

File Mat 001

M: You checking for levels? I'll probably be talking about that.

A: I will ask you for advice if I have any problems,. because I'm sure you're much more experienced..

M: I am. but it depends on the machine. As long as it sounds alright, not too faint, not too loud and distorted it should be fine.

File Mat 002

A: What's your first memory?

M: My first memory is being lost in the 'ning' shop, which was the local supermarket where one day early in my aural consciousness they were playing a song the chorus ended dramatically with the words 'thunder and lightNING'. So it became the 'ning' shop.

A; Right

M: And I would clutch on to my mother's skirt. And I got bored and drifted away and wandered back to the skirt, clutched it but it wasn't my mother's and I got all panicky and then my mum turned up and evrything was okay.

A: Yeah

A: So, tell me about your childhood.

M: I had a very very happy childhood, although amongst a sort of broken home. My mum and my father met playing opposite each other in a tour of the musical 'Salad Days'. My father was gay, he'd already had an unsuccessful marriage, he'd been thrown out of the R.A.F. for having sex with a guy, you know quietly, embarrassedly. So he was definitely gay, but he, you know, had a, we came from quite a posh family and there was a lot of family pressure to be straight and sire a son to at least prove, you know, to the outside world that you could fake it.

And so, I never know how much my father really fell in love with my mother or was doing what was required or what have you, but anyway they met and fell in love, so the story goes and I was born um, They carried on but Dad would go away for weekends and things and Mum would look the other way, and then when I was nine, Gerry came to live with us. Unbeknownst to me that was Dad's lover and.. I slept in the small bed at the foot of the marital bed, as it was London and it was small,. Unbeknownst to me Dad was sleeping with Gerry in the spare room and then getting up ten minutes before I woke up and getting into the marital bed so that when I woke up everything looked normal.

So all that was going on but I was oblivious to it all.

A: Right.

M: I just thought I was having a really happy childhood. But obviously the adults were having quite a stressful time. In terms of, I went to what is now, official, the poshest primary school in Britain, Sheen Mount, presumably because my Dad had posh affiliations, because it certainly wouldn't have been through any money we had or my abilities as a student (because) you're five when you start that school. But I remember going to Sheen Mount school, having lots of friends, one boy called me

screwed-up arms, another girl kept telling me she felt sorry for me. But apart from that I was just the life and soul and part of the gang, we had a gang I was part of it. Behind the bike sheds. Nobody mentioned anything, went on fancy dress at eight years old, I went as a boxer, with boxing gloves on, which ostensibly looked like boxing gloves sewn on to your shoulders, you know..

A: Yes.

M: No-one said a word. So there must have been a lot of liberal adult collusion going on, let him be what he wants to be, his parents have obviously set him on that path, (and) whenever I asked something they'd always say, I don't know, darling, why don't you try. Mum, can I do that, whether it was something that was obviously I wouldn't be able to do through ability or whatever access, they would always say, I don't know, try. So, that was my childhood, very happy one, I had lots of friends, was very popular socially, tiny bit of bullying but really that didn't arrive until er secondary school um lots of friends, always had lots of friends who were girls, very happy in the company of women, I was fighting stag beetles at lunchtime.

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There was a girl called Lisa Bergman and I liked her a lot and it was, there was a rash of pretend marriages in the lunchtime, and we got married, we were one of the couples that got 'married' at lunchtime. And I was very hurt because later on, I went to New Zealand for a couple of years and when I came back all my old friends were now in the first year of their secondary school and everyone had split up and I stayed with a friend of mine who was then going to a secondary school that Lisa Bergman was at, this was like four years later. And he said yes, she said you didn't get, you were lying and that you never got married. And I remember thinking, at the time I was so cut down by that. But in later life I thought, of course, poor bitch is thirteen years old, some guy goes 'You got married to that freaky guy didn't you?' she's like No! No! No!. And I can really see it from her point of view now. But at

the time I was really hurt by it, because I was thirteen as well, you know, and going through my stuff.

But, um I had a very happy childhood until, er, not until, throughout, even including the day my Mum said 'We're moving to New Zealand', her and my Dad had split up completely by this point and she reacted by moving to the other side of the world, where an actor friend of hers had said come here, I'll make you the lead actress in the main theatre in Auckland, they're dying for English actresses. Come and have a lovely career and forget about all of that. So we did, and back in those days of course, nineteen seventy, seventy-one, they were very keen to have this poshy English actress. She tried that again twenty years later with my sister in nineteen eighty-seven, when her second marriage broke down she went to New Zealand with the kid, tried to get a job at Mercury and they were like 'Get out of here you English fucker', you know. They'd discovered themselves..

A: Right.

M: ..as New Zealand people, which was good. Anyway (..) my mother at the time. Anyway. so we had a lovely two years in New Zealand. Then we came back and it was secondary school time. And we tried a few, I did a few entrance exams in various different schools and we seemed to be settling in Canterbury where Mum could get a job in the local theatre, which was this characteristic of why we moved to places. We got a place to live, she was in, seemingly always at the Marlowe Theatre. (0.006.07)

And I was enrolled into Kent College, which was the, not the posh one with the wing collars and the boaters, but the next one down of the three posh schools in Canterbury.

A: Right.

M: I was a day boy, as they were called, I didn't board.

A: Right

M: Em

A: Was that a school that made that distinction?

M: Oh yeah. Oh it was a really old-fashioned school. The first few years there were no girls. At all. The year before boys had thrown out their boaters. On fire boys had been 1976 heat wave been just prior to that, they'd just been allowed to undo their top button during the summer, it was that kind of school. Um, and I was the only disabled boy, there was one gay boy, and one black guy and me. And we didn't like each other of course, because such is the nature of.. you know, it was weird. And I, I have a very, I'm very ashamed to say this, but it's true and it happened. Happy for it to go on record. I..I can only assume that my desire to offload the attention I had as being the only disabled boy in school, usually the attention was negative. 'Manhunt', the lunchtime game was terrifying. If they caught you, they beat you up, they had an hour, from one bell to the other, you just had to not get found for an hour, that's the sort of game

A: Fu-uck.

M That was the game, right. So um (laughs) it's barbaric, isn't it, it's just one down from 'If', that film. Anyway, sorry I got mildly distracted there.

A: And for how many years was that you were playing Manhunt every..

M: Oh, you know, it was fashionable for a term.

A; For a term:

M: Half p scrambles, it was just a scrum with no rules, someone got a half p, most people got bloody noses, it was that kind of school. British bulldog was banned. You know, where you just run at each other.

A: Yeah, I remember British bulldog..

M: Because a boy had broken his arm the summer before, so it was that kind of school.

And, one day I saw an Indian boy at school, across the quadrangle. And I don't know what possessed me, I just ran the entire length, stood ten yards from him and shouted 'Oi, Paki', as loud as I could, because I wanted everyone to look at him. And he walked up to me, punched me in the face.

(A and M laugh)

M: Which is pretty reasonable. Under the circumstances. And I at home, I think eleven, twelve, somewhere around there, and thought about the nature of racism for the first time in my life.

A: Yeah

M it was really weird, and I thought that was a despicable thing to say. Why on earth did I do that? I know why I did it now. And he hated me. For four years. To this day he probably thinks I'm a racist, that kid. Maybe he might have processed it in the way I have. And understand that I was just a desperate person trying to get someone else to be bullied for once, or teased, it was more teasing, more verbal. But it, you know one remembers the bad things. But eighty per cent

of the time I was part of the community, a little bit mascotty at times, that was the price I paid for everyone's favour, cause it was a very achievement sporting based environment, you either were brainy and going to be an MP or you were going to be in the rugger team. Or cricket. And so, they liked those things and I was none of those things. (I was) just average academically and not interested in sport. And listened to the top twenty every Friday at lunchtime on my Heineken transistor radio with my friend Des, who was called Desdemona, who was called Des because he had to play Desdemona in the school play, cause there were no girls, and he was called Des for the next five years, you know. School, what can I tell you. Em, then girls arrived, and that changed everything. I don't know why I have, I wouldn't go so far as to say an affinity with women, I feel comfortable in the company of women, and just women, and think it was probably because I was brought up with a single Mum for so long, From eight and a half, nine, to fourteen it was just me and her, you know..

M: But I had a lovely childhood, I've always got on with everybody, I've got social skills, they're important. I was, you know, one of the class comedians. Often. I would be the one.. Because I knew that I was one step away from a slap, whereas any of my able-bodied counterparts would immediately get a slap. I knew I could cheat them one more time before the slap. And so I was often appointed as the one who would say the really cheeky thing. Just because I could. And then I would self-appoint a lot of the time and knowing that I had the amusement of my class to back me up. But I don't, I can't ever say I ridiculed myself and my own arms in order to curry favour. Because I remember one time, Derek Nash, a friend, we were playing and I was like, we were just playing with bodies and sleeves and hands and fucking around. And then he said oh your arms to me are like playthings and I said no, no they're not, no we can have fun but they're still my arms. And I remember thinking, not being offended or anything, but thinking no. that's not right. Um. But other than that I had a great time. I mean I was, we liked Slade, and nobody else did and everybody else liked Yes and bloody prog rock. And then punk happened of course, ideal vehicle, you go from being the school spastic to being the

school punk. That is an upgrade.

AL (Laughs) I'm telling you right now, it's an upgrade, because it's not about the thing that everybody thinks is negative and embarrassing, your disability, you know. And then the only other time I can think that my disability really impacted was when I was thirteen I was one of the golden boys in English and one term we got Mr Slade and he was really liberal and young, you know you get very excited when you get an English teacher like that, a world of possibilities opens up. And we all had to write a five-minute play, but it had to be a narrator, had to be a narrator. And I did this, but it had to be a famous story done as a ten-minute, five-minute play, I did this Goldilocks and the three bears done by a narrator. But when Daddy Bear saw Goldilocks, I had Daddy Bear go Woaar! And I said soandso said this and soandso said that and Daddy Bear said, and then I'd primed the guy playing Daddy Bear to go Ooaar! like that. and it got a huge laugh. From Mr Slade. And that was it, I was hooked, that was the moment, I knew then that I wanted to entertain, I wanted to write, I wanted to be a performer, because I made my English teacher laugh. That was the moment, the defining moment, definitely, in terms of the arts.

