

DIALOGUE

at



Welcome to BAC Dialogue, our detailed record of our three-week residency at Battersea Arts Centre in London, during its Autumn Cook-Up season, September 2012.

From the very beginning of Dialogue's life, BAC's artistic directors – then a joint team of David Jubb and David Micklem – were overwhelmingly positive in their support of the project. Although BAC holds a crucial place in British theatre ecology, it's often overlooked by the mainstream press, and the prospect of a website that proposed a new dialogue around theatre, based not on traditional criticism but conversations with theatre-makers about and around their work, struck BAC as both exciting and vital.

When BAC offered us our residency, there were a couple of things they asked us to think about specifically: how we might approach writing about Scratch shows, and how we might encourage greater integration of the various communities who use BAC, not just theatre-makers and audiences but people who attend yoga classes there, or Weight Watchers sessions, or learn life-drawing, or take children to the Bee's Knees playspace. Mostly, though, BAC was happy to leave us to our own devices, and see how we responded to the building. It was a thrilling three weeks, a mixture of successes and failures from which we learned a great deal about how two theatre-writers might operate within a building. Lots of our ideas didn't work; there were lots of people we didn't have time to talk to or work with properly; the research Jake put into tin-can telephones came to nothing. The Recommends cards - based on the cards you see in bookshops in which staff recommend books they love - worked really well; every other attempt to engage audiences in dialogue floundered because of a lack of confidence in presenting the invitation. It was an unpaid residency, so our time there had to be squeezed between other commitments: Jake's work in theatre marketing, and Maddy's parenting and writing for the Guardian.

It's taken us a long time to put this documentation together. Some of it involves fairly conventional criticism, some of it contemplates the different ways BAC operates, some of it muses on dramaturgy or Scratch or different kinds of theatre-maker and -writer relationships. And a big chunk of it attempts to represent the work we saw there unmediated by our thoughts or impressions: using film, audio, photography and text to convey the plethora of work programmed during this Autumn Cook-Up, and the surge of energy people feel when they walk into the building.

We'd love to know what people think: what works, what doesn't, what you'd like to see more of if (when!) we do a project like this again, what you'd like to see less of. And if you'd like to collaborate with us, that would be fantastic. We can be reached at:

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Thanks for joining us in our playspace.

BUILDING

BRIDGES

- Jake Orr

Devoted and Disgruntled

At the annual Devoted and Disgruntled event at York Hall in London this year I was feeling particularly deflated. The previous year had been my first D&D, and I felt energised and enriched by the experience. There was something within the open participation, the radical questioning and conversations that emerged that made me realise that I was not alone in my beliefs, and more connected than I originally thought. This year however the excitement was minimal, the conversations taking place weren't for me. I flitted between them, never settling. Yes, the rules of D&D state that if there is something not being said that you want discussed you should set up a session, but my problem was I wasn't sure what I wanted from D&D. It turned out that on the second day, the answer to my lack of question became apparent.

Maddy Costa, the Guardian journalist, had proposed a session called 'What new dialogue can we set up between people who write about theatre and people who make it'. Maddy and I hadn't met before, although Lyn Gardner had mentioned her to me earlier in the year because of a project Maddy was undertaking with theatre-maker Chris Goode. Maddy was observing Chris' making process from within the rehearsal room and writing about it. I was about to undertake something similar with Dirty Market, a south London theatre company, during their residency at Ovalhouse Theatre. It seemed fitting therefore that Maddy's session at D&D looked at this question of new dialogues.

It was a thrilling session, but also a frustrating one. Maddy wanted to find new ways to engage writers and makers, and to fill the gap between them. The session showed that there

were those that wanted to engage in this new proposal, and those that didn't. Which, to be honest, is fair. The rehearsal room for any artist can be a sacred place, but the divide that was beginning to form between 'the critic' and 'the artist' was tangible, and it was sickening. There has to be more to being a critic than just attending press nights and moving onto the next one.

Dialogue

Out of this session Maddy and I began to dream. What better place to imagine what the future might be than by closing your eyes and letting your mind think of the impossible. After many a late night email exchange or excited meeting in Maddy's living room, a project began to emerge. It was originally going to be a new website, but as yet the website of this project only acts as a calling card for the project itself.

We've called our work Dialogue. It is a project born out of a need to find how theatre-makers and writers (with audiences closely following suit) can do more, can work together and find a mutual language. We want to dispel the idea that we are 'theatre critics', and instead replace it with 'theatre-writers', but if we're being completely honest, we're fed up of labels altogether. Limitations can be found when a label is applied.

We wrote a manifesto:

Welcome to our playspace.

Dialogue is for everyone who is passionate about theatre and live performance.

Everyone who is curious.

Everyone who has something to share.

It's a collaborative space where artists, writers and audiences can meet on mutual ground.

A fluid space where live performance is uprooted from time.

An evolving space that adapts to the changing landscapes of theatre-making, participating, watching and writing.

Dialogue is fuelled by the desire to explore new ways of communicating with and about the work we love.

It is a place where the act of communicating is an art in itself.

Welcome to Dialogue.

We built a loose website: www.welcometodialogue.com and we began to engage with people who might share our vision. We set up meetings, we frantically emailed late into the night. It was a frenzied time, where our dreaming suddenly became reality. We met with theatre companies, with individuals, with theatre-makers and theatre-writers and we attempted to carve out what Dialogue could be, could mean for the ecosystem of theatre criticism and theatre making.

Battersea Arts Centre

This led to a meeting at Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) with its then co-artistic directors David Jubb and David Micklem. We told them of our idea, and in return they told us of their troubles with theatre criticism and how the work they produced in their building crashed and collided with critics and critical reflection. Despite this they listened to Maddy and me, and they asked a simple question: “What do you need from us?”

A few months later and Dialogue was to be a resident company at BAC, working between audiences, makers and other theatre-writers. BAC sent us some internal documents related to their work, in particular to their scratch work. Scratch being those work-in-progress pieces that are developed within the building, put in front of an audience for trial and error before being developed further (or indeed scrapped). Scratch shows are never reviewed by members of the press. BAC however set us a challenge. How can we, as writers of theatre, attempt to write about scratch without hindering the delicate nature of Scratch performances? Peter McMaster, David Sheppard and Greg McLaren.

Early into my time at BAC I requested from our producer Richard Dufty the chance to observe rehearsals of some of the artists present within the building. I’d previously done this with Dirty Market, spending two weeks writing about their work as they were making it. It had proven to be a challenging and rewarding experience, but also troublesome: there were moments when my own writing was blocked because I hadn’t allowed myself space. I learned how crucial space is for an artist, and for a process to develop.

Richard suggested three artists who would be developing scratch performances during their residencies at BAC. Glasgow based Peter McMaster as he developed his new piece Yeti; Brighton based David Sheppard with his piece Holocene; and Greg McLaren with Atomkraft. Three male theatre makers who have a tendency to create work as solo artists (although in Greg’s development he worked with artist Sara Lehn). Several cups of tea later I’d made agreements with the three artists that we’d figure out a way of me working with them, be it popping into rehearsals, discussing their work or from watching their scratches.

Cafe / Bar

We knew Dialogue would be resident in the building: what we didn’t know was what our artistic practice or output would be. This is partly why this documentation is coming several months after Dialogue at BAC has taken place. (Which makes me think of something I’ve questioned for the last few months: the immediacy of reviewing. I can’t dwell on theatre, I have to write and move on, but this has proved troublesome at times. “How long do you spend writing your reviews?” was a question that Anne Rigby wanted to ask critics at our Dialogue experiment in Edinburgh. Shouldn’t critics or writers spend a greater time digesting work before responding?) With little certainty of what Dialogue would produce while in

residency, but with some rough idea it would evolve around the three groups that interact with the building, namely writers, artists and audiences, Dialogue was given the cafe/bar space as our place of working.

You might find this an odd place in which to work. Artistic development and creating of work at BAC happens behind the series of closed doors across the building. It takes place in so many nooks and crannies that even a seasoned BAC-goer such as myself can't quite figure them all out (I later learned that they have 70 licensed spaces). The decision to put Maddy and me in the café was actually one of the best for our work. Where better to be than the place in which all three elements of our focus would at some point come together?

The BAC cafe is open throughout the day and evening (when shows are on). During the daytime it is a mass of mothers with their children using the Bee's Knees (a soft-play area of BAC that brings a sense of community into the building), staff members holding meetings and a throng of producers filling tables with collaborative ideas. In the evening, the dynamic changes, the space turns into a somewhat hazy mist of audiences, artists, and drinkers. A shared space. A meeting space. A space for dialogue and Dialogue to inhabit. Reflecting back on our time at BAC, our position within the cafe space was vital to some of the discussions and ripples of impact that we had upon both the staff and the artists. As a communal shared space, with open access, Dialogue found a home.

Ephemeral Discussions

Being based at BAC had an effect on the staff. In their eyes we were two theatre critics in the building that they would only really encounter on press nights. But here we were in their meetings, in the cafe space, in the rehearsal rooms, engaging with artists. They began to call us artists, too.

At times Dialogue took on the role of sounding board. There were producers who felt frustrated with the reaction of critics towards their artists' work. There were angry artists frustrated that their work had been mislabelled, misunderstood or just torn apart because the critic has the power and ability to do so. There is a frustration that critics and the current model are too distant, too hierarchical, too judgemental. There were staff members who didn't understand but wanted to understand why we as Dialogue were based in the building. (Perhaps questioning what right we had as people who review/write about theatre to enter a space designed for artists.)

There is something calming and reassuring that Dialogue allowed these discussions to happen. Leading or guiding someone through their concerns or anger in order to move on. I'm not saying that Dialogue is a form of therapy, that's not our aim, but people feel that they can direct things our way based upon our associations with the critical practice as a whole.

Dialogue showed that there needed to be a demystifying of the role of the critic, and that where critics were entering a building on press nights they left behind them frustrated artists. Thinking about it now, I wonder how many of those artists or producers would find frustration at a critic who had given their work a good write up, or the luxury of five stars. But it does worry me that there are so many frustrations and so many unanswered questions that trouble artists and facilitators of work. It's almost as if these dialogues between critics and makers or producers have never happened before. Heaven forbid that artists rock the boat too much and miss out on being reviewed.

