In putting these articles together we have interviewed several makers/artists/curators, and accordingly we've done a lot of transcribing – pushing the conversations into some sort of concreteness that can be read on a page. Forcing the language out of the ephemeral and into the fixed. It's a strange process and invariably creates a fiction, even if there is absolutely no intentional editing done on the page (which isn't the case in these articles, given their relative brevity). You can represent what people say, the words that are spoken, on paper – but you cannot 'faithfully' recreate the conversation because you are moving it out of its multi-dimensional live self and into a two-dimensional position of ink on paper (or virtual ink on virtual paper, in the world of the PDF). Considering the slippery nature of language in this way as we work on this project has been particularly relevant to us, considering that a core part of the thinking here is about feedback, dialogue, the interpretation of people's comments and their usefulness, and the best methods of recording/'fixing' feedback. How can we usefully talk to each other about each other's work? And are the plethora of 'scratch' opportunities now available actually problematising this exchange, in their efforts to make it commonplace?

For this article we spoke to the artist Mischa Twitchin (www.shunt.co.uk/mischa_twitchin/), solo practitioner and founding member of Shunt. We had a really inspiring conversation with him and here, as a test, we consolidate – without transcribing – some of the key issues that were raised. They are ideas that we as a company came away talking about with each other and which Mischa's presence and vigour and rigour were the catalysts for.

- as well as there being confusion between the concepts and definitions of 'scratch', work-in-progress, and platforms, there is the added aspect that in some iterations of the 'scratch night' model, what's really happening is a sort of variety night – usually with unpaid artists. However, because this context isn't intentional, embraced, or acknowledged, the event is not read as such and doesn't perform successfully as such. So there's a half-baked situation of a foot in both (all) camps but none of them fully realised. And crucially, the labour is taken for free because the artists are treated as though their work is unfinished and therefore unworthy (?) of being paid for yet – while at the same time it's presented as 'a number' in a variety-night-esque schedule.

- often what happens at 'scratch' nights, is that the responsibility for there being an audience falls onto the individual makers who are presenting work. And, unsurprisingly, this then means that there is usually an audience of friends and family - rather then the event having any sort of pre-existing (or even growing and evolving) audience of its own. So there is a perceptible lack of investment in *the audience* as the thing that should be in progress at these progress nights. It's rare to find such an event where the audience have no idea precisely who/what is on, *but they are coming anyway* because they have developed an interest in the event and the dialogue that the venue is having with artists and audience alike.

- something that is key for us about Shunt Lounge was that it positioned itself as much as a club night as an art/performance night. The environment was a large sprawling bar in the tunnels by London Bridge Station, where the audience were on site to socialise as much as to see the work that was happening. There was no formal gathering of an Audience to see a

particular piece, the audience group was continually fluid. In our experience, in such an environment there is little opportunity for focussed audience feedback – but this by no means has to be a lack. The real tangible feedback the artist is getting on their work as it encounters the audience is the all-important, 'does it survive?'. There is no space, time, need in this environment to frame work as in-progress or scratch. It stands as it is at this point in time. The question of how in-progress or scratchy what you present is, in this environment, is for the artist alone.

- another example of an environment/event like this, where the identity of the audience is as strong if not stronger than that of the venue itself, is Duckie (Royal Vauxhall Tavern's long-running and highly successful Saturday night event). It seems to us that at such an event, the artist answers to the spectator as opposed to vice versa and, in a way, has to have the permission of the audience to be (or certainly remain) there at all. So in this dynamic the audience has the ultimate power and control over the night, unlike at a scratch or work-in-progress event, where often the audience is 'magnanimously' invited in to sample the artists' work. And in this dynamic the curator's responsibility is to honour the trust of, and at the same time constantly work to push the expectations of their regular audience.

- but how does a curator do this? By nurturing relationships with artists whom they respect, or come to respect, and programming work not based on the product itself (maybe in fact having no idea about the piece in question) but based on the knowledge and personal commitment that this certain maker's investigations will be interesting and worthwhile and worthy of support. And not needing to have this 'proven' in the showing of the piece – if it's a disaster in the flesh, still inviting them back in future, because you have invested in them and want to give them time and space. And, importantly, you want to give them access to an audience with whom to test/experience/fulfil the work – *whatever it be*. The opposite model to the 'show me a DVD first' model.

