



**Transcript of *Making Progress - questioning the culture of 'scratch'* panel discussion**

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Jen: Hi everyone, welcome, thank you very much for coming along tonight, we are GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN, I am going to give you a bit of context about us and why we are here tonight. So, we are a performance company; we formed in 2008 and alongside performing, we started running a work-in-progress night called SHOW US YER BITS! and we did that in various theatre bars and cafes around London. We ended up in the Roundhouse Theatre Studio in 2012. And in 2012 we put the event on hold to undertake this research project. Alongside SHOW US YER BITS! we also ran SHOW US YER GUERILLA BITS! which was a scratch night for artists whose work didn't fit into an end-on format, and BITTEN which was an event for artists who had participated in SHOW US YER BITS! and wanted to show their work at a later stage, and get some further feedback. All of those events were free: we didn't get paid for running them, the artists didn't get paid for doing them, the audience didn't pay for a ticket, and the venue didn't charge us for using their space. So, for us, that got a bit more complex when we started to be at a stage where we were getting some funding for our work, because that sort of skews the value system a bit. Because if you're an artist and you're making a community of artists and showing work to each other, that is quite a different thing from if you're a funded organisation and the only person that isn't getting paid for showing the work, is the artist whose work it is. So that is why we decided to put the event on hold and undertake this research project which Hester is going to tell you more about in a moment.

On the panel we have Mamoru Iriguchi. Mamoru has trained as a theatre designer, and now makes multimedia performance rooted in his knowledge and experience in theatre design (set, costume and projection) as well as broad interests in 2D and 3D, gender and sexuality, parasitism and symbiosis, fairytales and evolution theories.

Amy Letman is Associate Producer at West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. Since joining the Playhouse she has led on the programming and producing of the Transform Festivals, initiated an artist development programme called Furnace - and developed and produced a number of productions and projects throughout the Playhouse as well as out in the city of Leeds.

David Micklem is an experienced producer and until recently he was the Joint Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Battersea Arts Centre in South London. Prior to that he was Senior Theatre Officer at the national office of Arts Council England.

Please welcome our panel.

Hester: Hello thanks so much for coming. Just to talk briefly about our research project, I don't want to spend ages talking about it, because I want to use the time to talk to the guests we've got here. But we are speaking to various artists, venues, programmers and curators, about their experiences and opinions and the questions they may have about the concepts of scratch and work-in-progress. And I'm aware that tonight, I myself, and maybe other people, use the words 'scratch' and 'work-in-progress' interchangeably. I mean, one thing that we thought about a lot is what is the difference - what *are* the differences between those two and I suppose one thing we think you could possibly say - I mean these things are up for grabs really - but the way we think about it is, maybe it's useful to say that scratch is when you give an idea an airing and you don't even know if it's a good idea, and you don't know if it's going to work, or if it has legs, but you're giving it a bash, you're just going to try something. And possibly for us then, work-in-progress would be more a case of giving an airing to some work or some material that you are actually quite invested in and you believe you are going to push forward to make something full out of; and you're showing it at a stage when it's on its way there. So for us, that's just a useful way to think about the differences between those two.

So lots of stuff has come up in our research and one of the core questions for us is about the difference between a scratch being an opportunity to fail you could say, in the harshest appraisal, or possibly a platform for exposure. Now there doesn't have to be anything wrong with it being a platform for exposure because of course all artists need to have their work seen - ultimately you are only judged on your work, really - it has to be seen for people to become interested, and maybe invite you to do something else or whatever - but just possibly the conflation between these two ideas of - here's a space where you can very safely try something and it can possibly totally fail, and/or showing something hoping - again that's the harshest end of the spectrum - hoping it will get picked up. And then for us, maybe some of the problems or questions arise when people at the same event aren't clear which of those two things it is. Or where on the spectrum it is between those two things. And possibly when stuff's being curated or put together for such an event, do the people doing that have a really clear sense of what that opportunity really is, and are they communicating that to the artist? Is it about wanting to show something and hope that interest is garnered or is it space to really try something that could be totally rubbish, but obviously you are trying it for the right reasons - but is it about risk, or is it a little bit of a selling situation? So those have been some key questions for us.

I suppose integral to that last thing about platforms is a question about context. It is quite important for us to say that we don't think that platforms for exposure or scratch opportunities, any of these things are a bad thing. We think they're a good thing, you know, we think that people should have opportunities to show stuff and to try stuff. But we do think that there is a risk, possibly quite a dangerous risk about stuff not being contextualised strongly. Because I think for us, we sort of feel in its worst case scenario, such an opportunity that is not contextualised properly can actually be detrimental to an artist and their work as opposed to just not helping it. Sometimes in the worst scenario which hopefully doesn't happen very often, people can come out sort of worse off than they went in. Especially because these opportunities are very frequently aimed at really emergent work, really really sort of nascent work, it's embryonic and somebody's really scared about putting it out there. They may be an established artist trying out a very early idea, and as we all know that never gets any easier, you're always embarrassed about your ideas when you first show them. If that's put out there and the context is miscommunicated, or the artist hasn't understood the context, or the context gets skewed in the moment - and really at a time when that work is at its

most fragile - maybe you give up on it or it makes you think you should have done something else, and this quite delicate time for the work could end up possibly ending that work or not giving you the confidence to carry on with it. And I think we've all come from a place where when you start out you're so eager for your work to be seen, you will sometimes go for every opportunity and maybe not put it through the sieve as rigorously as you can afford to later on. Later on you can go, 'oh this thing's come up but actually it's not quite right', but at the beginning you go 'do you know what I don't care - if it means 20 people are going to see it and one person's going to go "oh you're interesting let's chat" then it will be worth it'. So for us, it's just a question of – do venues need to be more aware of that fact that there's some really delicate work coming into these things and so it needs to be cared for and curated and contextualised with a lot of delicacy really.

