

Devoted and Disgruntled North East 2

What are we going to do
about theatre?

Gateshead Old Town Hall,
Wednesday 30 March and Thursday 1 April
2010

Issue number: 01

Issue: In Difficult times how do we best explain the value of what we do to the skeptical?

Convener(s): Paul Sutton

Participants:

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

First, remember that people/skeptics have their own pre-conceptions and expectations

We should revel in the difficulty of theatre, not diminish it

Show that people/votes value it, then maybe they will

Can we engage with the university sector to help evidence our value?

Narratives are powerful illustrations of our value as are images

Remember: document, evaluate, advocate

Make invisible work visible

Advocate for others work not just your own.

Issue number: 2

Issue: Do Theatre Companies have a pastoral role for artists and themselves?

Convener(s): Anna

Participants: Joanne, Kate, Caroline, Phelim

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Everyone agreed that pastoral care is an important aspect of the creative process but yet it is not recognized as a formal “role” for anybody but some people “naturally” incorporate it into their work. It has been recognized that some long-serving team members may be particularly rigid about what kind of care they provide (draw the line).

Pastoral care can be both helpful in protecting and enhancing the creative process and can be a hinderance – helpful in that attending to peoples’ basic needs (transport, accommodation, diet etc) they are more able to concentrate on their work; a hinderance in that pastoral care can be incredibly time consuming for other members of the team and distract them from their own work.

It was noted that as arts organizations funds have dwindled, pastoral care seems to have become more of an issue(?!) This may be that staff time is shorter.

It was suggested that once creative teams have been decided, they should meet as soon as possible to ascertain expectations in some way – this could be as informal as a team lunch or as formal as a half day workshop with getting to know you exercises. Expectation management is key here.

There was talk not only about participating artists, but the pastoral needs of the whole team (Creative Producer included). This led to some discussion around pastoral care of the “leader” – whatever their title may be.

It was recognized that there tends to be 2 kinds of leader – egotistical or collaborative. For the morale of the whole team, it was suggested that a collaborative leadership model caused less stress generally. For a leader to show some vulnerability (including self-doubt) it was generally agreed was more healthy than for a leader to show a hard, uncompromising exterior whilst tormented with insecurities!

Mentorship was a big part of the discussion – a few “heads” expressed a desire for a mentor. There was some discussion around what a mentor does, whether they just “come about” or picked for purpose (usually paid). It was suggested that however mentors come about, it is usually a good idea to “frame” that relationship (or formalize it).

Issue number: 03

Issue: What is the show you would love to make? Space to talk about it.

Convener(s): Annie Rigby

Participants:

Ruth Cooper

Rosie Kellagher

Jaye Kearney

Gillie Kleiman

Andrew Calvert

Kathy Paul

Mark Calvert

Michael Mould

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

We talked about the shows we'd love to make.

Theatre about hoarders, old people's homes, belonging, not belonging, round-the-world sailors, Grimm tales, knowing we must die, politics, home.

People's faces lit up when they talked about their show.

Andrew said he loves it when he is working on a show that is the show the director really wants to make.

Excitement is infectious.

We talked about what stops us making these shows. The money?

There is a lack of fringe theatre in Newcastle. A lack of self-financing projects, in rooms above pubs. There are gaps in the ecology in the North East. How can we fill them? A session is going to be called tomorrow.

We talked about why we don't make our 'dream shows' with the groups we are currently working with or in the context we are employed. Perhaps we need to be more flexible about scale. Just get the show out.

If you start, you can go on.

What makes us start?

- When we see other people's faces light up when we describe our idea. It gives us the permission.

- Deadlines
- Good stories
- And the usual – funding, space

We talked about the lack of spaces available, but that there are actually 1000s of spaces.

If we make work in non-theatre spaces we need to respect the audiences who are there.

**Empty Space have been involved in a spaces audit. How is that going?
Where will the information be distributed?**

We rarely ask someone to have a cup of coffee with us so we can talk about our idea. We should do this.

Formal mechanisms for doing this can be deadening. But we need to find ways.

There is no theatre forum in the North East. Online?

There are schemes for new work:

- Bridging the Gap – Theatre Royal / The Arc, Stockton / Berwick Maltings – offer a few week's rehearsal space and funding and 2 shows at each venue
- First in Three / Time in Two / Title Pending – Northern Stage. Scratch nights through to studio development time with technical support through to mainstage work.
- Live Theatre are looking at getting more people into their spaces

Really it's about finding the good stories.

When we've got a good story we can make the theatre we really want to make. We can enthuse other people. We can make people's faces light up.

Find the good stories.

Bring the good stories to the people we work with.

Make the theatre we want to make.

Issue number: 04

Issue: I am not a solo artist: What we do is collaborative. To what extent is it useful to draw parallels with other art forms

Convener(s): Alik

Participants: Alik and Alex

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Sitting on my own, I decided that it's useful to universities, because it allows them to sell courses with a fraction of the resources than actual hands on training needs. You're an artist, go make art.

After Alex arrived we talked about the processes of finding or creating an ensemble. How to get to make the kind of work you can only make by having worked together for years: Networking, but not in the venal sense; it's about finding the similarity and the stimulus.

We thought that a hub space would help, a place where people could pool resources, intellectual and physical and have discussions. We asked whether project-based funding was part of the problem, and how to generate and barter goodwill. Not a formal space, but an informal one. Maybe people could teach community classes in exchange for rehearsal space, or trade their willingness to be a helping hand for someone's expertise.

What kind of arts culture would encourage exchange, dialogue, opportunity? We talked about the importance of feeding things (energy, work, goodwill) back into the community, artistic as well as broader, and how to achieve common ground.

We talked about hard economic times ahead and Alex mentioned a volunteer-run movie theatre he knows. Maybe volunteer-assisted and barter-based models could help us weather the hard times to come.

Issue number: 05

Issue: Are there any Opportunities for generating new musical theatre in the North East?

Convener(s): Jenny Lee

Participants: Adele Evitt, Gez Casey, Natalie Querol, Andrew Calvert, Jenny Lee, Anne Besford, Tracy Gillman.

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

A reoccurring theme in our discussion was the idea that the NE has so many, dedicated, specific institutions which are devoted to individual areas of theatre making: the Sage stands gleaming across the river from the Live, there is Dance City, New Writing North, the Northern Stage, Customs House etc all of which cater for the creation of new work in their particular areas but, so far, none of whom seem to have come together to have a discussion about merging their particular specialties to collaborate on something like a new piece of new musical theatre writing.

We began to think of ways in which to ask these buildings/groups to talk to us and to each other with a view to sparking ideas, cross-pollination and collaborations. Our initial thoughts were...

