

# MAKE WHAT YOU NEED

Dustin Harvey



I believe that we all should make what we need. Make what you need.

'Make what you need' is a simple idea because it is connected to what you love, but it is an idea that runs counter to the more generally accepted idea that you should make the theatre that you think audiences want.

We make what we think audiences want because of the pressures that surround how we make work. Everyone feels those pressures. Those pressures are financial like box office and writing grants, sometimes they are expectations on ourselves to make good work. Or the expectations of your parents, or teachers. All these pressures have a way of killing creativity and stopping innovation.

If there was one thing that I know now that i wish i knew when I was starting out it would be to make the work you need because it will make you happy.

I will talk about 5 points related to this idea. As well, there is a post script. And a post post script.

1. in order to make what you need you have to start asking yourself the question.



# ASK THE QUESTION

What is it that you need? Maybe it is something you need more of. Maybe it is something that is missing.

There are two kinds of needs. Personal needs and professional needs. And the two are not entirely disconnected.

Professional needs have to do with work. It comes in many forms but one could be that you see a lot of work and you either don't connect with it. Maybe you need something that is missing?

Personal needs have to do with getting more of the things you love. Or maybe you are frustrated by something and it needs to change. that is also a way of getting at what you love.

We all have personal and professional needs and one often shows up in the other.

