's experience and reaction?

Do feedback forms (answered immediately after a performance) really capture what an audience member thinks about a complicated piece of work?

How much do/should commercial considerations come into the creation of a piece of work?

In the present economic climate are you (as audience members) restricting your own choices?

Do you see less, more or the same as you did two years ago?

Are artists taking fewer chances?

Are they allowing themselves to be restricted?

Can this be a good, as well as a bad thing?

Could the present recession lead to new ways of working?

Sharing a wide range of abilities and pooling resources:

A sort of Freecycle/Arts swap shop.

(Supportive particularly of emerging artists)

The creation of new online communities to share expertise and to offer advice and support.

The creation of a forum/ online Q and A for an hour a week with someone with a particular expertise: theatre director/lighting designer/tour

booker/administrator/ marketer/venue manager to answer problems and questions.

Should we be stressing that a night out at the theatre is still a cheap night out- a treat maybe but an affordable treat?

Could the recession help to sharpen people's thinking and reduce complacency?

Does it provide an opportunity to re-examine important questions:

Why do you do what you do?

Are you doing it successfully?

Who are your audience?

What do they want?

Can you provide it?

Do you want to?

Email addresses:

[rjmary@googlemail.com](mailto:rjmary@googlemail.com)

[gez@live.org.uk](mailto:gez@live.org.uk)

[rana@openclasp.plus.com](mailto:rana@openclasp.plus.com)

[bernie\\_c\\_byrnes@hotmail.com](mailto:bernie_c_byrnes@hotmail.com)

**Issue number:** 016

**Issue:** When there is no more public money which buildings must we keep open?

**Convener(s):** Paul Harman

**Participants:** Oscar, Ben, Sarah Richards, Jane Arnfield, Adele, Tom, Rhia, Helen

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The group agreed that the present buildings were suitable for theatre presentation of most kinds, but that new spaces for development were needed.

If possible, all should be kept open, but the uses should change in response to need.

There remain difficulties in getting access to spaces in the publicly funded buildings to present new, or niche work.

It is recommended that the managements of the funded buildings meet together to provide collectively spaces for new and emerging companies and niche work to be presented.

**CONCLUSION:** A regular open forum is needed to make public the demands and offers of collaboration and to bring makers and presenters together regularly.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Arts Council North East should make available a room for one hour each month to hold an Open Forum on Theatre in the North East.

Each person attending has the opportunity to present news about their activity, pitch a project to attract collaborators, open discussion about policy issues.

PH

**Issue number:** 017

**Issue:** New Media/Technology: do we have to?

**Convener(s):** Gillie Kleiman

**Participants:** Alison McGowan, Gillie Kleiman, Matilda, Phelim, Sarah Kemp, Julie Ward and...

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

NO - WE DON'T HAVE TO, thanks.

BUT:

- serves a purpose as a marketing and communication tool e.g. youtube, facebook, twitter
- flip video ??
- is this pressure a trend? From funding bodies?
- Can we be playful with the technology?
- If it is used well (purposefully), it can be great
- This good use often deals with old-fashioned theatrical devices too
- This good use is often a result of the live and the technological/virtual interacting in a useful way
- What does *technology* mean? A means, a tool, a device for doing something else
- Let's revive the technology of the question mark!

**Issue number:** 018

**Issue:** **Sitting in an audience, what does it mean?**

**Convener(s):** Jane Arnfield

**Participants:**

Sarah, Jo, Richard, Ben, Annie, Christine, Cinzia, Alison, Sarah, Matilda, Phelim

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

When Theatre works it is like sitting in your front room being part of a single event feeling safe and prepared being engaged and alert being receptive, being active not passive. A thought was raised that theatre isn't theatre if an audience is present. Audiences were thought to be in the best position if they could view both the performers and themselves if they were in the round or a semi circular form where contact could be made with each other and the performers.

It was raised that engagement with the performing area is critical and felt that removal from this engagement is alienating. The expectations of the theatre to be viewed were that the work had to be heard & seen unless otherwise intended.

Casting was thought to be important in terms of an audience feeling reassured or comfortable enough to expect something different in terms of casting. The role of the actor was thought to be critical in activating an audience. Eating before a performance was also thought to be important it was discussed that it is unlikely anyone is going to dehydrate or starve during a performance and therefore is it necessary to have access to eating and drinking during a performance?

In terms of an audience feeling ready for a performance it was discussed that the opportunities to participate before or after a show are minimal and that the language and activity of offering an audience participation opportunities is unsophisticated and intimidating presenting a post show discussion is just the beginning in terms of an audiences access into serious inquiry into the work.

It was discussed that allowing the space to speak was an important as the performance the building its warmth comfort and ease of accessibility. Reading the signs of a space is important in terms of its usability.

A disappointing experience at the theatre was thought to be traumatic in terms of individuals not being encouraged to view again. 90% of the atmosphere at the theatre was thought to be created by the audience. Is a new ritual required to engage cultivate and connect audiences with performers with theatre? At its worst is theatre a place for nothing to happen where payment is made on the understanding nothing will happen so no change can take place but change is not wanted so an audience can be reassured that having paid for nothing to happen nothing will happen meaning that as an audience they will nothing to do or contribute to the artistic culture.

Is attending the theatre a civic duty or collective responsibility?

Failing however in theatre is this allowed is failing true honest full bloodied failure allowed?

Is sitting in an audience about engaging in the pleasure of transformation?

Are different seats responsible for different experiences?

Is it possible encouraged to go to the theatre to see the same piece of work more than once like re reading a good book?

Do we patronize our audiences?

Toilets and plenty of them are required for ablutions but also perhaps to throw up in to be angry in to debate and celebrate within!

Do theatres provide a contract between audience building and actors and performance or a service?

If theatres had laws not rules would that make them more accessible?

Is going to the theatre about fear one of the last vestiges where human beings can really be exploring the unknown or the known but with unknown peripherals? For example seeing a know play but the experience being extraordinary and true?

Is an audience a witness an individual amongst a collective celebrating the unknown and unknowable?

A parting thought arising from out of the discussion & presented below by the convener:

Are tricks in theatre prevalent? Is an audience tricked into attending the theatre and presented with tricks? What are these tricks? Does an audience deserve honesty?

**Issue number:** 019

**Issue:** do we really value participatory arts?

**Convener(s):** Leyla Asadi

**Participants:** Ria Parry, Jo Cundall, Nazli Tabatabai

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

- Within Orgs not everyone is aware of the importance of Participation within their org which can cause problems in championing it.
- The values aren't always stated clear enough.
- Some venues put a lot of resources behind Participation and make sure it is as important as other productions and pieces of work.
- Do we class participation as 'something to do with kids or young people?
- Does there have to be a strong engagement on a physical level? Or could participation happen through the web for example.
- We all need to be open and honest about participatory work and the opportunities available. They do not necessarily need to be pigeoned as learning or education.
- It is good for being able to feed into artist's process.
- Don't like the term 'outreach'-seems like a government term and quite patronizing.
- Some orgs and venues still keep participatory work very separate from the rest of the orgs programme-need to learn to integrate.
- Is it a problem for participation teams to have to fundraise separately? A venue doesn't have to fund separately for their main productions or touring work but participation teams don't receive a budget as part of the main budget.
- It is clear when an AD values the work as they are present at events. Valued from the top down.
- As funding dries up, funders are going to get more value for their money with community work, so more likely to fund it.
- Having participatory work happen in a building makes them feel a sense of ownership of the building which may (or may not) build future audiences.
- Do professional artist want to engage and be a participant in projects not simply running them? Space to play and explore with a level of experience.



**Issue: 020**

**Issue: Everyone Has Something To Say – How Do We Relate To Disability?**

**Convener(s):** Christine Coles

Participants:

Christine Coles

Martine Dellard

Helen McBride

Katie Hammond

What we need to think about

We need to engage with the individual not the disability, but at the same time be aware of the additional requirements of people living with disability.