However, what happened was, there was then the school play. And in those days the English teacher always directed the school play. And I went up and said 'Mr Slade, I want to audition for the school play'. And I, I saw my first fearful smile from an adult. And it was a fixed, an unusually fixed smile for Mr Slade, with fear in his eyes and falsity on his teeth. And I thought to myself, oh, that's weird, he's embarrassed. And I went away and mulled that. But then I earnestly learnt my monologue, which was, I'd seen my father in Privates on Parade by Peter Nichols and there's a wonderful funeral speech and I'd learnt that to prove that I could. I think that's what it was, maybe I've got my dates mixed up and it was something else. However, I did an earnest monologue and there was this girl, a redhead called Carol-Ann Proctor who'd always be at the bus top on the way home, so I'd get my ten minutes with Carol-Ann before, and I, kind of got sweet on her over the

term. And she was, back, she was sitting in the auditorium in the back row with her friend giggling. Probably if I think about it because that was a get out of jail free hour during lunch, oh sit at the back of auditions, no teachers are going to bug you, you can do what you want. She was probably only there because of that and was probably laughing at something completely unconnected.

But I looked up in the middle of my monologue and saw Carol-Ann laughing and thought 'AH, she's laughing at me, I'm being laughed at for the very notion of getting on stage. So I had Mr Slade's scaredy smile and Carol-Ann's laughter. And that put me off. I thought 'No, it's problematic for other people, just the thought of me being on stage causes reactions that I had no idea would happen. This is fascinating and unpleasant and I want nothing to, to do with it and turned and ran.

And I didn't even think about performing until, my mother was having an affair with a local drummer and he asked if he could keep a kit round my place. And I said, yeah, can you set it up in the bedroom. And I started shuffling along and drumming along. And then he taught me what a paradiddle was, left right left left right left right right, the basis of all Western rhythm. And um, started drumming along to Elvis records, Status Quo records. And then my friends said let's form a band, we were thirteen. And so I bought a drum kit. And we became this weird teenage band who were allowed to practice in the cricket pavilion on Saturdays, on Sundays rather. Um, not quite sure where I veered off into the band, other than to say, oh yeah, we were then branded part of the weird people. But that was when we were thirteen, by the time we were fifteen, that had become the cool people.

And the guys who were the army boys, there were lots of quite sad kids there who didn't go home at holidays.

A; Right.

M: That's quite sad, when you're a boarder, you stay at school during the holidays. And they were the ones who'd bullied me earlier and ridiculed me a little, because they were insecure. But they wanted, desperately wanted to be in the cool gang once it was ascertained that we went to gigs, listened to music and, dare we say it, older people smoked pot. All that started happening. And girls. So um I had a very happy childhood.

Around thirteen, fourteen, it all changes doesn't it, em because the, your (/the old) genitals become involved and that means sexuality and adult behaviour and your disability impacting on all of that and then and you don't even know what it is yet. Because, you know, I believe that disability is a social construct, and so I was still working out what my disability actually was, the far reaches of it so to speak. Did it mean I couldn't get off with a girl? No. I was able to do that. Yeah, she was the last in the queue, there were four of us and four of them, I remember looking at the poor girl's face when she realised she was going to get lumbered with me. Anyway, I dunno, I always had friends, girls who were friends and from those friends would emanate girls who wanted to go a bit further, you know, just sometimes. I mean, I guess there was lot of do-goodery going on and a lot of caring on their part going on. Um. And then when you make an emotional connection with somebody, even if you feel you're looking after them, as you're a nine year old girl you're looking after them, thirteen or whatever, that can lead to the first kiss because it's safe, right. So I got, I guess I've got a lot of safety first kisses in that respect (0:17:36.6)

But yeah, I when rock..I enjoyed being in a band. I enjoyed having this new identity of being a punk but of course that meant being incredibly rebellious, telling the teachers to fuck off and things. So I did that, and looking back I imagine them wrangling with their liberal (..) 'Oh God, I have to tell her shut up, but he's like the disabled one, so I've gotta be nice to him. And I like him and I want him to

succeed, but he's breaking the damned rules.' So a lot of poor liberals, teachers had to wrangle with various beliefs and feelings as they gave me detention and caught me smoking and those things, because I wanted to be bad, I wanted to be naughty, it was much cooler and fun, much more fun than being the school spastic. that's what I was called. I mean, yeah. Flid, obviously, was my name at school, but I was still often a spastic and a spakko and a spasmo, all those things, um

A: Were you conscious of, was that a choice that you made consciously, this is better than being the school spastic, or is that you looking back and..?

M: No, it's me looking back. Em, I don't think I questioned, I don't think I sort of mused on it much at the time, I just knew that people treated me more cool, in a better way that I like better than pure pity or hatred.

Then my stepfather-to-be got a job as stage manager at the theatre in Aberystwyth University, and we lock stock and barrel moved to the middle of bloody rural Wales just as punk was happening. Now in Wales, they were still into Elvis, and were discovering Status Quo and Abba at the time. It was just a bit behind.

A; So where were you living?

M: Bronant, a small village eleven miles inland from Aberystwyth and seven miles from Tregaron.

A: My mother comes from Aberystwyth, you see.

M: So there, I had Brutus, my dog, had a little dog. Neither of us took to the country well. He chased the sheep and the farmers said we're gonna shoot him next time. So we had to give him away to my uncles and that was that, because they meant it. And I went to a Welsh comprehensive, a Welsh farming

comprehensive. So I went from being one of the thickies, because I wasn't in the alpha class, to the posh cunt, you know,. Overnight. And on day one this hulking heffalump of a man came towards me 'Well, I'm gonna fight you. You're new. That's the rules.' And I was like, oh, okay. Bam! Had me on the ground, you know I wriggled and struggled, kicked out a few times, tried to headbutt him, and he smacked me a few times then stopped, got up and went 'This lad's alright. He had a go. That's what matters. Nobody touch him, okay.' And that was that, never got, I wasn't really friends with the guy but he was the hardest guy in the school and he put the word out, no-one touch him. So that was that. But then I blew it. Because I was all like being offered, do you want to come and play football?' I think the headmaster had had words with the class, like the assembly before I came was a little laden with now we're going to be having a very special pupil coming. But I got invited to tea, football, buddery all sorts. But unfortunately punk had got its way into my system.

A; Tea, football and?

M: Being a buddy. No not buggery, no. And Dan Jones had a punk badge on. And I said you like punk, I like punk, and that was that. You know he's still my best friend, we met when we were fourteen, we were the only two punks in Dyfed, let alone in the school and you know, he got beaten up for it, they didn't quite beat me up but they reassuringly insulted me for being a punk. And I for some reason embedded myself in that culture, knowing perhaps that it had more longevity than a Welsh comprehensive identity. (0:22:02.1)

And as soon as I, that holidays and the O Levels were over, I was seventeen, I stumped upstairs telling my mother to fuck off one too many times. And I was packed off to live with my father, who was by this time living with Gerry, very ahead of their time domestic gay lifestyle. And it had a technical college down the road. And I'd been caught taking blues, speed pills, and I'd given them to Louise Gabriel

who was fourteen and she'd blabbed her mouth off, because you get a bit chatty when you're on speed. And Dr Sangster, the Headmaster, who thankfully for me was very liberal and had been a social worker said, look, you've given me a rather stark choice here Matthew. You either don't come back next term, which would be my advice, or you come back and I have to expel you. Now this is all unofficial, what's it gonna be? I said, I don't think I'll be coming back, sir. Very good.

So, unbeknownst to me I would have been expelled for that but he did the decent thing and er I went to this comprehensive where I retook all my O Levels, passed most of them, um, loved punk, me and my friend Dan were like, 'when we get to London, when we get to London', and er he went to an art school and I carried on, got to Colchester and said, Dan, It's brilliant here! Leave Wales, come here! There's like bands and everything. and there was, and he came, we finished our second year, I was eighteen by that point, my thalidomide compensation had kicked in, and perhaps foolishly my parents allowed me to buy a house. For twelve and a half thousand pounds, a semi-detached two-bedroom house in Colchester, which became college party central for three years and the band HQ. I didn't ever shut the back door, there would often be people in my house when I got home, they were always friends, there was lots of smoking pot and shagging and drinking and rock 'n' roll, it was super fun. Throughout my A Level college. And the, by that point we were in a band, and then we had to move to London, because that's what you do. (0:24:21.1)

File Mat 003

A: Can we go back a little bit? Tell me about thalidomide.

M: Okay, well. so the first time I kind of heard the word was an overheard conversation where someone went 'he's a thalidomide' and they were corrected by

his friend at school, who went no he's not, he's a Distiller. Now Distillers were the company that had produced it. It was all on the news at the time, because obviously the kid had overheard a bit of the news and got it a bit wrong. I remember that being the first time I'd heard the word. We didn't discuss it at home. I don't know why. We didn't discuss my disability at home, I don't know why. We would discuss how to get the sock on, and then why don't you try putting that finger there and then you can do it like this and then that might happen. Very good, now try again. Lots of that going on, but no direct addresses to the actual situation. At all, ever. I guess..I don't know why. Err.. Um..

The next time was when me and Mum were living, how do we afford to get to New Zealand, Mum. Well, you've got some compensation, thalidomide compensation, um and this is part of it and there are trustees, your Dad is a trustee, so every time we have to, we being my Mum and me, every time we need some money we have to get Dad to agree. And then when both of us agree we take it to the Trustees, who are Lady Hoare and all sorts of vice.. Group Captain this, that and the other, the great and the good retired. And when they say yes, then we can spend the money. And you, you, you know, we were no strangers to the thrift shop. Um,. but school uniforms for posh schools are expensive, so we dug in a little on that one, You're talking a hundred and thirty five quid in 1978, you know, not a lot of money. And then occasionally Mum would ask for things and then Peter came in to the scene, my stepfather, when I was about 15 and we were in Wales by that point, thalidomide was talked about a bit at that point, there was talk of well, when will I get my own bank account with the money And is it my money, or is it your money..I never distrusted my Mum, she only ever did things on my behalf, you know, and if she needed something it was to help look after me properly, so of course it was a good idea. (0:02:40.8)

Um but yeah, only when it came in to conversation around those things um I suppose by the time I was in my early twenties is when it started to get spoken

about. I remember I had a best friend at this boarding school um called Nick, his Dad was disabled um and we had seven pints and he said Mat, Matthew I've gotta tell you there's this word and we never say it and I've gotta say it, I've gotta say the thalidomide oh god, thalidomidethalidomidethalidomide. I said, what, what. He said well I can't say it in front of you. It's like a block I can't. And I was saying, why? it's silly, we can talk about it if you want. He said, no, we shouldn't, I shouldn't even be talking about it. And that was that, so I thought Oh. People have a very weird relationship with this word. Um, mine was just a non-judgemental, I'm called a flid, it's thalidomide, they can't bloody, why can't they pronounce thalidomide properly? Um, You know, flid is now a badge of honour amongst us all, you know, it's what we call ourselves, you know. But the reason it was flid was because people couldn't pronounce the word thalidomide.