The tension isn't felt by critics, I don't think, partly because I wonder if they care. But artists care about their work and they care when someone extends a judgement on their work from above without, at times, fully engaging, or understanding the purpose of the work. And the problem is, reviews sell tickets. (Or do they? A big question, not sure I actually have the answer. From my marketing experience certain publications have an impact on ticket sales, others less so. Depends on the show, on the work, on the venue...) How can you want to change something that ultimately supports your work and box office intake?

Reflecting back, all those conversations Maddy and I had with artists or staff members of BAC may not have appeared to have much impact from the outside, but they did help create a slight shift on the landscape. If we were listening to what the producers were telling us, they were listening to us in return. If the artistic directors wanted change, wanted to see something new, we were offering the start of this.

I DON'T

KNOW

WHAT'S

REAL ANY

MORE

- Maddy Costa

Seeing comes before words. ... It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. John Berger, Ways of Seeing

A journey across time in the last remaining car.
A guided tour of London in a language wrenched from sense.
A life resurrected in a video etched with dust.
Anxiety, loneliness, depression, in the dissolving colours of a painted owl.

Seeing, disrupted.

If you'd asked me while they were happening what connected the disparate shows and Scratch performances programmed in BAC's Autumn 2012 Cook-Up season, I'd have struggled to come up with an answer. Talking to one of the producers there, I got the impression even they weren't sure. Something clicked for me when I (finally! after 18 years of meaning to!) started reading Ways of Seeing: a thought connecting [Motor Vehicle Sundown](#), [Still Night](#), [Standby For Tape Backup](#) and [Puffball](#). In appearance, the four works are radically different: MVS is an audio piece for two people, sitting outside in a car; Still Night a fantasia rising mistily from the pages of Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities; Puffball a skittering amalgam of music, animation, nature documentary and performance; Stand-By a prose-poem waltzing with found television footage. The experiment in form separates them, but it also brings them together, in a slippery space between the tangible and intangible; between what their audiences know, feel and imagine; between what audiences see and what they're told.

Seeing comes before words

The Fireplace Room at BAC is small and grey and dominated by, yes, a fireplace painted to blend into the wall. With 14 chairs and a sound desk crammed into it, the space feels claustrophobic. Ross Sutherland is backed into a corner; behind him, projected on the wall, are the theme credits to the TV show Friends. Set verbal against visual information, Ross tells us sorrowfully, and images will always win. Will we hear anything he's saying, or just get distracted by the screen?

Standby is still in development – this was a Scratch show – but the game at its heart is already assured. Sutherland plays with words and pictures to test how far he can manipulate the relationship between the two. As his language increasingly reflects the visual stimuli, how successfully does he hold our attention? I wonder how much the answer might be affected by differing relationships with TV. I lived without one for years, and begrudge giving it my full attention. Approach the show with a resistance of TV pictures and the tension shifts: Sutherland's text forces you to look, to search for connections on the screen.

The show is built around an old VHS tape, transferred to digital, that belonged to Sutherland's grandfather, who died a few years ago. It's a ratchety thing, a haphazard collage of stuff his grandfather recorded, in the old world where video accidents could have unexpected permanence. The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air slices into Ghostbusters; Michael Jackson's Thriller video overlays an episode of The Crystal Maze. Another aside: this is the cultural mulch of my own childhood, but how much would be meaningful to someone born in the 1990s? I'm not sure it matters: what's more interesting is the jarring portrait the video creates of Sutherland's grandfather, the person apparently watching these things. Ghostbusters, Sutherland can understand: it's the first film they saw together, when Ross was a wee slip of a lad and terrified. But Fresh Prince? Odd – but enjoyably plausible.

More disorienting still is the way Sutherland uses the contents of the video, like the key to a code, to unlock his own buried thoughts: about his grandfather, the idea and actuality of death, the broken hope of love. He remembers being so unable to communicate what he really felt watching Ghostbusters, to articulate the knot of fear in his gut, that his grandfather took him back to the cinema to see it again. How much changed in the years that followed? For all his ability to spin language into kaleidoscopic patterns, when faced with an intractable relationship, Sutherland finds that words fail him. He watches a contestant on The Crystal Maze struggling to solve the problem she's been set, and sees himself, obtuse and uncomprehending, flummoxed by love. And though mismatched, this yoking of pop culture and autobiography is poignant: as in the song These Foolish Things, the least significant trigger makes memory bleed.

The precise interlocking of Sutherland's prose-poems with his found footage is startling: every phrase is relevant to the visuals while perfectly suiting his subject and theme. The tighter the synthesis, the more dazzling – and brain-frazzling – the performance. In my favourite sequence, Sutherland uses Fresh Prince's opening credits to contemplate his grandfather's existence, one narrative informing the other no matter how many poles apart they seem. The verbal barrage is so relentless that by the fifth iteration of the sequence I thought my head was going to explode. But then he did it again. And again. It's meticulously written, smart, funny, draining – and one of the best things I've seen in a theatre this year. And this was only a Scratch. I can't wait to see where he's at with it when it comes back to BAC in December.

Please remember that this is a simulation.

We have tried to recreate everything as accurately as possible.

But inevitably there will be some mistakes.

Andy Field, Motor Vehicle Sundown

Welcome to the future. A future without cars. Let's rediscover what they were like. Let's remember the journeys that people once took in them. That we once took in them. Let's take our seats in this, the last car in the world. Lean our heads against the windows, feel the cool of the glass against our skin. Smell the air – Forest Fresh. This is the future and it's now. This is

before and what's to come. This isn't real. Except maybe, frighteningly, it is.

A synapse-teasing disconnect between what we see and what we're told is at the heart of Andy Field's Motor Vehicle Sundown. It's framed as a fairground ride, or museum installation, in the post-apocalyptic landscape of cinematic sci-fi. Assuming there are fairground rides, or museums, in this cold metallic world. We enter a real car to take a simulated journey through the past; see cars flit by on the busy urban street ahead while a voice (Christopher Brett Bailey) drawls in our ears of empty nights in the back seat, gazing drowsily at blackened fields and dreary suburbs with the lights of the big city glimmering tantalisingly ahead. Each section dismantles its own little bit of American movie iconography: the long-distance drive, the drive-in movie, the pioneer's drive for gold. The further it travels from your own lived experience, the more the piece envelops you.

In some ways I was out of sync with MVS from the beginning: encouraged to recall childhood journeys, my head instead flooded with memories of teenage years. But it didn't seem to matter: the piece is expansive enough to allow you to inhabit it your own way. I went twice, first in daylight, then at dusk, first as the driver, then the passenger, in a different car each time (only the first had the Forest Fresh tree hanging from the rearview mirror, a cheeky nod to Forest Fringe). I preferred the latter, when the darkness concealed more of the real world; in the gloaming, only the rough hard fact of the car cradling your body distracts from the words needling at your ears.

The real world? But what is real? There's a brilliant moment, roughly halfway through the piece, in which the voice in your head – you, watching a drive-in movie – and the soundtrack of the B-movie burbling beneath it unexpectedly synchronise, ominous and impassioned:

VOICE: You can't be sure what's real any more.

MOVIE: I don't know what's real any more.

Always the dream of driving is the dream of escape, from the banal triviality of “real” life to some brighter future elsewhere. Only, in Motor Vehicle Sundown, that bright future is a catastrophe that has already happened, to which you return, an anaesthetised succumbing to an inevitable fate. Here, too, there are twists: the driver cedes control to the force of implacable nature; the passenger once tethered to the back seat gazing at the stars is set free to float among them. These journeys into oblivion ought to be depressing, because cars are among the handcarts in which we're travelling to hell, and the reality of that is terrifying, but they're framed with a tenderness that makes them strangely comforting. I emerged from the car, more so the second time than the first, reluctant to turn off the soundtrack, to return to the present, with all its simulations of happiness and hope.

Does anybody know what we are looking for?

Queen, The Show Must Go On

We might as well go home. The other performer hasn't turned up.
She couldn't face it. And the show isn't going to work without her.
What's the point in carrying on?
We should all just quit.

As a frame, I thought, sitting in the Recreation Room listening to Chris Bailey (again!) half-heartedly encouraging the audience to leave, this doesn't quite work. Of course we're not going to budge. If nothing else, the architectural magnificence of Bailey's hair is a performance in itself. When Bailey dons a silver sequined jacket and starts spinning around the stage like a human mirror ball, the spectacle is so amusing that the song seems irrelevant. Or rather, relevant only as a gag: Bailey acquiesces that the show must go on, by miming along to Queen's [The Show Must Go On](#). Boom boom.

The funny thing is, when I look up the song lyrics, it's like re-reading the show. What are we living for? Inside my heart is breaking. Inside in the dark I'm aching to be free. I have to find the will to carry on. Puffball, small, broken, unable to reconcile himself to his existence. Failing to live up to what's expected of him. Ineluctably drawn to the thought of death, its darkness, safety and silence. Refusing to play his part.

Puffball the show could be nauseatingly twee, because Puffball the character is a fluffy painted owl, his lugubrious features reminiscent of the mouth-downturned penguin in Oliver Jeffers' [Lost and Found](#), the explosion of fiery colour around him pure [John Burningham](#). But every picture-book-gorgeous thing Caroline Williams does as illustrator is subverted by every dark, challenging, surreal thing Williams does as writer and director and Bailey does as narrator and performer. Puffball is numb with self-loathing; taken into care, he is examined, drugged, coaxed and slowly rehabilitated. No matter how conditioned we are, not least by children's books, to anthropomorphism, Williams and Bailey know it is absurd to talk about an owl in these terms. So there is laughter, but in the spaces between the laughter the articulation of the experience of depression is acute. To the extent that he feels anything, Puffball feels suicidal because his place in the surrounding world is established and he wants to reject it but sees no positive alternative. He can't break the world – the show will simply go on without him. So he may as well break himself.