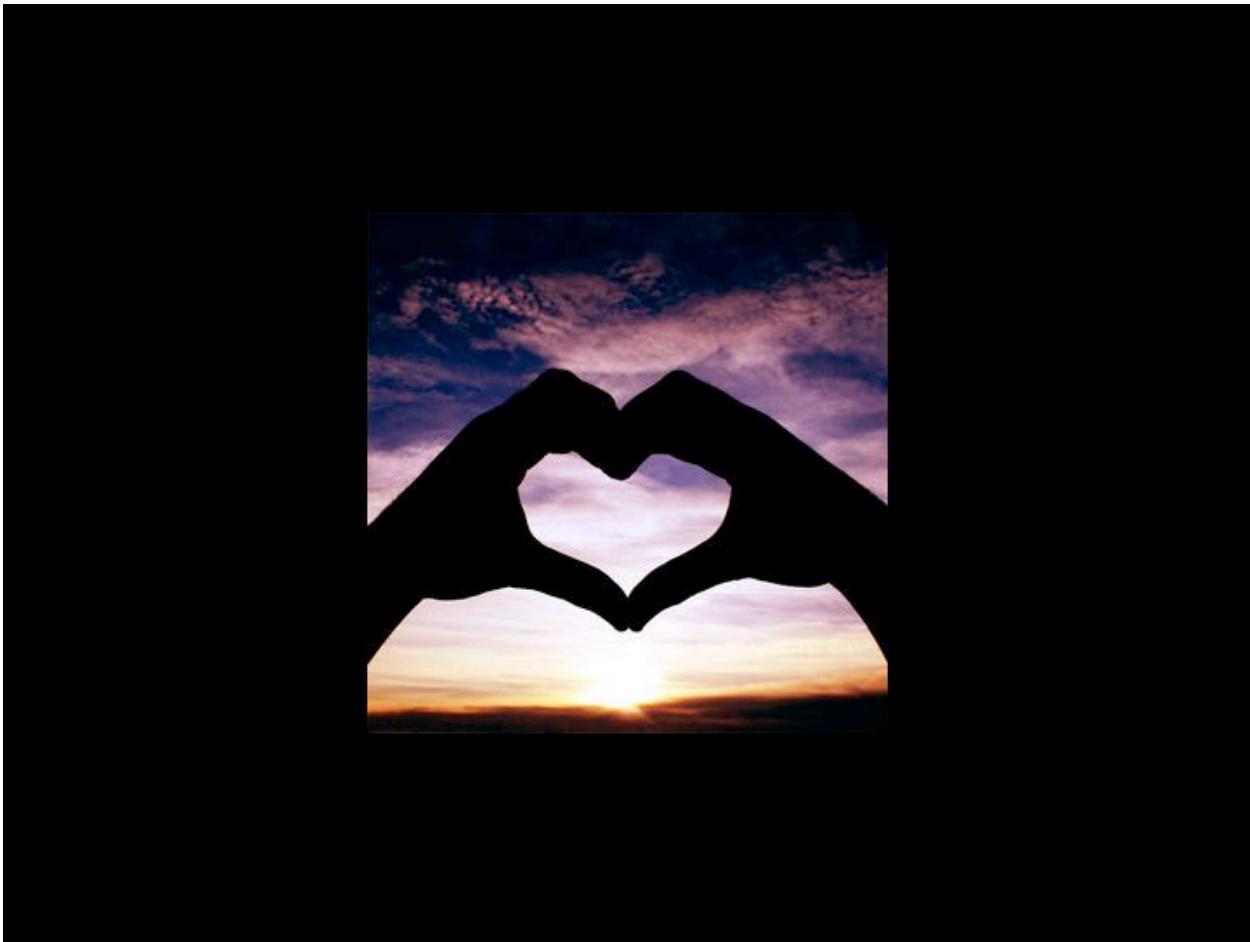


In 2006, I made a zine project called BEST WISHES: letters to a young practitioner because I felt a need for some sort of mentorship and I was surprised at the lack of documentation theatre makers' experiences living in my community. The way I looked at it, people had been doing what I was doing, going through the things I was going through for many years before me. But, nothing was being passed on. I felt like I wanted to do something in response to that personal and professional need.

The Best Wishes project is a series of letters written by Halifax theatre makers to a younger version of their selves or someone else starting out in the field. What came out of them was encouragement, insight, wisdom. I still get excited today when I read them. They really are special, and spotlight what it is like to make work in Halifax.

Compass Points has been doing a version of this project for the past three years, including this year I am very happy to say. Which I also think says something about how ideas spread.

Making what you need starts with asking yourself the questions about what you love.



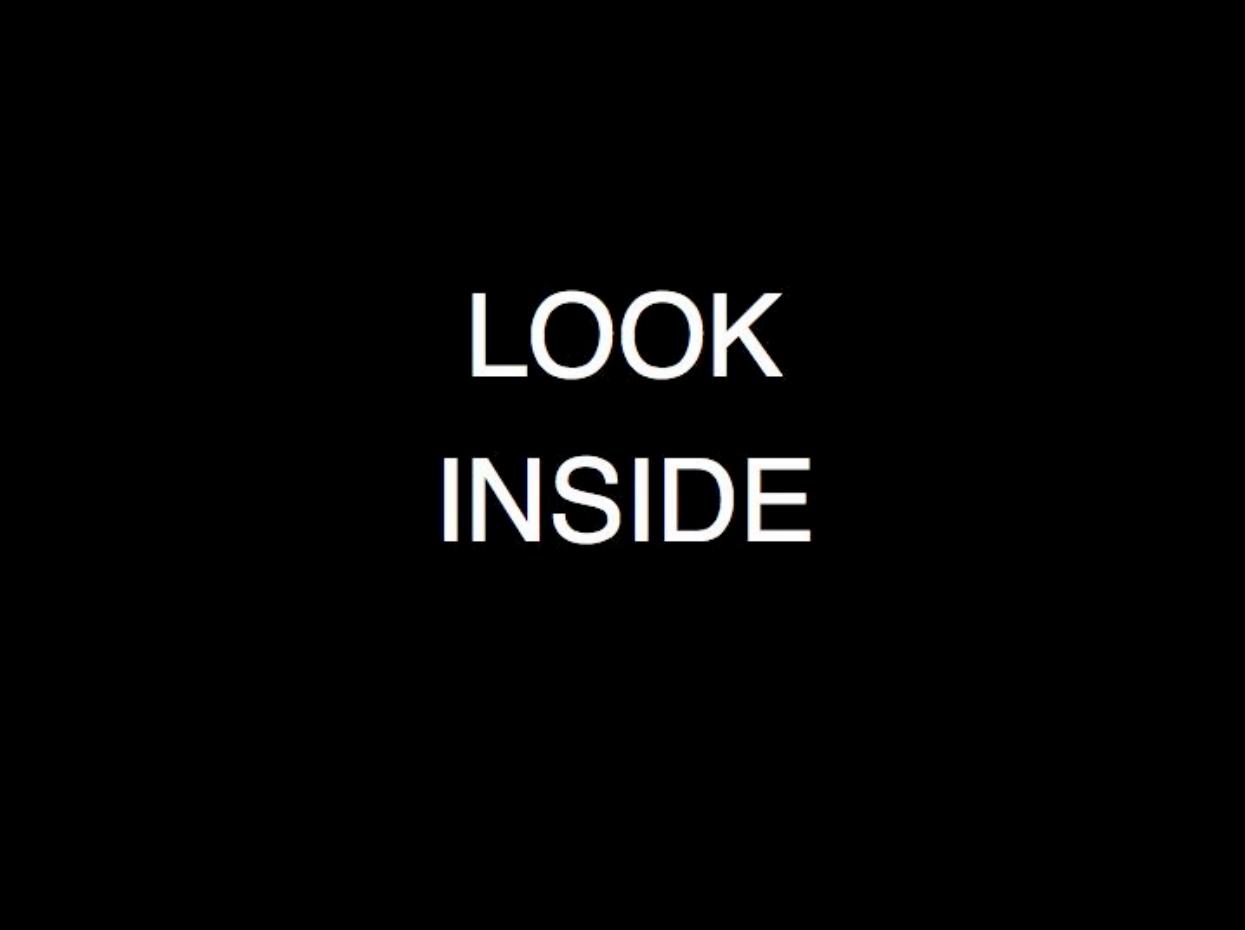
I am going to assume that you are all people that have gotten into theatre because there is something you love about it.