A: At the time that we got up to when you were what, seventeen or eighteen.

M: Yeah , at the time, no big mentions.

A: What I was going to ask you was, did you know other people?

M:Yeah, hold on. So, cut back to age seven. Some weird assessment. At Guy's Hospital, in a waiting room, suddenly see lots of other people with little arms. Very shocked! Never seen them before. Um this was the assessment. You know I got an annual settlement of what was then fifteen thousand pounds a year, based on my assessment. My assessment was as follows. At that meeting. Walk into a room, Mum not allowed, walk into a room, three men behind a desk. On the right hand side of the room as you walk in by the door a three-tier filing cabinet, metal, old-school, up to about the shoulder. One chair in front of the desk. Went and sat on it. Asked me a few questions, then they said 'Matthew, in the top drawer of that filing cabinet there are some sweets. You can help yourself if you like'. So, fucking drag the chair over, got on the chair, opened the drawer, got the sweets,

thanks very much, fifteen grand. Only a year later I realised, and I was angry at my mother. 'Mum, if you'd have told me, I'd have crawled across that.

A: (Laughs)

M: Even then, I knew what had happened, how I could have stacked the odds better if only I'd been given the information. That's just, that's just, isn't it evil how they get the compensation deal? I mean, really, just awful. Anyway, that was that. The next opportunity was when I was fifteen and Mum said the thalidomide trust are doing special holidays. Do you want to go on a group holiday? So I was like like, ooh, pretty embarrassing, cause I hadn't really got, you know that thing of being with another disabled person? That's a thing in itself you have to get over in public. I hadn't done that yet. But I'm like but it's in Corfu where nobody I know lives. Should be alright. Who's gonna know? So then I found myself being the punk on an all fifteen-sixteen year old hot and horny as hell thalidomide holiday in Corfu with thirty other thalidomides, none of whom else had had sex yet because we were last in the pecking order. You can only imagine what happened. We went absolutely ballistic. I mean, we ploughed through each other, ploughed through each other, I outed one of the carers as gay, because I knew my Dad and I knew gay men and I went, you're gay aren't you. and he said yes, he said, please don't tell anybody, I'm looking after underage boys, you know. I can tell you're cool, but they aren't. I said alright, but you have to take me to a gay club at some point. Is that alright? I said, I'm not gay but I wanna go. I wanna go out drinking with you. So that was quite fun.

In a way I was trying to dob (bond?) with my Dad or something weird, I dunno what was going on. I wanted him to know that I was totally down with him being gay, because my Dad was gay and that was fine, you know. That's what I remember from that holiday. That was my first, and I threw Simone in the pool, I was a bit boisterous, I threw Simone in the pool because she was a bloody nag. And Simone's ne.. I mean we're still, still all know each other, that first group of fifteen year olds,

we all still know each other. And I'm the best of friends with Simone now. because she was the first of the other flids to politicise and call herself a disabled person, I'll never forget it, because the rest of them, viewed through a Marxist perspective, the collective disability social construct meaning anger that thalidomiders suffered was bought off by the state. Why should they bother about being able to get on a bus? Compensation, a house and a Volvo, that's the average thalidomide.
(0:08:05.9)

I mean a Marxist perspective would go, yeah, your anger's been bought off by the state, you know and there's truth in that because very few thalidomiders are political disabled people. Anyway, um, so yeah, that

A: Being a little bit older than you, I can remember the thalidomide..

M: YES!

A: ..thing when it all broke

M; When it was that for everybody else..

A: Being like a big thing in the papers.

M: Oh yeah!

A: But one thing that I remember is, when you were all, I dunno, about three years old or so, there was all this stuff about people inventing these incredible clunky arms..

M: Ah, yes

A: ..and legs and things. Which as far as I'm aware, nobody, I dunno anybody affected by thalidomide who uses that stuff.

M: I know two people who still use them. And we tease them about it, because it's purely cosmetic. He's a wheelchair user, he still wears his false legs. Bless him!

A: What I wanted to ask is, is that something that you all each arrived at individually?

M: Yeah. Yeah, there was no collective 'let's all chuck our arms in a bonfire', you know, moment.

God I wish there had been! Wouldn't that have made a great scene? It would have been exhilarating. But no we all came to it personally and privately and in different ways. My experience of that was, I'd have six-month check-ups with Dr Fletcher at Roehampton, because that was the catchment area. Lot of us went there. um and it was for the ministry of whatever, the British Medical Association, that's it . Um and one, it was stuff like seeing if I could pull my foreskin back because I would need to be able to do that for washing and just see with stuff if I could do, and then one day I was brought.. I wrote a whole poem about this called the Roehampton Collection years and years ago. I was taken into a different room one day by Dr Fletcher, with both my Mum and Dad, who didn't usually both accompany me. And there were all , the array of every prosthetic arm you've ever seen around the walls. And we're gonna try and fit you with one of those, I said, why? He went, well we.. thought you might like that. No. No, I don't want that. Don't want that at all. and they went, okay! and just walked me out of the room, And that was that. I obviously had quite liberal parents.

Dr Fletcher, later in life, cause I, we became quite good friends. I visited him when he was a sad lonely old man, a few times had dinner with him in winter, Um, he

said he knew all those limbs would be rejected. He know straight off the bat. They were useless, and functionality was everything and cosmetic appearance was nothing. And he said, he knew that they' d all be rejected and live under a bed sooner or later. But he had to do the bidding of the British Medical Association, he had to try his best. You know the Weeble legs, the ones that Eddie Freeman, no arms no legs had, which were literally a platform where if you wobbled correctly you could sort of inch forward by going side to side. God help you if you over-wobbled, cause you just fell forward, flat on your thalidomide nose. Cause you had nothing to break your fall. How terrifying must that have been?

Em, I didn't have them as a child, so when I, I came to my false arms for a cabaret gag as an adult. And I still use them. For gags, on stage purely and simply only. Because they render you useless, you can't do anything, you might only have one finger, but you can work the front door with it, not with your prosthetic arm on you can't, you can't do anything. So they are utterly ridiculous and comedic. And we've all got one, we all laugh about it and say I'll bring one to the conference, bring my old one from the seventies to the conference to point at you. We, we, there's been a lot of cathartic humour around them. But t the time, I mean you ask any of those kids, every one of us has a hideous teenage school story. You know Mary Duffy's is probably the worst, because she had no arms and was given the awful gas powered ones. She went to St Joseph, Mary and the Doodah, you know Catholicity nuns' school in southern Ireland and her fucking arms, the gas ran out and she was in its full extension mode, she spent the day in crucifix position. Can you imagine that, having to go sideways through all the doors that day. Wasn't allowed to take them off. Now *that's* trauma. (0:12:53.2)

That's trauma. She's got a poem about that, too which em when we get to it is the thing that made me realise that I was a disabled person. You know, later on in 1991, we all have one person, don't we, that unlocked us, our coming out if you will. What happens is you get the seed, you get stabbed with the seed and you can only

ignore it for so long, cause it will grow, whether you like it or not. And she stabbed me with the seed, with that poem call 'Whole', about how she saw herself as a whole person, not unfinished. Mary Duffy was ahead of her time, you know Alison Lapper gets credited as doing the Venus de Milo thing, but Mary Duffy was doing it ten years before. It's just nobody noticed. Nobody was at that ICA gig where the completely naked Mary Duffy walked on stage and did all this weird performance art, testimonial stuff, nobody understood what she was even doing, nobody could even describe what it was as a genre, and she came and went and went, fucked off back to southern Ireland and became a figurative painter, which she is to this day, living the really beautiful, lives on the cliffs, all of that business, chose a different lifestyle and she's happy.

But um I went to the first ever, because I rather enjoyed those thalidomide holidays, truth be told they were basically a debauched party. And then they decided they would have their first international thalidomide meeting, united international thalidomides, UNITH. and back in those liberal funding days we had our first international conference in Nejmejen in Holland in 1991. Now I'm a big marijuana user, and so my, all my bells were like dingalingaling, my god, a conference in Holland. Forget, smoking hadn't been banned anywhere by this point, everyone was still puffing away inside living rooms, inside meetings rooms. So I spent, I smoked cheroots of marijuana throughout the four day conference, annoying all the officials.

But I met this one woman who was kind of interesting. I saw this poem called 'Whole' and it, it er injected the seed of disability into me and I thought I should go and find this woman. And then we spent like a day and a half together, she basically hauled me over the coals. The trouble with you is you don't even think you're disabled, you don't even know what disabled is. I mean I really got it in the neck, cause I was being Flash Harry in the band, you know with the dreadlocks. And she's sort of like, you're one of us whether you like it or not, you're gonna have

to come to terms with it and I'm gonna make you right now. And she did and em I have her to thank for that, for ever and ever and ever. And a great conference,

There's nothing more fun than going to a, the Dutch are a little bit weird, they're super liberal but they're actual, a lot of them are real body fascists underneath. And so you go to a pot shop, buy some pot, there's the three stoned guys in there like there always is. And they're just so fascinated by the way I rolled the joint, not even pretending to not be fascinated, just being fascinated and I'd like, I'd finish my joint and go alright lads, see you later. They're like uh what yeah, bye, thinking what the fuck was that? I'd come I'd go (..) and they're can I come with you? I wanna get stoned too. So I spent all week bringing people in and I tried to design it so they'd have smaller and smaller limbs throughout the week. So that by the end I brought a guy with no legs and no arms into the, into the shop. It was almost, that was fun.

But the serious thing about that was Mary Duffy got me my disability consciousness. I saw it as a social construct, I realised I was one of them, and when I came back to London I had a fire lit under me like you've never seen. It's probably when you and I met, roughly around the first time, it was at that point I just sought out and joined the disability movement. I'd been on the Mandela, the abortion, all those marches, I'd been on the poll tax riot, I was of that ilk. And now I had my.. and then, and finally I realised what my anger was all about. I have a, dead now, my surrogate mother was a Marxist feminist, lived at the other end of Brixton, in Villa Road, in the squats. And she said, she said, it was one of the proudest days of my life when you invited me on your first demonstration. Because she'd always been (..of me) and I took her to that one where we shut down Parliament Square, do you remember it, years ago, we shut down Parliament Square. Strategically, like the whole of Parliament Square was shut down and gridlocked because of us campaigning for accessible public transport. And em, I had the fire, I had the fire by that point and Mika saw the fire in me and thought good,

my work is done! Cause she said, she'd just been waiting around to see when I was finally gonna realise I was disabled and what was I gonna do about it. Disabled in the social context.