To read that narrative as human experience is easy. But every attempt to imprint humanity on Puffball is unsettled by an unemotional insistence that the reality being discussed here is that of owls. Intermittently, Bailey offers up some Proper Facts About Owls as though this were a nature documentary, detailing their habitats and feeding habits, usefully regurgitating an undigested pellet. Just as Puffball is assessed by the people who assume his care, the audience are given the opportunity to assess some Actual Owls – oh, OK, small ornamental china owls – weighing them, examining their colours, running a finger along smooth sculpted feathers. One is filled with pot-pourri whose stale scent is offensive. As with the elaborate introduction, this interlude seemed a bit daft in the room. Too obtrusive, too tangible. But

again, looking back, I wonder if I missed the, or at least a, point. The more the audience's senses are engaged, the more pitifully trapped Puffball appears in his apathy. In withdrawing from the world that confines him, he denies himself the freedom possible in sensation, connection and, ultimately, love.

** After publishing this, Caroline Williams got in touch about these final couple of sentences. "The whole point," she wrote, "is he doesn't deny HIMSELF that freedom... it's not a choice... as most people with mental health problems will tell you." Reading her email I felt a right twit, because I'd understood that and yet still managed to use all the wrong language, thereby conveying the entirely opposite point. Thank you to Caroline for the clarification.

The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things.

Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased.

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

There was a moment in Still Night when I thought: ah, yes, I remember this. I remember the mind-fizz of reading Calvino's [Invisible Cities](#), all those years ago; remember how disorienting it was, how magical, how shifty and strange. Kublai Khan, Marco Polo, the mutability of dreams. And then, a few days later, I pulled the book down from the shelf and began to read and recognised nothing. Not a word was familiar. Had I really read this book? Or only imagined it?

"Set out, explore every coast, and seek this city," the Khan says to Marco. "Then come back and tell me if my dream corresponds to reality."

Made by Gemma Brockis and Sylvia Mercuriali, Still Night transforms the city in which it plays into one of the fantastical cities the Venetian explorer Marco Polo describes night after night to Kublai Khan, cities that haunt and taunt the emperor's imagination with their refusal to correspond to his imperialist sense of his empire, or the world. When they performed it in [Brisbane](#), Gemma told me, they did so in a room at the top of a tall building; for most of the duration, the windows were concealed by a curtain, so that when it was drawn back the city, with all its sulphur brightness and mystery and promise, wasn't merely revealed but a revelation.

That sense of revelation is integral to the piece, which makes BAC an odd place for it to play. BAC sits in a hinterland of London that is not quite suburban, but far enough from the centre to seem disconnected, a world unto itself. When the shutters are taken down in the Recreation Room, the feeling isn't so much, "Oh! And there's London!" but, "Oh! Of course! BAC has windows!"

Although Still Night wasn't presented as a Scratch show, it felt scratchy: because of moments of disjunction as with the windows, because of certain hesitations in the performance, because of technical glitches that provided their own oddly delightful theatre, Brockis' eyes widening in silent appeal each time the audio or video refused to behave. That untidiness felt true to London as the subject of the show. While the Olympics were on I thought again and again about how my city, with its scruffiness and shonky shops and half-cut building sites, presents itself to visitors. In other cities I see these things snootily as black marks of underdevelopment; here I'm more forgiving.

Not that Still Night is actually about London. The city that plays host to the performance is simply the trigger for a contemplation of how people experience cities; of how a city operates on multiple levels, so that even if you were born there, even if the cracks in its paving stones mirror the lines of your hand, always something about it remains elusive. The piece begins with a sightseeing tour conducted in a language that sounds like Portuguese, Romanian and Lithuanian rolling around in bed together, a suggestive stream of enthusiastic babble accompanied by photographs of London just slightly askew, glimpses of the city at once familiar and unknown, specific and generic. And as the tour travels from the seen to the unseen, with a teasing nod to the magic underworld beneath our feet, whose entrance is concealed somewhere in the Serpentine, Still Night appeals to every harassed Londoner's desire for a city of our own, aside and empty and perfect. At just that moment, facts flash up on the projection screen. Population of London: 8.1 million. When I was studying geography as a teenager, it was still only 6.6 million. We don't all fit.

In the midst of that tension, that longing, Still Night travels further from reality, to the heart of Invisible Cities. The audience are instructed to put on headphones and close eyes, to settle back in seats as though in a swaying hammock. We're in the garden of Kublai Khan. The night is warm – a soft, balmy breeze wafts across the room. The air is scented with jasmine – there, yes, that's what I can smell. I remember Chris Goode trying to do this as part of the [Cendrars project](#) – in which Brockis was one of the performers – but the honey-laced shower gel he squirted across the CPT stage had no olfactory effect (it did, however, leave a lot of sludgy mess). Here, I don't know what they do, but it works. The perfume and the breeze and the warm dark light and the huge head of a horse that Brockis wears, everything appeals precisely to our senses in the real world, but does so to take us to the surreal world, to implant us in the imagination. The experience is disorienting and delicious: you feel Still Night brush against your skin, tingle in your veins, shiver through your body the way an ice-cold cocktail does.

And I no longer remember where it came or why it was there but, in all this dreamy sensuality, the most ravishing moment is when Brockis unbuttons her coat dress and lies back across a chair with a model cityscape of luminous buildings rising from her stomach and chest. It is the perfect image for how we create the city within and around ourselves: the city is what we choose to see, to recognise, to inculcate, to project. And maybe that was the problem with the removing of the screens covering BAC's windows: nothing in the twinkling lights outside

seemed as beautiful, as full of wonder, as the tiny gleaming city curved across this woman's body.

Marco enters a city: he sees someone in a square living a life or an instant that could be his; he could now be in that man's place, if he had stopped in time, long ago; or if, long ago, at a crossroads, instead of taking one road he had taken the opposite one, and after long wandering he had come to be in the place of that man in that square. By now, from that real or hypothetical past of his, he is excluded; he cannot stop; he must go on to another city, where another of his pasts awaits him, or something perhaps that had been a possible future of his and is now someone else's present. Futures not achieved are only branches of the past: dead branches.

"Journeys to relive your past?" was the Khan's question at this point, a question which could also have been formulated: "Journeys to recover your future?"

And Marco's answer was: "Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveller recognises the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have."

I read Ways of Seeing in the run-up to a John Berger event, [The Field of Performance](#), organised by [Chris Goode](#) as a way of thinking out loud about the influence of Berger's writing and politics on the way (some) theatre is made and seen. At that event, artist/producer [Alex Eisenberg](#) was musing on the double qualities of the window glass as the afternoon sky darkened, both translucent so that the world outside could be seen clearly through it, but opaque so that the room inside was reflected, and this struck me as a lovely way of thinking about theatre: it is at once window and mirror, offering insight into other worlds, other lives, while at the same time showing you unflinchingly your own. It might just be me who feels this: one of the performers in the room (Tom Bailey) said he'd never gone to the theatre looking for either experience. But again, it's what connects these four Cook-Up pieces: they make you look outwards and inwards at the same time. Not through naturalism: the more they seem to "represent" "reality", the more they make you question that reality and your relationship with it. What you see jars with what you (think you) know, again and again, so that sense can be found only in the interstices between time and place inhabited by the imagination.

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One of the purposes of Ways of Seeing is to make the reader consider how art, specifically oil paintings, reinforce the social order through their representation of reality. Something of that political motivation is woven into these Cook-Up pieces, too: it's in Still Night's snub to the commercialised city – both the city outside and, in the Marco Polo narrative, the cities of Kublai Khan's expanding empire – in favour of celebrating oddity and wonder. It's in Motor Vehicle Sundown's quietly furious argument that capitalism is the source of global

destruction. And it was particularly evident in the Cook-Up season's more community-oriented, personal work: in Sayraphim Lothian's [A Moment in Yarn](#) and Lucy Ellinson's [One-Minute Manifesto](#).

The former is a one-on-one piece for an audience member and a “performer” who could be anyone handy with a crochet needle. You tell the performer a happy memory and they translate that image into a crotchet granny square before your eyes. I love this project for so many reasons: the generosity of wanting to give something physical, tangible, to the audience member – and for that something to be theirs already, but intangible, at risk of fading or disappearing from their life; the calmness and reflectiveness of it, in the hubbub of work and family pressure and otherwise unbalanced lives; the way it uses craft, so often disparaged, as a tool for art; the way it creates a secret community around itself, both of performers, dubbed momenteers, and recipients. Sayraphim calls it a “loveliness project”, and that's exactly what it is.

Lucy Ellinson's One-Minute Manifesto project is more radical still: anyone can perform it, as long as they have something they passionately want to say. Over the course of the Autumn Cook-Up I read or heard [Peter McMaster](#) encourage listeners to embrace failure, [David Sheppard](#) celebrating the naughtiness of older people, [Andy Field](#) inciting shoplifting in the local Asda, a young guy whose name I didn't catch talk inspiringly about the importance of taking the time to cook, BAC producer [Shelley Hastings](#) advising us all to slow down – each one a heartfelt recognition that the way we live is in so many ways not right and we have the power to change it. I talked to Lucy a lot about the project while based at BAC, and enjoyed listening to her plans for guerilla manifesto performances, walking the streets of Clapham Junction encouraging passers-by to stop and speak. That wrenching of “politics” from people in suits shouting at each other in the Houses of Commons, in favour of a politics more genuinely democratic; that wrenching of art from conceived ideas that separate “artists” from “audiences”, in favour of an art that belongs to everybody; that desire to change the way people think about their own ability to effect change: all these things make the One-Minute Manifesto project vital. It encourages people to reject what they're told – about money, value, market systems, competition, everything dehumanising in our society – and express instead what they feel.

INSIDE EYE

- Jake Orr

Seeing the Scope of the Building

How often do you enter a venue and feel like you understand the workings and artistic vision? You might have a feeling of familiarity to the building, or to the work that they produce, but can you see the full vision at play?

Stepping into BAC has always been somewhat of an adventure for me; where dreaming is a starting place, and the unknown is praised. BAC has resembled a playground for me, a slightly distorted playground where theatre-makers go to play and then throw open the doors for audiences. In 2010 I experienced their One-on-One Festival which showed, for me at least, the sheer scale of the building. Others I'm sure would cite Punchdrunk's *The Mask of the Red Death* but my theatregoing habits hadn't matured at that point and it passed me by (a big regret). In 2011 I returned to BAC to the One-on-One Festival again, and also Forest Fringe's Micro Festival, which again uncovered parts of the building unknown to me. It seemed that each time I visited the venue my experience was never the same, unlike numerous experiences at other venues where auditorium and stage remained still regardless of my attendance, it was just the shows that changed.