We need to have an ongoing dialogue with this significant group in our community and listen to what they tell us.

This is what we are likely to hear:

Barriers

Access – to a venue

The reliance on shift-work support workers, and with Social Services cutting funding mean there is likely to be less availability and a greater expense for mobility support.

Cheaper forms of public transport (bus and train) are problematic for the disabled sections of the community. Alternative transport methods, like taxis, are expensive.

Access -within the venue

For disabled actors – too many stairs (e.g. stage to dressing rooms and up to lighting box)

Signed performances – issues about the quality of signing.

Audio loop – not in every theatre and not always available

More imaginative approaches to replacing the visuals of a performance for those who will “see” through touch and increased sound variation.

Youth and children’s theatre excludes certain disabilities by the very nature of the theatre.

Rules about the number of wheelchair users in a building at one time because of the fire hazard– The Baltic. The Sage – maximum is three wheelchairs so a group with four wheelchair users would not be welcome.

Awards venues – access for award winners with a disability – the answer should not be the options of manhandling individuals into the building or leaving them outside, because the host organisation has not thought things through.

Group Opinion

Currently we do not seem to be resolving access issues to the satisfaction of the disabled even when the right questions are raised.

### Hartlepool as a Role Model Provider of Arts and Theatre Experience

Adult Social Care disbanded the Day Centre which then became the Handprint Art Studio with a variety of activities available.

Roaring Mouse Theatre Group – studio space

Shoot Your Mouth Off – award winning film maker (promotional videos etc)

### But at the Town Hall Theatre

There are accessibility issues for disabled actors and disabled audience members taking a theatre tour because of the backstage arrangements.

### The Dichotomy of Theatre for the Disabled

How do different practitioners, who are involved in the care of this section of the community, see it?

Therapy? (Medical)

Or

Art? (Personal development)

### The History of Disability Theatre

The need to be reflected as part of the wider community.

Provides a voice

### Work Placement for Disabled Actors

Why do able-bodied actors play disabled characters, when so many good disabled actors are out of work? Do we lose some of the intensity of reality, by casting in this way?

### The Role of the Theatre Critic

Is there a place for venue assessment in theatre review and should reviewers demonstrate greater disability awareness than they currently do?

### Making Improvements for the Disabled Theatre User

Making truly inclusive theatrical experiences for autism and multiple-sensory disability by using immediate message/visual and multi-sensory theatre.

Programmes in easy print.

Programmes in large print.

Providing accessible disabled toilets

A Critical Friend: An expert or consultant to overview the venues inclusivity (access inside/outside, etc)

Access Statement: To demonstrate how each venue is catering for the disabled.

A country-wide 'Disability Theatre Week' to raise awareness both within the theatre and outside. Arcadea, a development organisation staffed and managed by Disabled people, is trying to get funding for such an event, but so far it has not seemed important enough for funding providers to support.

### Arts Funding

NORDAF (North Disability Arts Forum) disbanded and Arts funding stopped.

Now become Arcadea)

It is better that funds are distributed through Arcadea or NORDAF rather than direct from Arts Council. Disability needs to be thought of as a sub-group of 'Diversity' because the needs are very different from other minority groups that are seeking funding.

**Issue number:** 021

**Issue:** Arts Funding in the North East

**Convener(s):** Chris Moad

**Participants:** Chris Moad William Scott Johnson Natalie Querol

1. Government spending twice as much in London per head on Performing Arts than in the North East.
2. More competition in London
3. Loss of Actor's Centre in Newcastle. It used to be networking through Actors Centre, which has gone now.
4. Raise the quality first, then we might get more funding in the North East.
5. People move to London through being committed, so diluting other Regions.
6. There is a benefit to spending some time in London to be recognized and to make contacts.  
Why isn't there more choice for audiences in the North East?
7. You can have a life outside of your work in the North East, but not in London.
8. If you're good you're more easily spotted in the North East. You're  
a  
needle in a haystack in London.

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We related our discussions with an article in the newspaper that London are getting more funding than in the North East. We shifted our argument for and against this decision and came to the conclusion that this was due to the fact that

there is more competition in London than there is here in the North East. We agreed that the quality should be raised to get the funding available.

**Issue number: 022**

**Issue: Is the arts scene in the NE full of cliques**

**Convener(s): Jo Cundall**

**Participants:**

Jo Cundall

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

It might be, but so what? That's only dangerous if we let them have all the power!

I don't think there are cliques – and if there are then we're not bothered because no one came to this session. That's a good thing!

**Issue number: 023**

**Issue: I think digital technology is really exciting. Why do I think it's someone else's responsibility to explore it?**

**Convener(s):** Annie Rigby

**Participants:** Bev Fox, Ann Besford, Gerry Ling, Kate Craddock

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We, Annie Rigby, Kate Craddock, Ann Besford, Gerry Ling and Bev Fox, are announcing ourselves as experts in digital theatre technology.

Expertise in this field needs to be reclaimed. The expert is not somebody else who looks like he's from an old TV programme about what the future will be like. It's us.

The technology changes so quickly that no-one can keep up with everything anyway. Just because we don't know what we're expecting doesn't mean we aren't experts.

We are lucky. As the pre-digital native generation (i.e. people who can remember a time before mobile phones and the internet) we are able to be conscious about why we use technology and what it is for. We remember the before, so we can think about the after.

Sense of artistic purpose is paramount. We don't want to use technology for the sake of it, but for a specific artistic aim.

We are interested in the meeting point between new technologies and their fragility. Often online connections, equipment, technology are uncertain, not slick. In that way it is very like performance. Ephemeral. Full of chance. We are interested in making it playful.

The web offers a new geography in which we can be explorers. So often we stick to our already-known territory, and perhaps we should set up not a book club, but a web page club where we introduce each other to our online worlds.

Digital technology reshapes our landscape of who holds the power, and who is at the forefront of exploration. In many ways individuals lead the way here, not institutions or organisations. People with learning and physical disabilities can work and play in a space which is as easily accessed by them as by anyone else. It levels the playing field.

We are interested in making connection between the live and the virtual. Otherwise it's not theatre.

We want to talk more with people who are engineers, web-coders, etc. We have something to bring them in our expertise, just as they have something to bring us. We need to explore the meeting points between us.

We ask for more encouragement and positivity in the learning environment for new technologies. It is just a new language for us to learn. We'll learn it quicker if we are encouraged.

We are interested in new possibilities for archiving devised and improvised work. We can step away from the tyranny of the script-based archiving. There are new ways to record ourselves and distribute our work.

**Issue number: 024**

**Issue: How do we get the Arts Council to best serve our needs and not just tick their boxes?**

**Convener(s):** Sarah Kemp

**Participants:** jane Arnfield, Lucy, Becky Jamieson, paul Harman, Oscar

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We would like the Arts Council to:

- Provide an evaluation form so that artists can feedback on their experience of funding process.
- Have more continuity of discussion and support between artists and arts officer after the piece of work has been completed
- Arts officers to link artists together with people who may be a) in similar situations so that they can share experiences b) are more experienced and can offer support
- To offer secondments and/or placements to artists at the arts council  
Eg For 6 months or a year so they gain greater understanding of how

AC works and can also offer their experiences and expertise to other AC officers

- Free up arts officers so that they can spend more time with artists, seeing work and offering support, both constructive discussion on work and practical form filling
- Support/create a consortium of theatre practitioners in region that can then meet and put forward its thoughts, views, ideas etc to art council. And/or support Empty Space to do more of this - but it would need to be more democratic?
- Recognise that as this is a time of great change for arts council it is also a time to bring more artists into decision making process
- If there is money left at end of year use it to set up a forum/show case where artists can share/show extracts of work that they have done over the year.



**Issue number:** 025

**Issue:** What is the difference between – cultural diversity, internationalism and interculturalism?

**Convener(s):** Nazli Tabatabai-Khatambakhsh

**Participants:** Richard, Jo, Julie Ward, Gilly, Adele Evitt.

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Broader idea of cultural diversity to reflect a range of identities going beyond race relations widening the debate.