- To approach these buildings and groups and actually pose this unasked question: are you already looking at this kind of thing? Are there already strategies in place for developing this kind of work? If not, how can we develop them? It was suggested that in the first instance approaching theatres might be the first port of call.
- That showing is better than saying. That a one/two week R&D period for a new musical piece given as a workshop performance would be a new and exciting opportunity for musical theatre practitioners in the North East. For example, the Empty Space and the Live theatre in collaboration recently enabled the development of Sawdust and Stardust as part of a two week bursary. This piece used musical theatre and text in an elegant and original way without it ever being labeled as 'musical theatre' - this kind of new performance style and brave exploration of how to merge different kind of creative practices is just one example of how musical theatre might take an exciting turn in the NE.

- There seems to be a deficit of grass roots, start-up funding and opportunities for musical theatre in the region. It would be wonderful if there were more, well advertised start-up opportunities for emerging Musical Theatre artists (writers, composers, choreographers etc who might collaborate together). N.B. very important that emerging isn't seen as a limiting phrase – not necessarily 'young' or 'up and coming' but practitioners who are trying to make their dreams happen, develop their work to its next level.
- A scratch performance as a chamber piece (so without the expense of a full cast and band) is great way to showcase the seeds of new MT writing. –this approach avoids the work becoming a talking shop and allows prospective funders/interests to see it up on its feet early on and with space for a producer to imagine how it might develop.
- Finding ways to make bridges outside of the obvious groups/institutions in the NE also emerged as an important way to develop collaborations with e.g. Gala or with those buildings not necessarily in Newcastle, such as ARC in Stockton, the 'ENO in town', Cardboard Citizens, Open Class, Catherine Tykells Folkworks at the Sage, The Irish Centre...
- Another route which might be worth looking at would be talking to Newcastle college about whether or not they do a Musical Theatre course like Northumbria Uni do and discussing potential ways of collaborating with them on R&D work.

Other recurrent talking points were the preconceptions people have about Musical Theatre, the costliness of staging productions and the potential of Musical theatre as a genre.

- We talked about how the 'poor theatre' is perhaps a dirty phrase but might just be a magic one for musical theatre in time of a recession. As musicals are generally considered twice as costly to stage as theatre productions we talked about how to approach musical theatre on a budget with imagination, creativity and originality as well as professionalism.
- Why should musical theatre have to be draped in red velvet? Why can it not look more like a Complicite, Julie Taymor, Knee High or Improbable show? Why not look even further at exciting prospects such as site responsive musical theatre? Why not explore unusual venues? The North East seems to be a region for producing exciting experimental work in so many areas – why can't this risk extend to musical theatre in the first instance on a small scale? Or is it really the case that the North East is still, at heart, a risk adverse region and Musical Theatre is fundamentally too risky to stage.

- Lots of musical theatre gets made on an amateur level in the region – two big amateur theatre companies use the theatre royal each year – the very fact of which shows that there is an appetite for musical theatre in the region as a popular form of entertainment. Professional venues are more and more interested in involving the community in their productions – why not do the same with musical theatre in the area? – develop a new musical theatre piece that involves the community thereby simultaneously creating an audience for the work through community involvement and bringing to life this overlooked genre in the professional arena in the NE. Doing community projects like this is a great way to bring audiences into see theatre and getting them to return to see something else which they might not otherwise have bought tickets for.
- Musical theatre can draw in an audience that fills a theatre in a recession even though it takes a lot of money to put on in the first instance. It's a popular form.
- Musical theatre still suffers under the stigma in the North East that it is 'not proper theatre' – this is changing in so many other places in the country – the NE should get on the band wagon and see the fundamentally, bizarre but populist, avant-garde but inviting potential of the genre.
- Musical theatre doesn't have to be show-tunes and Lloyd Webber – it can also be theatre of value that uses music
- Another way of combating the costliness of Musical theatre would be addressing the skills base of actors in the NE - training for actor-musicians for example who could develop their skills and perform in the way that groups such as Monster used with their tradition of casting actor musicians. Time and lack of training opportunities have seen this generation of actor-musicians move on from the NE - ...perhaps now might be a great time to revamp skills courses for actors from within buildings such as the Sage.
- How to get people in to see new musical theatre writing when musical theatre audiences might be those who go to traditional work that they are familiar with? Lock the doors? Create work that is familiar but attractive, a creative and irresistibly unique experience.
- Where is the Arts Council new musical theatre writing pot? How do we access it?

We need to create a body that will encourage musical theatre in the North East – the body doesn't need to be a house or even have limbs – it could be an embryo, as long as its aim is to maximize the possibility of new musical theatre writing to begin to have a chance of flourishing in the region. The North East already has a strong tradition of story telling and song. If looked at as an incubator – an initial chance for an idea to develop, a chance to play, to experiment, to get people interested in taking the piece forward, this route could be great.

Key Questions...

How can we get cross-pollinating and creating opportunities?

How can we set up scratch performances of new work and how to let people know about such opportunities?

What other models in other regions can we look at –whom and where has recently developed new Musical theatre work?

How can we change peoples perceptions of musical theatre?

How can we prove/show/convince it doesn't have to be expensive and big, especially in the first instance?

How can we encourage people to take a risk – what are the right conditions for them to do this?

The North East IS a region where new musical theatre could emerge.

Issue number: 06

Issue: We can find fairer ways to spend public money for theatre

Convener(s): Paul Harman

Participants: Aliko, Steve, Tom, Caroline, Helen, Natalie, Mark

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

The consensus was that while there is inherent unfairness in present systems of public funding, there is little confidence in the possibility of finding an alternative.

It was agreed that in the UK we have no mechanism from discussing evidence of alternative systems.

The participants were principally concerned with opportunities for new work or artists to find appropriate support.

The current system is based on state patronage which some people find acceptable. Other systems for distribution of public money are:

Vouchers for every citizen (Adam Smith Institute suggests an arts voucher for £11 annually)

Empowering local communities to commission or buy shows

Vesting public subsidy with venue programmers, representing the interests of their local audiences.

Separating the larger regional producing companies from their buildings and making spaces more open to a wider range of producers.

The consortium model for commissioning new work, as in the Street Arts model for Without Walls, has gained ground in recent years. This model of funding has been a core funding channel in France for many years.

There is a great deal of waste because there is no obligation for individual producers or recipients of project funds to collaborate and share resources. Sets are dumped and shows expensively created receive too few performances because there is no encouragement to collaborate.

There is no link between the funding for buildings and the funding of artistic production – local authorities may set commercial targets which preclude programming work funded by Arts Councils.