And so, I came back from that, going yeah Mika, I'm disabled and she's like are you? Interesting! You're angry? Oh I see. You know, thinking, it was lovely, it was lovely. And em it all came to a fruition because at that point the Rights Now Campaign and DAN, Direct Action Network were cooking and we had a couple of demos in ninety-three, I think. And then there was the big weekend in Wales in '95. And by this point I'd become friends with a guy called Nigel, who Vicky was good friends with for a while, gay guy, lived in Peckham.

A: I remember Nigel.

M: More trouble than he's worth. That's why we all remember Nigel, but are not still friends with Nigel. And he needed a companion 'cause he wanted to go on a three day demonstration in Wales. And I thought I'm going too! Patou, my wife at the time, herself a revolutionary in her own way, said yep let's go. And we found ourselves in someone's Ford Escort, four of us packing up to thing. We done the buses on the first day, it was the trains on the second or the coaches or something, found myself in a car park having to get everything out of the car repacking, get everything back in the car for the next demonstration and next to me was another car doing exactly the same thing and there was a woman there and we went hallo and that was Liz Carr. And that was the first time I met Liz Carr, because we were both doing the repack in (..) demonstration. '95 that was.

Now once I'd found that community.

A; Now what demonstration was that?

M: Dan, Direct Action Network. Three-dayer, shutting down all the forms of public transport. The Welsh choir came out, the whole choir, 25 of them came and sang in solidarity.. Only in Wales, right? Only in Wales. Housewives, I mean everyone was on our side. Half the cops were on our side. It was nuts. But then, you know, the Welsh are a community-minded people, aren't they? More so than us Londoners.

Um but once I'd found the Disability Rights community, it was a combination of angry outsiders who didn't trust the system, people who wanted extreme political change based on their idea of social justice and disabled people. and there were all the things I liked. Punk and stuff was just a matter of taste, there was enough common ground. You know, And.. because a lot of things were going in parallel.

Um I had rediscovered my desire to act by that point. My Mum had said there's this play on, called Ubu, at the Oval House. Might go, wanna come? Disability company, dunno. I didn't do disability in those days as far as my Mum was concerned. So, looking back, they were obviously like, it's about time we got this fellow to his natural home. My brother came, I mean thinking about it, it was probably a pincer movement on my family's behalf, cause I was, the second that show opened I was hooked, the second, I just remember thinking, what the fuck is that guy saying? Jamie Beddard, cake in his mouth, cerebral palsy, didn't give a toss. I looked round, and here's the big thing, no-one was embarrassed. This was the big thing to me, they were all able-bodied people, mostly, they were laughing, and enjoying it. Disabled people don't necessarily have to be embarrassed by being on stage. They can be good, and entertain, and hit all the marks that an entertainer needs to hit. I do want to be an actor. I don't want to be in my band any more. Knock knock knock Graeae.

And that was all within twenty-four hours. I told my band, I said I've got to go off

and be disabled now and they went, we were kind of wondering when that was gonna happen. We kind of sensed it for the last two or three years. Away, go, be happy. That was The Grateful Dub, who were beautiful, three of them are dead now, ravages of lifestyles, em and so once I'd arrived at that .. I had a bit of embarrassment between my like punky , musician group that I'd been with for fifteen years, that community, very much who rejected all politics as being PC bollocks and so to say I'm disabled and proud sounded a bit like PC bollocks to them. So I lost maybe fifteen percent of my friends at that point. No, I just didn't bother calling them anymore because I knew they'd be thinking it was PC bollocks. And they didn't call me to tell me it wasn't.

But I gained so many more people that it was more than worth it. And, you know, the joyous ones of, ones who embraced the disability movement and went well., I, if you're, of course, I don't know why I hadn't thought of it before now. But of course we should all be fighting for this. You know, those were my favourite people of course. And em, you know I felt myself very blessed. And it's a community that is, you know, now, twenty years after that, um and I'm living largely in New York, extends all over the world. It does, it's a commonality. And yeah, they do it a little bit differently in America, a little bit too much arts and disability, and not enough disability arts, but backstage, talking to the arts and disability dancer person, we've had roughly the same experiences in theatres, you know. We're both actually striving for the same thing. They just want the dance to come first and the politics to come second, you know that's the inherent difference, isn't it?

Um, but , so yeah, that sense of community, I've always been and needed to be part of a community and floated from one to another er what's good about now is that I'm part of the disability community, several communities that have crossed over.

When, you know, jumping way forward, when I arrived in New York in 2008, having done a lot of sideshow stuff, we can go back and talk about that, but when I started

being Mat Sealboy the burlesque MC in downtown New York, they loved it,. And then 3 years later when I said you know there's this thing I don't agree with and I'd like you all to not agree with it as well, they all went with it. They didn't even think twice. And it's extremely gratifying that that happened. And I know now that if, if I needed to call a demo on a shop, I know I could galvanise thirty people. and I know only five of them would be disabled. It's pretty good. Not bad. Not bad at all. But then what we're witnessing right now, Allan, are re-politicisation of the youth, I believe. God, It's been long enough coming, innit? There've been times in the last twenty years when I've smashed my head against the wall. But now, they're looking at the shit they've got coming and they don't like it. But there've been several communities along the way..

A; Part of the reason that I wanna do this stuff and like create some history, put stuff into archives and whatever is that, is so that people have got a sense of they're not the first.

M: You know, I look at feminism, and it's a dangerous thing, when you're a fifty-four year old straight white man, to look at feminism when you're being recorded. But I'm gonna say what I think. You know back in the day they said don't do freak shows, it's the pornography of the disabled, and I remember thinking well Andrea Dworkin first wave feminism said, I'm sure I'm paraphrasing, forgive me, all pornography is women hatred. But Camille Paglia, in the late 80's, early 90's came along and went 'ER..let's critique that..and critiqued it. And all I wanted to do was Camille Paglia the freak show, critique the previous understanding of Paul Longmore, you know. And I feel that I did. I probably went too far the other way. that's what happens, isn't it? In life, reactions, reactions. actions. Um But um when I got po.. so what's ha.. so then, so what happened was there was feminism, right, I remember as a young man in the pub, all us blokes turning round and said to this guy fucking sexist! at one point. And I remember thinking, god we all genuinely thought that. This is where we are '84, '85 maybe. Then we all dropped the ball,

didn't we, cause the work had been done. and the New Lad came. And we still didn't, we just let the ball stay dropped. And then the ladette happened, and that was new feminism. Some of us were like is it? okay, if you say so, and the the ball just kept getting dropped. And the guys were like, so what I can just do what I want again. Great! I fucking will. And guys became arseholes again. And now rape culture and all of this stuff. And I know young women who are so angry. And It's like watching the lesbian avengers again from the early eighties. And its like Wow!, it's a cycle. and everything's different, it's more like a spiral than a cycle, isn't it? 'Cause it's always, it's got an added module on it next time it comes round, cause it's like, for example we live in the post-digital age now, it's like Mr Soandso who said the rapey joke backstage in a club in New York is gonna get outed in Birmingham. Because it was reported on Facebook. That's different. So, I'm watching all these new women have this ferocious new feminism wave coming through. And I, I, I welcome it, I think it's about time that that happened again. I think as an antidote to all this shit. But I think what we as disabled people are currently experiencing is what women and feminism was experiencing maybe fifteen years ago where young women are going no no no, don't need to do all that, we're equal. Are you? Are our wages equal? So disabled people are now like, don't want to be identified as.. I remember Lisa Hammond saying don't say 'crip', I hate that word, I hate that word crip. Because what she meant was it means all you political lot and I'm not like that. Cause my friends don't like political people, because that's PC gone mad. (0:29:08.1)

And this is my connectivity going on analysis. And so, so now we've got our youngsters going no no I'm not one of those angry disabled people that you don't like, I'm one of the good ones that you like, or I don't know what's going on Allan, but I feel that I'm, well you know let's see who gets into power, let's see how many more rights are taken away before we feel the vitriol of the young disabled people again. Because I hope you do. anyway, things go in cycles, big news. Um I've always benefitted from being in community, and always found strength and identity

from being in community. Trying to combine communities is often difficult.

A: Give me an example

M: Well, your punk mates and your disability mates don't always want to party at the same place. Funny, enough of them do. And now, disability's really overcome the embarrassment struggle, I think, recently. Like, everyone gets it, everyone's going to have to move a little bit when the wheelchair user comes through the chocablock door or in the pub, if a few chairs have to get shifted, no-one goes tut any more, they just get on with it don't they? I dunno, I hope so. I think things have changed a bit and that certain aspects of disability access are taken as given by the general public. Which makes us all a bit more, which makes society at large a bit more au fait with the disability community and their needs and assimilate to it a bit. Certainly I've found that with all my friends who, fifteen years ago were the ones that needed telling, they don't need telling any more.

(0:30:52.5)

But um,. really, it's superhumans, er which is the current paralympic ident celebration inverted commas for Channel Four and Alex Brooker, the geezer lad who's disabled is the sum total of the achievements of disability of Channel Four in the last thirty-five years. Which is all that I can see. Then it's a pretty sorry state of affairs isn't it? I've somehow gone back onto one of my horrible and favourite subjects, em, but I unleashed on Alison Walsh recently. Nicky nice new lady at Radio Four sorry can't remember her second name got me, Lisa Hammond, Liz Carr, Shannon Murray and Cherrylee Houston all in the same room at the same time and I got there, and I'd just got back from America, there's all my lovely mates and I got there and someone said the W word at the Walsh and I just, my mouth opened and I unleashed and spewed this vitriol that's been lying in the pit of my stomach for twenty years, Allan, 'cause you can't blame an individual for a society's failings. But you can sure look at the gatekeeper and go 'Why d'you keep it locked all that

time, bitch?' Why? You could have done so much. And at every twist and turn you went yes massa. and now you got in at the Beeb? I just, all those dra.. all the.. Robin Sturgeon has a song, right, Angry Fish, 'All the Things I Could Have Been' I can't even listen to it, Allan. (Cause?) I think of all those things I could have done, all those roles I could have had. all that society we could have changed, all those minds we could have changed, all those careers we could have encouraged, all those awards that would have led to other careers, to other commissions that didn't happen because Alison Walsh is a fucking Tory. Now it's unfair to blame her. But there are lots of people like her. Okay, it's really unfair. You know what? I admonish myself for blaming the gatekeeper of the little slit in the wall when I should have been having a go at the wall. I do. I apologise, Alison. But when I've got nobody else to be angry with... When I did American Horror Story: Freak Show several million disabled people saw themselves reflected for the first time on television in a long time. They don't have short arms, they weren't in a freak show, but they saw themselves in a way they hadn't done when they saw A.N. Other person and got told how wrong I was getting it by a lot of people. And that's fine, I understand that, I tried to answer every one of them with a realistic appraisal of how unrealistic the television industry can be. You know.