Did you know that BAC has 70 licensed rooms? This allows for a plethora of work to take place across the venue, but also house other organisations and companies. Hidden away across the building are not only the BAC staff but rehearsal and performance spaces, bedrooms (yes, really bedrooms), and the offices of Puppet Centre Trust, Ridiculusmus, Fuel and others. That's not taking into consideration the extensive front of house space that includes a bar/cafe and a children's playroom.

BAC is in a constant state of flux, and while you're never going to know what you might find there, you might also not feel comfortable with the venue. The rules of engagement are generally that there are no rules, apart from those dictated by the on-duty staff members. That informality isn't suited to every audience member. Rules can have their place.

Having recently returned to BAC after Dialogue's residency, I am once again struck by how the building seems to tilt and shift on its foundations. The main foyer space now has a bar and

kitchen area replacing some seating that was originally there. I know it's a small detail, but I've sat at that large wooden table on many occasions waiting for shows. Now it's a bar. How can you find the personal and small moments, the associations, in a building that never stops moving? BAC's strap line is to make the "theatre of the future", but by making the future, does it forget its past?

My time at BAC made me feel somewhat like a sponge, soaking in the building and its artistic developments that slowly seep out of every working room. If BAC is a place in flux, it is also a place that thrives on artistic creativity. When you enter BAC you're not just entering a venue, you're entering a home, a playground, a creative vision, a centre of brainstorming, a dystopian world, and an old council building. That's the joy of BAC, it is so many things, but it is one thing: a building with life.

Dialogue's month at BAC allowed me to truly understand how the building operates. As I said at the opening of this section, how often do you feel like you truly understand a building? You can get a feel for it, but how about truly understanding its mechanics? True, there is plenty of BAC that is still somewhat of a mystery to me, but being placed in the centre, and watching the daily life and commotion of a venue was fascinating, and educational as well.

The BAC Carousel of Development

As a resident company Dialogue was treated just as any company would, with Maddy and me as artists. Our output may not have been known, but our ideas were embraced (and often challenged). We were given a producer, a space, a timetable and goals to try and reach within our work. Just like any company or artist entering BAC we were put onto the carousel that makes up the development programme that BAC adheres to.

There are several steps through which BAC grows its artists and work. There is the entry level where artists are invited to Freshly Scratched nights, these being an open call for artists that BAC has never worked with before to showcase a short piece in an evening of work. If the producers see the potential within the work the artists are recommended to return to BAC for development. The next period of development tends to last a week or fortnight, and is part of a programmed season of work. Several artists will be developing work in residency at the same time. They're expected to put on "scratch performances" for paying or invited audiences towards the end of their residency. These scratch performances (more on these elsewhere in the documentation) are to show the work to an audience, to see what is or isn't working, and to generally have an end goal for the residency; something to work towards.

BAC also has ongoing relations with companies such as Kneehigh Theatre, Uninvited Guests, and Little Bulb, to name a few. These companies often premier their work or are produced by BAC. In the case of Little Bulb their work has been developed repeatedly at BAC through their

schemes, they've lived in the building, showed scratched performances, and now working on a large-scale piece.

Aside from the scratch performances and development there are larger pieces that take priority within a season at BAC. During our residency Kate Tempest was playing a four-week engagement of her new poetry-performance piece Brand New Ancients. These larger, more fully defined pieces are placed within the bigger theatre spaces within the building (compared to the various rehearsal rooms that also act as performance spaces for the scratch artists). For an audience, the engagement with BAC might only come through the large-scale shows, or no shows at all if we look at the various parents who make use of the soft-play area. The development programme whilst marketed at the same time as the larger shows, has less impact upon potential audiences, unless the artist themselves have an audience base they can bring with them.

It strikes me that audiences may not realise the full scale and extent that BAC operates within. They attend the big shows, but rarely, from my experience, do they flock to the scratch events unless they are friends or family, or indeed other artists. At times I want to push the blame onto audiences themselves, I want to tell them that "yes, you can enjoy Kate Tempest, because she is amazing, but you can also discover new hidden work if you open your eyes a little." But how can an audience truly understand the whole scope of a building when it is in a constant state of flux? There is the 'cook up' programme, there is the 'take out' programme and the 'tuck in' programme, but do audiences actually understand these terms?

I'm not trying to knock BAC, I guess I'm trying to understand how a body of work that is programmed can be translated to an audience when it is a complex and fragile thing. The programming, the development, the presenting, all of these are part of a process. The layering of work that takes place at BAC replicates the subsidised theatre model as a whole. This is becoming clearer the more I think about it.

An example:

BAC and 1927.

1927 are currently playing at the National Theatre for the second year running at Christmas. Their piece *The Animals and Children Took To The Streets* was first developed and programmed at BAC. Since then it has toured the world, appeared in festivals, and been programmed at the National Theatre, twice. Out of support and development from BAC, with scratch nights and a month long run, the 1927 troupe have been able to develop their work and it has been a success. This is what BAC strives to do. To create the "future of theatre" by acting as the incubators of the work. To nurture, to develop, to expose.

Being based within the building allowed for Dialogue to witness this development and support. The staff and producers are committed completely to BAC's ethos and aims. They attend scratches; they constantly (and I really do mean constantly) attend meetings with their artists and fellow staff to assist in the development of work. Often the staff themselves are

creative practitioners. Dialogue's producer for our residency was Richard Duffy, a senior producer of BAC and also one of the founding members of Uninvited Guests, a BAC-supported company. Immediately after supporting our residency Richard was in rehearsals for *The Good Neighbour*, the next full-scale BAC production. The staff understand the process of making theatre. They want to challenge artists, but equally they want to be inspired and provoked back.

Thinking about our time there, I'm reminded of films in which the central character is standing in a crowded place, perhaps a government building or a shopping centre. They're standing focused, their eyes searching everywhere for signs. Their ears are attempting to channel a communication that is happening, a whispered discussion perhaps, somewhere. Then there is a moment when everything falls back, like someone has hit the mute button, and everyone seems to fade into the background apart from a couple who are engaged in a conversation that is not meant to be heard. That focusing, and slipping back of all the noise, is what Dialogue at BAC felt like for me. It was about clarity and understanding of a building. Sitting in the BAC Café and watching the comings and goings of the staff and audiences made me feel as if I was witnessing the lifecycle of a theatre, from opening to closing night.

A residency in which part of the aim was to listen and to learn, to document and to attempt to navigate the chaos of the building. That is what the purpose of Dialogue at BAC felt like for me.

THE

OUTSIDE

EAR

- Maddy Costa

I have issues with the word dramaturgy. And dramaturg. For one thing, I'm never entirely sure how to pronounce either. The Gs mess around. And I'm even less sure what they mean. This wasn't a problem until Jake and I set up Dialogue and the words kept coming up, particularly in reference to spending time in rehearsal rooms. What is the role of a critic or theatre-writer in the rehearsal room if not to act, in some way, as dramaturg? It's hard to answer that question without some endeavour to understand the term.

While Dialogue was based at BAC, our spiritual allies at Culturebot published an essay with the title [Re-Framing The Critic for the 21st Century: Dramaturgy, Advocacy and Engagement](#). "The dramaturge," it argued, with a discombobulatingly weird spelling, "is an intellectual and aesthetic companion engaging in constructive inquiry and investigation alongside the director, choreographer, designers and performers. At the same time the critic/dramaturge is a scribe and documentarian." Which sounded reasonable enough. But two days later, Andrew Haydon wrote on [Postcards from the Gods](#): "When the British say 'dramaturg' they basically mean 'script-therapist'." And that strikes me as both true and no good at all.

Andrew is an adherent to the German method of dramaturgy, which – I'm slowly learning – is closer to what Culturebot propose, but with the dramaturg holding a central place within theatre buildings themselves. They work as an equivalent to Britain's literary managers in terms of reading new texts, nominating plays for revival and contributing to the shaping of a theatre's programme; they also play a direct role in the rehearsal room, collaborating with the director on creating the concept for a show and then watching rehearsals to ensure that every movement, every vocal inflection, every prop and detail of the staging, contributes to the articulation of that concept. That, my friends, is hardcore dramaturgy. It exists here, but it's by no means a widely performed, acknowledged or discussed practice.

For the past few months I've been following Michael Pinchbeck's blog [Outside Eye](#), in which Pinchbeck documents elements of his research towards a PhD investigating the role of the dramaturg. Mostly on that site he posts interviews with makers in which he asks them what a dramaturg or an outside eye means to them, and how the difference between each role manifests itself, whether either is a luxury or an essential; questions about subjectivity, and representation of an audience, and documentation, and so on. One of his interviewees, [Jochem Naafs](#), a dramaturg, theatre scholar and writer from the Netherlands, talks brilliantly about “intersubjectivity”: during the making process, the outside eye anticipates a multiplicity of audience responses and seeks out “the meaning that exists between various subjective meanings”.

What Pinchbeck is forging on that blog is a definition of dramaturgy that exists between various subjective practices and experiences of the role. What might the theatre-writer's experience of it be? Stupid question: that's subjective, too. I know when I go into a rehearsal room I take in with me a fair bit of anxiety about not being a maker, and a fear that my individual response to anything I'm shown will carry too much weight. I know I don't want to affect the work being made directly, or rather, any more than my physical presence in the room might. I know I don't trust my own judgment, my own eyes. I go into rooms wanting to learn how work is made, but not wanting to be there for my own benefit only: something positive has to result for the maker, and for anyone interested in that maker, otherwise why should I be invited in?

At the start of Dialogue's BAC residency, Jake and I hoped that we might spend time in several different rehearsal rooms, especially with people creating material for Scratch performance. In the event, I focused on just one, Peter McMaster's, as he began work on a new piece, Yeti. Neither of us knew what I might be doing there, or what our relationship might be. And there was an oddity about me going into the room at all, identified by Peter in an email he sent me a few days before we met:

I am actually exploring solitude in this process, and to what extent does a human need solitude in their life, especially within moments of noticeable transition. However, perhaps it would be really nice to have someone there to just be there while working. to maybe help

retain a silence at times, nurture a space where the ideas can be tentatively approached and shared, or maybe to puncture the earnestness of it all.