There is inherent unfairness in the distribution of public money between classes or groups of citizens – children, young people, adults, rural, urban etc. The group could not suggest ways to ensure greater fairness in this regard.

The Conclusion:

There may be fairer ways to distribute public funds but it is not a strong priority to find them.

Paul Harman

Issue number: 07

Issue: "I'm scared of funding applications...HELP ! or how to get money out of the Arts Council...is it worth it ?"

Convener(s): Tracy Gillman

Participants: Phelim, Jaye Kearney, Julie Ward

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

- It's a social enterprise in all senses of the word.
- Just apply
- It's about people-just talk to them.
- Don't project your worries onto them
- Join in
- Pay someone to do it-get a producer,barter...
- RFO status involves horrendous paperwork, sometimes get more money continuing with project funding.
- Be irresistible.
- Don't get depressed by rejection.
- Soon it'll all be about public procurement – tendering...be afraid
- Cultivate allies
- Collaboration/co-production/partnerships are the key

Issue number: 08

Issue: Working with children, can we do it without puppets?

Convener(s): Richard Bliss

Participants: Paul Harmen, Richard Bliss, Sarah O'Brien, Anna (Hullabaloo)

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

We agreed that it was possible to work without puppets and soon dispensed with the question. I (Richard Bliss) asked if we could talk about what a programme of cultural activity would look like if children were the programmers? This is a question I am tackling in a school in Sacriston (County Durham).

Agreed that children and adults pick work from what they know – so being an audience member and being a programmer are very different activities.

In programming for children it is important to have a good understanding of child development to ensure that the work selected is appropriate to the age group and development stage.

As professional performers and theatre makers we have a responsibility to make an offer and then just take the work off if young audiences don't like it – this is what we do for adults.

When looking at children's theatre – it is good acting that makes a good show, children (and adults) don't remember text.

In the UK there is not a tradition of children's theatre. This is very different to about 80 other countries in the world where theatre for children has a strong cultural tradition and is well supported. This is particularly the case in France and the Scandinavian Countries.

In the UK and the USA children's theatre has to have 'utility' – in the UK it has to support the curriculum in the USA it has to support the morality of the Christian right.

Trying to find out why there is such a big gap between what children do in their free time – their play time – and what is offered to them culturally is an interesting question. For example – lots of young teenagers love going to ‘teen’ clubs in a group but they don’t come to ‘teen’ theatre unless they are with their school or their parents.

In the virtual world children are both ‘makers’ and ‘audience’. They have no problem in creating avatars and being creative people through their avatars. Are avatars a form or puppet and mask?

Does asking children to review and critique work lead us to programme new sorts of work?

Is the best way forward to present a massive range of choices and take children to masses of different sorts of cultural activity in order for them to make choices in the future?

Children are very inventive – the virtual sleepover and the stop go animation on a mobile phone.

Issue number: 9

Issue: Space: Do we use what we have in the best way? Do we need more?

Convener(s): Anne Besford

Participants: Caroline Routh, Natalie Querol, Mark Mulqueen, Kate Eccles, Helen Green, Sarah Kemp, Julie Ward, Jennifer Lee, Gillie

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Answer to both questions is NO! Existing space can be used much more effectively. Bucket can hold stones, sand, water analogy – buildings might appear full but do we not just need to think about the problem differently?

Linked to funding issues – buildings mop up lots of funding resources by their very nature. Creating more buildings leads to more resources being required to sustain them.

In difficult economic times there will be less money and therefore the need to make more effective use of the space we have is imperative – we need to share!

Publicly funded organizations with buildings should be required to share their space, treating it as a resource for the sector, not just for the creation and dissemination of their own work or the work of the people they have existing relationships with. Where is the system allowing artists to access spaces without already being known to the building? Balance of power currently lies with the building – needs a change of culture. In the current funding climate, buildings will need to demonstrate their additional worth – be more permeable.

Donating space used to be more widespread – why isn't that common practice now? This is very important for emerging artists/companies.

Key issue – venues have commercial hire targets, giving space for free or at drastically reduced rates means that commercially viable space is tied up. A requirement of capital funding is the production of a business plan demonstrating that space will earn its way (sweating the asset!). Property is at a premium.

How is capital investment into development of venues that then rely so heavily on commercial hires an effective use of public money? Could a proportion of ACE capital funds be used to 'buy' time for artists in venues at commercial rates?

What do artists need out of space? Needs to be USEFUL – ie not merely at convenience of venue, they need to commit space to artists that they can own (eg not have to move everything out at the end of the day).

2 key issues coming out:

Cheap empty warehouses etc are hard to find

Current space is cost prohibitive

Moving forward we're going to find availability of space hard to change – more likely to win the battle with existing space.

Empty Space are in the early stages of developing a pilot project in Tyne and Wear, through Misson, Models, Money, to look at feasibility of brokering artists with space. Useful to have a single point of contact for artists, venues and commercial sector. This pilot will work with venues on financial modelling to look at the impact of releasing commercial hire space to artists.

There seems to be lots of space in the north of the region, but is there a need for more even distribution of spaces across the whole region? We need to make sure we're looking outside of 'theatre' spaces.

Issue – do people want to travel to use spaces outside of Newcastle/Gateshead, seems to be a psychological block? Do we need to consider transport as a barrier as well as cost of space? Really basic support eg travelcards can make a big difference to an artist.

Social space as well as creation and performance space is important. Needs to be flexible – mix of virtual networks and physical opportunities to meet. Can use a variety of physical spaces as long as its regular. A central online forum for the sector was suggested at last years D&D, its was set up but fizzled out as it wasn't adopted – networks/forums need to be owned and used.

Gaps in terms of experimental theatre performance spaces. But with a relatively sparse theatre infrastructure spaces need to be generalist rather than specialist.

Using alternative performance spaces can provide a solution, but there is a key issue of lack of infrastructure eg box office, stewarding, technical, marketing.

Stockton Space, creation centre was flagged up – has two large making spaces, and workshop/costume facilities. Underused facility at the minute – needs to be promoted wider.

Artists have a responsibility to factor space hire costs into funding applications and make a strong argument as to why they are appropriate.

Affordable accommodation is important to consider around making spaces available for use. Venues have digs – can these be used too?

Proliferation of Empty Shops schemes, supporting artists to make use of empty town centre spaces. Can be a useful platform / starting point, but we need to be

careful to understand if expected outcomes are to support creative organizations or to get shops back into long term commercial use.

Gillie – idea for artists in residence in the community scheme. Identifying useable spaces in local communities and brokering deals with artists for long term residencies in exchange for workshops. Link with Empty Space brokering scheme – is this just a different take on that?

Issue number: 10

Issue: How can we get more work on without ripping people off?