A: I've tried to stand up for you occasionally.

M: I'm very happy with what I've done. Couple of things I'm ashamed of, but I.. outed myself way back. The poster. some government poster once and I thought,, yeah, no I shouldn't have done that. But since then, I'm quite happy with the stuff I've done, because I know why I'm doing it and can argue it, can argue the case if court.

A: But I just think.. It's like,. when people have got a career to make..

M: Yeah.

A: You've kind of gotta do the stuff that, that , that makes a career and, and the current thing may be a bit shit, but it's, but it's potentially a step along the road.

M; It is. I mean I'm currently having a bit of a mental year, I'm going a bit crazy because um my long shot, outsider, I'll bet on the horse with three legs thing that paid off, the Freak Show thing. I'll stick with the freak show stuff, Sooner or later someone with a lot of money is going to put their money where their mouth is and cast real people in the roles and it'll be high budget. Then everyone, I'll be in it, then everyone'll know me and then I'll get work as an actor. That's my strategy. It has, actually, secretly been my strategy for the last ten years. And it worked, except it didn't work because I just did pilot seasons in L.A., and I'm here to tell you, you may be unsurprised to learn this Allan, I'm ashamed for having forgotten it, they have no intention of giving me a job in Hollywood. I was right for the freak show, but they can't see me as a neighbour or a father or a teacher. No way, No way!

So I got a lot of PC polite auditions where, I knew I was wrong for the part, you still do it anyway, because maybe the casting director, maybe the director, maybe the producer will be doing something else later on and they'll think of you so you have to give a good whack of yourself. But really, you've got me as the guy who meets Joey in the kindergarten and I'm the anal Dad who wants all the kids to learn Chinese to be competitive in a world market, and then I see a spot on his face and wipe it away with a hanky. With my hand, in the first scene, without it being explained on American television. We all know that's never going to happen. I'm fine with that, then I catch myself at two in the morning Allan, stoned off my bonce on the sofa going ' Why shouldn't it happen?' Why am I so laughing, I'm laughing at the ridiculousness of the possibility of that happening. That's how pathetic our situation is. Still. Well, no, just mine. Because it's my weird hand and face and that's a very complicated mid- close-up. If thy guy had been in a wheelchair, no one would have batted an eyelid. So we are getting on.

A: Is this because you're so distinctive? Is it that it isn't like *a* blind man, *a* wheelchair user,

M;: No, it's not.

A: It's Mat Fraser.

M: It's Mat Fraser the exotic. And he only is going to be an exotic and we all have to come to terms with that, so please don't give him a hard time for being in the freak show thing. You know, he tried to get in the normal things, they didn't want him in them. You know. What else can I say? You know, I wanted to be in

A: I've heard that BBC story, 'Oh, we've done Mat'.

M: Yeah. They have done Mat. That's fine. I mean that's how it is. You know I'm, I'm coming to terms with it all and it's difficult, I'm annoyed at myself for not, for still finding it difficult to come to terms with. I should have, years ago. I came out of the New York, the incredibly successful New York run of 'Beauty and the Beast' on a high, best review from the New York Times of any play ever. sold out, toast of the town. The apex of the work I've done of, of showing a life where disabled people and non-disabled people live together. The apex of the work I've done theatrically in terms of working with Improbable, the apex of my career in many ways as a producing artist, I turned to Julie on the last day and I said I'm the happiest I've ever been in my whole life. And this directly, a month after finishing American Horror Story, or six months after, or a year after, I can say I'm just about as unhappy as I remember being. Cause I'm back in the same place. You know, someone is going to knock me over the head at one point and go Mat, and have you not got it yet? Don't do the telly, do the fucking theatre. Do the stuff you can control, cause the audience love it. And they're growing, just concentrate on that.

But something in me keeps making me go back. Now 'Is that because I went to Kent College?' is my question to you. Is it because my teeth were cut on mainstream ideals, cause I was given, I was in the class where they told us all to aspire to this that and the other and not in a special school being taught to serrate the birthday cards with a scissor like Laurence Clark was.

A: Right

M: Ever tell you that one? He had to serrate the Christmas Cards one year , with a pair of scissors. Great job. He's a PhD now. But em, because it's a curse, Allan, cause it's there. (Sniffs) What? As soon as I sniff it I'm off. And yet, my own career, which is glorious, it's an empire, is standing right there going what are we going to do next? Here's the funding. And I'm like can I have a part in your SHIT drama. Because that's the other thing about pilot series, I'm bending over backwards to find ways of making people feel less problematic with me to audition for their story that dot dot dot next line is an unbelievable fucking pile of shit that I don't even want to be in if I think about it for two seconds. Yet I do, because I want the right to be in it, to be seen in the mainstream stuff, because otherwise how will I and then dot dot dot what I'm fifty four what am I doing, I'm having an existential crisis. I am, no I'm actually at this moment going through it, I broke down about a week ago, told Julie everything, she thinks I should go and have therapy, I probably will. Trouble is, Allan, I don't trust non-disabled people to give me the therapy. How do I know they won't read stuff into it. I'm not putting a blocker up, you find me somebody I'll go. Dominic Davis might be able to help (0:40:27.9)

Anyway. So um , so I'm not happy. I got given another little space at the big table. And you're like, but I'm happier outside playing with my friends. Why do I still wanna be on the big table. And the shitty chair, the shitty chair that isn't

actually really part of the big table..Why am I, why am I doing it? (But I'm asking) why am I doing it? I just don't know.

Meanwhile, I carry on writing a play and a show and I am interested in it and it does feed my soul and it's fun to work with your, your partner. I like working with Julie, we're like Ma and Pa productions sometimes. And all of that's cute.. She thinks I should turn my back on television and not bother with it, she says, Mat this is how it's gonna go, someone will give you a call for something in the next three years. They all know you. They know you're out there, they don't want you in their thing, but then the special thing'll come along and they'll want you in that. And they'll just ask for you. Don't wait around for those three years, go and do something useful. And she's right, of course she's right, that's how it's gonna be, you know. Em, so that's, if I could say to, you know other people out there, don't make that mistake, don't do that it's a waste of your time.. Having said that, I've twenty thousand Twitter followers.

And I go to conventions and I sign my ten by eights at horror conventions for a line of people who tell me I'm their favourite. And mostly, they are fifteen to twenty-five year olds inverted commas misunderstood young woman, the goth in their town, right, no one understands. Mat understands, because he's different. No he fucking doesn't, but okay. And so I get the most delicious cultural phenomenally revolutionary moment where the nervous thirteen year old - I did a lot of kissing and saying I love you on American Horror Story so I was the romantic one - come up to me with their nervous father, who's taken her there, right. He's younger than me, she's emoting in a sexualised, emotional way, she's not coming on to me because she's fifteen and I'm fifty-four and that would be wrong for all of us. But something is going on where she acknowledges my sexuality and she's asking for hers to be acknowledged in the way that young girls do ask, in their wildly inappropriate way that they do, and they don't understand why it's inappr - all of that. And I simultaneously had to give her what she needs, make it okay and

invisibly transmit to the dad it's alright, mate I'm not a paedo, I'm doing this for the cause, right. Get a grip, I know you know that, I know that's why you've brought her here, because you approve of it. I get it. What I'm doing here is going to last her for the rest of her life. and we all know we have to do this. So then I have this interaction with her, and I go and how do you spell Lizzy? And I go Lizzy Hotness or something. Exclamation mark! things. I push it just as much as it's appropriate to push it inappropriately, it's appropriate inappropriateness, cause that's my job. I go away and then that girl in three years time will go to the school prom and she might say to that guy with one arm or the guy in the wheelchair d'you wanna date where she might not have beforehand. And I'm aware that all that is potentially resting on this cultural interaction.

And so, when you say don't do the TV thing, Mat, yeah but when you do then you get it, you get all of this, and that's really powerful. So I've got twenty thousand young women followers, all of whom would have been abjectly embarrassed to meet me before American Horror Story because they wouldn't have known how to shake my hand. And that's embarrassing. Now none of them give a fuck about how to shake my hand, cause they've seen the essence of the human inside. And when you get as an actor to show your universal humanity as a character, what you are is transcended by who you are. and no-one cares what you are any more, because they care about who you are. And the irony of having to wait around for seventeen years in order to portray a freak, to be allowed to show my universal humanity is not lost on me.(0:45:08.9)

But I celebrate it. because I kind of figured it would be that way. I'm sorry, but it has proved to be that way. Because the BBC have done Mat Fraser. So I don't get to be in the detective thing. I get to be in the freak show thing.. and so all the people who think it was distasteful and I shouldn't have done it because haven't we moved on a bit, well I don't know, ask the BBC, is all I can say. and I know, I'm the annoying one, I was talking to Ewan about this, Ewan Marshall. It's like, why can't I

just shut up and stop wanting it to be about Mat. I dunno.

A: (Laughs) Because you're a fucking actor

M: I'm an actor, of course! Yeah, Thing is, I am community, And I do love Ken Loach. And I do sort of want to have the revolution. But can I just get an Oscar first.

AS: When I was first going out with Vicky, there's one time she took me along to a party, it was in the afternoon at somebody's place, drinks, and I was thinking who are all these..

M: Arseholes.

A: Yeah these arseholes. Oh, they're actors, that's okay, I don't mind, that explains it. got it, they're not..

M: It's not their fault, they have to be like that.

A: if they don't look good, they're fucked.

M It was interesting taking to Sheralee, Lisa and Liz, all of whom are in permanent employment on television, and Shannon Murray, who, I don't know if I'm allowed, well this won't come out until after broadcast anyway. But on Dr Who, apparently, they're always talking about this school that's like an offscreen school that everybody went to, that they always refer to. Well now the Beeb are actually doing the series set at the school. And Shannon Murray - d'you know Shannnon? Wheelchair using blonde woman, been around the block, she got a regular part as one of the Mums. I said who are you, she said I'm basically Buffy's Mum, it's like magic school. And I'm like one of the main girls' mums. But she's a wheelchair

user and that's a move forward.

A: Absolutely.