Even if you are not so sure about what you love, you made the effort to be here and that tells me there is something you care about.

All I am asking you to do is start allowing yourself permission to make your work about that.

The choices you make will either fuel that love or allow it to fade over time.

It is your decision you decide.

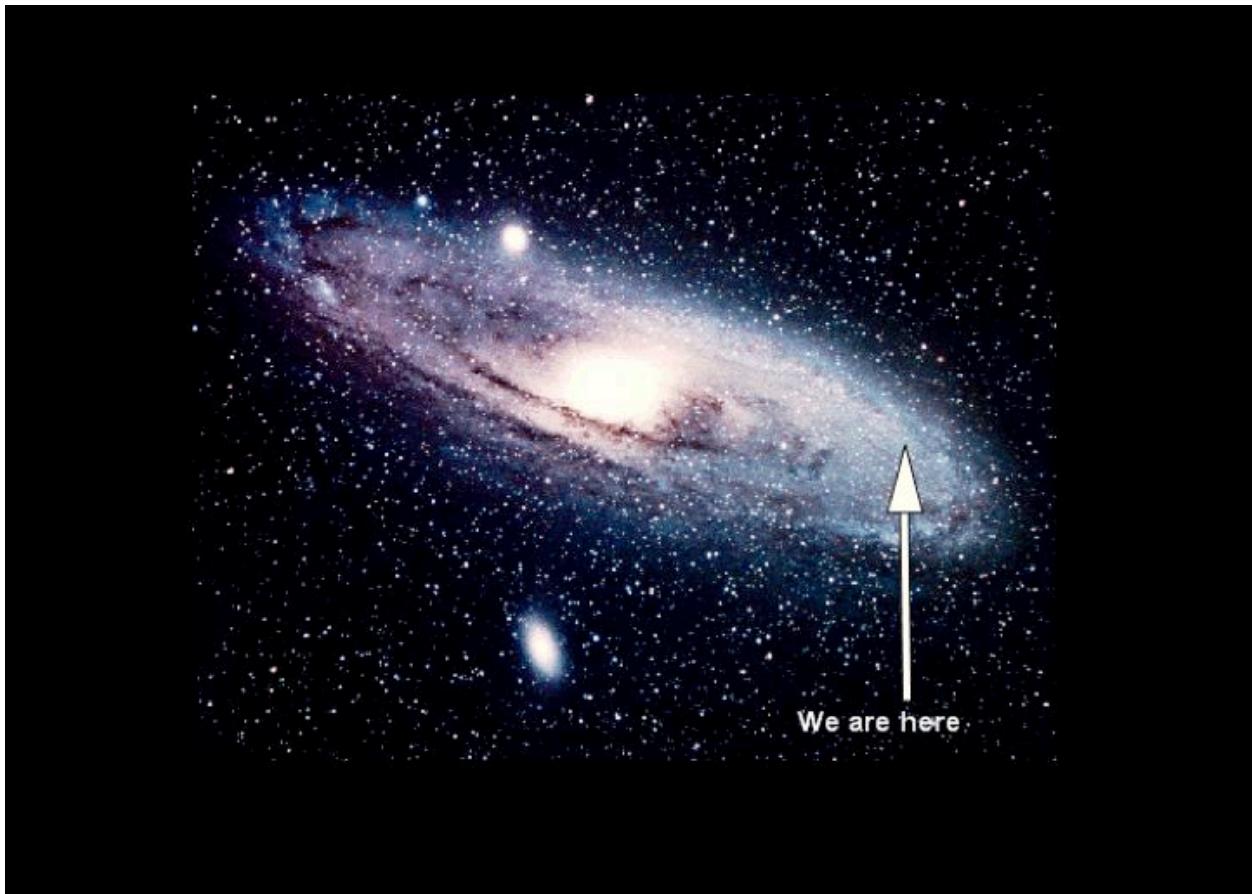


LOOK  
INSIDE

2. When you start to ask the question you start to look inside yourself, and to the people and places around you for information. This includes your relationship to community.

I believe we all have a lot in common. I also believe that asking yourself what you need tells you something about what we have in common. For me, this is a really exciting way to make work because it is looking carefully at the small to tell us something about the big.

I can also understand how looking at the outside gives us perspective on where we fit into the bigger picture.



Also, I believe that if something is meaningful to you, it will be meaningful to someone else.