-    if curators commit to the unknown this way it helps to puts the brakes on the drive for describing/prescribing work either at an inappropriately early stage or with inappropriate measures. It is common nowadays to be asked what/who your work is 'like' as the first point in a conversation with marketing departments or producers. In places where this is the go-to question one can ask oneself, if the focus is on who we are *like* rather than *who/what we are*, why don't we all just go and watch that other thing, instead?

- perhaps in some cases, having to articulate specific questions about your work for feedback is unhelpful to an artist and it's purely the testing out of something in front of an audience and receiving that kind of instantaneous 'survival' feedback that is important. Is it as simple as saying 'different strokes for different folks'? Or is it possible that the standard model of the 'scratch' night with its verbal or written feedback (while this can come off successfully if strongly structured and contextualised) is more potently dangerous than widely acknowledged? It allows for many loose and unstructured feedback formats which can be detrimental to an artist (especially an emerging artist getting to know their own practice) because, mishandled, they can contribute to a sense that that the audience's opinion of an artist's work is more important than, and should therefore be more influential than, that of the artists themselves.

- while these days it might seem like a faux pas and even a moral trespass to suggest that an artist should not have to care about an audience's feedback on their work, perhaps there's a

fundamental truth within that. An artist is only making their work because they believe they should and it is essential that they have sufficient faith in their own practice to listen to what is said and take from it what they find useful and constructive (be it positive or negative) for the particular path they are on with their project, but not feel obliged to adopt feedback wholesale into their work.

- and a really significant debate for us in reference to the idea of feedback is – if most makers can be said to be speaking in and through their work, is there a risk that the concept of audience feedback is becoming conflated with this core creative conversation, when it is in fact a very separate process? What can we do to ensure that both conversations/ways of talking can exist in parallel and have a useful impact on each other, without them being seen as interchangeable?

So there's an interesting dichotomy emerging between (in the harshest appraisal) the irrelevance of audience feedback to the process of the artist, and the huge power wielded by an audience in a Shunt/Duckie context where the 'permission' for an artist to be there/be watched lies firmly with the audience group who 'own' the night and the space. Maybe the middle ground between these two tells us what we've all already known for decades – that there is a measure of both in any worthwhile performer/audience relationship and any worthwhile event that purports to host such a relationship/dynamic. An artist 'has to' have sufficient faith in what they are doing to continue regardless of what audience members suggest or announce as preference, and an event 'should' have/build an audience that has such trust in the curatorial approach that it will be there creating the very event itself, regardless of likes/dislikes of what's shown on any one occasion. The 'power' of the Shunt/Duckie type audience really only becomes articulated as such because in those contexts the 'polite' rules of theatre are not relevant. An audience can talk, drink, walk away, walk out, laugh, ignore freely if what you're doing doesn't hold their interest, because the context is as much a social one as an art one. Perhaps the usefulness of this sort of 'immediate' feedback lies in the fact that it does not suggest what the maker *should* do in general sense (which is what happens so often at 'scratch' feedback sessions), only what they shouldn't do – in as much as where the audience loses attention and withdraws its 'permission' for the performer to be *there* (albeit that 'there' is a highly specific context).

In our next interview we look at this from the opposite perspective, thinking about work which wants to talk to 'polite' theatre audiences and to play its game within that framework, but which is rarely given access to such spaces/contexts because of its content. We speak to Lauren Barri Holstein, who performs as The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein and has experience of developing and showing new work in the contexts of work-in-progress events and club night/cabaret scenarios, but whose work holds at its core a battle with mainstream theatre frameworks, and therefore needs to be positioned in them in order play itself out fully. We speak to her about the siting of her work – what access 'illegitimate' work has to 'legitimate' performance spaces – and how the 'dirty' and the 'difficult' content-wise can often be conflated with work-in-progress and scratch, no matter how inappropriate that label may be for it.

HC, LM, JP   9/9/12