A: I noticed, watching the West Wing, there's a really determinedly liberal show, Vicky's got used to me suddenly spotting something and like pausing it and like do you mind if I rerun this, because there, we must have watched this, I dunno, ten times but suddenly what! and there's this brief moment where somebody comes through a door and there's like an extra outside to make it look.. But the person outside you glimpse for just that much is a wheelchair user. And they've actually gone to.

M: Makes a huge difference..

A: To put disabled people into it..

M: The thing is..

A: In an ordinary sort of way..

M: I think what we've done is, we've got it slightly wrong all of us, which is that we are complaining from the wings of non-inclusion instead of waiting until we're centre stage and going 'See how good it is?' Don't you want some of this? Because, here's the thing, I know, I know now, because I've seen real television addicts and how they respond to me, they lose their shit over me, Allan, they lose their fucking shit. It's the most exciting thing that ever happened to them, meeting me. Only because I was on TV. In that weird exotic role in the weird exotic tv series. What I know from this is two things. If ever there were proof that both disability and celebrity are social constructs, it is when one supersedes the other, just because you're on TV, right, isn't that proof? Isn't that all the proof you need? Um, and the other thing is that the first people that go there, that it's well written,

well directed, well acted and has some exotic looking people, disabled people in the leads and they let them go NO I WILL NOT and cry and do the big fucking stuff, the big dramatic stuff, the first one that gets through the gate on that will win all the awards. And then all the floodgates will hopefully open. This is the plan, right? And I very much want to be a part of that movement. What's annoying is that, since American Horror Story I've talked to the entire writing team at Twentieth Century Fox and I have had, I have had meetings you can only dream of...that Ridley Scott film, and they don't get it. I can see they don't believe me. They don't understand. And they're wrong! I said look, you're all, no offence but scrabbling around looking for a hit and it's all in front of you. And none of you have got the guts to have it. All you have to do is do it and you'll have the hit. I can prove this, here's what happened to me, this is why I know it's true. Who here wants to be showered in gold dust? And they just laughed at me You're laughing now. But can we all just remember this moment. Don't know when, but it's all going to come home to roost everybody and I want us all to remember this moment now. I said this and you all laughed. And then thought Mat, don't be militant in America as well, shut up. that's what happened here, isn't it, oh no, we've done Mat. So I try and keep in the background. (0:50:54.8)

A: It's like, David Bower in Four Weddings and a Funeral, the most successful British film ever,

M: He had like the cameo heartthrob part, all the girls fancied him

A: He didn't get a single what

M: I know.

A: Not a single fucking thing.

M: I know, I know. You know, Lisa Hammond, we all knew she should be in EastEnders, but it took fifteen years for them to realise.

A: Yeah, right.

M: I mean, it's her natural home, isn't it? She is an East ender. But, you know, I, I, I don't know what to say, you know. And I look at Clarissa.

A: Is she in EastEnders now?

M: Yes.

A: I have a policy of not watching soaps that have stopped using me.

M: Fine. Every time I turned on for the first year, her occasional line would be somebody else's plot development: 'What, Allan? Yeah, I saw him going off with Dave', you know, lines. And then the last time I saw her, she went 'I need this baby'. I thought fucking hell, what's going on?' And she's, her stepbrother is Richard Blackwood, the black actor. And her character's decided that, tick-tock and all that, better get on with it and the only person who's safe to impregnate her is her stepbrother, cause it's okay, cause they're not actually connected by blood. So, we've got that whole storyline and like.. So you've got the dwarf girl asking the black guy to impregnate her for the surrogate baby. Please don't look at the Twitter comments on that one. Cause I'll guarantee, ain't gonna be nice. Yeah, no, she's in the thick of it.

A: Brilliant!

M: Finally. In the thick of it. Meanwhile Liz on CSI.

A: The things about other people's storyline, you shouldn't worry too much about that because, if you're watching the whole series and that's all she got, then fair enough. But I know from writing for EastEnders, there are certain aspects of plotline for that half hour you're dealing with like two or three key, key sort of plot developments. But there'll be other stuff that's gonna come up in the next.. and like, you need to keep the balls in the air.

M; Oh, absolutely, I did First City for 6 weeks, the Irish EastEnders and that's, the concept's the same, it's all the same.

A: It was really useful for me, discovering how little it takes to keep those balls in the air.

M: Yeah, I bet.

A Just like a sort of passing comment or a..

M; Yeah. But we have come along in leaps and bounds in general, and I still feel part of a community. I straddle the Atlantic now, and the community in America's very different. The actors, you know the sort of disability arts crew, who are very much considered part of the community here, even though we're all split off now into our various places, we all remember when we hailed from the same place. It's not like that in America, it's slightly more fragmented, so we've got Simmy Linton, who would be an equivalent of, say, you, been around since the '90s, um finally got her job with the Mayor's Office in Cultural Affairs, you know but it's taken the whole twenty years journey, you know you recognise that kind of thing. Then you've got the youngsters coming up, just dropping a brilliant piece of theatre, who are like, yeah, I'm disabled, what, it's about me being gay. Oh, okay, wow! I've never seen anything like that, that's brilliant and um it's almost as if they'd skipped Charles and gone straight to William. 0:54:53.3

A; Yes. Let's, can I..

M: I'm terribly non-linear..

A: ..come back a bit. A thing you haven't talked about yet which I'd like to hear is the martial art stuff.

M; Yeah.

A: How did you get into that?

M; Well, Always, I had the picture of Bruce Lee from 'Enter the Dragon' on my bedroom wall along with the Elvis, the three beagle puppies and the lady touching her own bum at the tennis court. The five famous posters from the seventies. So I was always into Bruce Lee and martial arts, always into the sort of mystical fighting, used to love ~David Carradine's series 'Kung Fu'. Would watch that religiously. But no more of an interest in it than that. and then, in 1987, I move to Latimer Road, just below Ladbroke Grove, which at that time was a little sketchy. And the day I moved there, a big gang walked up the road, looked at me, didn't say hello, didn't laugh, didn't do anything, just walked past em. and I thought, big scary gang. Went for a swim that evening and saw an advert for Taekwondo in the local sports centre. Went along, the guy, I didn't know that Taekwondo is the kicking karate. The guy took one look at me and thought ooh, ooh I've got something here. And he did a really sneaky thing, he brought me into the class and he said let's see if you can break a board. And he put one of those easy to break slot together boards up, And I broke it. Like butter. 'You are a natural.' So of course, I signed on in the evening. Somebody wanted me, You know I'm an actor, somebody wanted me. And we found that I did indeed have a natural kick and I was taking a lot of cocaine at that time and one, I came back thinking dammit, I'm

almost as high as I am with cocaine, but this is good for me and the coke's bad for me. And I swapped one for the other, pretty much. I got my highs from martial arts training, that kind of exhilarated adrenalised feeling I got from punk, still, and from martial arts. And not so much the, the, the drugs. Again, you know, that's, if you talk about communities, I'm very community, the second I was in that community I was treated like an equal, because my kicks were just as tough as their kicks. And I could keep people at bay with my kicks and I got pretty damn good at it and that, I got respect as an equal. Not, I will cerebrally recalibrate my brain to assume you are equal even though deep down I'm fighting against the feeling that you're lesser than me because you have less limbs, that's what, you know I just had a dude, you can beat me up as well as I can beat you up, you're an equal. It was not more complicated than that, so it was hugely attractive to me. Because I'm part of another community, there's always been a bit of a fighter, a warrior in me, 'We shall mount the barricades, come on!' For England! or whatever, you know. The thought of being with comrades that do martial arts was very attractive to me. And so I took to it like a duck to water, trained like a crazy man, my ex-wife Patou and I did it together for a long time, until she realised she has her own anger issues and realised that she needed to switch to yoga and not do something that made her more aggressive, whereas I needed the aggression so that it didn't bleed into my real life, cause you know if I don't do my martial arts for month or so I notice that I get a bit more aggressive in my real life.

A; Tell me about that anger.

M: Ball of fury, can't quite, don't quite know where it comes from, you know I'm now old enough to be willing to accept..I will have a discussion about whether I'm angry because I've got little arms. The physical feeling of it. I'm sorry, I can't find any anger for that, because I was born with it. So I don't have grief over a body that I used to have. I don't have none of that born again stuff. So you can say that's a politicised decision but I hold that my anger is about the way I've been

treated because I'm different. Not because I'm different. I look at you, reaching the thing with your bloody thumb and your long arm and I don't think, I don't burn to have that (thing). I don't. I honestly don't. I think I would do it by getting that chair or what have you. It, sometimes I think a thumb would be a useful upgrade, but only because I'm such a (Bicy Backson) and I want more time in life, and it looks like it would speed shit up. But that's the only reason I can honestly say. I don't want long arms or a thumb, I'm fine. Um, but it would be nice to have been treated equally. So the fury comes from not being treated equally, doesn't it? That's where I think it comes from. But like I say I'm old enough now to put my defences down and say alright if you really think, deep down, Howard Stern, that it's because I'm a mutant, let's talk about that. But I can't, I've, I've talked about it at length with myself and I've really gone there and I can honestly say that I don't think it is that. I really think it's the social stuff. That's why..It's a social construct, you know. Yes, I wouldn't have got 'Every Time You Look at Me' if I hadn't been disabled, but if I had got it, as we know if I'd have got one job at the Beeb, or acting, the other ones would have followed, where they didn't because I'm disabled. So that's something that happened, that's some reason to be angry. I mean, gosh I don't know, I dunno. 1:00:56.7

A; You know, I've had parallel experiences with scriptwriting. It's like 'Inmates', 'Inmates' is the thing I look, Look..'Inmates' ought to have been a radio series. The telly, not so sure particularly of that, but by the time we did it for radio, we'd, we worked on it a lot, it was really strong. And we wrote a fucking shit hot um pilot, which David Hunter, Senior Producer in Radio Drama said 'This is the best opening scene I have read in years.

M: Yeah. And then it didn't get commissioned. Because someone lost their nerve?

A; It's because of, of the length it was, because what it was it would be going into

a slot that was equally shared with, between Drama and Light Entertainment, bit of some and bit of the other. So final decision went to the Head of Radio Four at the time. And he clearly couldn't handle it. It's, it sounds a bit like sour grapes to make, but

M: All of our stuff sounds like sour grapes, but we're with each other

A: But, you know when it happens again and again and again. And on this occasion, like after we've had such praise, it comes back and he says it's not funny and the opening scene doesn't work. I'm sorry, the opening scene was fucking brilliant, it was, it was fucking brilliant. That thing with Gobbo on the toilet. I mean

M: It's all about them not having any..