Convener(s): Gez Casey

Participants: Caroline Pearce, Kathy Paul, Jay Miller, Mark Calvery, Andrew Calvert, Ruth Cooper, Caroline Routh, Rosie Kellagher, Thom Freeth and Natalie Querol.

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

The opportunities and platforms for new work in the north east were discussed: Mark outlined the First in Three/Time in Two events at Northern Stage, Gez talked about the recent Emerging Artist Bursaries at Live Theatre as part of the New Writing Festival, Tom spoke about the Theatre Royal initiative with The Arc in Stockton and The Maltings in Berwick. The Beg, Steal and Borrow project co-ordinated by Tracy Gillman at the Newcastle Irish Centre was also outlined.

We talked about audience expectations for these events, the extent of quality control that is appropriate and/or desirable over the material and the difficulties of judging and evaluating ideas.

There was an acknowledgement of a lack of a “scratch night” culture in the north east compared to other parts of the country. There were also comments about a lack of a critical culture. Whilst the value of feedback was agreed, there was discussion about the best method of acquiring these comments:

With a work in progress, how useful are standard feedback forms?

Would a BAC- style graffiti wall be more appropriate?

Can anything beat a good chat/debrief in the bar afterwards?

The Shunt Vaults model in London was discussed: a variety of themed entertainments in different parts of the same space on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. How feasible would such a club/space be in the north east? Could a space like Live Theatre be used for such an event? Clearly, it would need a long lead-in time and careful programming.

What do emerging theatre makers want? Jay mentioned that, for him, the opportunity came before the idea- a starting point was crucial. Clearly, money helps but other concerns (space, expertise, resources and contacts) are also important. A relationship with an established venue can also assist with Funding Applications and negotiations with other arts organisations and venues. Emerging companies also have things to offer more established venues and companies: new ideas, new collaborations and new audiences.

We also considered rolling the work out throughout the region and beyond. Also, we discussed the benefits of working with artists and organisations from elsewhere to share work, artists, material and best practice.

There could be greater cohesion and collaboration between venues to provide different but complementary opportunities. Also, there could be more matching of writers to companies and opportunities for emerging producers and designers to make events happen.

Gez Casey
31.03.10

Issue number: 11

Issue: How can we find the creative teams that we want/need?

Convener(s): Joanne Hartley

Participants: Annie Rigby, Aliko, Kate Craddock, Jaye, Laura, Kate, Sarah

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Selection or process? Can the right people be found through a carefully considered selection process or is it more important to develop the skills to get what you need from whichever individuals you are working with? – We repeatedly came back to this question and general consensus was that it is not possible to know how you'll work with someone until you try it, and that experiences with the same people can vary. There's an element of risk taking involved. Learning to manage this risk rather than anticipate and avoid it is more practical.

Various participants described an aspiration for a small group of people to work with on a regular basis to avoid the relationship brokering phase of work making. However, it was noted that theatre 'collectives' didn't frequently come together as effortlessly as it might appear.

It was felt that shared collective group projects worked best when the team were equally invested. We asked how could the level of investment/engagement be established at an early stage. Discussions were not conclusive though it was felt that experience facilitated a 'sense' or perception of real commitment from individuals.

Annie referred to a comment from a previous session where someone had said they enjoyed working on shows that the Director was really passionate about. Don't underestimate the power of your enthusiasm to rub off on others.

It was felt that it was important to know what you want to do/achieve when bringing a team together and that definition of roles was paramount.

It was believed that you get the team that you need at the time (to learn which ever lessons you need to learn)

Practical advice as follows :

- Do approach people who you admire to suggest working together, even if they're more experienced than you.
- Articulate when it does and doesn't work in working relationships.

- Anne Bogart “look around you” – it’s likely that you already know or have connections to the people you’d like to work with.
- Work with people you like and who make you laugh.
- Look to people who may not have the skills but are keen to develop.

Issue number: 12

Issue: Running before you can walk! When planning and company 'business' overtakes the creative process.

Convener(s): Jaye Kearney

Participants: Phelim, Caroline, Paul H, Joanna Hartley and Alik.

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

The chapter headings for the unwritten story of this session (Alex Kelly, misquote)

What is the show then?

Hard questions.

Assigning blame...

Misunderstandings and repetition.

Frustration!

Product! Product! Product!

The nub of it.

The different relationships to the subject of the show as a mirror for our approaches to the project.

Owning it.

Free therapy for artists.

You are not alone.

Your assumption + positive opposite = incisive questions.

"If you already knew that it would be better than you ever thought it could be, what would you do about Jill and the business plan."

Keep asking it. You know the answer.

Issue number: 13

Issue: How can practitioners and venues initiate and build better/more sustainable working relationships?

Convener(s): Thom Freeth

Participants:

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

1. Venues can:

- Present artists' work (but is there going to be an audience)
- Offer space to create work
- Provide support to a company in residence

How can this support be reciprocated by artists?

2. Importance for universities to send students out as practitioners.

3. Contact agents regarding education work?

4. Actors Centre used to provide services to practitioners. Could've been a useful link between venues and practitioners? Plus the Centre provided info about jobs, training opportunities, etc.

5. The Forge – keeps a database of artists for Arts in Education work in Sunderland and Durham. Intercultural Arts website also has a similar database.

6. Sharing artists between venues. Formalised pool of artists – but then how do new comers approach this?

7. Assessing the quality of a practitioners work is an imperfect process. Aim to be fair and transparent.

8. Perception of venue and shows impacts on perception of the practitioner work available. Importance of matching skills & scratching beneath the surface.

9. Work-in-progress sessions with advice on professional development, eg. Northern Stage *First in Three* scratch nights.

Issue number: 14

Issue:

How can North Eastern arts forge closer relationships with other areas of the country?

Convener(s):

Jay Miller

Participants:

Natalie,

Rosie,

Laura,

Julie Ward,

Jenny

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

- It was decided that for the North East to make links with the rest of the country we needed to first ensure that the regional network of venues/companies was better facilitated. We suggested that an email forum be created through which people could send their needs and concerns. The Scottish model is a good example of how this could work.

The regional venues might also facilitate a stronger network, perhaps collaborating on 'Scratch Nights' and/or with their marketing efforts.

- To create international links we considered single artists such as Peter Mortimer who has identified clusters of immigrant populations in the region. He has developed work with these communities that develops a dialogue between the North East and the community's place of origin, therefore creating work that reaches out of the region to other parts of the world.
- Natalie spoke of a report written by Empty Space that researched the merits of national tours. It was concluded that tours are a massive benefit to companies because their work is exposed to different parts of the country where audiences might respond differently. It was also thought that giving companies the opportunity to travel is artistically beneficial. The Arts Council has recently decided that this report is a confidential document.
- There was a desire to see more co-productions. It was thought that co-productions formed between North Eastern companies and national venues could encourage 'regional' work to be performed in other parts of the country.