We like to think that people coming to the UK to participate in our culture is cultural diversity OR that inter European activity is cultural diversity actually there is much the same only language is the difference OR An empire driven perspective of what cultural diversity exists across all art forms.

Lots of White people traveling of all ages is seen as a good thing but when Black people travel it is assumed it is because of poverty, war, oppression etc.

It is a fascinating thing international as it is about a lot of cultures.

Cultural mix = better mix of work as it recognizes the universal that actually at the end of the day it is about power.

Notions of Diaspora is shared aspects that can be about faith that between international contexts goes beyond language.

Disability and sexual diversity are also about cultural diversity.

An example of engaging in intercultural national and international activity/initiatives (Visiting Arts) that enriches multi platform work that takes place between urban/metropolitan and rural places – do we need to always have a clear definition of this before we embark on the work or is it something that is discovered in the journey of the project?

Good to be asking these questions about cultural diversity, internationalism and interculturalism outside of the day to day as there is time to think and to reflect on what it means.

Working in a respectful way across international borders so that to be able to be sensitive and not to escalate social danger rather to raise awareness for debate in a meaningful way – such as making a piece of work about gay men and children in Iran.

Looking back on our own UK shifts in legalities such as making work about gay men and children how the law has changed and how there are still barriers and negative assumptions such as pedophilia – these are fears...

Mythologies of socio-political structures and norms from pre-war Britain that have created gender conflicts.

Age is an issue where the age extremes of old and young are freer with their expression of the world.

Old middle class men are in charge of theatre.

Bringing together age extremes there is a lot of good practice about this.

Older people do want to talk about sex not just the war!

Is it just semantics – yes and no!

Interculturalism is about equalities internationalism is about going beyond these ideas of equalities...?

What about the British diaspora?

English people are bad at multiculturalism but their Scottish and Welsh cousins are better at it because of the shift of power – yes and no.. because English people are sometimes bad at recognizing when they are good at multiculturalism... power it is all about power...?

Boxes are good for raising awareness for checking in with your work and yourself but are bad for trapping you and your work.

White guilt... fear of being racist...

Cultural diversity can enable a common ground a place to bring people together to talk from a perspective that they all share – from this the oppression and the positive to then be able to explore beyond the familiar mono.

Cultural diversity is bad when it is used as a marketing tool when you assume like for like – why not find the French speaking audience who are from Senegal going beyond the obvious!

Seeing work is interesting another language as well as another artistic language like dance.

Seeing work that is in Russian for example three sisters because you then experience the quality of the performances as they need to transcend language.

Translators – clarity, how they change the art and add to it in the rehearsal room in our work this role is important in working in Iran as this informs as well as challenges our creative process – the shift in the work and how we work.

Boundaries and limitations make the work interesting.

Censorship, self censorship, working internationally going beyond the perceived shutting down – making the work rich so it can have impact in the context and beyond – this is in the UK and internationally just different scales...?

The example of white people – slavery how this is manifested in our work.

Sharing a creative process in terms of CD, Internationalism and interculturalism this is valuable as there is no right or wrong we are making the art to pose questions to connect with our audiences.

Devils advocate maybe we talk about it too much maybe we just make the work?

Partnerships with diaspora artists and how they connect with audiences that have come from the place where the story has originated the differences and responses that can be negative as well as positive.

Ideas of what is white how this has come about the reference to the book 'being white' there is this idea is white is a comparison with others and everything else becomes black – indigenous populations and where we have come from what this means in the UK and in beyond there is much to be acknowledged and discussed and recognized in a way that brings forward history and makes the present informed and enabled.

Working with disabled actors widening your aesthetic enabling your choice and moving beyond set and old models of what a piece of work should look

like – seeing fresh and having a dialogue with a range of artists with specific experiences so as to deepen the work.

RSC casts black actors in lead historic roles but then there is the problem of casting black actors in contemporary work as suddenly they become real people.

Visioning is a choice you must have integrity in how you do this and to be clear with your vision to then think of casting to be strong in your artistic ideas – not just to go with what is easy or perceived as the only way.

Myths and symbolic approaches – to go beyond this and to not get hung up about side stepping.

The point of seeing work is about learning about different experiences and cultures.

Sometimes it is about thinking about it sometimes it is not!

Making work in contexts of platforms for debate such as Contacting the World.

Standing by your process being brave about it.

Because you are from a diaspora it does not make you an automatic expert but it does mean that you have a unique international experience.

Diaspora's can sometimes have a capsule of a particular point in cultural time sometimes this is ex-pat behavior sometimes this is some that is cherished as pre-upheaval life – in all it creates another reference of a point of time that is living and valid.

We all stereotype sometimes we are aware sometimes not.

We make a judgment about someone to inform ourselves not to fix this as a definition of a person.

Theatre can be good at shifting the stereotype as when you see a character for the first time all you have is the visual reference and then it changes as the story is shown.

**Issue number:** 026

**Issue:** Linking Dance and Theatre. How? Why?

**Convener(s):** Dora Frankel

**Participants:** Gillie Kleiman, Peter Harding, D. Frankel

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The issue isn't necessarily about doing cross art productions but about cultural attitudes. Dance and theatre are fundamentally the same both are performance practice. But they still attract 2 different audiences

How do we change this? It's more a UK 'thing' and not a European problem. It seems rooted in our text based tradition which is text based since the Victorian times. Things are changing but so called contemporary choreographers still use old fashioned practice not relating to now and their audience. Faults on both sides!

Art isn't necessarily for every-one so why should dance fulfill everything to fit in?

Back to venues needing to put 'bums on sits' stops them programming work that uses dance and text based theatre together particularly if not already known.

However total theatre being recognised - witness Award for Total Theatre at Edinburgh fringe.

Important to programme being aware of these things but also for practitioners to question what they are doing and to raise standards.

Dance and theatre are inextricably linked but this isn't actually being explored enough.

## SOLUTIONS

Encourage thinking outside the box among practitioners/funders and venue managers.

Talk to each other! Set up an e:group - interested? talk to Gillie Kleiman about this!

Improve post show discussions so they are more audience centred and ask the Q Why did you do this work? Why did you do it just now?

Involve critics and reviewers

**Issue number:** 027

**Issue:** Subsidy vs. Philanthropy: how can we steer the future of funding?

**Convener(s):** Ben Fletcher-Watson

**Participants:** Leyla Asadi, Phelim McDermott, Susan Coffey, Sarah Richards, Caroline Routh, Melinda and others...

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

When is subsidy positive and negative?

Can artists ever be involved in the higher-level decisions, or are we destined to raise our placards after the event?

The National Campaign for the Arts is currently creating its Manifesto and many of these ideas feed into it. Is theatre part of leisure and recreation? Is it health-related? What about psychological health? How do the issues of participation versus observation feed into the debate (i.e. dance as a sport / healthy activity means lots of funding is now going into dance, but only as a participatory activity – young people aren't seeing professionals at work)?

Everything is subsidized in some way – education, health, employment – so why do the arts get bashed? Why can't we get the message out that it is good value and gives a huge boost to the economy?

Successful public art (from Angel of the North to theatre) requires a public who feel connected to the arts, whether via arts education / TiE, outreach, participation, etc.

What about hard numbers – figures for engagement? Local authorities now have good data for the first time, and the numbers are impressive.

Artists can be their own worst enemies – “there's no need for me to use my skills differently even when the world changes”.

In hard times, does lack of subsidy prevent people from making art? No! Does it trim the fat? Arguably, yes.

There isn't a clear EITHER subsidy OR philanthropy dichotomy – we need input from lots of sources, some of which may have strings attached. Perhaps one can make the argument that those companies which raise their money in a

diverse way are most deserving of subsidy, and not those who hang about waiting for money to fall from the sky!

Funding buys time.