And also in these situations, as Jen said, when we started SHOW US YER BITS!, we had no money at all and so, I won't say we felt comfortable, but kind of fair in the 'no money exchange anywhere' because exchanging money wasn't an option – it wasn't that we were withholding money but there was just no money, anywhere. But, you know, with very early artists, if they're not going to be provided with money for their time there, what else can they be provided with? And that could be things like context, even things like courtesy, greeting them at the door, introducing them to the other artists, getting them a coffee, whatever. These things can be really valuable. And this is one of the things we spoke to Gemma Paintin of Action Hero about, and she said something that really stuck with me, which was that, when you're in the audience for a work in progress or scratch event and you might think that the work you see is a million miles away from what you might make, so you're not 'enjoying' this work as such; but if you can witness that the organisation or venue has taken loads of care in how it's presented these artists, that it's really valuing these artists' time, it's really valuing the audience that's come, then it speaks a lot about the venue, about the organisation. It's not about money, they're not putting their *money* where their mouth is, because they're not bringing money into it; but it's like they're putting *other value* where their mouth is, you know? And it really shows that there are other ways to value art and ways to help people to get moving, before they can get paid. It's understandable, you know, when starting out, not everyone's going to get paid, because there isn't enough money to give to people – there are loads of people. So of course you won't get paid a hundred pounds for doing scratch, so what else can you be given in exchange, so that you are actually being valued.

So those are some of the core things we've come up with or questions that we're thinking about and we're trying to push on or move on with our thinking and this is what we want to do tonight. This isn't just a display of our research findings, this is about trying to provoke ourselves to think further - and we're really really lucky to have these guys with us - and put stuff out in the public, because it can be quite easy to sort of close doors and say 'let's put the world to rights'. So that's why we'd love to hear what these guys have to say around the subject.

I thought it might be useful to ask each of these guys just very briefly to just say a little bit about their relationship to, and experience of, work-in-progress and scratch, so we have a bit of background of where they come from with it. So David if you could just give us a brief outline of your experiences with scratch.

David Micklem: Yes, hello, good evening. Until quite recently I used to work with David Jubb at the Battersea Arts Centre, which, for those of you who don't know, is an organisation in South East

London that commissions and investigates new theatre, so is interested in nurturing the preoccupations of artists and doing that in association with an audience at an early stage. And Battersea Arts Centre in 2001 started Scratch, so scratch was born at Battersea Arts Centre and they coined the term Scratch, as in making stuff from scratch, and since then it's been adapted and adopted as a principle by a number of other organisations, across the UK and across the world in fact, there are scratch events in Sydney and in California and other places around the world. It's based on a very simple proposition, which is that good work or good ideas develop through collaboration - collaboration between artists and audience. And what I would say briefly, by means of introduction is that I'm really preoccupied with liveness, I'm really preoccupied with what happens when an artist and an audience are in the room together. I'm not that interested in what an artist does on their own. That's not to say I'm not interested in what artists do, but I'm really interested in that spark, that frisson that happens when you get in the room together, so I'm very interested in work like that of Chris Goode, who talks a lot about when a black cat walks into a room and the artist doesn't respond to the black cat, then it's not live. I really understand that, I'm interested in theatre and performance, I'm not so interested in TV - I know that if I start waving at the TV, it's not going to change what happens on the TV, whereas if you guys start waving or throwing doughnuts at me now, then I'll probably react and do something different. And whilst to my dying day I'll be defending the rights of the artist to make great work, I'm also interested in how the audience respond to that work and how the audience can influence that work. I will shut up, but I just want to say something about dramaturgy - dramaturgy is an obsession of mine. Dramaturgy, for me, is about the process of refining artists' articulacy, about the processes by which an audience, or producer, or other artists or the artist's mum and dad might help that artist refine their articulacy, how do they make the thing that they really want to communicate to the audience distilled, purified, clear to the audience. And I think in scratch, or in the best of scratch, that's what the audience does, the audience refine an artist's articulacy.... by laughing at a joke, or not laughing at a joke, or pissing off halfway through because it's boring, or not understanding what's happening, so I think that the best of scratch is the audience collectively acting as a dramaturg for a piece of work. And I think that if the relationship you have with an audience is properly mediated or contextualised by a producer or somebody who is helping that artist-audience relationship to thrive then I think that scratch can be hugely beneficial to all kinds of artists in the creation of their work.

H: Great, thank you. Amy?