A: But specifically, the thing, I mean you know what happens in scripting, people give you notes and they ask you to fix stuff. When people tell you stuff's wrong, but they're not asking you to fix it, then what they're doing is, they're making excuses. Can't handle it, so find things to complain about. But you're not asking us to fix those things, you're just justifying your own decision. Fuck off!

M: Like Francesca Martin and Lisa Hammond, they were both attendees, like myself, on the BBC comedy course. Ash Attallah was one of the speakers and he'd got Geoffrey Palmer, Commissioning Editor for Comedy at the BBC.

A: I remember him.

M: Rest in peace. He died in a car crash a few years ago. To speak. Now his famous commission, of course, was The Young Ones. Got a nice bit of gossip. Mike, of the Young Ones, we always wondered about Mike, right, it's cause he hated Peter Richardson, Peter Richardson, and they won, and, Geoffrey Palmer came to

almost blows and Geoffrey Palmer said to them all it's the series or it's Pete Richardson, and they were like 'We get Mike in', you know. So that's, that was just interesting, why he always seemed a bit incongruous, should have been the other guy from the lot of them from the rest of them.

A; Right

M; Anyway. And he said, I said, so when you get these scripts, talking about proofreaders, how you know something's funny or not, well how do you know? Well we have readers. But, but but if um, we've just ascertained that some of the writing around disability will be sort of like, not usual, (be new to writers). How many of your proofreaders are disabled? None, he said, and I went, just looked at him said, well that says it all really, doesn't it. How do you expect them to think it's a good idea if they don't have any experience of it and they can't then sell why they think this seeming offensive thing is actually funny, because it speaks to my life. But no sir, it is funny, because this happened and that happened in my life and we all think that. Oh really, do you? Oh, maybe it could be, oh, you know that persuasive moment in the meeting room is just not gonna happen. I mean it still isn't happening is it, you know. So, you know, I mean I'm, I'm fifty-four and I should have calmed down with a lot of things, I mean I have calmed down, I look at Bernie Sanders and the Jeremy Corbyn, you know the political stuff and have extreme feelings about it, but I know I'm powerless, I know it's gonna trundle on anyway and my life will roughly be the same, you know, there'll be worse things, better things, but roughly the same, you know, I'm old enough to know that now. But I'm still, you know, kind of annoyed about how we didn't quite get as far as I thought we would. You now I, I used to joke when I was younger, maybe when I'm in my fifties someone'll win an Oscar, I'm now looking at my seventies, you know. 1:05:42.5

So it is, it is, I am part of lots of communities and I do feel part of a community. For a while there I felt like an actor again. After um, after American Horror Story,

but I..

A: Do you find there are conflicts? Do you find there are times where you have to consciously leave, leave one community in order to enter another, or , or can you just..

M: I can mostly co-exist.

A; Co-exist, right...

A: I think em, no , no I don't know any separatists any more, you know people who want to talk to certain other people, um most people are fairly reasonable, most people are fairly liberal, so most people take on board the other stuff. on the whole. I find.. Um Yeah

A: Tell me about how, let me... (RECORDING ENDS)1:06:34.2

Mat.004

A: (Mumbling) got to get a new.. Thing.

A: Yeah.

A: Tell me about how you became an artist. I mean, we kind of started to cover that.

M: Well, my mum and dad are actor and actress, my dad died when I was 24, my mum's still an actress. I grew up, people learning lines, people learning songs, actors laughing loudly because they were a bit pissed, um, I grew up backstage, you

know childcare is free ifr you just get the kid to the theatre and then they have the run of the place and they know where they're not allowed and everything else is okay.

A: Yeah.

M: And you learn theatre behaviour. So when I became an actor and I went backstage as an actor it just felt like home. It was weird. So, so, I'm sorry what was that again Allan? I'm thrown

A: How did you become an artist?

M: Yeah. So, the arts were my background, my domestic background. And then my interest, you know, English was my favourite subject

A: Right.

M: Books were huge, I always had two books on the go, songs. I remember that my dad said right, one Saturday when I was nine, we are going to the record shop and we are gonna buy you your first record. I've got to go and get McArthur's Park for your mum, by Richard Hasrris, 1969, what would you like? 'Fire' by Arthur Brown. Because he'd been on Top of the Pops the night before on live TV with flaming antlers that they'd cut away from suddenly and made you wonder what had happened.

A: I am the god of hellfire.

M: That's it

A; Remember it

M: So I was musical and my first musical choice was outside of the norm. and I was, you know when a kid is all like unwittingly cool and adults think it's cool. Wow, you like Motörhead and you're six or whatever, you know, people thought it was cool that I liked Arthur Brown, So I suppose I was encouraged in that vein um I would listen to John Peel, punk was huge to me as it spoke to me, it was, it was a music that didn't require me to be able-bodied. Not that the other stuff did, but somehow I'd decided that it did, you know. Em, yeah I know why I'd decided that it did. Because at discos I wasn't welcome.

A: Right!

M: Because I looked wrong. Several times bouncers wouldn't let me in. And they're like, no offence mate, but you're gonna put some of the customers off, so sorry, not tonight, you know. They'd think they were being liberal and nice about it, but that's not the message you receive, you know. So disco, you had to be body perfect to be disco. And punk was the antithesis of disco, so of course I leapt at it, it didn't require me to be anything other than myself. With an added safety pin. Very easy. 0:03:04.7

Um..yeah. Em, arts were a way of expressing myself where I could control the expression in a way that I couldn't.. Plus I was shit at maths and physics, I mean *shit* at maths and physics. I wouldn't say I'm dyspraxic, but I shut down when you over-number me, you know. I had to go into the thick class to do maths, to just scrape my GCSE.

A: Right

M: Um, em I just took to the arts, I've always been, I've always seen, I'd been watching, given my mum and dad notes on their acting since I was ten. (Saying) you forgot that line there mum, and when you looked at the thing it was obvious

that, you, you know, in that childlike way that you do. So it's just been in my world. It didn't occur to me I would do anything else, I think. I mean I do remember the weirdest careers.. Cause you have it, what, six weeks before you leave or something, your careers advice meeting, which was with the chaplain, God knows why, who didn't know what to say.

A: Yup

M: And I said, I'm in a band. And he went '...very good'.

A: Laughs

M: And that was about it, I think. Yeah. So yeah the arts were an obvious to me, they didn't, you didn't, you needed, you didn't need to be as able-bodied to do the arts. Obviously all the regimented stuff was out, wasn't interested in any of that, politically I was left-wing, arts people seemed to be the only people expressing their left-wingness in the late '70s. So I went that way. But I mean you know, probably because of my mum and dad, wouldn't you say? I mean like, their go-to leisure activity were other arts pursuits.

A: Yup

M: So I grew up listening to their records . Then my stepfather came along, who was a musician.

A; Right.

M: And he brought his record collection with him. That was mind-blowing, he had like Captain Beefheart and Rick Wakeman and just all manner of seventies overblown weirdness. Um, so it was once infected that was it, I think. Plus, punks

liked me. I remember very early on at fifteen my lovely history teacher, 'cause I was a boarder in the last year of my school, 'cause when we moved to Wales I had to do out Kent College for a year as a boarder. Um, and I asked to go on a CND march, but I needed an exeat, something called an exeat.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

M: Um which meant you could go away for Saturday, um and he because he'd been on the CND march in the '50s, saw it as the natural progression of. And it was Rock Against Racism.

A: Right.

M: And racism was really important to me. And he could see that, he could, I could see him thinking I want to encourage this boy's politics, I'm going to give him the exeat. So I got my bus ticket and I went to the Rock Against Racism march, had my first Special Brew, remarkably strong lager, totally overwhelmed me as a young fifteen year old. Marching, I'm like half falling over. And the truck comes past with a punk band playing on the back. And the lead singer just leans down and gives me his hand, cause he just spots me straightwaay as someone who needs a hand, and yanks me, and pulls me onto the truck and I spent the second half of the march to the gig on the back of the Ruts' DC Truck. Malcolm O committed suicide the following year. Amazing! You know.

So, when you know those are the people looking out for you, you're like, I know my back's turned and I know there are people looking out for me but they're probably that kind of people. You do feel awfully looked after.

A: Yeah.

M: You know, in a way that's like ah! This is my family, not all those horrible people at school, you know, who you didn't choose to be with, we don't agree with your stuff, I remember talking to Wheatley, who must be in the Tory government. He was right wing even then and I couldn't get my head round a fifteen year old right winger. 0:07:21.3

I couldn't get my head round it. What possible interest have you got in being right wing. But of course, familial interest, his dad and his dad before him and all he had to do was cross the i's, dot the i's and cross the t's of the script he'd been given and he would end up in parliament. Or the stock exchange or what have you, You know. And I couldn't..yeah, so those are my communities, the lefty-arty ones. And, and and it's natural, isn't it? Do you know any right-wing cripps? I don't. I don't know any disabled people who are out proud and pushing for more inclusion who are right wing. Apart from maybe Tom Shakespeare.

A: Oh you bitch!

(Both laugh.)

M: He's not right-wing, it's just that, I was at a disability conference in New Zealand in 2009 where he was like, come on it's about time you(?we?) moved on from the social model and did this whole, like, let's call it diversity thing. I went straight from there to work for the British Council in Namibia. It was hell, Allan. To a small outpost in Namibia, where the disabled people would come to the small town to try and live in the institution because if they didn't they'd be killed in their village because they were the work of the devil.

A: Yes.

M: Four days separated those events. And, you know, you just think wow disability

means something very different in different parts of the world. You know, Tom.. Probably flew first class, university probably paid, blah de blah de blah, that's all fine, he's doing hard core critical thinking around disability. The sort of stuff that'll be policy in 20 years' time. Great, I get it. But four days later I was with people who were making wooden prosthetics in an outhouse in Namibia, going please can I come and live in the institution.

Allan (..)

M: 20 to four.

A: Is it really?

M: I talk the arse off a donkey.

(Mat 005 is repetition of Mat 004)

Mat 006

A: Yeah. That sounds good. Yeah. Yeah.

M: Okay, fine. So yeah, um, can't quite remember, yes I do remember what happened. So at the time I had really long dreadlocks. They were over two foot long, crusty was the fashion at the time and I very much looked crusty, the drummer in the reggae band, living in Brixton blahblah blah.

A: Could I just interrupt there and ask you a question?

M: Yeah.

A: Did you have a conscious move from punk to crusty, and if so what did that involve?

M: No, Punk turned into crusty like, most crusties had been punks, It's what kind of happened to punks. Their sort of antistate stance sort of imbued by years of Tory rule backing off into a squat, smoking too much pot, growing your hair, just the next generation, hippies for a nineties generation. Basically no difference, right.