The public know the cost of theatre, but not the value of theatre. So why have the arts not changed their arguments in 50 years? Science won most of its battles many years ago, and now bodies like the ESRC expect funding increases annually. R&D has been their biggest trump card.

Does philanthropy exist in the UK? Yes – but it revolves more around music than theatre. Why? Maybe because it's aspirational ("I used to play the violin / I wish I could play like that") or people feel a connection to music. We must also remember that **Big Money Is Conservative**: music doesn't change when the Music Director leaves an orchestra, but theatres change when ADs leave. Maybe donors feel that they want things to stay the same – they like what they know?

US-style philanthropy is scary – prodding and poking artists like circus freaks, but it offers huge returns. But in the UK, only the big companies can manage this – US Friends of the RSC, etc. Are their big teams the reason, or their 'connections' – 'national' companies, Royal links?

Bequests are great, but can really flummox organizations who aren't prepared for them, or skew an organisation's work.

So, what do we do?

Thanks to all for their great contributions.

**Issue number:** 028

**Issue:** What should theatre writers be writing now in 2009?

**Convener(s):** Jo Macpherson

**Participants:** M d'Ellard, Peter Lathan, Bernie, J J Mitchell, Christine Coles, Billy, Jo

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We didn't really answer this question although we wanted to, but discussion included:

- The process of writing – an hour a day? Ferment and vomit? The benefits of alcohol?
- Getting political ideas into writing; the writer's interaction with the material and where they are coming from
- Should the writer tell people what to think to any extent or provide snapshots without any agenda/ personal viewpoint?
- Writing of the 1990s being dated and return to 1970s style attitudes to feminism
- What are the hot issues of the moment? Credit crunch, environment or perhaps feel good escapism?
- Changes in the Newcastle theatre scene – generally viewed negatively by participants – gritty cutting edge engaging theatre replaced by faceless uniformity – “musicals” (brought in from London) or “dark Russian plays” (we have swot up on to understand). What happened to the stuff in between – the poignant but funny; the fun but intelligent?
- Difficulty of taking risks because of financial pressure and no fringe scene in Newcastle for new and experimental work
- Writing should be multi-layered to appeal to all and not just those who want an intellectual workout - both intellectual and fun



- Why is the experience of going to the theatre so often fearful?
- Loss of acting craft to cult of celebrity
- Fear of being seen as intellectual if we try to do anything new
- The importance of truthfulness in writing
- Work channeled towards getting arts council funding
- Loss of identity in north east performance venues
- The irony of NE writers and actors having to move to London to get work and north east work being far more saleable when sold from London – people brought back from the south rather than using people who are based here, who then have to move south to get work!

I probably haven't covered everything that was discussed here or expressed it in a particularly articulate way in my notes but I would like to say how interesting it was to talk to you all. As someone who is just getting started with playwriting I got a lot from this session and feel that I have a greater understanding of the field I am trying to work in, particularly here in the north east, from our talk. Hope you all got something from it too – I say don't let the bastards grind us down! Many thanks to you all, Jo.

**Issue number: 029**

**Issue: Some of the best theatre work is NOT happening in the so-called 'professional' theatre! Discuss...**

**Convener(s): Julie Ward**

**Participants: Geraldine Ling**

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

What is this wonderful theatre I am referring to?

It is the work I have seen created by youth theatres, street kids, groups of disabled people, old people, rural communities making collective work, etc

We need to acknowledge that often these groups have professional input such as a director or writer, which can help to shape the work and add production values.

But the wonderfulness comes from something else – not a professional veneer. Often it is the subject matter – stories and themes that are close to the heart of these communities. Location plays a big part in defining a certain wonderfulness– how people connect with their immediate environment, landscapes and their history – being on home territory. There are lines of energy that reach back into the past, encompass the present and are directed to the future. It is almost tribal, can be religious in concept.

There's also something powerful about a community of interest, a group that is brought together by common concerns for example refugees, prisoners.

The kind of theatre we are thinking of here embodies a community spirit that a trip to the more usual professional repertory theatre cannot replicate.

It is often more of an event, a welcoming; spaces are decorated, processions precede the theatre show, food becomes an integral part of the occasion. There is a festival atmosphere. These events appeal to non-theatre audiences and are more inclusive than the majority of our so called professional theatre output with its highly subsidised programmes for a largely elite audience.

The energy, enthusiasm, dynamism and vision of maverick individuals who make this work happen is something that we so-called professional theatres should aspire to.

Can we name some role models in the professional world – our peers?

Kneehigh Theatre who have successfully become a national treasure with an international reputation making work that still feels totally connected to deep-rooted core values – they have become successful on their own terms and audiences love them, perhaps sensing the 'place' from which they come and the very human values that they embody.

Barrie Rutter with Broadsides is another wonderful maverick, uncompromising and outside of the box – being fiercely regional and aspirational with it.

Companies like this seem to generate a team spirit, a collective creativity which informs us that making theatre is not just a job, it's your life, and that your work with your chosen company is not just a stepping stone to somewhere else.

Even if YOU don't like the work you have to admit that ordinary audiences do. The shows are remembered, the companies are talked about and word of mouth prevails. There is a buzz – there is an aliveness!

**Issue number:** 030

**Issue:** Do you want to work with gay men?

**Convener(s):** Richard

**Participants:** Oscar, Adele +1

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

- Gay men working as nursery nurses makes the papers but parents who know the men seem to be less concerned
- Gay men's stories are usually problematised – tragic, dead, lonely...
- Do we want to educate and inform or just make art by and with gay men?
- Work with gay men challenges stereotypes
- Being lesbian or gay (l/g) has only relatively recently been taken off the list of mental illnesses and it was recently reported that 17% of psychotherapists would still try to 'cure' l/g to become straight
- Can we do work in schools?
- Homophobia restricts straight men – it means they don't touch for fear of being labelled gay
- There is self-censorship by gay men who say they don't like children in order to make them appear 'safe'. This allows gay men to 'out' without raising the false 'spectre' of danger to children.
- Bigots always ask the question – "What impact will being brought up by lesbians and gay men have on the children?" no-one ever questions how badly heterosexuals parent, particularly the way the parent lesbians and gay men.
- You can't tell people what to think, but you can tell people what they are not allowed to say when it's designed to be oppressive.
- People feel homophobia in their hearts and assume it is ok to express that feeling, rather than applying the logic of their heads – for example if heterosexuals produce l/g children then can't l/g parents also produce heterosexual children or l/g children....

**Issue number: 031**

**Issue: Why do actors often work longer hours for less pay than administrators**

**Convener(s): Sarah Kemp**

**Participants: Jane Arnfield**

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

# It is good when the Arts Council recommends a daily rate for artists as this gives credence and value to their work and confidence to ask for a reasonable fee

#However it doesn't really apply to actors – is this because there are too many?

#working conditions for actors are very poor – ie even when working for RSC still expected to stay in digs rather than RSC paying for hotels. Or if they do get hotels are often expected to share rooms. This would not happen if they were in most other professions.

# In Europe actors are payed much less for rehearsing and much much better for performing and also have better conditions of accommodation and subsistence

#Why are we as performers afraid of asking for a reasonable fee?

#Why are so few people interested in this issue - - is it a reflection of how we value performers? – is it all done for love of the art? How do you retain older and more experienced performers with families and mortgages who can't afford to work for very little?

**Issue number:** 032

**Issue:** Who are we doing it for?

**Convener(s):** Susan Coffey

**Participants:** Jo Cundall, Kate Craddock, Laura Cull, Anne Besford, Jane Arnfield, Ben, Gilly, Chris

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Generally, artists are not doing it for themselves, but for an audience.

Occasionally artists do not consider the impact on the audience – this was thought not to be a good idea.

It was felt that audiences can help shape the work and that the process is about developing a relationship.

If an artist is funded has an obligation to consider the audience – ‘it’s a privilege to be funded’.

Artists should consider the legacy of the work and the influence it may have on others. Work comes with responsibilities.