Issue number: 15

Issue:

Convener(s):

Max Allsup

Participants:

6 people, I forgot to send the sheet around...

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

In brief we concluded that ego is crucial to being successful in our sector. However we determined that this was due to the importance of self belief for our work.

There were conflicting views as to the negative connotations of this with regard to the prevalence of arrogance.

Issue number: 16

Issue: my old man said to me, know your audience!

Convener(s):Micahael Mould

Participants:

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Example; Doing a show in a working mans club you would not swear. It is not done to swear in front of the wife!

Doing a show in a trendy Theatre it would be perfectly alright to swear.

Doing a show in a No1 touring Theatre, according to the Daily Mail, its not acceptable either.

How do you choose/know these conventions, and many others?

Do you compromise your work by obeying?

You have to learn not to offend Unintentionally!

And when to offend Intentionally!

Issue number: 17

Issue: Why has our work experience student (who is 14 and wants to be an actor) never been to the theatre?

Convener(s): Ruth Cooper

Participants: Max Allsup. Michael Mould

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

We discussed: theatre as an elitist art form and whether the idea of it as 'not for me' has got worse over the last 50 years. We talked about the previous tradition in Newcastle of youth theatre as a way into the industry and what there is now as a 'pathway'. Max spoke about his experience of work experience with C&T. We talked about Michael's work in touring to community groups over a long period of time – seeing people, then their children and grandchildren. We talked about the funding situation for touring to communities. We talked about Contact theatre building in Manchester and the idea of being an audience member as important to development as an artist.

Issue number: 18

Issue: Creative processes can be very challenging, could creative mentors guide us through the difficult times?

Convener(s): Joanne Hartley

Participants: Joanne Hartley

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

A creative process can be seen as a journey. At times it can be difficult to know which way to go and sometimes there are obstacles that block the path. I suggest that a creative mentor could act as a guide on this journey to assist with navigation and negotiating obstacles.

I recently experienced a very challenging creative process where, for a variety of reasons, I found myself struggling to provide direction and strategy to the team I was leading. The pressure of the situation (the fact that the show had to go on, tickets were paid for, the audience would be watching us and the work wasn't shaping up very well) made me even less able to develop the work productively. It was a catch 22 situation and I realised that I needed support from someone completely detached from the process and the pressure to provide the clarity that I was unable to achieve due to the duress I was under.

I was fortunate to get the right kind of support from someone I knew who had undertaken the role of 'Creative Mentor' in the past and had experience of helping creative projects achieve their potential. This made me realise how useful this kind of support was and made me want to be able to offer the same kind of support to other people who might find themselves in the position that I was in.

The reason that I think this kind of support is important is because creative processes can be risky and uncomfortable, especially in experimental work that pushes boundaries or for practitioners who are emerging and finding their way.

Creative processes can be battles with the inner critics and inner censors of the artists which can make the artist vulnerable, wear the artist out and jeopardise the success of the project. However, I also believe that when managed well the inner critical censoring 'voices' can shape work positively and can be an essential part of the process.

I don't think I'm alone in finding it difficult to be objective about my own work, and (whilst battling with my critic and censor) also at times hard to remain positive. A mentor who comes into the process as an outside eye can really help alleviate these problems.

At a previous session regarding pastoral care we also spoke about mentoring and it was felt at this session that the relationship between mentor and mentee should be defined or framed to get the most out of it and should involve some kind of conclusion when the interaction has come to an end. (be that on a meeting by meeting basis or following a period of mentoring).

What is a mentor?

Someone whose practice/conduct/journey/approach/ethos can be observed and used as an example for learning or development.

Someone with whom a dialogue can take place to provide full insight into all of the above (and so the mentor has insight into the mentee also).

Mentors can offer guidance on :

- Professional development
- Personal development
- Working process/practice
- Project specific glitches or problems

Artists can be sensitive and this sensitivity informs their art and makes it great – however sensitive artists don't always thrive in competitive environments because of their dispositions.

Very ambitious artists are successful in getting their work made and seen because they cope well in competitive environments, but their robust nature does not facilitate the kind of self criticism that the more sensitive artists experience and their work can reflect this.

Creative mentors can support both kind of artists (and the vast spectrum in between of course) , they can support and encourage the sensitive artists to access the competitive environment and they can guide critical questioning and development of those less able to do this for themselves.

Leadership can be lonely and mentoring can help alleviate some of the pressure of lone leadership.

My idealistic vision sees a peer mentoring support network as well as a pool of mentors who work in industry available to access on a one to one basis by emerging artists.

Issue number:19

Issue: Does technology undermine the theatreness of theatre

Convener(s): Aiki Chapple

Participants: Jaye Kearney, Phelim, Jenny Lee, Max, Sharon, Joanne, Alex Elliot, Erica, Paul Smith, Rosie Kellagher, Caroline, Paul H, Joanne Hartley

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

We started out agreeing that theatre takes place in a physical space, but also in an imaginary space, and that technology only contributes to theatre when you keep the porousness between the two. Theatre works by suggestion, it is incomplete, inviting the audience to complete it. Video, for example, makes explicit, shutting the audience out of the creative process by presenting them with something complete.

Questions to ask yourself before incorporating technology into your performance.

1. Why are you using it? What purpose does it serve? Are there other means to serve that purpose?
2. Does it leave space for the imagination to work?
3. If it doesn't work, if something goes wrong with it during a show, can your show still happen, or will the loss of this element ruin it?

Phelim pointed out that theatre has always been about the use of technology, whatever the technology of the time was. It's just that he finds some of it more interesting than the whiz-bang cutting-edge stuff.

We talked about the power of pretending together, using for example, paper cut-out trees to present a forest—making a conspiracy with the audience to pretend it's a real. Show them that you're pretending and they will come along with you.

There's a risk, in rushing to embrace technology, that theatre becomes the bastard child of cinema, tv, video games.

But it is possible to use new technologies to play on the theatricality by not being as realistic as it allows you to be.

It's not about being realistic in what you do, it's about being realistic in the fact that what you do isn't real. Example of Paper Cinema, a company that uses paper cutout characters and scenery in a little box, projecting the resulting live video, but the box and the performers manipulating the paper are also there, they are a part of the experience, they are not hidden.

Joanne said that she hated seeing mobile phones on stage, and we talked about how a huge swathe of plays, from Romeo and Juliet through thrillers can only be staged as period pieces- one SMS message would have solved them.