Our first conversation was a little tentative and a little shy. There was self-consciousness on both sides: all the perplexity I feel about “being a critic”, Peter shares about “being an artist”, with its conservative connotations of indulgence and intellectual privilege and unbridled ego. He came into Yeti concerned that he shouldn't take the opportunity to create theatre for granted, wanting to use “being an artist” as a means to connect with other lives. The paradox being that he was making a solo show, alone, and thinking about solitude as part of it. And this was where it became useful to have someone in the rehearsal room, however briefly, with whom to begin creating a sense of community.

We did that just by talking. An hour a day, for four days, scattered across Peter's two-week residency. Peter would offer to show me material he had been working on in readiness for his Scratch performances, and I would steadfastly refuse. As already mentioned, I did this because I didn't want to affect directly what he presented to other audiences. Looking back at my diary notes, I wonder about the degree to which I was kidding myself. In our first session together, just a few hours before his first Scratch, Peter told me he planned only to talk the audience through his list of ideas for the piece and ask what we'd like to see. But when I returned in the evening, he announced that he had changed his mind: the ideas list formed a brief introduction, and the rest of the scratch was spent performing a collage of early ideas for movement and images: using his clothes to create a Yeti figure over a chair, his foil survival blanket to construct a silvery mountain range; walking in a circle around the room on the very tips of his toes, an eloquent suggestion of a struggle to maintain equilibrium, not just physical but mental, and also of reaching upwards and forwards in life; and a conversation with an amusingly French-accented Yeti that ended with a passage contemplating music and death read from Sartre's Nausea. Had he changed his mind about what to do because he'd already begun talking through the ideas list with me? I don't know – but that it's possible suggests the beginnings of a dramaturgical effect.

The ideas list – a long scroll of brown packing paper pouring down the wall, beside two others, listing materials and, under the title Where Do I Start?, a brief account of each day's activities – fascinated me, not only as source material but because it revealed so much about Peter. The thoughts and questions written there were personal, honest and uncynical, full of vulnerability, self-doubt, hope, respect for others and a love of nature. Early in the list came two foxing questions:

How do life's experiences affect your soul?
Do we have souls?

We discussed this in our second conversation: Peter talked about wanting to make work bigger than what could be made by the conscious mind, work that comes from elsewhere in

some way, that reaches to an understanding beyond the self. What I felt looking at his ideas list was exactly that: instant connection, somewhere in that mysterious place that might be called the heart or the soul; a sense that I was encountering someone who doesn't balk at the word spiritual, engaged in a spiritual inquiry, searching and unsure.

That feeling of connection coloured our time together. Now and then I felt self-conscious still, worried that what I was saying about community, or loneliness, or art, or notions of masculinity, was platitudinous. I also worried about seeming to “review” what I'd seen in the scratch shows. In our third conversation, I mentioned wondering whether the second scratch was perhaps opaque to the audience members not privileged with rehearsal-room knowledge: I understood when, this time unsignalled, he began a conversation with the Yeti and constructed a mountain range in the fireplace, but did others? It was a useful confession in that it prompted a discussion about what makes a work transparent, and what that means. But it left me alarmed: how reliable a judge could I be of other audiences' ways of seeing? How reliable were my assumptions?

Those fretfulnesses aside, talking to Peter was joyful: philosophy through a theatre lens. This is some of what we talked about:

Living in uncertainty, in liminal space. How performance can reflect that, communicate with that. An idea raised in Yeti: for something to progress, its form has to die to move on. The passage from Nausea:

It seems inevitable, the necessity of this music is so strong: nothing can interrupt it, nothing which comes from this time in which the world is slumped; it will stop of its own accord. If I love these notes it is above all because of that; it is neither for its fullness or its sadness, but because it is the event which so many notes have prepared for so far in advance, dying so that it might be born.

Which became, slowly, across the scratch showings, a story about being murdered by the Yeti to be born again, new, and ready.

Linked to that, what became the central question: “How does 'I' become 'we'?” This was a question about art: how does the I that is the performer, especially the solitary performer, connect with his/her audience? Peter reflecting on [Lone Twin](#), the natural inclusivity of their work, and [Marina Abramovic](#), who embraces the idea of “artist” and accepts the way it sets her apart. Me reflecting on this in relation to theatre criticism: how does the critic's subjective response to a work connect with readers? Reflecting, too, on the responsibility of audiences, to come to work open, ready to engage, not just intellectually, but with their hearts, with feeling.

But it was also a question about life: how does a human being make the transition from adolescence to adulthood? How does the self-absorbed child open up to become a more socially aware and involved adult? The rituals involved in that. The journeys.

Which became, in the performance, almost by accident, ritual movement within the circle formed by the audience, making fleeting contact with each person, knee brushing knee, skin touching skin.

Linked to that: what humans need to feel whole. With 27 on the horizon, Peter has been thinking about “the 27 club”: all those people, musicians especially, who died at the age of 27. Why that age? What is life missing at that age? The search for serenity. For a feeling of calm and self-acceptance.

Linked to both those things: the relationship between humans and nature. The need for the outdoors. Peter itching, yearning, to be outside. Perhaps spending time on a bridge. Perhaps leading the people outside BAC on a hunt for the Yeti. The separation of western city living from nature. The lack of use for old-fashioned “masculine skills”. What it is to greet the morning sun on a mountaintop in India.

And a moment of beautiful serendipity in the first Scratch showing, when the small room was bathed in the golden light of sunset.

And moments of hilarity, adventure and wonder in the later scratches, when Peter led his audience downstairs, outside, and said goodbye to us on the pavement as he went in search of his Yeti in the night.

Linked to that: myriad anxieties about privilege. Peter wanting to be outside partly to rupture the privilege of spending time alone in a room making art, to deny the image of the solitary playwright of art-history cliché. Peter wanting to be aware of his privilege as a white middle-class male, and through that awareness recognise the assumptions he makes about others.

An interrogation and rejection of entitlement which, in the later scratches, became embodied in the hilarious, grotesque figure of alpha-male mountaineer Reinhold Messner masturbating on a mountaintop.

That's some of it. We talked an awful lot about other work, other theatre, too: theatre addresses (and sometimes answers) so many questions about life for me, that when those questions are raised elsewhere it's to theatre memories I return. I can't emphasise enough how filtered my record of our meetings is: not only subjective but a particularly slanted impression of the Yeti process. If Peter were documenting it, I wonder what he would focus on, how his record would read.

Underlying all our conversations was an awareness of how precious it feels to be able to talk unreservedly with someone you're just getting to know. To be earnest, and enjoy being earnest, not in a po-faced way, but in a light and joyous way. To dig deep in difficult questions and not be afraid of getting muddy or a face full of worms. Doing so was affecting the performances, Peter told me in our third meeting: there was a clarifying quality to them, that helped him, however fractionally, to sift out what actually needed to be presented to an audience. The day after his residency ended, Peter emailed again, describing our time together as: “a real dialogue with a lot of heart, which soothed anxieties and sparked inspirations”. And as he moves further from that BAC residency, he told me more recently, this record of his time there becomes “part of the process”: difficult to read, because it seems to sum up ideas, or attempt to tell a story about the way he works; but also useful, as it illuminates his work and way of working in unexpected ways.

We talked, we bonded, we shared ideas, we had fun, we carried on communicating long after we left the room. Was this dramaturgy? Not by any of the definitions I've encountered so far. But perhaps I'm working towards another definition. I talked to [Tassos Stevens](#) about his peripheral involvement in the Autumn Cook-Up programme, with a [Coney](#)-hosted project from Australia called A Moment in Yarn. Made by artist/crafter/theatre-gamer/all-round brilliant person [Sayraphim Lothian](#), A Moment in Yarn is a one-to-one loveliness project (she also creates guerilla kindnesses), performed with crochet needles. You sit with Sayraphim (or one of her army of “momentees”) and describe to her a memory. She then transcribes it into a crotchet granny square. It's a small but beautiful piece, and Tassos was the first person to experience it, on a trip to Melbourne.

As far as I can tell, Tassos' role in the development of the piece was as generous as the thing itself. He acted, he said, as an “outside ear”, a listener and questioner, encouraging new thoughts about how audiences might interact with the piece. That “intersubjectivity” idea, I suppose. As a variant of dramaturgy, this really appeals to me. I like talking with people, listening to their ideas, probing those ideas, confessing what I don't understand in them, and perhaps through all that talking and listening and confessing illuminating something for the maker that enables something in the work to be developed or sharpened or itself become more luminous. And if calling myself an “outside ear” means never embarrassing myself by mispronouncing “dramaturg” again, that's all the better.

A POSTSCRIPT. I sent the above to Peter in advance of publishing it, just to make sure he was OK with me opening up his rehearsal room to the world, and also to ask a couple of the Michael Pinchbeck questions about dramaturgy. And because I don't want this documentation to be all about me, here is some of what he sent in reply:

How would you define a dramaturg or an outside eye?

Now, I would describe a dramaturg/outside eye like this: “intersubjectivity”: during the making process, the outside eye anticipates a multiplicity of audience responses and seeks out “the meaning that exists between various subjective meanings” – what a beautiful role and description of a job!

But also, I would say that the dramaturg needs to be an ally alongside the intentions of the work. I would really find it hard to be in a situation where the person who was acting as outside ear was not on board with what the work was trying to do. This therefore, perhaps problematises the idea that a dramaturg is someone you could just hire in – a freelance dramaturg. They are a collaborator also, and they sit completely within a creative capacity (look at [Pina Bausch/Raimund Hoghe](#)). I had a dramaturg for [Wuthering Heights](#), who ended up just being in it.

Is it a luxury or an essential?

I think it is both. But not like a box-of-chocolates luxury, a treat that you could do without. It is a luxury because it is expensive, both time-wise and financially. However, it is incredibly essential, which means it is a shame that it doesn't happen enough. The description of 'intersubjectivity' is so beautiful, who wouldn't want that?