While work is being created for audiences – do those audiences always relate to or even understand the work and the artist’s intentions?

How do we help support audiences to ‘get’ work that is unfamiliar and perhaps perceived as difficult?

Discussion about engaging audiences from an early age – how children are taught, lack of a philosophical approach in British teaching methods – children not encouraged to question art/culture and therefore can become fearful or disengaged from it.

With older people – how do we tackle the ‘not for me’ syndrome?

Perhaps some barriers will be overcome with generational change.

Theatres, unlike cinemas, can be intimidating and in themselves a barrier to attendance.

Young audiences – particularly students and those studying drama or the performing arts – are notoriously difficult to engage with contemporary theatre. What more can we do to support their understanding and experience? If we can't engage and relate to the next generation, who are we doing it for? Does the work that we create/present match the life experience of these young people? Whose responsibility is it to expose this generation to life experiences that the art reflects?

Do we create work to satisfy the funders? –

Feeling was that if in receipt of funding there was a need to be accountable, but it should not influence the nature of the work. The relationship between artist and funder should be a collaborative one; an equal partnership.

There was a feeling that small scale companies have to respond to funding criteria in order to make the project happen. This was thought to be an unfortunate and rather cynical approach to accessing funding. A professional thought that this would be exposed by the application process and that unless the passion came through the application it would most likely fail.

Artists should take more responsibility in 'selling' work in different ways to different audiences.

How involved are the public in deciding what work they want?

Public engagement in a debate about the arts is limited – not sure how much influence or representation they have on funding strategy. How representative is ACE of public opinion when it is responsible for the distribution of public money?

National Theatre of Scotland used as an example of a well funded and artistically successful organization, whose rapid popular rise has led to some of the work not being available on the middle scale and being seen abroad – who are they creating the work for?

Frustrations with the feeling that the work was not being created for disabled people, or people who feel excluded.

Conclusion:

The work should be for everyone, but how do we deal with inertia in audiences?

**Issue number:** 033

**Issue:** Theatre should be funnier.

**Convener(s):** Bev Fox

**Participants:** Bev Fox, Gary Kitching, Phelim McDermott, Alison McGowan, Becci Jameson, Matilda, William and Nazly.

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The session began with trying to define what funny is – as opposed to fun. We kept coming back to this and didn't really reach a conclusion but agreed there are different types of funny (clever, naughty, strange, shocking), and that fun means entertainment and enjoyment. Matilda (as an actor) says she sees herself as a serious person and enjoys being able to explore that intensity as a performer. She has felt excluded from comedy as she doesn't see herself as a funny person. From an actor's point of view, if they are attempting comedy and don't hear the audience's laughter they interpret this as 'no response', and fear they/the play isn't funny. Is this really true? If the audience isn't laughing it doesn't necessarily mean they're not interested or engaged. So if a play is billed as fun rather than funny does that take the pressure off the creatives who are scared audiences won't laugh. Is there a real division between funny people and serious people, you're either funny or you're not?

Phelim: You can't go deep unless you're funny first.

Alison: You need light and dark ...

To find something 'real'.

Rather than tackling issue based theatre from a completely serious view point how can we use humour to elicit an emotional response.

If we re-frame an issue or see it from a different point of view we can see the humour in the situation.

To be funny you need two perspectives therefore with theatre there should always have two points of view.

There was a feeling that an element of Generosity and goodwill between the performers translated well to the audience.

Fun rather than funny.

As a performer don't try to be funny.



There are many different types of audience laughter- feeling awkward/ embarrassed, the audience responding as though they should find something funny, the rhythm of dialogue and gags.

The enjoyment of being naughty/ rebellious, the suppressed laughter and freedom that "conventional" theatre tries to suppress.

What is the role of gender in comedy.  
Are women given the space to develop and explore comedy?  
As comedy is generally male dominated how can women find their own space to develop comedy.  
In the rehearsal process is where women are finding their own voice rather than on the stage. Women confident in being really stupid/ silliness.  
In improvisational and stand-up comedy males tend to be more competitive than women to the detriment of their development and expression.

Why not have comedy by women for women, men have been happy to do this for years.

Differences in comedy and "straight" theatre audiences.  
With comedy audiences they feel they have the right to respond - to laugh, groan audibly sympathise with characters, this is missing in conventional theatres.  
There was felt to be a cross over with comedy and musical theatre audiences.

Summary:

Don't try to be funny.  
Allow your audiences to judge for themselves what is funny rather than forcing them.  
Allow them to respond.  
Treat all issues from different perspectives.  
Allow women to find their own voice in comedy.  
Generosity and goodwill are paramount to good comedy.  
Theatre shouldn't have any shoulds.

**Issue number: 034**

**Issue: Making the break to do my own work: How do I find the time/space/money?**

**Convener(s):** Tom Walton

**Participants:** Abby Moffatt, Annie Rigby, Leyla Asadi, Fiona ? (sorry)

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Initial Issues...

As young/new/emerging artists, it seems it has been very difficult to balance...

- **Time** to create new work
- **Money** to rent **Space**
- Finding the **Money** to live e.g. catering for loss of earnings whilst in the process of renting space.

There is a cycle that the desire to create work comes across certain barriers. In order to make ends meet, artists find themselves in part-time/temp/office (etc) type jobs... but in order to make work/ do the work that we want to do, we have to pay for space, which is expensive. Added to this is the loss of earnings whilst in the space. The combined cost of creating our own work in the first instance then costs us a lot of money e.g. - a weeks pay + a weeks rent for the space. This is almost impossible to balance and more than often cannot afford to lose pay or pay for space without funding/professional backing/support in kind (which is very difficult to get without a proven track record).

Do we ask for too much?

It could be true that no one should have a divine right to be given space for free or be subsidised at other's expense, however, we find ourselves in a time where reparatory theatre is gone in the area and it is not simply a case of joining a ladder and working your way up in an organisation. We still find ourselves in a position where chances are hard to come by and space is at a premium.

It is also the case that those who want to create their own work are not simply actors and agents are not always appropriate.

It is not a work-shy attitude in any respects. We do not expect things to be handed to us on a plate. We are prepared to work hard for reputation and

pay however, the dilemma still remains that without initial help there is a problem. It is not in a purely selfish manner that this help is asked for, the group felt that their motives were to create a product for an audience and a product that they would enjoy.

Should we just get on and do it?

Find space anywhere... parks, bus stops, back alleys, church yards?  
These spaces are not always conducive to the type of work being created.

After discussion it was realised that the real problem was caused by the cost of rehearsal/work space. For a dedicated artist, time will be made to progress their art and practice, even if the circumstances are not ideal e.g evenings, weekends...

Addressing the Space issue....

It is understood that buildings such as Dance City are trying to create affordable and useable work space however, it is also understood that these kinds of buildings are expensive to run... electricity, management, maintenance etc... These costs are, of course, passed on to the artist.

Perhaps the time has come where we have to become more inventive with the spaces we are willing to look for and use. There are so many unused buildings/rooms in Newcastle that, to us, seems a massive waste.

How can we make their owners aware of their usefulness to us? What can we offer them? How can we make these offers attractive?

Initially a portfolio/database of all spaces for rent and prices would be a very useful starting point.

Could there be a 'lastminute.com' for useable and available theatre spaces. Theatres/Arts Buildings/warehouses/offices etc... could advertise last minute reduced rates on spaces suitable for rehearsal. They offer a resource for cheap rehearsal space... we offer them a nominal/reasonable fee for workspace that would otherwise be unoccupied/not making money.

In terms of theatres and arts buildings, this also creates opportunities to actively support emerging artists and build relationships with them, to bring in day time business and the possibility of expanding their audience base.

Perhaps this could be the responsibility of the Arts Council. Instead of monetary contributions, they provide emerging artists with support in kind. We could

apply to the Arts Council for space. It may be that we are given what is available... one space one day, a different space another.