In this age of rapid response and constant information, Is it theatre's job to slow things down?

Some of us felt that video and sound were very effective creators of atmosphere and emotion, whereas others found them cold, engaging intellectually but not emotionally. Aesthetically perfect, technically complex work can make you wonder at the hidden processes. To the theatrically literate, it can reveal the invisible element of the process; an autocratic director using actors as puppets.

The conversation changed tack with the arrival of new people. Max suggested that digital technology could be a way of engaging young people. A theatre is an intimidating place. He talked about a digital version of the 20th Century idea of the Living Newspaper. The workshops that he's involved in engage young people to comment creatively in various technologically enabled ways on their lives and the issues that concern them on a website.

But, we asked, is that theatre? It's exciting, engaging, immediate, but unless it culminates in a group of people in a shared space, a performance that's live and proximate, it's not theatre. And theatre does something that nothing else can do, because the energy generated is about shared space, real space, not virtual space.

We talked about the various groups involved in pervasive gaming, and the danger of isolation. Gamers interact on line, not in person? How can an online network generate the kind of passion that physical presence does? 3D environments can be extraordinary---but actors are already 3D

At the same time, the young who are "digital natives", do they have a new way of communicating?

Restriction is a kind of creative invitation, an invitation to be inventive. When technology is used well, it enhances the experience.

Pervasive gaming is an emerging practice, and I argued that it was crucial that theatremakers be part of that emergence, to ensure its theatricality. If we don't start playing with these ideas, it might all end up virtual and isolating, depriving audiences of the collective experience of being an audience, actors of the joy of live creation for a present/proximate audience.

Paul S quoted a director who said that digital technology is about the binary; one or zero. Theatre is interested in the space between the two.

And so we came full circle. Our conclusion:

Mind the gap.

Issue number: 20

Does

Issue: imagination ! and the continuous battle between form and content!

Convener(s): Michael Mould

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Which comes first? What is more important? How does your work evolve? How do you reach an audience? How do you understand what you are saying to your audience is the right thing for them?

Does content drive the form (the car is to be built) or is the car (the form) already built.

The car turns out to be an enormous Guzzler because the driver made the wrong choice???

Issue number: 21

Issue: North East Theatre, "a Geordie Mafia". Am I doing the right thing to join?

Convener(s): Andrew Calvert

Participants:

Adele Evitt,
Paul Sutton,
Tracy Gillman,
Richard

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

I rose this session, as an opportunity to see if this expression, "a Geordie mafia" was known to other theatre practitioners in the north east. And having recently returned to the north east, I have come up against various barriers when seeking work and so, I was interested to know if I was doing the right things to break through them.

Firstly Annie caught me before we started, (as she was joining another session), and simply said, "Yes, we'd be glad to have you". A positive response certainly greeted with a smile by me. Is this an acknowledgement that the Geordie mafia does exist? I was keen to continue.

Adele kindly described some of her experiences and the work she has done as an actress and agreed that often it can be difficult to simply be seen by certain companies with a lack of open calls or auditions.

Paul suggested that from his experience in Worcester, the North West didn't have a particularly strong identity as a region, compared to the North East and maybe this had led to a potential mafia style business within our region.

Adele also suggested that actors need to keep working, when they are "between work". Performance group at Northern Stage has offered her various opportunities to simply continue doing her art. The actors centre was once a great venue that offered training and fitness to actors, with courses, resources and further opportunities to simply work, but unfortunately the organization is no longer in action.

Richard suggested that if there are barriers, walls or indeed a mafia, he simply chooses to ignore them. He doesn't feel excluded, he just turns up, makes himself known and how could anyone possibly say no to Richard? A great attitude to have, but maybe one that is difficult, for someone intimidated by some of the bigger theatre organisations. Practice makes perfect.

Although there may be few official audition opportunities, as a group we established that events like “first in three” at Northern Stage are a great opportunity to do work, be seen by other practitioners and get a new name out there. It’s an old cliché, just, “right place, right time”, but maybe we can seek out those places and times and as a result get to know the right people, by simply hanging out. People talk, don’t underestimate the power of gossip, not necessarily a negative thing.

Tracy felt that the Geordie Mafia has always been a problem, inevitably a small community fighting for the same resources, but events like these D&D affect change and the mafia’s (now referred to in plural), are beginning to cross pollinate and break down some of these barriers.

In conclusion, yes, the term is known, especially to those who have experienced both sides, (its certainly good to know one can be in, out and back in again). I’m doing the right thing; networking and keeping busy, and don’t underestimate the power of chat as a result of those actions. It’s not as difficult as it might seem, to be seen by those “within the mafia”!

Issue number: 22

Issue:

How can theatre forge a close and productive relationship with Higher Education Institutions?

Convener(s):

Jay Miller

Participants:

Sharon

Paul

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Companies need to establish a partnership. The relationship needs to be reciprocal. The university and the company should work together, researching together and the producing together.

There is the opportunity to engage in research with universities. Relationships must be formed between theatre practitioner and academic. If a company wants to work with undergraduates then the work must fulfill an aspect of the different modules they are studying. This might be achieved through offering a 'live project' with which the students can engage.

The Arts Council looks kindly on companies that have relationships with universities. It demonstrates your company is securing regional partnerships with large institutions that have access to resources and audience.

Peter Mandelson has recently been bleating about the 'employability' of students. Companies need to be aware that drama students need to be 'employable'.

If you are interested in developing the work of students then go and see their work!

Higher Education Institutions are going to be tightening their fiscal belts over the next few years. You need to be canny about what you can offer, and then what to expect in return.

Issue number: 23

Issue: Could individual artists be revenue funded?

Convener(s): Caroline Routh

Participants: Paul Harman, Gillie Kleiman, Kate Craddock, Laura Cull, Jenny Lee

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

RF gave kudos and visibility. Being able to afford to rent an office gave you credibility.

RF would buy time for an artist to develop ideas, rather than spending time running workshops in a school to earn a living. It would also allow time to create partnerships, find residencies, find funding etc.

If the RF grant were set at say £20,000 this could be the equivalent of a year's salary; if the artist then earned money elsewhere in addition that proportion of the grant could be spent bringing in other artists, investing in production etc.

It was questioned whether, if you had more money than just one salary, and started employing other artists, would that make you/mean you had to become a company?

Would revenue funding for individuals create a hierarchy of artists?

It was important to define what an artist was – should this be only those who instigated/created the work or could it also include an actor or a dancer (for instance) who were only interested in being employed by an existing company?

If an actor were to become revenue funded it would break up the current structures – it would give actors the chance not to work in parts that didn't challenge them and they could select the work they wanted to do. However, would that create problems in that actors would be selected because they were free (their salary being paid by the state), rather than because they were the best for the job?