Recently, it was really important to me to make something about Halifax, the place where I choose to live. And make it in such a way that you cannot see it working in any other place.

The Common Project is a theatrical walk for one person in a public space with the help of a headset. It was a project I made with Robert Plowman.  
(VIDEO CLIP)



Too often we look outside for help. We wait for the right collaborator, or the right space, or enough money, or enough time... If there is something I know now that I wished I knew then it would be that there will never be enough money, or time, or people. So start working with what is around you.

They may even be in this room!

If you haven't take a moment to introduce yourself to the people around you.

Which brings me to my next point.

3. Attraction.

# LAWS OF ATTRACTION

Or better put, making what you need follows the laws of attraction because it has a magic ability to attract like minds.

That is how relationships are formed. That is how networks are created.

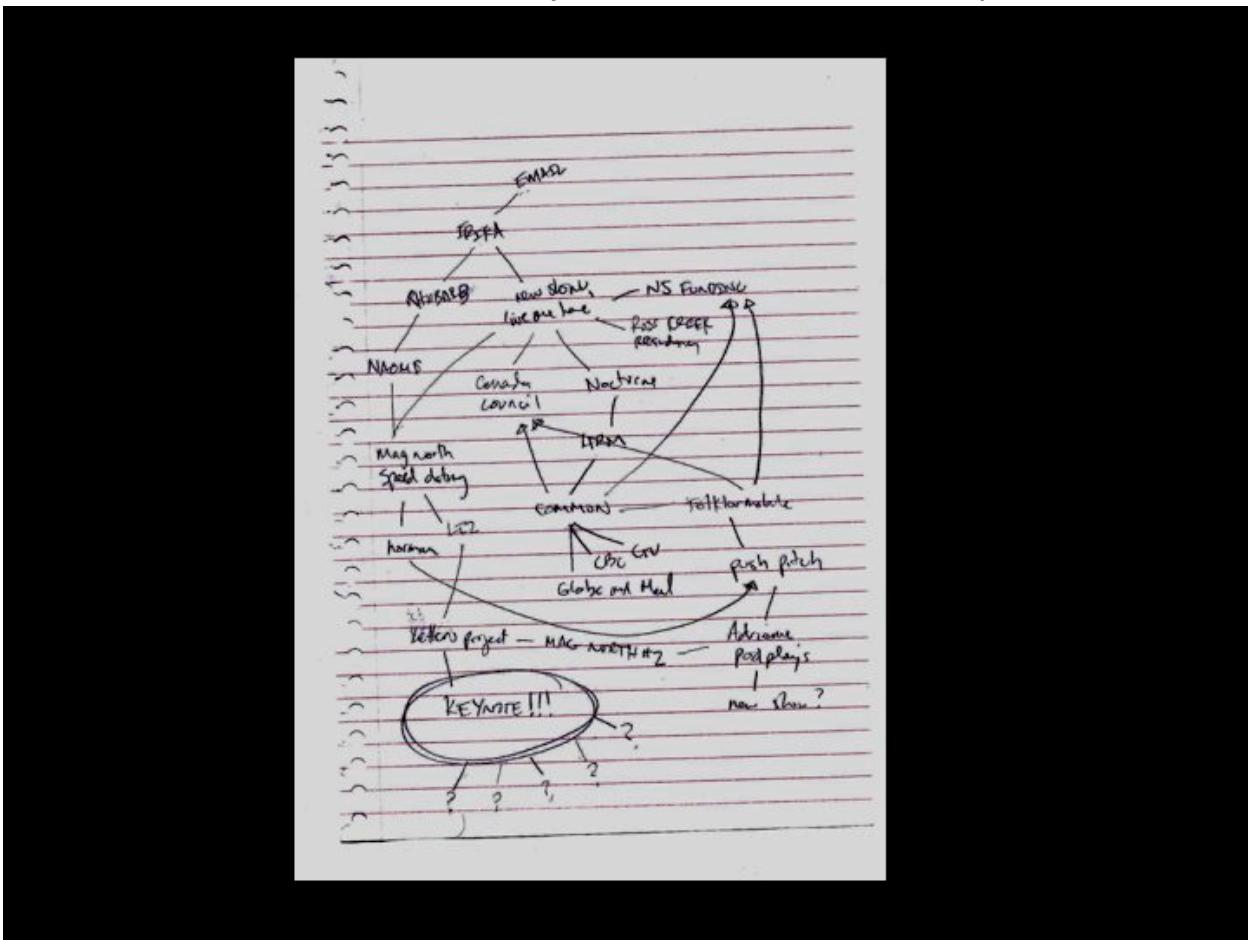
The catch is, you have to put yourself out there to the world. It may take dozens of emails or phone calls, it may take a number of projects. Be patient.