I think the heart of Yeti is about learning how to live independently as a man of negative ways that have come before, and of course the practice of solitude will help to discover what that might mean. However it would be foolish to believe that one could live independently from all of the rest of life. We are all connected, and beautifully metaphorically speaking, the roles that we established together only reminded me of that in the process of scratching Yeti. In this case, your role was essential as the relationship helped exacerbate the meaning of the work, but only through a particular way of viewing our roles.

I did not think you were a box of chocolates I could pick up and discard when I wanted, I needed you to save me from flying up my own arse, and to learn more about what it means to be working in a public service job: serving others, serving the public, serving oneself. Perhaps there is something essential about the idea of service in there – that we must keep practising it in order to learn more about our work and our lives; you serving the public as a theatre writer, me serving the public as a theatre maker, us serving ourselves as needy human beings and what better way than in the relationship between artist and outside ear?

In conclusion, it is essential for me to have a dramaturg as I see it is as a way of humbly serving someone else in the rehearsal room. To lower my ego's power, to practise what I am meant to be doing in the actual performances, and of course, connected to that, to make sure on a practical level that I know what the work is about and is doing.

Scratch – To

Itch or Not

to Itch

- Jake Orr

Being based in BAC saw Maddy and I working with three artists as they took their journey into developing their pieces. Peter McMaster with Yeti, David Sheppard with Holocene and Greg McLaren with Atomkraft. Each of them was based within the BAC building and being given two weeks to develop their pieces with scratch performances for audiences towards the end of each week. In the case of Greg, his two weeks were split across the month, where both Peter and David had two weeks solid.

Asking to be part of the process for these artists as they made their work was not easy. The rehearsal room is, and should be, a place where the work – in whatever form it takes – should be supported and in a safe environment. The rehearsal room is a place in which artists take risks, and with the nature of scratch already inviting an audience to see work in a fragile state, inviting an ‘outside eye’ to observe and ultimately write about this process is challenging.

Both Maddy and I are aware of the challenges that this proposes for artists. On other occasions when we have asked to be part of the process of certain theatre companies we have been point-blankly told “No. The rehearsal room is sacred”. We get this. Artists need the

time and space to make work without prying eyes, just like Maddy and myself as writers need the time to develop our words. Inviting an audience to peek over our shoulders wouldn't be easy, and the same is true for a theatre-maker to invite someone into the room to observe their work.

Maddy worked closely with Peter, bordering into dramaturgical support, while my relationship with him was a friendly face to speak to now and again during down moments of the rehearsal room. Although I had a few conversations with Greg, we never formed a strong relationship. For me, it was my ongoing commitment to David Sheppard that led me on an artistic journey discovering how a solo artist makes work.

David had previously developed his scratch at BAC, but from what I gathered it didn't work out. (There is nothing wrong with this – failure is very much part of the process of scratching and developing work – the key is knowing when to learn from this and move on or pick yourself up). Returning again with a different approach to his work, David embraced his residency with new vigour. David identifies himself as a queer artist, working predominantly in autobiographical material. He is a producer and theatre-maker, regularly producing other gay artists or his own work on the fringe-circuit. He is based in Brighton.

Some immediate thoughts:

- Brighton has an interesting artistic community. I use the word 'interesting' because I'm still not quite sure how to gauge it. From my interactions and conversations with individuals in and out of BAC about Brighton the feeling I get is that it is a creative place but also a difficult place. The community is very disparate at times, and even though Brighton boasts its own festival and fringe, and venues such as the Nightingale and the Basement, there are too many artists and theatre-makers for too few opportunities (but hey, that's a problem even for the likes of London). I was told repeatedly that artists leave Brighton to produce work, seeking opportunities in other cities, rather than all attempting to go for the same Brighton-based chances.

- Autobiographical work. I always feel slightly cheated by the autobiographical artist/theatre work. The subject of self is an easy route to take, especially for solo artists. That said, David's use of the autobiographical work is fascinating, especially in relation to his sexuality.

- Being a gay artist. I almost cringe as I type this. As a gay male myself I often feel displaced and removed from my sexuality. I struggle repeatedly with the notion that because I am gay I must have a certain way of being, when really all I can ever be is myself. I get annoyed at the campy and the gayness of being gay. Then there is gay theatre, or queer theatre, or anything that is remotely 'gay' in theatre. It frustrates me. David's work isn't frustrating though, it is personal, honest theatre. Yes there are tongue-in-cheek moments as he delivers a prayer to God while describing his worshipping of the urinal wanks for old men, but it is also

rooted in some deep sadness that seems to underlay his work. A sadness of sexuality, and of family.

My interaction with David during his residency was a curious one. I felt as if at times I was treading on his toes, or demanding something from him as 'the critic' in the room. My presence wasn't disapproved of, but it brought a heightened state of awareness of himself as an artist. Much like when a producer walks in a room, David delved deeper into himself as an artist, performing his words and apologising for things going wrong, rather than seeing me as merely an observer or someone to talk to.

When we first meet it is agreed that I would visit David towards the end of his first week. He needs time to get into his work, and as he is the artist and knows what he needs (my words, not his) I allow him to lead on this. David tells me that he'll be having some external creatives in the room with him to help him develop his work, mostly the Brighton-based director Emma Kilbey. At first, he'll work alone, developing a script and working around the material that he hopes to develop. He is looking into volcanoes – and in particular Maurice and Katia Kraft, who were volcanologists, pursuing their love of volcanoes until they died. The scale of disruption, of how fragile the world is, becomes themes in which David makes parallels to his own life. Some of the footage that David uses during his rehearsals and performance piece show the magnificent scale of volcanoes and the chaos they cause. How small us humans feel in comparison, how defenceless.

In the words of David:

“Holocene is the geological age in which we are living and sums up all the ways that humans have influenced the planet. The piece I am making is about volcanoes, fear and the way the human ego copes with the knowledge of death.”

Being in the room with David is to watch an artist struggle. The process of devising is not an easy one, it requires constant configuration, reworking, and attempting to understand what is trying to be shown at the core of the piece. David weaves together his own fascinating insight into volcanoes, with anecdotes of the Kraft's life, and personal reflections upon family and self.

I kept my interactions with David during his rehearsal room times to a minimum, instead tracing the development of his piece through the director Emma who is acting as an outside eye for the work. Emma has created solo work herself and knows the challenges for an artist going through this process. She stresses that having someone in the room to observe and to see where the work is taking shape is crucial for the solo artist.

Emma and I speak at length about the failure of the solo artist, the challenges and constant strain that they go through in order to try and make work. So why not make work with

others? It's about telling an individual story, and at times, that requires just your own self, no one else. It strikes me that I've not considered why David might create work on his own, or indeed any artist for that matter. Is it resources? Lack of collaborators, or just the simplicity of having to rely upon yourself to develop the work? Trusting your own instinct and knowing what does or doesn't work? There are some solo artists who have previously collaborated with other artists but found that they can't. They can't bring themselves to the point that they are willing to let go of what they've built and the working relationship becomes strained.

The Pressures of Scratch

What does become apparent the longer I spend observing David and speaking to him between rehearsals is the pressure that he feels under. It's a pressure which all the artists I spoke to during Dialogue's residency and since too feel during their own residencies. During a residency at BAC you must deliver scratch performances for audiences to see your work, whatever state it is in. Yes, it is a risk, but scratch allows for that risk to that place. The problem is that artists feel that they must deliver, they must push themselves and work hard to show something. Not even for the audience but for their producers, because it falls down to the producers to recommend them for future development in the building and hopefully into a full-scale piece.

As someone who works in the arts, be it writing or marketing or running a theatre website, I know the importance of having a deadline for my work. It keeps me spurred on, checking the clock and making sure that I don't rest on my laurels. For theatre-makers this deadline for work can, at times, become a hindrance. Just like the writer who struggles with writer's block, the theatre-maker can struggle from block. They must have something – anything – to show to an audience, which encourages them to work hard, but is it the right frame of mind for a theatre-maker to be in? I'm not sure.

Scratch as a whole is a good concept. In practice, though, it puts artists under pressure. My concern is that this can work against them. During one showing for David, it felt as if he was ill-prepared for the scratch. Not because he hadn't worked hard to bring material together, it was just that the material wasn't enough, or not at the right point for showing to an audience. What he needed was more time to formulate his ideas than having to rush them for an audience.

During one scratch of Yeti, Peter McMaster said that he was "kicking up the dust" (or dirt, I forget which), implying that this was only the dust/dirt beneath a body of work that was much deeper. The phrase stuck with me afterwards, because I think it is a good way of looking at the scratch model as a whole. Scratch thrives off the risk that artists have to take to explore their work in front of an audience. It reminds me of some of BAC's other missions of wanting to "break bread between audiences and artists" – to essentially eat and experience with them – and this is what happens with the silent contract between audience and theatre-maker during scratch. We agree to enter into a contract with them as they kick up the dust waiting

to see what patterns will be formed beneath. But it's clear that not all dust is ready to be kicked up, just like not all theatre-makers suit the scratch model.

Writing about Scratch

As part of our residency BAC were keen for Maddy and I to think about a way in which scratch shows could be written about. Some of the above equates to this, writing about the work, but not reviewing (we were specifically told no star ratings, no reviewing).

After seeing Peter's Yeti scratch I wrote the following. It uses a stream of consciousness to try and capture some of the ideas at play within his work.

A response to seeing Yeti:

Yeti. A monster in the mountain. Somewhere in India. Clothes discarded. Rubbing up against legs. Primal. Animalistic. Primal. Animal. It's like he takes an animal quality. Circles around the room. Dancing. A solo dance just for us. Some chairs placed with precision. Fish knife clamped between teeth. Nervous laughter, someone smiles. Stories of miniature proportions. This isn't a performance. This is a small happening. Getting changed into clothes from the mountains. A rucksack clamped and tied to the back. A journey. Altitude. Monkey. A poem. From You to I. Or Me to I. I can't remember which. Lists on the wall. Seeing Maddy's name. Process. Repeated ideas again and again like the circles that he spun around us. The primal nature of being on all fours. Shuffling and searching. The poem of identity. Trying to understand what this man and this beast is. To me and to him. What is he explaining. Unknown. Beast. Hairy Beast and a man. The two mould together to create something new.