There was difficulty within the group understanding how actors could be revenue funded – it was felt that they needed to be instigators of the work. The debate turned on the idea of actors being regarded as public servants, much as nurses or teachers, but for that to happen in this country would require a significant change in culture and in the way in which arts are viewed.

If the actor were paid in this way, it would give them more power in the relationship – they would not just be employed by a director but would be a collaborator in the process

Would it be possible to adopt the French system (soon to be phased out) whereby an actor who had secured enough contract weeks at an agreed rate of pay during the year, could then have the state pay the rest of that year's salary? The time not required for specific rehearsing/performing time would then be used on training, personal development, entirely at the actor's discretion.

Artists in receipt of RF would have to plan their work and show exactly what they planned to do over each year. All such artists would also have to be assessed on a three yearly basis, just as organisations.

It was questioned whether revenue funding itself was the answer. Would project funding on a longer term basis be more useful? That would allow the artists to identify a range of work over a period of time that would help them to develop their practice, or a number of projects that developed along particular themes.

With no repertory system existing, there was nowhere for artists to train now. There was no new infrastructure within the system to support performers to develop after their initial training. If individuals were to receive RF that could provide ongoing training time. Any training programmes should then link into the existing structure of theatres/companies etc so that one can feed the other – at the moment they don't.

Issue number: 24

Issue: The Greater North – how can the North East, North West and Yorkshire start connecting?

Convener(s): Natalie Querol

Participants: Caroline Pearce, Erica Whyman, Anne Besford, Caroline Routh, Jay Miller, Jackie Phillips

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

We began with a discussion of the benefits offered by uniting as ‘the north’:

- Strength in numbers
- Finding new northern voice that industrial or clichéd
- Unity - the group felt that it was easier to be optimistic in the north than in the south at the moment – the boom wasn’t a boom or everyone.

This was followed by a discussion around what defines ‘the north’:

- If we had a greater sense of the cultural identity of the ‘north’ then we might be more likely to identify each other as colleagues.
- Does the North West already own ‘the north’ as a descriptor?
- Cultural norms for audiences differ north and south – the image of the silent, polite audience is far more prevalent in the south, further north audiences engage more actively and simply make more noise.
- Are there other better ways of defining ourselves – do we identify as the north because the south identifies itself as the south?
- Perhaps it is more interesting for towns and cities (people) to connect to other places like them rather than geographically close to them. For instance parallels were drawn between Hartlepool and Barrow in Furness, and between Huddersfield and Stockton. Much easier for the big cities to do this as they are more visible so they know who their peers are.

There was a feeling that there is a momentum towards cross regional projects, not directly as a result of the new ACE structure but possibly because the move towards the larger ACE region has removed some perceived barriers. EW gave examples of collaborations in the offing between some of the bigger theatres across the region and it was suggested that perhaps whilst it is easy for the ‘big guys’ to reach out across the region to find collaborators, smaller companies and individual artists could find themselves more isolated. It was agreed that the bigger organisations have a responsibility to create opportunities for smaller companies to connect across the region.

Practical ideas included:

- Cross region artists residencies

- Scratch nights that move around the larger region – identify 2 artists from NW, NE and Yorkshire who each create a short scratch performance which all combine into one evening's entertainment. That evening's entertainment then plays for one night in each region. The artists are supported to stay in each region for an extra night to see other work in other venues.
- Potential co-commissioning schemes could grow out of the scratch programme.
- Provide 100 bursaries for theatre people across the larger region to attend D&D in London – great for the north to have a visible presence in a national forum rather than traveling the same sort of distances to meet on our own turf.

Issue number: 25

Issue: Professional development: what kind of professional development would help you flourish?

Convener(s): Natalie Querol

Participants: Caroline Routh, Jaye Kearney, Jay Miller, Sharon Patterson, Jackie Phillips, Ruth Cooper

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Bursaries like the Live Theatre / The Empty Space one which give artists seed funding, space and other support to create work.

Workshops by really exciting national and international artists happening in the region ie Complicite.

Reciprocal workshops run by interesting artists with the north.

Information about who's out there, what resources are available etc (mapping)

International links (Belgium/Netherlands).

Opportunities to connect with artists from other art forms

Help getting venue programmers from across the country to see work.

Opportunities to work with other artists on a short project (like The Empty Space's Kazuko Hohki workshop).

Support to build connections in the region (networking events etc)

Sessions on how to develop as a company / freelancer in the region.

Mentoring – access to those that have traveled the path ahead.

Support with planning

More D&D style events – networking, connections, access to different kinds of experience.

Opportunities to see work outside the region.

Information on funding – what's out there and how to get it.

Session on how to tender (cultureworks may be doing this).

Session on selling your skillset.

Internships in small companies for people who want to set up their own companies.

Issue 26

Issue number: 27

Issue: Easier to make a living out of theatre in the regions? Harder to be brave?

Convener(s): Annie Rigby

Participants: Jaye Kearney

Jay Miller

Andrew Calvert

Gillie Kleiman

Ruth Cooper

Sharon Patterson

Kate Craddock

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Questions:

Does being brave mean doing something different?

Is our best work our bravest work?

Are we brave or is it more that we are easily bored?

Truths:

Restrictions can be liberating.

In a smaller theatre community we don't have as many examples of different ways of doing things.

We have the lowest rate of entrepreneurialism in NE (Question: Is this affecting our levels of bravery in making our work?)

It is easier to be brave with other people than alone.

How to facilitate other people being brave?

Networks. Which leads to stronger critical feedback, challenging us, pushing us on, supporting us.

What we need is a good local pub. Not a venue.

Last Friday of the month at The Bodega?

Space

We know Empty Space are working with the venues to work out how much space they have free and how it can be opened up.

But what about non-theatre spaces? Easier to find out / share information / get access if we work together rather than as individuals.

What about this space? Gateshead Old Town Hall?

Kate went to ask for Marie from Gateshead Council at reception, so we could find out more. Kate was told to wait. She waited.

After a while Kate noticed a woman heading down the other stairs, out of the back of the building. The woman looked at Kate, looked a bit startled and then ran out.

Reception suggested this was Marie. Reception phoned back up to the office and were told that Marie had gone.

Kate was given a leaflet with hall hire costs by reception.

Issue number: 28

Issue: Theatre as a popular form: Breaking out of the high culture ghetto

Convener(s): Aiki

Participants: Mike, Paul H. Cath

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Fairly desultory discussion, a lot of the ground had been covered by the group in the previous session that talked about who goes to the theatre.

Paul H. said that theatre was popular, and there was no high culture ghetto.