It is also proposed that any venue/organisation is then accredited for their support in kind where work produced there becomes successful. To give otherwise unused space to an artist is an easy way to for organisations/businesses interested in helping the arts to provide 'in kind' support.

It is important that this is not a way of taking business away from people who let rehearsal spaces. This service is ideally for those who would not otherwise be able to afford space. Or maybe it is the future of space rental or a way of driving rent prices down to an overall more affordable level.

What else could help?

It is important to remember that the answer to our space problems might be found outside the arts organisations.

In an ideal world established theatres/practitioners/arts council would take a chance on young talent and support them in realistic ways... providing space... small amounts of start up money, funding to try out ideas without having to have a track record.

**Issue number:** 035

**Issue:** Puppetry and the devising process, getting them in from the start

**Convener(s):** Alison McGowan

**Participants:** Abby Moffat, Adele Evitt, Martine D'ellard, Nick Sweeting, Gary Kitchen

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The title arises from frustrations with getting puppetry in at the start of the devising process, rather than puppets being created while devising takes place and then stuck in at the end where they invariably don't work well and can become an uncomfortable add on.

When this happens, the show may well be better without the puppets as they haven't been part of the process of making it, but people feel obliged to keep them in because they have taken time and money to produce. They can become another marketing bonus – there are puppets in it!

Improbable recognise the need to have things to play with in the rehearsal room. Having had their initial ideas, their designer / maker will make an initial kit of puppets / objects ahead of their first rehearsals. He may well sit and make in the rehearsal room while devising takes place, where he can respond quickly to the need for new things.

This process relies on the particular skills, materials and techniques that the company have developed which allow things to be made quickly out of foam / latex / paper / selotape etc and which are responsible for the resulting aesthetic.

Breaks in the devising process allow for further making to take place and consolidating earlier makes. There is often a team of makers involved who may go on to operate and maintain the puppets they've created.

Difficulties arise in smaller companies where there are fewer people / smaller budgets and when companies with different approaches to devising ring up to have puppets made when budgets and timescales are already fixed.

Different types of puppet making are better suited to different theatre making processes. Consideration also has to be given to the show's design, aesthetic and how durable they need to be.

It became clear that the Alison should set the agenda and where possible be more pro active in asking for what she needs from the start.

Perhaps as Alison's company PuppetShip CIC grows and more people become involved there will be greater scope for meeting the requirements for different companies who ring up by passing work around to different makers.

There are issues of craft verses bodging to be explored further in another session.

A fruitful discussion followed about using quick build techniques alongside Improv work

Does anyone want to make a piece for an adult puppetry cabaret for Halloween?

Contact Alison on 07971 407282 or email me at [alison@puppetship.com](mailto:alison@puppetship.com)

**Issue number:** 036

**Issue:** How can we make theatre more accessible for people with disabilities?

**Convener(s):** Martine d'Ellard

**Participants:**

None!

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Just some useful websites and stuff to google...

YouTube: Oily cart (Blue)  
Carpet Films

'The social model of disability'

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

[www.freewebs.com/jamboreeproject](http://www.freewebs.com/jamboreeproject)

DAIL (Disability Arts in London)

Nwdaf (NW Disability arts forum)

Oily Cart

Mind The Gap

Graeae Theatre co

Lawnmowers Theatre co

BBC Ouch

Laurence Clark

Liz Crow

Tom Shakespeare

Matt Fraser

Karen Shearer

**Issue number: 037**

**Issue: Where are all the stage managers in the north east?**

**Convener(s):** Caroline Routh

**Participants:** Sarah Kemp

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

It was suggested that the issue could be widened to include lighting technicians and other technical staff as well – all of whom were difficult to find in the north east.

The Interact scheme was only able to attract a very small number of stage management applicants and even advertising nationally (from TSF experience) proved unsuccessful.

Regional colleges didn't seem to be providing a wide range of stage management/technical students of a high standard; it was suggested that perhaps links could be made into the colleges by regional companies and venues to offer work placements/mentoring that could help to improve the quality of the graduates. This could also help to retain graduates in the region as they would have built professional relationships. It was suggested that an apprenticeship scheme might be useful – or that the one operated by the Gateshead Newcastle Arts Forum and funded through the Learning Skills Council could be accessed (it was believed that the Sage, as coordinators, were keen to see a wide range of apprenticeships available in different companies).

Sarah reported that the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama had a high quality of stage management students and it was suggested that links could be made and that opportunities available in the north east could be advertised to the students there (on the basis that if the students were in Scotland they might be more prepared to work in the north east than if they were London or south based).

Caroline suggested that the Stage Management Association could be approached for details of the north east based stage managers and technicians and that perhaps these details could also be held centrally on the Empty Space website and accessed as a regional resource. This tied into other suggestions that had been made throughout the day about the region needing a central pool of information for all kinds of needs within the theatre sector.



**Issue number:** 038

**Issue:** How best do we give ourselves a kick up the butt to get started? And why is it easier not to?

**Convener(s):** Abby Moffatt

**Participants:** Me (Whoever comes is the right people – this is a true thing)

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Why do we struggle?

Is it about jacking everything else in?

Is it about keeping the faith?

Do we use society, pressures, finances etc as a scapegoat?

Or is it that we need some help, a helping hand?

What is daunting about getting started and how do we make it less so or more manageable?

Is it easier to think, to do a lot of thinking, to do a lot of planning, to focus on the admin side of things because we feel like we've achieved something if we've filled out that form or written down a plan?

Do we make plans of plans to delay us from actually fulfilling those plans?

Are we scared of getting up on our feet, of doing, of thinking practically rather than theoretically?

Are we afraid that we might not come out with anything good? That the ideas we have thought and thought about, don't end up translating very well and then we feel like we've got nothing left.

Is it about getting some encouragement? Perhaps we need someone, personally or professionally, to congratulate us on our achievements or even simply our commitment and perseverance.

A love for what you do is a rare and precious thing, let's not lose it.

How much does money matter? Again is it a scapegoat, or do we need that time off, that blank canvas, that empty space, that time to think which often money can afford us? (Maybe not)

Is it a slap round the face we need?

Is the answer actually just really simple - and as Nike would say - JUST DO IT! And as Dr. Pepper rightly observes - what's the worst that could happen?

If we're going to commit, let's fully commit. If this is the career path we've chosen, let's really choose it and rejoice in our determination.

Maybe we need to re-evaluate - do we need a flat in that nice location, do we need that extra glass of wine, do we need to work five days a week or can we survive on four days with a few less luxuries. Surely we can survive on passion for what we do, a burning desire to do it and love alone.

I was always told that if something's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

If you want something enough, you'll find a way of making it happen. You need to go for it 110% (why not infinity percent) and not just half-heartedly.

Don't be afraid of saying hello, of making that move, of feeling you have something to say, that you deserve to be there. Don't be the quiet one on the outskirts, be the active one in amongst it all. What's the worst that could happen?

Forget about other people's perceptions, the third eye watching you, the nay-sayers because actually, they're often only ever in your head.

We're our own worst critique. More often than not people aren't being negative, they're listening or in fact not saying anything at all.

What are we scared of?!

Have belief in yourself, in your vision. Only you can make you feel fulfilled, only you can truly satisfy your needs.

We're actually very lucky people. Not many people can say that they're following their dreams, the aspirations, persevering beyond reservations and in the face of adversity. Congratulate yourself!

Know what it is you want, you need and don't stop until you get it (because you can get it)

Stop putting up the obstacles, the barriers because they're actually only put up by ourselves. Think sideways, jump higher, look at things from another angle.

You may be tired but make that phone call. You may want to watch that programme, see that friend for an extra half an hour, but send that email first. It may be easier to lie on your bed bored but get your ass up, get on your feet and do something! (It is guaranteed that you will feel better having made some progress)

However small, however short amount of time, every little helps.

Don't lose yourself, don't lose your vision, feel empowered that you're following your dream (as cheesy as it sounds) and be happy.

