

In summarising the post-reading discussion of Nikki Chowen's *Carrot Cake*, I think I'll focus on three key points. I might not focus on three. It might be four; it really depends how many points end up being "key" once I've written them out. I might find, in the process of writing, only two are worth focussing on. I don't know yet. They are arranged by the order in which they occurred to me.

Point one: this question of whether or not we now have a culture of encouraging writers to approach the business of writing as if there is a play-doctoring process that will correct their mistakes for them. The underlying assumption here is that whoever is doing this "doctoring" knows better than the writer what makes a good play. It is vital for any writer to learn to question this assumption at all times and in all situations. Do we have too many new plays? No. We have too many people in theatre management roles who programme too many plays that either aren't good enough, or aren't ready yet. Martin Harvey would say it doesn't matter that they might not be ready yet – we should be watching more plays in varying states of readiness and spending less money on tickets to watch them. I'm inclined to agree, but I would also say that artistic directors have a responsibility to new writers and new plays and to not expose either of them to public scrutiny too early. Which is where a genuinely exploratory development process becomes vital. My experience of rehearsed readings staged by producing theatres is that they tend to be badly judged; they do not serve the play or, by extension, the writer. The priority here is development – not just of a particular play, but of a writer. Notwithstanding the intentions and skills of many excellent individuals whose job it is to implement writer-development within producing theatres, at an institutional level rehearsed readings are box-ticking exercises to satisfy funding bodies and nothing more: they don't make money. Exeter's own regional artistic director, Ben Crocker, who shall remain named, had to be coerced into attending a reading in Exeter's drama department and singularly failed to understand either the play or the purpose of hearing it read. I guarantee if the Arts Council made their funding conditional upon him developing a new writing policy inclusive of a developmental programme he would have at least pretended to enjoy himself. For any new writers reading this, I am not for a moment suggesting you should avoid rehearsed readings. You shouldn't. They contain greatest value when ownership of the play remains with the writer, as it did with Nikki in this setting... thanks, of course, to Martin and to the actors. This is a forum in which their considerable skills are offered gladly to serve the play and to expose its dramaturgical strengths and weaknesses. Peter Thomson's notes on his response to Dorina Hulton's paper "Compositional Strategies for Making an Interdisciplinary Performance" concludes with some thoughts on the nature of "interplay" – that it might be "...more concerned with what goes on 'between' (between times, between people, between ideas)... and tie in to the condition of *becoming* rather than of *being*." This is the kind of interplay we should concern ourselves with when we enter a rehearsal room to make explorations towards a reading. There is a generous exchange of skills, ideas, etc. going on between the various entities in the room and it is in those exchanges that the event, which serves the play, develops. The play, in the hands of the new writer, then evolves (or not) as a result. In the end, all of the agents of theatrical production which might normally take ownership of the play away from the writer are powerless to do so.

I've said what I wanted to say under the heading of "Point One". I will continue to ponder points two to four...