To demonstrate my point I want to tell you the story of how one email 4 years ago is connected to me being here today.

In 2008, I sent about 40 or 50 emails to various people about the work I was doing at the time. Only one person, Erika Hennebury responded to it. She was immediately excited by it. She invited me to do the work at the Rhubarb Festival at Buddies in Toronto and suggested we make something new together. That project became '(we) are here'. At Rhubarb I met Naomi Campbell. That project also became the first

Canada Council grant we received, and it was presented at a Nocturne art at night event where the public art coordinator of HRM public art saw the work and loved it. He help fund a new project called The Common, which I told you about earlier. And Naomi who I met at Buddies invited us to Magnetic North last year to do speed dating. I met a number of people there including Norman from PuSh who along with Sherrie Johnson invited us to Vancouver to pitch another new project. Doing speed dating last year introduced me to Liz and let me speak to people about the Best Wishes project, which is directly connected to my invitation to be here today.

In case that all doesn't make sense or you are confused, I drew a map.



The conclusion is that it was all about attraction. An attraction that started by making what I needed and putting myself out there.

Fear is what holds a lot of people back from making what they need in part because it is putting themselves out there.

And that brings me to my next point.

# YOU ARE GOING TO MAKE MISTAKES

4. When you start to make what you need you may not know how to go about it. You are going to make some mistakes.

There are a bunch of different types of mistakes, but if you can take responsibility for them you can actually learn from them.

Lately I've been thinking that art practice is more about mistakes than it is about successes.

I can think about a bunch of different mistakes I have made in my life but in terms of our topic today, making what you need, the mistakes I have made are because I am trying to figure out how to say the thing that I need.

So how do you say it?

You need to make a lot of work.

You learn by trying something out. See what works. What doesn't and try again. This is about finding your voice. If you make a lot of work, you will start figuring it out. And when you do, that is gold.



For me it took a long time to figure out how to collaborate.

I was bringing too many of my ideas to the room, which put the other people in a position where they looked to me for answers. I wanted collaborators, but instead I didn't give them enough permission. So it wasn't working out.