A: I work at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, and in the last few years we have been exploring how we nurture work and how we support artists who create work in various different kinds of forms, ways and contexts. When I was just starting at the theatre, we had the Artists' Programme and that was essentially what there was in terms of artist development. So, at the moment we are doing a lot of work in terms of how we support, I guess, the next generation of theatre-makers or a broad range of theatre makers, whether you're a writer, director or any kind of artist, what opportunity can we signpost you towards that will further help develop your work. I guess one key element of this has been Furnace, which is a development strand which started a couple of years ago and is about developing new work and inviting audiences into the process at an earlier stage, I guess, like Dave was saying, in order to purify the work and enhance its process, but only where it's useful. So I guess it sorts of starts with a conversation with the artist about what the idea is, what they're making, and what the format, in terms of the development of that, should be. And where it doesn't feel appropriate to share a piece of work at that stage, then we don't do that. There's also a

project that we run called Summer Sublets. A lot of regional theatres kind of close up during the summer, which we've traditionally done as well, so when I started, it kind of felt like a little bit of a ghost-town in July and August, so we came up with this idea of just filling spaces in the building with artists developing projects over the summer, and at the end of that residency they then have the option of sharing the work with an audience; and often we don't know until the last day whether it's going to be appropriate. So I think for me, what's really important with a venue is that conversation, that dialogue with the artist, because it feels unfair or inappropriate to present the work when it's not ready. And then I guess why this is also interesting as well, is that we're looking at running a regular scratch night from autumn onwards and also involving our associate artists and companies in the process of curating that and supporting the artists as well, so at the moment we're working with Unlimited and RashDash who are both associate companies at the Playhouse, on a scratch night for our Transform Festival, so we're interested in that as well, involving other artists. Yes, so I guess that where I'm coming from.

H: Yep, thank you very much. And now Mamoru.

Mamoru Iriguchi: Hi, my name is Mamoru, and I am an artist and I have made work that has been shown at scratch shows. I make quite big show pieces, but also one-to-one pieces.

As an emerging artist, I did experience all kinds of residencies, some of them came with the scratch night at the end, and some of them were just pure residency. And then there's another kind of – I don't know if you would call it residency – but sort of space and time to work, and at the end I was expected to deliver the 'finished' work. And I think they all created different dynamics which was interesting. Also, I think that, as an artist you have to kind of plan how you use that space and time that has been given and make sure you understand what is expected by the venues or producers who have provided that opportunity.

Also, as Jen said when she introduced me, I have also worked as a theatre designer which has given me the opportunity to work with other artists in many different settings.

H: Great, very useful. Maybe I could ask my first question to....I'll start with Amy, if that's alright. So, we have a question about how much pressure in reality there is, in your experience, on organisations to have some form of scratch or work-in-progress in their programmes? Because it does seem now that places which historically haven't had these, now probably do. And you might kind of go, 'oh, that's another one to tick off that's got one now.' So, and again, at its most cynical end, which isn't a nice place to go, but just to have it in the air, you know, there can be questions about funding boxes that need to be ticked about artist development and getting 'x' amount through the door, or whatever. So we're just asking what your experiences are with regards to that.

A: Yeah, I guess rather than pressure, it kind of feels like, a lot of the conversations we're having at the moment are to do with responsibility to provide a range of opportunities for artists that work in various different ways, so I think there's that angle, but there's also the fact that it can be a useful thing for us to do. So, as an example, with this scratch show that we're doing at the moment at Transform, I think we've got about twenty-six applications, which have come through for one scratch night, and we need to program, like...six, from that. And they're amazing, they're West Yorkshire-based artists, a mix of companies, writers, a couple of like...comedy troupes, musicians who want to test out this idea and just want to be part of what we're doing. I'd say at least half of them are artists

who are based in that area that I haven't heard of before, and Leeds is a pretty close-knit theatre community, so you get to stage where you're like 'I've probably know everyone now', so it was a big surprise to me to get all these applications. So for us, it's introducing us to lots of different kinds of artists, it's bringing different influences in, it's developing relationships between the theatre and these new artists that we're going to meet, and it's new experiences for our audiences as well, and then it's exciting to think what might come out of this. So, a couple of projects that we've presented during Furnace, we're now supporting in a more meaningful way - and these are pieces that came out of works-in-progress that we got really excited about and we're are developing further, so it's a brilliant way of finding work, so I guess less about pressure and more about 'look at the big opportunities this gives us'.

H: Yeah, and how would you guys advertise and define the difference between something like Furnace – so Furnace is kind of like a work-in-progress incubator isn't it? And if you're planning to introduce scratch, is that because you feel like you want there to be a lower rung, further down the ladder or does it feel like two separate kind of ventures, work-in-progress and scratch?

A: Well, traditionally with Furnace, what we've been doing is sort of curating it, so approaching artists and saying 'we're really interested in your work and would you be interested in developing something with us?' And I guess that with the scratch nights, it kind of feels more like, 'no pressure, let's get to know each other and see how it goes, and who knows what will happen from then'. You could end up working together further, so I guess it's like a first date, kind of thing.

H: Like speed dating?

A: (laughs) Yes.