"Keep interested in your career however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time." (Desiderata)

To quote a film – get up in the mornings, clap your hands, and say this is going to be a great day!

Everything is possible! You're no less capable than anyone else.

GO FOR IT! (And to hell with the consequences.)

Leave the after until after.

Your ass is durable; it's made of thicker stuff (like our resilience, our determination, our love and our passions) so go and give yourself a really big kick up the butt!

**YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE!!**

**Issue number:** 039

**Issue:** Can we broaden our definition of 'resources' and share them more equally and creatively?

**Convener(s):** Julie Ward

**Participants:** Christine Coles, Gary Kitching, Alison McGowan

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

You have an empty space – I don't have any space  
I can provide an audience – you want them

You have core funding – I only have project funding BUT  
You need a project – I have one (several even!)

You have a gap in your programme  
We have spare dates in our touring schedule

You have empty rehearsal spaces  
We need to rehearse and we'll run free education workshops

You have a big office and spare telephone lines  
We need an address and a telephone answering service  
And we can provide volunteer admin assistants

You don't know what to do with your old equipment, sets and costumes  
We love cast offs

You want to do a project working with another sector (eg. Heritage, environment)  
We already have the contacts, networks and partnerships

You have a remit to create new work  
Working with us would be very NEW

You are a large RFO – we are a small unfunded organization  
Let's bury the differences and work together

You want to have a regional focus  
We work in the hinterland – it's part of your region

We have a venue to perform in and shows to tour  
So do you – let's swap

You like organising parties – we all need one! (What happened to the Arts Ball?)

**Issue number:** 040

**Issue:**

**Convener(s):** Adele Evitt

**Participants**

Bev Fox  
Oscar Watson  
Chris Moad  
Ann Ridley

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Concerns – What were people getting from the previous Actors Centre?

Too restricted.

Open it out to other Agencies eg Teachers

How many members of the A C compared to no. of actors in NE

Good idea – differentiation and levels of workshops etc. ??

2 levels ? Those who want acting work and those who need skills for other reasons ?

Discussed need for CVs and auditioning in London and Manchester.

What is needed ?

—Social ?

— “need ” not to go cold

—what techniques are needed to be addressed ( eg 2 weeks ago we have no National TV Co.

Impetus—The Need for a Community

Bev identified there is a need for impro on several “levels ”

Space is a huge issue

There is a need for a place for actors to build their skills

Bev has a network of actors etc. who could answer a questionnaire

There is a wealth of skill to be used in this area as well as bringing in "visitors" to do masterclasses.

\*\*\* Bev is willing to start the ball rolling

How many professional / non proff participants might be interested ? ( 1 subsidises the other )

Demand can be varied - could have different places in NE - core in Newcastle and "satellites eg ARC in Darlington.

Hangar 51 suggested for large scale workshops

Newcastle Library will have new performance space

\*\*\* Oscar Watson will support admin etc.

## CONCLUSION

SEEDS OF A NEW ACTORS CENTRE SOWN

BEV WILL BE IN COMMUNICATION WITH OSCAR

THEY WILL KEEP ADELE INFORMED

**Issue number:** 041

**Issue:** Will the north east ever be more than a stepping stone for professionals to move on from?

**Convener(s):** Viktoria

**Participants:** Peter, Molly, Layla, Ann,

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

It's better to be a bigger fish in a small pond than vice versa in London.  
We don't want to have to go to London. We don't want to move?  
We're sick of people thinking they can help the region when we can help them.  
How can we get more people into the area?  
If you're willing to be proactive you can work anywhere.  
We are our own experts.  
We need the theatres up here to take more risks or else we need a new theatre where we can take risks. We need to be able to explore, learn and FAIL!  
No theatres are taking risks anymore and we need places where there are no risk factors.  
It's much more positive to be up here.  
There are places in Gateshead that have potential.

We need a new/old Live Theatre that takes risks, space and encouragement.  
We need directors of theatres to be more willing to view new work rather than not taking risks with an unknown company? How else will new work be made?

Janet Plater has the monopoly on actors up here and if you are not with her then no one will find you.

We need a place where professionals can keep abreast of each other's work and be less isolated. We need a place to bounce ideas and improvise and create. This place does not have to be pretty or completely kitted out - just somewhere that is the hub of the industry in the north.



**Issue number: 042**

**Issue: What shall we tell the Arts Council**

**Convener(s): Paul Harman**

**Participants: None**

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Please put the key under the flower pot when you leave. We may need it again when we have thought more about what the theatre needs.

**Issue number: 043**

**Issue: Craft vs Bodging? Discuss**

**Convener(s):** Alison McGowan

**Participants:** Gary Kitchen, Julie Ward

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

Bodging...The word has negative connotations, but we came to understand bodging in a very different light by the end of the session.

Without formal training you can feel like a fraud in your own profession – a bodger? It's easy to feel like a total outsider to those who have undergone conventional theatre training even when you've worked as an actor for years.

In terms of making things, bodging also has negative connotations of clagging things together with hotglue, being shoddy in workmanship.

Craft was always learned via apprenticeship - doing something over and over for years. You learn via doing so the formal qualification doesn't necessarily make you an 'elite'.

Teaching also gives you insight into your craft.

Does bodging happen due to pressure of time and resources? Would it not be better to think of it as improvising? Something creative emerge from the panic of the deadline.

Craft is more about technique than creativity. The mastering of technique through repetition takes you to a higher level of skill. Your bodging can then become something creative, exciting and very positive.

Craft provides the bedrock the foundation for artful bodging which can be playful and fun.

Julie then joined the discussion and informed us that 'Bodging' is in fact an ancient term for working with greenwood. It's a wood turner's term, referring to going into the forest and using the greenwood that you find to make something useful, beautiful, functional.

It involves feeling your way with a material, using your hands and your skill. Being in some way shaped by the material, allowing artistic expression. Here's to Craft AND Bodging

**Issue number:** 044

**Issue:** What shall we do?

**Convener(s):** Annie

**Participants:** Annie, Richard, Paul, Kate, Mark, Caroline, some other people who said good things!

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

I went to collate action points, and there weren't loads... But the ones there were were good ones.

Gilly and Leyla are going to set up an e-group to enable us to network better, share resources, share skills, be more effective.

Gerry convened a session which culminated in a 'last Friday of the month' training offer from lots of practitioners.

A theme that came up from lots of discussions was the need for a spaces audit and scheme, so artists can have better access to affordable rehearsal and performance space.

Caroline told us that Mission Models Money in collaboration with BalletLorent, Northern Stage, Empty Space and NAME are already doing this. We agreed that it was really important that their findings are fed back to individual emerging artists (as well as organizations) as those are the people who need it most.

We agreed doing D&D annually here in the North East was a thing we want to do. Empty Space are committed to trying to make this a reality. However, we also agreed that we can all use the Open Space Technology to call our own get togethers, if we have specific questions/issues that we want to address. We need to take responsibility for this, not look to the big theatres to always take the lead.

We talked about the role of Empty Space, and that they could usefully signpost all of us to the different forums, networks, actions that come out of D&D. Keep us connected. A 'What's On' of sorts.

We will engage with the things we care about.

**Issue number:** 045

**Issue:** How can we have a more honest discussion about quality?

**Convener(s):** Jo Cundall

**Participants:** Jo Cundall, Jane Arnfield, Bev Fox, Susan Coffey, Phelim McDermott, Mark Mulqueen, Nazli TC, Lucy Ridley, Dora Frankel, Sarah Richards, Anne Besford, Natalie Querol

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We need to become familiar with one another, and the work

Artists need to be more articulate and honest – ‘this work will appeal to everyone’ is not useful!

Does feedback shape the process?

The role of critics: are they the ones to tell us that something is good or bad?

Quality is a very personal subjective thing

Definition: fitness for purpose

Not possible to always see work – have to trust relationships and past experiences

What are the things that get in the way of money? Time, money, what about skill??