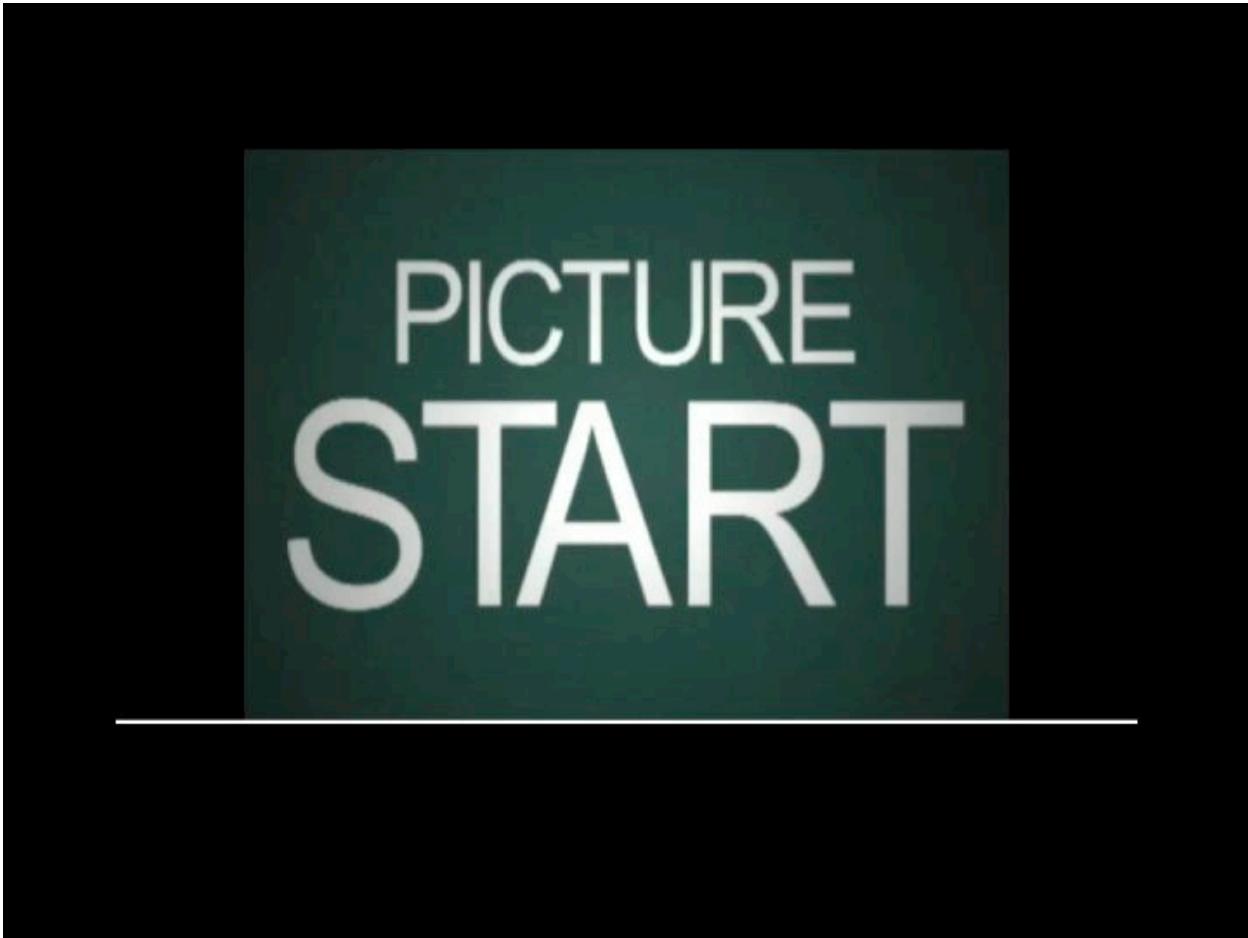
Now I've learned to start with one thing. and the other person starts with one thing. We find a framework where the two ideas can coexist, and start from there.

I should tell you that this has become the working principle of secret theatre which is the group I lead in Halifax. The work is project driven collaborations!

I want to show you a clip of the first time I felt like I was on the right path of learning from my mistakes.

This is that project 'we are here' I was telling you about. It is a live film made by hand. The piece was made with Erika Hennebury. She was interested in a young woman feeling homesick, and I was interested in the feeling of drifting. We found a framework in a layered project where the audiences could see us making it live.

What you are about to see was recorded in a live performance with the audience around us.



(video clip)

That was a really fun show to make.

My final point.



# ARE YOU HAVING ENOUGH FUN?

## 5. Are you having enough fun?

If you are going to make what you need, you are already committed to making work in spite of the pressure that surround work.

It will also benefit you to remind yourself to have fun. You are getting play with the things you love, which is a really lucky thing.

If you indulge me for a moment, I want to show you a couple slides of people i think have a lot of fun making work. Check them out.

small wooden  
shoe.

## SMALL WOODEN SHOE (Toronto)



gob  
squad.