H: Cool, great. Maybe on the back of that, I could ask David....because Amy said something there about how it brings in new audiences and opens up things for audiences and that's a question we had – a lot of people we spoke to, we spoke to people who ran these kind of things, and talked a bit about this idea of audience development...and there can be a feeling in the audience sometimes at these events that it's made up of your friends and other companies that are there and the person who runs the bar. And how much have you experienced an audience that does specifically want to see scratch? Because it's quite a strange thing, quite a complex and difficult thing to ask somebody to watch and be with unfinished work – it's actually a difficult thing to watch and know how to relate to – everyone's slightly on the back foot, there's a thing about kind of apology or excuse, I don't mean that in a derisive way, but it's like we're already saying 'we know this isn't good enough', as it were. And just, you know, is there genuinely an audience that can come in and move past that, or is it more about this kind of speed date thing, between the curating party and the artists?

D: Well, BAC scratch is about thirteen/twelve years old and over that time, certainly that conversation has happened a lot, and it's definitely grown with scratch. Certainly at the BAC, those are people who want to be there at the beginning and I think that over twelve/thirteen years, BAC has built that audience of people who are really interested in being in and seeing something really exciting early on. Everyone now claims to have been in at the first scratch of Jerry Springer the Opera, (there would have to have been quite a huge crowd by now and I think the room itself could only hold forty) so there is that hunger to be there at the beginning of something. It's taken a long time to get to that, it's taken twelve years. And we shouldn't underestimate how many people there

are who are interested in scratch. I see a lot of the same people at scratch nights at the BAC. A lot of them are artists, artists who are interested in new ideas that are being developed, but also a lot of local people who are just genuinely kind of interested in being involved in that kind of 'pointy' end of what's happening next door at the theatre, or being able to say, yes – I discovered the next Punch Drunk, so we're really excited about that and I think there's definitely an audience for scratch. The other thing I'd like to say is about high-profile scratch nights – I think that the BAC got derailed on several occasions in the last twelve years by really high-profile artists' scratching work. I probably shouldn't mention any names, but established companies who've been around for a long time, doing scratch and attracting (in the Council Chamber space) a hundred and eighty people, to see the next piece of work by this company, and it's shit, really bad work, and people's expectations are, 'well, it's company X and they do really great work' and suddenly they're seeing something that's really raw, very ragged and very unformed, and my experience of that is that audiences are much less forgiving of that work than they are of total strangers trying out new shows; people they've never heard of creating something really exciting, and it's raw and unfinished and full of new ideas, and there's something there. When an established company comes in and does crap, or something a bit nascent, it can get really vicious, it can get really 'I'm never going to see them again, they've betrayed me'.

H: Something that we've been talking about a lot during this, is that you could say however carefully you frame something as a bit of work-in-progress, ultimately, if you show us something, on a stage, even if it's kind of in a café or something, you can't help but read it as a piece, even if you know in your head that 'it's in progress - make allowances' – maybe this is up for debate, but I suppose we build it up. You know, you try to understand how to read something as a piece, saying 'oh, let's imagine it's a piece', like you go into a really rubbish house and you go 'oh, just imagine it was redecorated' or something. You just squint a bit and go, 'yeah, it's alright.' But that's the only way you know how to be, watching a performance, so possibly it's where this slightly tricky dangerous thing is, where either people are really early and are so vulnerable and it's a very scary time, or when people are carrying this reputation on their shoulders and maybe the risk is too great. **If** I could ask you, off the back of that... at the SHOW US YER BITS! nights we used to do, we'd never announce the line-up until the event, partly because we wanted to build the identity of the *night*, and partly so people wouldn't come because they saw something and went 'Oh, I've read about them, I know about them'. Obviously, a lot of people who came were relatives, friends and family and supporting artists and whatever, but I think by the end, well, we haven't ended, but by the time we paused, there were some people coming because they thought 'it's SHOW US YER BITS!, there'll probably be something I'd like to see.' It sounds like what you were saying with the BAC, where you begin to trust the kind of curatorial context and you think 'there'll probably be something interesting going on... some of it might not be to my taste, but I'll go for the event rather than for the pieces', and I wonder, who knows, but I wonder if there's room for these events to do that to such an extent that you wouldn't know if you were going to see something really high-profile, there could be a high-profile company on the line up, but there could be somebody who's never done any work before, but it just is what it is, and it is whatever's there. Because for us, the minute you announce a line-up, you cannot help but slightly be in the persona of producer and like, what's cool and what's hot dynamic, you know, and Amy, I know you haven't started your scratch night yet, but do you have any thoughts about that? Announce who you've got or not?

A: Yeah, I guess I just assumed that we should announce who's performing, but that's interesting. Potentially we could not, and I'd be interested in hearing what other people thought. My sense is

that it's good to give the audience some sort of sense of what they're about to go into, but also, I think maybe the artists might feel that they want to be credited or they might want people to know that they had actually done something, because if they're applying to a scratch night, then they're actively saying 'I want to present my work at an early stage', then I think they would want people to know that they were performing a work-in-progress of their piece, but I'd be interested in asking artists and to know what their views are.

H: Well, maybe I can ask Mamoru a bit on that, on your experience of events that you've done and things. As Amy said there, presumably you would want to do it because you would want your work to be seen, in that context, but how much would you (and I understand you're also saying it's different in each event), but how much for you is it important that actually the space is a space to play in? For me, from my experience it's probably almost the opposite. I want it to be seen by people that I don't know and who may never see it again, because I know that it might go really badly, but I would like the people in the room to be there to, like David says, make it live and make it a real event – but if it's proper early work, that I'm thinking 'is this even a thing?', then it's a shame if that space to play starts to slip away because I'm partly thinking about it as a space to show and be seen.