Make a point in saying ‘I know it is flawed’ if it is

Build time in to production period for feedback

Be brave and own your opinions

Quality can sometimes be an intangible thing, not just about skill. Sometimes artists use those as an excuse....???

Honest dialogue is the way forward! Between funders, artists and programmers

Should the word in the question be ‘constructive’ rather than honest

ACE ‘go and see’ budget is missed!

**Issue number: 046**

**Issue: The north east produces the lowest proportion of national touring theatre of any of the English regions. What's stopping us from putting our work on a national stage?**

**Convener(s):** Natalie Querol

**Participants:** Caroline Routh, Julie Ward, Dora Frankel, Sarah Richards, Paul Harman, Sarah Kemp, Phelim McDermott

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

We began by asking if the fact that north east based companies aren't touring much nationally was actually problematic. This led to a discussion of the benefits of touring which included:

- Value for money – once the initial investment has been made in a show it represents better value for money if that show is seen by more people – good return for the tax payer.
- Economic viability – some companies stated that they simply wouldn't be economically viable if they only performed in the region – they need the fees from national and international touring to make the company work financially – staying in one region limits income generation.
- It changes how a company sees itself – TSF for instance see themselves as a national company based in the north east – it would effect the whole ethos of the company if they saw themselves as a regional company.
- Touring gives a critical opportunity to test the quality of your work against others nationally and internationally
- It's through touring that companies build relationships with venues that can eventually lead to commissions, co-productions etc.
- Performers want to perform and touring allows opportunities for more performance opportunities – longer contracts etc.

It was generally agreed that touring is important but also difficult. The biggest barriers to touring seemed to be:

- The process is very time consuming – companies don't have the spare capacity to book and manage a national tour let alone do the relationship building work that is essential to effective tour booking
- Tour booking is a specialised skill, most companies don't have the expertise or the contacts to step up to national touring. Good tour bookers are hard to come by.

- Timescales are difficult to manage – funding decisions vs venue programming deadlines
- Perceived pressure from ACE to keep making new work. As a general rule venues won't book a show unless they've seen it (unless they know the company very well) so the show needs to be made and showcased before it can be effectively sold – then each tour can be used to generate additional sales of the show thereby leading to retours. The European model of repertoire is therefore more effective as it allows companies to respond to demand for each show rather than having to book their one and only tour before they've even begun to generate demand.
- 'the tyranny of distance' the geography of the north east is such that it's very difficult to build a national tour of England cheaply – for companies based in the middle/north of the region there is only one other English region within an hour and a half drive (north west) and it's considerably further to get to the main cities even in that region. Companies in the south of the region can also reach Yorkshire within an hour and a half but Yorkshire has very few venues compared to other regions. So depending on where they are based there are only one or two regions that north east based companies can get to, perform in and get back from in a day. The cost of overnight stays (accommodation, staff costs, travel etc) can be prohibitive when initially building a touring network. This is less of a problem for other regions as few others are so geographically isolated.
- The funding system is set up in a way that makes it difficult for companies to gradually build a national touring circuit – applications either need to be region specific or, for national touring applications visit at least three regions (and ideally more if you want to make a strong application). This makes it very difficult to move from staying within the home region to touring nationally.
- Further south there is a clear demand for more physical/visual theatre than there is in the north east so it's difficult for companies to create work that will work both here and further afield.
- There is relatively little work touring into the region and it is therefore difficult for artists here to assess the quality of their own work against their peers from across the UK. In other words the lack of work touring into the region means that local artists are underinformed about their marketplace.
- Some artists that they actually found it harder to get programmed within the region than without.

Some suggestions were made of how the situation might be improved:

- Companies need to attend national and international festivals even if they're not performing at them, to get a better sense of the competition, to meet promoters and develop networks.
- Is there a way in which regional programmers that already have networks can advocate for local companies?
- Regional venues to support regional companies more, not necessarily by programming the work but by spending more time explaining why they're not programming the work and what companies could do to make their work more saleable.
- A need for showcasing opportunities or chances to meet and build relationships with promoters was a recurring theme. The south west bookers fayre was given as an example of an existing model elsewhere.
- The importance of programmers working collaboratively was raised and an example given of the French children's theatre system where there is an established network of children's theatre programmers who are obliged to meet 3 or 4 times a year and travel together to see work.
- It was also felt that the region was lacking a venue for early stage, experimental work and that was hindering the very creation of quality tourable work.

There was a feeling that whilst regional initiatives were valuable there needed to be a national initiative that the north east could be part of in order to combat isolation.

**Issue number: 047**

**Issue: If there was a dedicated 'space' for theatre makers in the north east what would it look like?**

**Convener(s):** Natalie Querol

**Participants:** Peter Lathan, Ann Ridley, Lucy Riley, John Hoggarth, Helen Green, Edmund Nickolls, Caroline Routh, Phelim McDermott, Cinzia Hardy

**Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:**

The group suggested what makes up a good space for theatre makers. The list included:

- Affordable rehearsal space (max £50 per day)
- Access to managed resources inc
  - Sound equipment
  - Lighting equipment
  - Flexible staging
  - Basic props and costumes
- A team of people running the space that are sensitive and on hand to help with problems or enquiries
- A variety of spaces to accommodate different kinds of shows/companies
- Somewhere that could facilitate networking meetings – a space where artists could get together to talk and exchange ideas
- A technical/making space alongside rehearsal rooms
- A place where cross-pollination could occur – lots of artists milling about a building at the same time.
- Accessible all the time not just 9am to 5pm.
- Showers/washing facilities
- A place to prepare and eat food OR proximity to shops/cafes etc. The group felt very strongly that food was an essential part of the equation, that in an ideal world a space would have a kitchen and someone to cook for the group. Plenty of examples were given of companies in France and also Lanternhouse in the UK where food was at the heart of the creative process. A creative triangle was mentioned – when you feel safe, warm and fed then you can be creative.
- Dock doors for getting set etc in and out.
- Blackout AND good natural light
- Public transport links and parking
- Carbon neutrality

There were also some things that were mentioned that were in direct contrast to each other such as:



Isolated space that allows artists to totally focus on their project without the hubbub of the city. Where they can stay on site and be completely immersed in the work.

vs

Space that is in the heart of everything so that artists can fit rehearsals around their normal daily lives, be inspired by others working in the space, and have good access to shops etc.

From this the group discussed whether it was possible for even the most amazing building to answer all these needs when some of them were totally contrasting. Perhaps it would be better to have a central database of theatre spaces, with full information on the pros and cons of each space, so that people could easily find the right space for them without having to begin the search from scratch every time.

Examples of some spaces currently available either for use or as interesting models included:

- Pametrada Arts Centre in Wallsend (many spaces in one building although as yet unmanaged)
- National Youth Theatre building has a technical space as well as rehearsal space which has been a really positive experience for NYT although considerable care does need to be given to fair and manageable booking systems etc.
- There are 6 spaces within half a mile of the Cluny in Byker that all have some space but none of it is quite right as rehearsal space.
- Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Northern Ireland – an interesting model – artists apply to ACNI to stay there and make work.
- Cinzia mentioned a great free space in Northumberland that was fantastically well resourced and only 30 minutes from Newcastle.
- Bolbec Hall has some amazing spaces potentially available to lease.
- Lanternhouse
- CTC have a rehearsal space which stands empty when they're not rehearsing. Companies can contact Lucy Riley to discuss whether there might be ways in which that space could be used.

Several members of the group felt that the space should also be useable for corporate clients in order to generate an income stream. Particularly as artists have a unique way of working and relating to a space which we could share as a model of good practice with corporate groups. Phelim questioned whether having corporations working in a space left a residue that somehow lessened the capacity of the space to nurture art. Can one space serve both corporate and artistic ends?

The session ended with a question:

Who runs such a building? Would there need to be an artistic director or could it function without one?

And a statement:

The work is more important than the building. Therefore the building should bend to the needs of the artist rather than the other way around.