## GOB SQUAD (Berlin)



zuppa  
theatre

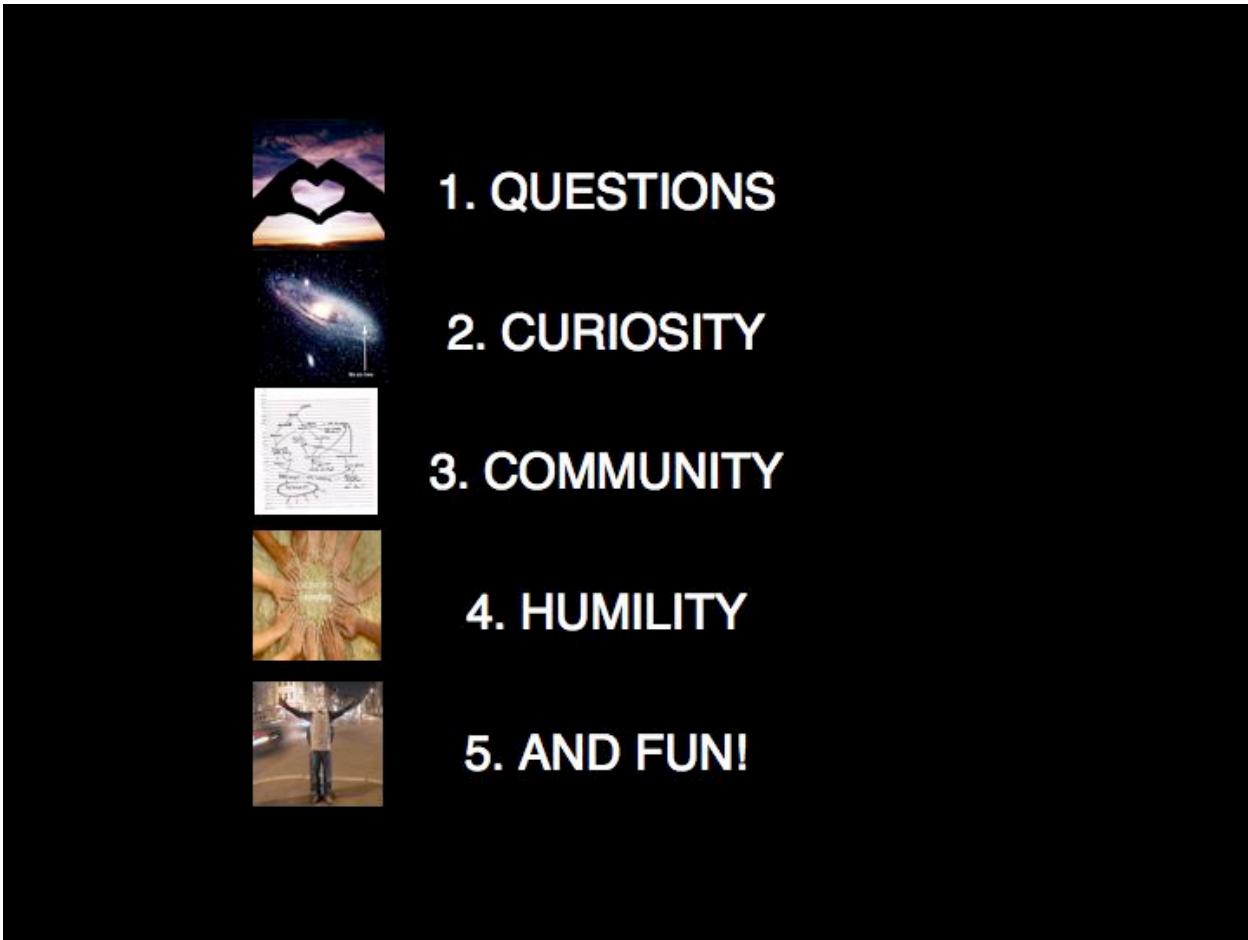
## ZUPPA THEATRE (HALIFAX)



In conclusion,

When you make work that you think audiences want you are making choices based on an imaginary group of average people.

Instead, what I am suggesting is that we should cultivate a kind of honesty that includes



questions, curiosity, community, humility, and fun!

Thanks for listening.

Before I forget,

PS Talk to the people whose work you like. It is often easier than you think.

PPS Do one thing to help someone else. we all could use a little help sometimes.



**DUSTIN HARVEY.COM**

**Bio:**

I am essentially an actor who works in interdisciplinary performance. I come from a theatre background, and not a visual arts or performance art background and that is very important to me because it informs the way my work is read. Over the past 8 years I have created site responsive performance, theatre situations, audio installation, and small run publications. Each production is about the theatrical, while engaging audiences intimately.