M: Well, it's very difficult, especially to be an emerging artist and to have so few opportunities to show your work. You're often dying to try out something new because you're thinking that no one has ever tried it, but it's important that you're clear about what your questions to the audience are and what you're really trying out. You have to make sure of what you're really trying to communicate to the audience and then you really have to make good use of these wonderful opportunities and you have to make good use of the feedback from the audience. In order to do that, if I'm offered a scratch opportunity now, I would reduce the time and scale of the piece so that I can sort of make sure that the impression I make is very clear, rather than trying to present everything that you're working on.

H: Can I just ask you something on that? When you say 'your question', do you mean your general question of what you're exploring in the work, or do you mean a question that you have about a section of what you're doing, or a more concrete question about, 'does this, I don't know, this repetition drive you crazy, or whatever?' A specific question or more of an exploration?

M: Sometimes the general question, or the thing you want to try out... but you could try to clarify the things that you're trying to kind of *share* with the audience and see what they think or what they feel. So that you can at least get a clear response to what you think is new and what you want to try now.

H: We talked a bit with Mischa Twitchin, one of the co-founders of Shunt, about these events like Shunt or Ducky, which are much more a social event than some others, and how the 'feedback' there, in a way, is so much more immediate – it's like 'does it survive?', because people will just go and chat to their mate or just talk over the work if it's not sufficient to hold their attention and they'd rather just chat or dance or whatever. So, in a more theatre context, where a scratch event isn't so much one of these art/social evening things, obviously feedback is a massive part. What really is the best way to understand what forty people, or twenty people think about your work? And if you're very early/emerging in your practice, how do you hold on to what your practice is and not get confused by 'she said start there, he said stop there,' and suddenly not know how to do anything anymore? And so Mamoru I'm very interested to hear you talk, because your work is so



different and so clear and seems to have a very clear sense of what its practice is actually. How do you navigate feedback, and what, for you, have been the most useful or 'un-useful' feedback experiences? Is it as David said, you just feel it? In which case, should we give up our time giving feedback and just have the experience?

M: When you have to write feedback as an audience, you have to prepare yourself to write something meaningful or useful. I think that sometimes one of the most important things as an artist is how to sharpen this sensitivity while you're doing it, whether or not you're actually on stage - as a director or as a performer - you will have to have a measure of sensitivity to sense of what's going on in the room. Is there a sense of sharing or a sense of engagement in what's happening? That's one of the differences between work that is live or recorded - TV, or whatever. So I think that that is only possible when an audience is there - you need to have people. I think that's indispensable and I think it's more important than written feedback. I did a scratch at the BAC a long time ago to five people and two people left feedback, and both of them said 'you've gone too far' and that was very sad that both of them thought that, but [laughing], it's useful. But you have to be aware, when you're reading written feedback that the people have written it once they have left your show and had a chance to get 'sober'. It's not immediate anymore.

H: So if I could ask this to David and Amy, I'll start with David – there's a question that comes to us about the ownership and branding of work that is initiated at scratches. Something that we experience quite often is that there lots of opportunities to make new things, but if everywhere wants you to make new things, then you've made eight new things and you can't show any of them. So people will bring something and will be pretending it's new and it's not. This is where you get something at a scratch night that's really developed and they've said 'yeah, we're just going to try it' and the minute they do it, you're like 'ahhh, you lied.' And fair enough, really. I suppose our question linked to that is this thing of venues really wanting to be receiving new work makes total sense in terms of making interesting theatre and thinking outside the box, but does it come with a kind of ownership of what we do and how much do you think a venue or organisation should give an artist before they ask an artist to carry their logo on it, for the foreseeable life of that work?

D: I don't know how to answer the question.

Can I answer one of the other questions?

(H: yes)

This is about the way in which feedback is received – one of the earlier questions. I've seen probably over 500 scratches at the BAC over the last six years and at every scratch I've been handed a piece of paper saying 'write your feedback here.' I've never ever written on that, for a number of reasons. One is that primarily in live theatre, feedback is dialogue, so I'd rather not write it down on the paper when I can have a conversation with the artist. I think there are lots of ways to give feedback, but writing it down on a piece of paper is not for me. Also, I often don't know what I think, I don't know immediately – I need to go to sleep or have a drink or something to eat, so I guess I'm just saying, I don't know, there are a dozen reasons why I might not write feedback. The most successful way that I've seen feedback working is actually asking the audience what they think they saw. Often what an audience thinks they saw is completely different to what an artist thought they were sharing. That, in my experience, is where an artist might say, 'oh no, I thought I was making a story

about...my dad or a story about my dog', so I think that feedback is better when it's a conversation at the bar or an email sent a couple of days later – so I think that's a really important way of feeding back.

That was me covering the fact I didn't answer your other question.