It's curious looking back on this piece of text and remembering parts of the performance, and how certain images have retained their vividness. In particular I can remember the way in which Peter rubbed his body against each of the audience member's legs, who were sitting in a circle. There was something animalistic about it, but also something very human. I realise that this response to Yeti isn't as coherent as a traditional review, it's a snapshot of images and ideas. In a way it's a piece of 'artistic work' itself (although that's not to say that reviewing theatre or writing about it isn't an art) that could have easily have been written by Peter himself as he used free-writing within his devising process. Perhaps it would make an interesting experiment to do another free-write or to attempt to write about Yeti after so much time. I normally write my responses to theatre immediately, but there is something in letting ideas and thoughts settle before, to use Peter's terminology "kicking up the dust" again. I've written about how writing immediately after a performance isn't always the best method or outcome desired for an artist. Perhaps the same is true of scratch. Perhaps this is why scratch pieces aren't reviewed. It's too embryonic to be forced into words.

THOUGHTS

ON

SCRATCH

- Maddy Costa

Even before Jake and I walked through the doors of BAC to start our Autumn Cook-Up residency, it was clear that we were affecting the way people within the building were thinking about the artist-critic relationship. Or at least, that we were sharpening into focus thoughts that were already floating around the building, unresolved and conflicted. Some of those thoughts were to do with press night arrangements; some to do with the impact of blogging on BAC's ability to protect Scratch performances from being reviewed, no matter how informally. One of the senior producers, Richard Dufty, sent us an internal document setting out rules of engagement between ourselves and Scratch performers that – excitingly – suggested the relationships we hoped to build as potential models for the future. Its proposals were simple: you don't write about a Scratch piece unless you've engaged with its making directly, whether by sitting in the rehearsal space or having a conversation with the makers in advance; you don't pass value judgments; you don't use star ratings. The document didn't feel prescriptive, it felt full of possibility.

I've had an odd relationship with Scratch in the past. More accurately, I've barely had one at all, as I rarely go to scratch/in-progress shows. It's not that I'm not fascinated by work in

development, clearly I am, but there are barely enough evenings in a week to keep up with “finished” work (I use the word carelessly; usually I'm quick to dispute it), let alone work just begun. When I do go, I almost never fill in the feedback forms: questionnaires are dispiriting. And I never engage in conversation with the makers in the bar, because whenever I've ill-advisedly tried I've been a gushing idiot and regretted it for weeks after.

Because I so rarely go, the question of whether or not I would write about, blog about, a scratch piece hasn't come up. But right at the start of Dialogue's existence, I started fretting away at the complexities of this issue, because of a Critic's Notebook column by Lyn Gardner in the Guardian that ended with the following:

[A]ll across the country micro festivals are springing up, presenting works-in-progress that I keep being invited to review. I love the chance to see work in development. Furthering the dialogue between critics and artists can only be good. But after trying and often failing to assess potential in 300 words, I'm increasingly wary about subjecting fledgling work to critical scrutiny. Although the show might change, the review remains set in stone – or at least in cyberspace.

I know Lyn is writing about a very particular kind of reviewing here, but instinctively I faltered at some of her language. It's because I don't want to “subject” work, developing or developed, to “critical scrutiny” that I avoid calling myself a critic. And yes, the writing is “set in stone” – at least, in a mainstream context; blogs can always be re-edited – but that degree of permanence makes it all the more imperative that the thoughts contained in the writing are fluid. How you achieve that fluidity is the challenge: one that the BAC document posed directly. Writers engaging with Scratch, it suggested,

... might place doubt, an openness to changing their minds (and changing what they have written) and an equity between the writer and the person reading and responding (rather than the current hierarchical online model of the writer and everyone else who passes comment) at the heart of their approach. They might decide not to focus primarily on value judgements but instead they might try to write about what is interesting about an artist's process and the challenges/ideas that that artist is grappling with.

One thing that wasn't interrogated in the BAC document is the assumption that people showing work-in-progress want feedback, either immediately or at all. But that's the purpose of Scratch!, you cry. Sure – but not everyone wants to use it in the same way. Alexander Kelly of [Third Angel](#) was instructive on this point at the [Dialogue discussion](#) held at Northern Stage/St Stephen's during the 2012 Edinburgh festival. He finds it frustrating when people talk to him directly after a work-in-progress performance, because invariably they pin down themes to such an extent that the piece feels less open for discovery. He prefers to hear people's thoughts a few weeks after the event, when he can hear what has stuck in their memories, when they speak more of resonant images than of what the piece as a whole was

“about”. Until then, it's not so much the audience's reviews of what they have seen that's useful to him, but the quality of their viewing in the room – and, more pertinently, how the piece feels within his own mind, his own body, in performance.

So who are those audiences? At the Scratch shows I saw during Autumn Cook-Up, numbers ranged from five to maybe 50 and noticeably included friends of the performers, others making work at BAC and, almost always, people from BAC's team of producers, whose presence made even me, semi-resident in the building, feel curiously self-conscious, and indeed curious: I would sidle out of shows behind them, surreptitiously earwigging their comments. I began to see Scratch as a useful tool for BAC staff: an aid both to figuring out what to programme, and to knowing what support a company or director or performer might need.

And that puts a weird pressure on Scratch: for all that makers are encouraged to use it as dream-time, to take risks, challenge themselves and try the ideas they might otherwise avoid for fear of failure, these makers are still looking for affirmation from BAC – and a space in its programme. It was interesting spending time in the rehearsal room with [Peter McMaster](#) during his residency: the days when he was performing I felt he was a little less relaxed, a touch restless, and we talked briefly about the contradictory feelings Scratch performances engender. He characterises the split as: “anxiety about the pressure of making something that is not valued, for whatever reason, by venue and audience, while at the same time enjoying the structure of the scratch process to help retain a focus”. But there are different ways of generating that focus: other makers resident at BAC staged informal afternoon showings of their work, which had a similar mix of BAC producers/staff/artists as their audience. Why does a more general public need to be invited?

Even asking the question feels odd to me, because usually I'm all for transparency. And actually engaging with Scratch after an extended period of not bothering reminded me what a beautiful offer it is. As an audience member, you are invited to become involved with or attached to a work: to watch it grow, shifting and mutating and blossoming over time. More discursively, it gives people not involved in the making of theatre an opportunity to witness almost-directly how work is created. The more time you're able to devote, the more illuminating Scratch can be: the four performances of Peter McMaster's *Yeti* that I saw differed subtly from each other, and offered insights quite apart from what we discussed in the rehearsal room into the way he builds up a piece. But who, in the normal course of life, can see four scratches of the same show? I managed it because I was squeezing *Yeti* into the 30 minutes before another show started. But the BAC schedule isn't consistent in creating that possibility, and an awful lot of Scratch shows sit in time slots that overlap with or butt against other work.

Then again, something intriguing happens in that scheduling: the hierarchy of Scratch and developed work melts away. On the down side, this can make you expect too much of a piece

in progress: watching Bad Host's *When the Lions Drink*, I couldn't understand why it was dominated by a seemingly interminable scene in which two performers painstakingly transferred shot glasses from a tightly packed tray to an adjacent table, forgetting in my fidgety boredom that the young company needed to put the scene in front of an audience to appreciate that what looks hypnotic in a rehearsal room and in a performance space is not always the same thing. Jake and I had a long chat with its director, Chelsea Walker, afterwards, and she admitted wishing she had anticipated that scene not working. She also told us that in a previous residency, Bad Host had flooded BAC by attempting to stage *When the Lions Drink* – which imagines London submerged by a flood – in a four-inch pool of water. Now that I would have liked to see.

On the plus side, that blurring of finished and unfinished made me more willing to give myself up to Scratch shows, more ready to surrender to their worlds. I absolutely trusted the premise of Ross Sutherland's [Standby for Tape Backup](#) – that he had come across a long-forgotten VHS tape at his grandfather's house, and in it discovered aspects of his grandfather he hadn't known – and was thrown by the suggestion on the feedback form that he might have found some material for the show elsewhere. I had a similarly gullible moment watching [These Trees Are Made of Blood](#): it didn't occur to me that the two women who came into the room late, stumbling and embarrassed, were part of the show, although it felt obvious in retrospect. The room in this case was a ramshackle construct, a dusty night-club in Argentina during the military dictatorship of the late-1970s and early 1980s, a time when political dissidents might at any moment be kidnapped and killed, joining the ranks of the “disappeared”. In a Scratch context, uncertainty and anxiety could imbue both the form and the content of the piece.

Another potential positive of BAC's flattened hierarchy is that it becomes more possible for the Scratch spirit of experimentation to hold even in developed work. Sweetshop Revolution's [Tree](#) was presented as a finished piece, and certainly felt like one when I saw it. At 100 or so minutes, it was probably too long, but the relationships forged between the four performers were consistently moving, thoughtfully provocative and often very funny, from the first confrontationally violent simulated sex scene through a series of individual vignettes contemplating money, family, religion, ambition and social atomisation, to a final, bruised and tender dance trio in which one man kept falling, falling, and the other two would catch him and prop him back up, a scene I interpreted as a physicalisation of the need for support networks, especially for the vulnerable and afraid, and which the friend who came with me read as a challenging reminder that clinging to baggage in life, clinging to responsibility, can be as destructive as it is generous. I saw the first performance and loved it; the second, according to its director, Sally Marie, was a disaster, and the third was radically different, with vast chunks of material excised. I love that being at BAC made this quick-fire reinvention feel possible.

In which case, the more-or-less traditional relationship between theatre and critics that you find at BAC feels especially peculiar. Annoyingly, I no longer have the official press release I was sent relating to Autumn Cook-Up, but in my memory only two shows had designated press showings, Kate Tempest's Brand New Ancients and Andy Field's [Motor Vehicle Sundown](#). As it happens, Lyn Gardner saw both shows on dates of her own choosing, but that doesn't quite prevent the invitation BAC extends to the press feeling uncharacteristically rigid and old-fashioned. There are, of course, several critics perfectly content to slot shows into their diaries on appointed days, and if they miss the appointed date then oh, never mind. But BAC doesn't strike me as a theatre that does things because that's the way they're done. And, gratifyingly, by the end of Dialogue's residency, artistic director David Jubb had begun talking about operating a more flexible system and conferring with artists about how they themselves wanted to invite the press to see their work. If Dialogue contributed to the removal of the imposition of a specific press night from theatre-makers who don't want one, that feels like quite an achievement.