Mike said that "high culture" was phrase he used to describe the opposite of his work.

I talked about how popular forms like Epitheorisi (topical political satire revues) in Greece attracted audiences of all classes, and that it seemed to me that this didn't happen here, except perhaps with panto.

We said that if people won't come to the theatre you have to take it to them, which both have spent decades doing, and I expressed my frustration that I didn't know anyone who wanted to that with me, or who thought it possible, or worth doing.

We talked about how vibrant forms exist, but aren't taken into consideration by ACE because they're not considered artistically valuable, and asserted that anything well-made was valuable.

We talked a bit more about the community pressures (internal and external) that prevent people going to the theatre, even when it's as cheap as the cinema, but we didn't come to any conclusions

Issue number: 29

Issue: Is theatre transformative? Do we have a collective responsibility to address social injustice?

Convener(s): Jackie Phillips

Participants: Joanne, Adele, Richard, Tracy

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Transformative on many levels in small or large ways:

As theatre practitioners we all have stories about our first moment we got 'hooked': tended to be on emotional level

Can we harness that 'power' to promote social change?

Theatre with a 'social message' can tend to preach to the converted..Do we make such theatre to feel better, show we care, without reaching the audiences we purportedly care about.... links in with discussions about audience development,

Does our theatre connect with society as a whole or are we a separate entity that evolves and feeds off itself ?

What proportion of the British / North Easterners go to theatre? Is it as relevant as in other countries e.g. Brazil and Boal..Europe and its healthy youth theatre traditions etc

Should we be thinking of going to Teesside, to Corus, to its redundant workforce not as do-gooders but attempting to facilitate the acquisition of skills to allow angry people to have their voices heard through the medium of theatre. Or will they tell us to fuck off because luvvies are as relevant to their lives as politicians..?

Interesting discussion about the communication skills of children – OTT child protection policies discouraging the language of 'play', and physical, imaginative, emotional expression - skills that are central to those of the theatre practitioner.

How can we 'grow' an audience for theatre if those communication skills are not nurtured? If the language of theatre itself is becoming redundant except for those of us who prop up this craft of a bygone era!

But No! New technologies I'm sure can help engage a younger generation who are more adept at digital communication and imaginative virtual worlds.. The theatre world will respond and evolve and is doing so as we speak.

But should it intervene in an intolerable situation and demand justice or should it provide an escapist, temporarily soothing balm for armchair liberals and the grin and bear it brigade?

Issue number: 30

Issue: To paraphrase David Hare: "Theatre-making is a young person's game." Is this a useful statement?

Convener(s): Tracy Gillman: Beg Borrow Steal

Participants: Sharon and Ruth

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

- Making a living in theatre's difficult when you've got family responsibilities.
- It's exhausting particularly in hostile environments.
- Physically tiring – touring, long unpredictable hours, patchy work patterns.
- It's all-consuming.
- Perceptions of age are changing however
- For women in theatre with family what happens when something at home goes wrong...?
- Therefore is it a young man's game?
- Other work places the work/life balance is also difficult
- Has David Hare become a cantankerous old misogynist with nothing left to say but pithy idiot sound bites ?
- Would be interesting to have a young director create a piece of work with an older actor.
- Isn't it valuable for younger creative people to learn from older ones ?
- Culturally we're always re-inventing the wheel: younger, newer is always better: age is awarded but not shared...
- Good examples that dispel Hare's myth: Sian Phillips in 'Romeo and Juliet', Peter Brook, Aeschylus, Pinter, Ellen Terry, Sarah Bernhardt, Joan Littlewood, Victor Spinetti, Thora Hird, Alan Bennett, Any older Jazzer who's survived past fifty, likewise any painter, musician, dancer...who would play King Lear, Mrs Alving, Queen Margaret...?
- So it's usefulness as a statement lies in it's ability to provoke...

Issue number: 31

Issue: Social Networking. A help or a hinderance.

Convener(s): Jaye Kearney

Participants: Aliko Chapple and Andrew Calvert

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Andrew asked, "In what context?"

I replied, "As a new company forming and making a new piece of work, who already have a website capable of hosting a blog."

Questions I wanted to pose –

Is it a distraction?
Can it be a useful tool?
How much is too much?

The answers –

Yes/Potentially

Yes

THE BIG QUESTION

Clearly we were all giving it a go, to varying degrees and with varying degrees of success.

Problems –

- only using as a substitute for an actual network
- (Twitter) connect to other artists but they often don't respond
- feel pressured to have a presence on Facebook.
- (Twitter) largely populated by geeks. They're not theatre people?
- Not quite living up to users expectations
- (Twitter and FB) no segmentation so hear about things you can't go to
- Oversaturation – some people link FB and Twitter, so saying same things twice
- Does it stop you from existing in the here and now?
- "You have to tweet a lot of frogs before you find a Prince."
- Relentless cheer sounds like marketing – keep it real

Benefits –

- Potential access to limitless numbers of people
- (FB) can be recommended by a friend – WOM
- You may hear about things you didn't know anything about – Aiki heard about D&D because following Phelim
- You can reach out, join and link up with networks beyond your physical reach
- Ability to share additional info/give insight into processes and get feedback – if you are lucky

Social Networking isn't just online. 10 years ago this term would have meant something totally different. Don't forget to make real connections.

Join/follow this debate on Twitter @Yorkshirebint.

Thanks.

Issue number: 32

Issue: What are we going to do about D&D NE?

Convener(s): Annie Rigby

Participants: Caroline Routh
Paul Harman
Kate Craddock
Gillie Kleiman
Plus others

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

Who are the right people for next time? How are we going to get them to come?

Talk to them.

Emails don't communicate why to come for 2 days. Talking communicates why.

D&D NE or wider? D&D North?

It would be good to get D&D going in Leeds / Manchester. Good to go to those as North Easterners. But we should keep D&D NE going too.

Monthly D&D NEs

Let's do them.

Kate is hosting the first at The Shed, Gateshead High Street on Sat 15 May.
Caroline will send out an email about it.

At this first monthly D&D NE we'll make a plan for the next ones.

Issue number: 33

Issue: Does the North East need a Regional Theatre Showcase?

Convener(s): Paul Harman

Participants: Ten people

Summary of discussion, conclusions and/or recommendations:

The first response was suspicion of the role and purpose of a showcase designed to promote NE work to outside bookers. One person doubted if there was much work ready for touring nationally or internationally.

There was general agreement that NE work would benefit from being seen within the context of a festival of some kind.

It was agreed that there was enough work available for showing within some informal, voluntary event.m (Gateshead Interational Festival of Theatre)

Agreed that a concept such as GIFT should form the content of the first monthly D&D or Open Space meeting.