H: No, that was good. Perhaps we can go further with that cover, which is to ask you – so this thing about 'what did you think you saw?' – something that I suppose is really useful about that is that it's away from language of, 'I think you should...' or 'it would be better if...', or 'why don't you...?' – it's just a reporting of your experience. So, a question that we have that's come up in our conversations is that, is there perhaps a sort of moral position now that artists should care, should listen to audiences tell them how to make their work? And should they? Obviously, it's always good to have conversations and be open, or whatever, but it seems like it could be slightly controversial and inappropriate now to sort of go 'you know what? I don't want to hear what people think about what I'm doing. I want you to be here and I don't want you leave, but I don't want to hear you tell me what to do, because this is what I do'. Not because you know what to do, because you don't all the time, as an artist. But it's like 'I know how to work, I know what my practice is, and I may know that I haven't finished this piece, but it doesn't mean that I don't know how to keep making the piece'. I just wondered if you had any thoughts on that feedback – possibly in opposition of 'open it up, tell us what was wrong with it, or what we could do better', I suppose.

D: Yeah, I mean with what you're talking about, I think of the 'Liz Lerman' process, which for those of you who don't know, is a quite well-established process particularly used in dance, not text-based performance, which encourages audience to feedback and is about permission, granting permission to the audience through a series of very direct questions, so it's not about giving your opinion at all times, but it's about the audience asking questions of an artist about....rather than saying 'why did you make that whole piece of work with a candle lit, or why was it so dark?', saying 'what led you to make those decisions about the lighting?'. So the question is always framed in a more constructive way.

H: Yes, thinking through what those decisions were, rather than just going 'that's not to my taste, that moment.'

D: Yeah, and scratch is probably a bastardised version of this development feedback. Perhaps it doesn't quite have the subtleties of that process.

H: Yeah. So, Amy, maybe I can ask you – as you guys are thinking of mounting a scratch event – how do you relate to this thing of how often these events attract very early stages artists who may not have a firm grip on their practice and who may feel a bit battered by lots of people saying "I did like it", or "I didn't like it". What do you feel – as a producer at your venue – how would frame that for them?

A: Well I usually ask the artists what would be useful for them. So often we don't do feedback. There's one that we did in October with Unlimited where we had three companies presenting short pieces and we asked them if they wanted us to ask the audience questions. And they all did and so we had just a couple of questions and John from Unlimited at the end of the pieces asked the questions of the audience and then said we'll all meeting be in the bar after. So we all had drinks and

chatted about it after, and that felt like an appropriate way of doing it rather than – I don't know – those things can always make me feel quite uncomfortable, just immediately opening it up to people. We've had stuff like that before and actually it hasn't felt useful.

H: It can be challenging for the audience – they're thinking 'What shall I say to say the right thing?'

A: Yeah.

H: OK so let me ask you this question then. What do you think the least should be that a venue or organisation should give an artist before it asks the artist to carry its logo on its work?

A: Well, again it's a conversation with the artist so if someone rings me up and goes 'oh I need a couple of days rehearsal space' I'm not going to say 'can you put our logo on all of your publicity?'. But if we've supported it in a meaningful way then we've probably had a conversation with the artist about 'what does this mean?'. So if we've financially invested in the work, then we'd expect to be credited in some way. If it's been space for a couple of weeks or a bit of producing, or tech support, there will be a conversation when it gets to the point of agreeing what we want to make it into together. So it's a conversation – it's not like we have a set 'this is what we ask for'. Often we've found that people have been very responsive, if we've said 'ok well cool we'll give you the space for a couple of weeks and this and that, and we would want to be credited in this way in the future' and they go 'yeah cool'. From an artist's point of view having the credit of a venue you're being partnered with - that might be useful, when taking the work elsewhere.

H: Can I ask you that question as well Mamoru? If an organisation said 'you need to carry our logo with this work now' what would you have expected from them for that?

M: I think if support is being given, it's not just about space or money. What I really value is the conversation with the people who run the venue, or the organisation, because they are risking themselves as well, if the work goes totally 'wrong' - so I think it's a mutual risk-taking thing happening there anyway. And what makes that happen is the trust created through conversation.

A: I'd also say, it's more than a logo. It's about, what is your relationship? What are you setting out to do together? Are you working together? Or are you merely providing a space for someone for a few days? If you're making something together – well then you're actively engaged in developing a new piece of work. It's a partnership. And when it comes to marketing and all that other stuff, there needs to be a way of expressing that relationship.

H: And do you think that should involve paying the artists for their time? Or do you think it could be ok if you just had good conversation and studio space and tech help – or do you think there should be some financial help included?

A: Again it depends what you're setting out to do together. So how it works with us, is that we have a programming team and we meet on a weekly basis and people bring up different ideas – so we'll have different relationships with different artists or different ideas coming in – and we have a conversation where, yes, we might decide to develop some things further, or work with the company or artist to make it happen. And that would then be, either we are funding it or commissioning it or putting development money into it or working with the artist to fundraise or, if it's a co-production, they're bringing a certain amount to the table and we're bringing a certain

amount – whether that be finances or resources... It totally depends on what the project is and how the company's set up. Because if they're an National Portfolio Organisation you'd start with looking at, 'is this a co-production?' If it's an emerging company that doesn't have any resources, then obviously that conversation is very different.

H: Yeah, you're not equal partners as much. You're helping them get it going, to get a boost up.