FOR THE

LOVE OF

THEATRE

A record of the discussion about theatre criticism, held at BAC on Saturday September 22, 2012.

This was Dialogue's second “live outing”, by which I mean our second attempt at staging something that is a bit like a conference, a bit like an Open Space discussion and a bit like a party, something informal where it doesn't matter what your involvement is in theatre, all voices are equally valid and everything contributes to an understanding of what people want from theatre criticism, and what theatre-writing could be.

Jake and I gave a lot of thought to building a frame for the event, which began with choosing the title: For The Love of Theatre. We made clear in our [invitation](#) that the event was for “anyone who watches theatre, makes it, or writes about it”; about 40 people came, a group comprising bloggers/journalists/critics and theatre students (including [Andrew Haydon](#), [Matt Trueman](#), [Catherine Love](#), [Megan Vaughan](#), [Dan Hutton](#), [Stewart Pringle](#)), people who would variously call themselves makers and directors and performers and playwrights and writers (including [David Jubb](#), [Selma Dimitrijevic](#), [Chris Goode](#), [Jonny Liron](#), [Mary Paterson](#), [Andy Field](#), [Hannah Silva](#), [Ira Brand](#), [Greg McLaren](#), [Maggie Saunders](#), [Jenifer Toksvig](#), [Tom Morris](#)), people who work in theatre marketing, producers, plus two women – one who works in the

administrative team at the [Siobhan Davies Dance Studio](#), another who works in book publishing – who, delightfully, came as theatre fans.

This was our introduction:

“We called this session about theatre criticism ‘For the Love of Theatre’ because all critics, whether theatre-makers think it or believe it or appreciate it or not, start from a place of love for theatre. We’ve all felt it. That moment during a show when goosebumps erupt across our skin, and our breathing is heightened and we think, yes, this is why I’m here. It’s when theatre rises up inside us and dances a fiery dance that makes us want to shout and scream. It’s when theatre becomes a life support, when the theatre that we see flows through our veins and heart and we can’t help but to feel like we’re witnessing change. This is why we do it. This is the reason we sit, observe, speculate and write. For this moment. For this love.”

And this is how we defined love: as a combination of respect, admiration and trust (a lovely phrase borrowed from the Hal Hartley film [Trust](#)). There is – most of the time – respect and admiration in the relationship between theatre-makers and -writers/critics. But what about trust? At the very end of the session, a young director offered a different definition: Love is the ability to sit and listen to someone tell the same story 1000 times, and enjoy it every time. That felt useful and pertinent, too.

We divided the day into three sections, each with an introductory speaker – although again, the aim was to keep the mood informal, so everyone sat in a circle and there was no platform separating invited speakers from anyone else. The first section posed two questions: what do makers – and audience-members – want from theatre criticism? And: how could we rethink the role of the critic? Chris Goode opened the discussion with an extraordinary piece about his relationship with the Guardian's [Lyn Gardner](#), the person who has had the most impact and influence on his career, by writing about him consistently and for the most part positively for the past 12 years. You could feel an electric ripple through the room when he compared the contract between them to that between a parent and a child: the child holding up its painting to its parent, hoping for approval; the parent wanting to like it, wanting to see the good in it. That desire for approval, Chris argued, can be an unhelpful shiver in the mind of the maker embarking on a new work, especially on a new work that might be deemed risky, unconventional, experimental.

He ended with an address not to Lyn specifically, but to:

... any critic who perhaps underestimates how they tower illegibly over the process sometimes, who maybe feels a bit squeamish about the idea of being, as it were, in the room when the work is made: you’re already there. You’re there and you’re silent and invisible and a bit scary, and resented sometimes, and maybe even diminishing the scope of what’s possible. If you wanted, your presence could be something completely different from that, but one way or another your presence is a given and that’s the place we’re starting from. You’re already in the

room.

The second section invited everyone to consider the role a critic or theatre-writer might take within a theatre company – and asked: what happens to the critical bit of criticism when they're there? Selma Dimitrijevic, co-artistic director of [Greyscale](#), told us here about her recent experiments with inviting critics into her rehearsals, a decision influenced partly by reading long-form online reviews and being excited by the engagement with ideas she found there, and partly by her own experience as a dramaturg to playwrights, where her role was to “provide a filter through which the writer can see their piece without emotional co-independence”. Unlike theatre-makers, who find it difficult to be completely honest with each other about their work, especially when they are in the middle of making it, critics are not afraid to say what they think: as such, she argued, having a critic as an outside eye, offering a different filter through or view into the work, is good for the company, the work, for everyone.

The third section was led by BAC artistic director David Jubb talking about some of the difficulties he experiences in the traditional relationship between theatre and critics. Press nights tend to be his least favourite in the building, and it troubles him that critics are given preferential treatment: he spends time writing information sheets for critics to build up empathy for the work, gives them free drinks. Why don't we do the same for audiences? Why not make every night press night?

He also raised two brilliant points about the perspective of theatre-writers. He feels that BAC is at its best when its practices, artists and audiences are more at the periphery than in the mainstream, because it's at the edges, the periphery, of a culture that exciting and creative things happen. In which case, are critics – and, for that matter, the staff of BAC, and other similar institutions – interested in pushing the periphery towards the mainstream, or in nurturing the periphery so it exists creatively in its own right? He also argued that when critics – of whatever art form – talk about whether or not a work is good, immediately they diminish their reach. Whereas when critics behave more like philosophers, and involve themselves with the debate and the ideas within the work, it doesn't matter if they're talking about theatre, or visual arts, whatever, they're talking about something everyone can access.

The discussion inspired by and firing off from these provocations was knotty, sometimes frustrating, frequently illuminating, energetic and a little fraught. Unsurprisingly, it darted hither and thither rather than following a linear course, so summarising it is tricky. What follows is by no means comprehensive, more an attempt to gather together key thoughts and themes.

On the subject of theatre-writers watching rehearsals, or being on the inside:

A playwright noted that she is very used to having her work critiqued at every stage of its existence, as she frequently gives drafts to people to read. However, they tend to be other

playwrights, or theatre-makers.

A sense of awkwardness from one critic about what he sees as the attempt to wrestle critics into a dramaturg role; his desire not to impact on the show being made, and to reserve the right to say what he thinks about it when it's finished.

More than one person felt that if a critic has spent time in the rehearsal room, they should leave writing a review of that work to other people.

An interest from one theatre-maker in taking advantage of the critic's breadth of knowledge of theatre – because often critics have seen a lot more work than makers have.

One young director felt excited by the possibility of theatre-writers creating stronger artist-artist relationships: although he feels too shy to have a critic in his rehearsal room, he would love to read accounts from theatre-writers of other people's processes, as this would help him grow as an artist himself and perhaps out of that shyness also.

On creative reviewing:

A reminder that writing is difficult, and writing is an art.

An interest in writing about theatre that does more than admits its own subjectivity, writing that is more poetic or lyrical and that comes from within the experience of the work. Writing whose creative voice is inflected by the experience it is trying to describe.

An interest in the potential to disassociate criticism from the act of writing. Admiration expressed for charcoal drawings of theatre work, haiku blogging, pieces of audio made in response to work.

A question was raised: can new forms of criticism find the audiences who will enjoy the work most?

And a frustration expressed: what does an experimental review actually tell you about a piece?

David Jubb wondered what institutions can do to develop creative critics, and for positive collaboration between them.

Mary Paterson talked about a professional development programme she went on at the [Live Art Development Agency](#) six years ago: what she and other participants found was that exposure to experimental art made them question whether reviews do the work justice, especially when the temporality of live art and theatre is so radically different to the temporality of the review. She began experimenting with using gestural or notational languages, and with creating different kinds of texts, including: texts to be read by people in queues, to be destroyed immediately after being read, to be read aloud by audiences. She's now thinking about the performance of being a writer, and what it is to sit on a stage while a performance is happening, taking notes.

Andy Field talked about [Fierce Festival's Press Gang](#), which nurtures writers and in doing so nurtures a critical context in which its work can be situated. What about artists reviewing or responding to each other's work?

On the requirements of theatre criticism:

One director argued that theatre-makers want from criticism: publicity, accountability (did I

communicate what I wanted to communicate?), a liaison or bridge between the creators and the audience.

One maker wants theatre-writers to uncover a “plurality of intentionalities”: to provide a way of thinking about work that differs from the artists'.

Readers want to be entertained, and they want star ratings. Certainly that's the marketing perspective – but it's a perspective many in the audience share.

A paranoia was expressed, that if you read a review before seeing a show, it will affect what you think of it.

A desire to read not just a response to the piece seen, but a response to its themes and thoughts that encourage the articulation of new thought.

Chris Goode expressed a longing for a paradigm shift in what's wanted from critical discourse, from encounter with individual pieces, to relationships with artists.

As at Dialogue's [first live outing](#), at the 2012 Edinburgh festival with Northern Stage at St Stephen's, the discussion raised several questions that cannot be answered simply and are worth returning to repeatedly. Here are some of them:

Is it possible to write about a theatre piece without assessing whether it's “good” or “bad”?

How can you separate the discourse of criticism from the market, and if you did, would criticism still have a value?

Is criticism in service to marketing and development?

Are you a reviewer or a critic? Are you in the theatre world, or in the world of journalism?

Does anyone think the star-rating system should stay?

For the Love of Theatre didn't end positively for me and Jake. We felt deflated by the discussion, and acutely felt that we had failed – something [Jake wrote about on his website](#) a few days later. Partly this was an adrenaline crash. Partly it was a recognition that we had spent so much time building our frame for the event, we hadn't thought hard enough about how to manage what happened inside it: how to make shy people feel comfortable to speak, how to stop strident voices dominating. [Greg McLaren](#) has written on his blog of how he found this aspect of the session frustrating. When it comes to the next Dialogue live outing, we'll be doing a lot of things differently.

What we hope won't change is people's willingness to be open, honest, generous and patient with each other in the spaces we create for dialogue. Thank you to everyone who took part in this one, for all the brilliant, valuable, difficult and challenging things you said.