A: Yeah well, you're still making it together but they don't have the set up. They don't have the staffing and infrastructure. So it's more a conversation of 'ok what can we put into this to make it happen?' I think it totally depends on what the project is and who the artists are and what we want to do together. But if it's a project we're less certain about, we're just getting to know each other, we're not sure how it's going to work, we would start by offering rehearsal space or seeing what we could do in-kind. If it got to the point where we said 'actually we're really interested in this project and we want to take it further' then that becomes a different conversation.

H: So David, when you develop a relationship with a company in the way Amy's talking about and it becomes more than giving a bit of space, and you know it's going to be long-term, what's your opinion on getting to the point where you can detach from a certain piece of work and not have to go 'tell me what it's going to be about or who's going to be in it' or whatever, but you try and develop a two-way trust so much that you say 'we will support your next thing, whatever it is' - knowing that there's always a risk there that it might be rubbish.? Because in our experience as long as it remains about a specific piece of work and this 'can I see the DVD?' type of game that can be played or 'what other work is it like?' – then you're always one step away from being in a totally safe supportive space that says 'I trust your process as a company and the way you think as artists - I trust in that so much that we will co-produce your next show or whatever and we don't know what it's going to be'.

D: Well at the BAC they have a team of producers who have the best job in the world – they get paid to go out and see work every night all around the country. And the artists they see who they are most excited by, they say come to the BAC - come and be resident, come and do your show, come and hang out. So sometimes that can end up with the BAC saying let's co-produce your work, come and do it with us and we'll premiere it here, and that's really exciting. And sometimes that's because a BAC producer has seen something at, for example Bethnal Green Working Men's Club – it's nascent, 10 minutes work, a tiny thing, but there's something really exciting about it. There's a team of people doing that – being really really excited about the work. And it has that producing structure with a very important meeting every week where all the producers get together and say 'these are the people I met with this week' and 'this is what I've been doing' and 'these are the shows I've seen' – and 'I've just seen something awful but there was 5 minutes at the end that was the most exciting thing I've seen in the last 12 months. Let's get them in.' And sometimes that can be about saying 'Have a week in one of our spaces' and sometimes it's about saying 'here's 5 grand – we'll pay you or we'll co-produce you'. If it's a company's first piece of work, they haven't been around that long, you might say let's produce that work with proper resources and make it happen. Then obviously it might tour all around the country and all over the place and all over the world –

H: So I guess you could say there's a parallel between what you say with the BAC and I guess all venues – where the dream is that the audience trust the venue so much that they'll come to something, they'll come to a scratch without having to necessarily know what it is beforehand – they

see something's going on and they know something worthwhile will be happening...And maybe there's a parallel to saying there could be a method of artist support that says 'I trust or believe in your work so much that we'll support it regardless of what it is. Do you know what, if the next show is really dire and it's the one where everyone goes 'oh do you remember when...' do you know what, we'll still ask you back. We're not going "no sorry you failed, now you're embarrassing". I suppose what makes sense is a company or artist might have to be around for 10, 15, 20 years for that to happen – it's not going to happen just like that.

D: With Freshly Scratched it's a completely open thing, it's great because they are all artists who have never had work at the BAC before. And that's a high risk thing to do, in that sometimes a lot of it is not very good. And most of the audience are family and friends. There are very few who are there on a whim just to see Freshly Scratched.

H: Can I ask you something on that? I think it's fair to say that as an emerging experimental maker you might find that these scratch opportunities were really the only opportunities open to you. If your work is more mainstream there can be scratch opportunities but there can also be more mainstream options, like Young Companies at established theatres etc. So do any of you think there's any sort of risk or even conversation to be had about very early, very unfinished work being placed in close proximity with more 'difficult' work. If you were someone who thought 'well I do have this piece but I can never get in anywhere with it because people say "that's too weird, what is it?" – but it does get in here at this scratch' and therefore you might feel you have to take the opportunity even if the work's finished. But possibly in the public experience and imagination, more difficult, hard-to-read work becomes conflated with early, unfinished, not very thought-through work. Are we letting those two things exist in a mish-mash, rather than going 'just because it's more marginal, liminal work, that doesn't mean it's unfinished, it's scratch'.

D: I don't think that happens in London because there are a whole bunch of contexts here where good, well-paid experimental practice can sit outside the scratch programme, but I can see where in regional contexts, where there's a much smaller seed pool of artists making that sort of work, that work can all get muddled up as the same thing.

A: That's a difficult one, but I think if something's really interesting and the venue wants to realise it - I mean at the Playhouse, if we're really excited by something, our programming team will push for it and make it happen. Many of the things we've shown in development so far, many of them are being realised in some way or another. There are two really different examples of that at the moment: one is a storyteller called Matthew Bellwood and it's a tiny piece for ten people at a time, and we love it so we've found a way to take it further and it's being presented in the Spring at the Playhouse. And at the other end of the spectrum, a couple of pieces we developed, we're now looking at them being co-productions. So if we're excited about it, we'll find a way for it to be fully realised beyond just a work-in-progress.

H: And in your blurb for your scratch event that you're going to launch, do you anticipate that you will say that it's really about people that want to try something out that's new, or do you think you will also say 'do you have a piece that doesn't fit in a theatre that you need to do somewhere – do you have something that doesn't fit in that you want to try?'

A: We've been talking around that because we are very keen to enliven our spaces in the theatre – but that's our agenda – and what we don't want to do is push our agenda on artists so they're having to go 'oh shit, they want something in a toilet cubicle, what can I think of?'. So I think we just need to find a way of articulating that. So what we've done for the thing that we're doing in April is we're saying, you can put forward a proposal for the Den, which is like a studio space for pieces which require more focus, or a proposal for the Bandstand which is the front of house stage, or for another nook or cranny in the theatre. So we're being quite clear that there are various options. And I think when we continue doing it we have to continue that thing of saying to artists 'where would you most rather show this?'. Rather than someone misreading it and going 'ok they just want something in a different kind of space'.

M: I have often been asked to do my work in unusual sorts of spaces. That is because I think the venues are more keen for the artists to make use of their spaces. And I think that can be a healthy challenge to the artist. You must examine your practice if something is forced upon you – like if it's a space you never envisaged your work would be in. I think if you use the challenge, as some sort of task to respond to, and use it to examine your work and what you are trying to do - you learn a lot from those experiences.

H: Yes. Amy has to leave now, so one more question Amy. Your scratch event that's coming up, will it be in the 350 seat Courtyard space at West Yorkshire Playhouse?

A: The one in April will be in the Den studio space. The future ones will be programmed wherever the work suits.

H: So if someone said 'I want to scratch something and I need to do it in a massive space' –

A: It would be a case of matching up the work. So what we'll do is one application call per season, and then we'll match the projects up per event for the different spaces.

H: Thanks very much, Amy.

*Amy leaves.*

So a question I wanted to ask David: we are wondering if the proliferation of scratch events since they started 12 years ago, and the fact that a lot of artists now get their work going through them, could possibly be rubbing off, or affecting the aesthetic of contemporary theatre now. And by that we mean a scrappiness, a homemade aesthetic, a DIY aesthetic – all of which we totally relate to and come from and play with – but our question is, is work being made in this failed, cheap aesthetic because of scratch, or not?

Mamoru, you have some hi-tech stuff going on in your work, it's not just cardboard and napkins, but there *is* also an element of that to it, isn't there?

M: I think that's more a trend, that sort of homemade feel. I think the audience has changed recently too – they want to see more closely what is happening on stage, in the same space that they're in. And that is a sort of reaction against the really high-tech end of the spectrum of what's happening in film and TV. There's so much tech that everything's possible. We see someone in such and such place on TV and we don't believe it because you can do it with a computer. So I think when

you are actually sharing the same space in time, I think what the audience would like to feel more now is a much more tangible connection with what's happening. I think how scratch contributed to that is, as David said, the history of audiences wanting to be given more opportunities to feedback, to be involved in a tangible sense with the performance.

H: And so when you're making a piece now. How much do you think 'I'd best keep it quite flexible because I might be asked to do it in a theatre, or a conference room, or a café.' How much do you find that you're catering to the fact that you know you won't always be in the space of your choice?

M: As I say, I think that's an interesting challenge. I always wanted someone to come to me and say you have to make a show for outdoors because then you really have to think about what you're doing. That does excite me, that unforeseen spaces might be part of the sort of relationships you could build with the venues and the opportunities. And it's true more venues are asking artists to fill their public spaces now. I welcome that as a challenge to make me investigate my practice.

H: Cool. Thank you. David, any thoughts on that?

D: Yeah, I agree with Mamoru about tangibility. I love stuff that can break, that isn't slick, that isn't perfect. That's why I go to the theatre - that liveness thing. To see people fucking it up. Not fucking it up in an embarrassing way, but what's the risk and what are the things that could go wrong. But I also agree that scratch does perpetuate a DIY aesthetic. And I also think that sometimes the best version of a show from an artist is the scratch version. When they've still got tape and marker pens. And then they get a lighting designer and tech and it all sort of works too well – the scratch was the best thing – a kernel of a broken idea. So I guess it's interesting in terms of support to think 'how can we retain that exciting idea thing, and enhance it rather than polish it?' We can't just make the idea louder but not richer.

M: When you're an emerging artist you really have to do everything yourself. You can't hire people in and you can't buy equipment, you have no money. But that doesn't mean you haven't got resources. You can do a lot with cardboard and pens and you can really get to know your own practice through limitation – you really get to know your area. And in these situations people work together and are very creative. And the question is how can we maintain this dynamic after a scratch or work-in-progress stage.

H: It's interesting – this idea of risk, and we've talked about the potential for failure – the elements of those you always have in the room at a scratch event ('this might be rubbish' or 'are they even going to remember what they're supposed to do because they've only been working on it for a week?') – it might not all be desirable but it does mean that there's this tangible liveness. And I suppose a really useful thing for the work that a curator or producer does, could be about realising that part of the benefit of scratch and one of the unique things about it might be that risk is inherent in it. Be it because it's the first time we've done it or there are no lights so we can't look pretty. Maybe there's something to be thought through about how, even for really really emerging artists, you could get them to hold onto that risk as their work develops. Because I suppose you always, in a sense, are having to scratch something - even in a finished show. You have to be trying something new every time, even if you know the show inside out. If you just go out and do it, we might as well all go home. You need to go 'tonight we could try (or 'scratch') this new thing inside the show/with

the show'... I need to know, if I'm in the audience, that the performers are not just phoning it in and I need to have permission to know that it could, in the best possible way, all go wrong.

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