A: I remember them well.

M: Anyway, I do remember, I know we've already covered when I cut off my dreadlocks.

A: No we hadn't.

M: Okay. That's coming. So anyway I said to the band guys I've got to go off and be professionally disabled. They said, collectively, so to speak, we were wondering when that was going to happen, kind of sensed it. So off I went and they got another drummer and everything was fine. Um, and I, I asked if I could audition for Graeae. Ewan, I.. Ewan said yes, and I thought well, they're gonna imagine, cause I look like, I looked like a terrible crusty hippy, that I'm incapable of rigid disciplined British drama. So I learnt the Captain's eulogy from the play Privates on Parade, terribleh, awfully terribleh sad, the private, you know, awfully posh eulogy, quite funny, well written, and channelled my father, basically, who was that guy, who was the posh actor. Well, posh-voiced actor. And, Um NO! That's right I didn't. I had that in reserve and learnt a soliloquy, did one of Shakespeare's soliloquies, but forgot the last two lines. And of course anyone who knows Shakespeare knows how many lines a soliloquy is. So at the time I could tell, in retrospect, Ewan knew that

I hadn't completed, but just said why did you choose that particular soliloquy? And then talked and then said would you be prepared to cut off your hair? I said yes to whatever, I was in an audition, I said yes to everything. And then thought yeah, no that is gonna be very limiting. It's me, Mat. And it came, and I went to a funeral in Oxford and I got out of my funeral clothes, had my joint, I was in Oxford station with my bag, now back to looking like the crusty that I was, but it was also all this disability politics was bubbling up and it was by this point it's akin to it bursting, trying to burst out from my skin and I'd become bloated with the pressure. This is a bad metaphor, but I'm going with it. Um. And it just needed an opening to just ALL of this stuff come out. And it just was looking for somewhere. And there were these two sexy girls on Oxford station and I saw them look, and I'm an expert at the looks. And they looked and there was an initial disturbance from my hands, which was superseded by their wonder at my amazing dreadlocks and how crusty, how damned crusty I looked, I looked like a real one, because my clothes, I had been one for four or five years and so it looked, I didn't look like I'd just put it on at a shop. And their look changed from disturbed by the disability to admiration of the fashion. And in that instance I said, I have got to get rid of all of this I don't need this fucking identity. I need *my* identity, I'm fucking disabled damn it. I'm not like that. It was a huge moment for me. And I said to Dylan, Mika's son, I've got a razor, come round and cut off my dreadlocks. And er, a couple of my mates turned up, turned it into a bit of a sess, one of them filmed a bit of it, (sawing noise) at the root, got rid of three razors trying to get rid of my dreadlocks. All their expressions were beginning to change, I refused to look in the mirror until I was done. And then I looked in the mirror. Now you've gotta remember I had been this person for twelve years, I had grown into this person from being a punk. I wasn't disabled yet, properly, but I looked in the mirror and, it happens to a lot of people that the long haircut, I didn't know who I was. I didn't have a person to put a frame round the image that I was looking at. And I had to physically fight the physical desire to run into my bedroom, lock the door and not come out again until everyone had gone away. And I could feel it really bad, a guy had actually had a nervous breakdown in

my flat a year before and done exactly that, so I guess that I was using that in image and I was, stood there and told myself no, Mat, stay, the fuck go back in the living room. And I turned the other way and went back into the living room and went 'I look like fucking Einstein', because all my hair was all frizzy. And, that moment didn't happen, but it really could have. Then it was done, it was done, I had nothing left to be except disabled. And it was glorious. I mean, you know then I became insufferable obviously, you know. Then you met me, and then I met..

A: No I'd met you before that

M: Okay, but what I mean is then I

A: Because I, I can..

M: Dived into the pool of disability.

A; Because I can remember the time when you were going, about to have the hair cut off, where if I could have found the stuff, I, I'd wanted to make a film of it.

M:Yeah.

A: Because I knew that was gonna be a big moment.

M: It was, because I was coming out as disabled, you know.

A: And you'd been somebody who, I remember seeing you before I ever knew you to talk to, just seeing you bombing down Brixton Hill, this guy with arms like this, dreadlocks three feet long flying out from the back. Distinctive even by Brixton standards.

M: Yup. People still remember me. Did you used to have a bike/ did you used to live in Brixton, people say. Yeah that was me.

Anyway, so um, and the other, the other bit of that was, I didn't have anything else to be but disabled and at that point, you know I was reading Sounds, the NME and the Melody Maker were the three music mags at the time. And Simon Smith is, was a disabled artist who'd released his album. And it was, you know roughly espousing rights not charity, um, and the reviewers were really cruel. I mean admittedly his music sounds like Dire Straits and it was in Sounds and they only liked punk and alternative music, so stylistically they were always going to rubbish his album but they said no, you just sit there like a good little cripple and if we feel like it we'll toss fifty p into your cup. And I just lost my fucking shit on it. At that point Clare, I've forgotten her name, but she still works for the women's centre in King's Cross, and did then, and she was one of those antagonists that could see me as a potential ally in the cause and kept feeding me all this provocation to get me more and more annoyed. And she said, have you seen this? 0:08:12.4 Have you seen this review? It's pretty bad, don't you think it's bad? Don't you think we should do something? And I thought yes we fucking should! So Simon got a meeting with the editor and I asked if I could come to the meeting. And I watched - are you alright? And I watched people make excuses and I realised I was a free agent and said 'Can I say something?' I said, you can say all you like about this, but you as an editor have failed your readership and I absolutely ripped him a new asshole. On the level of being a bad editor. Because it was bad to do that. He hadn't read the review, it was offensive, it was ill-conceived and I called him out on it because it was the only thing left. I needed, we needed to win on one point at least. Because they were like, yeah what you gonna do about it kind of thing. So, I felt quite empowered by that. And, then another couple of things happened and I would stop, and say what I thought about it and I thought fucking hell this is.. You I, obviously I was feeling having a voice and finally, you know I had marched for abortion, I had marched for Mandela, I was really really angry. Mika always knew

what my anger was about, she was just waiting for it to spark and light. And then that demonstration happened and I forget which happened first chronologically. But the big demo where we shut down Parliament Square happened. I still had my dreadlocks then. But pretty soon after that I didn't have them any more and I was full-on, disability revolutionary, my poetry immediately became rap because I went, I got pissed off with Johnny Crescendo because I could see he was a bit of a Che Guevara. And I went to..My ego clashed with his ego, nothing more than that, em went to Wales. He was the Che Guevara of the three day Cardiff demo. And I said, because I lived in the world of music, which was hideously disablist, 'We should do one at the music venues' . And he went, no *you* can do one at the music venues, we're doing this. And I thought 'you cunt'. Um, he was right, I was wrong, but I didn't know that at the time. Um, and then, you know, at the cabaret, later on, there he was, choices and rights in our life and, yuo know the famous songs and basically, disability Bob Dylan, I think that's a fair thing to say. But I'm a punk, I hated Bob Dylan, I wanted to hear contemporary music, I desperately wanted the entire world to rock to the disability beat. So I decided in my infinite wisdom to go off and do an entire rap album on my own, thinking that it would be relevant and that the kids would..

And all that happened . I think I refreshed, if you will, some of the message, musically, in terms of the disability arts scene, people rather liked the thalidomide ninja, as I called myself at the time, leaping about doing my kung fu and angrily rapping, then going AAAAAH and being a physical manifestation of fury on stage. And of course people feel the anger and they liked me manifesting it for them, I think in retrospect that's what was going on. I had a ball, but no one was, no one in the real world, the non-disabled world was noticing. And I didn't give my album for review, because after the Simon Smith experience I thought there is no point, they will not understand, this is not for them anyway, this is for the troops. And it was! For the troops, it's just thta the troops were like mmm, what a weird white guy with flippers, rapping, why is that happening, you know. Some people liked it. Anyway,

so that was going on and um disability cabaret became hugely important. We did a few shows together, it was in flux, we were coming out of those first cabarets, the ones that Geof Lawrence and people had done, maybe at Chat's Palace, there's very few..

A; Geof Lawrence?

M: Maybe not Geof Lawrence.

A: Geof Armstrong?

M: Geof Armstrong, I beg your pardon. Slightly pre-me. And then I arrived just as Victory Gardens was happening and we had this weird gigs where 65 pensioners in deckchairs would watch,

A; (Starts to laugh)

M: Would watch disability arts, slightly bemused, but nice enough anyway, you know. And they were glorious days. Er, meanwhile I..I suppose we've got to about 94, 95 now um I got the job at Graeae, I was offered, a role, I auditioned for and got offered a role of Dr Prentiss in What the Butrler Saw, Joe Orton farce. And had my first show. It was really good, I maintain to this day, it's one of the best shows that Graeae's ever done.

A: Yep.

M; Um, very very funny, a blind Dr Rance is genius when he gets the gun out. Everyone ducks of course, because he's blind, you know, it just added to it. Anyway, a woman called Hettie Littleton, who was an agent, had a feeling that disability wasn't being.. and so agreed to take on a disabled assistant, it was a

friend called Alison. And she said, I'm gonna get my boss to come and see the play, put her money where her mouth is. And she basically got blackmailed into it and went and then thought, no, I will take one disabled client, I'll take this guy. And from 'What the Butler Saw', I got, Graeae, like many theatre companies, they get one or two Equity cards a year to give to actors. I got an Equity card! And an agent, from What the Butler Saw. My first professional play. So., 6 months later, my agent got me a job in a fringe production, that had nothing to do with disability. It came and went and nobody really noticed, but that's not the point. I was in an actual play, on stage, as an equal. And it was pretty phenomenal. And then over the next few years..

A Was that the thing at Southwark Playhouse?

M: Yeah. Crazy! Marisol. And you know, that takes us to about '99. Um, I think, yeah '98, '99. Um and I was writing a lot, lots of poetry, lots of rap, did a second EP, was learning the London Arts Board, as it was at the time, funding, learning that whole things that crips, artistic crips, do of sorting out the funding to do your project, doing projects, becoming in ensembles, really immersing myself in disability arts as was the turn f the last two decades. Um, then you know, TV people were sniffing , not sniffing around me, but you know. I don't, I can't, you probably remember it better than me, Allan, that phase, because I wasn't one of the more experienced..

A: Channel Four wanted you.

M; Disabled people able to liaise with their commissioning editors and things, so I just sort of found myself at a table one day, and I don't remember how I got there. And I was the young new crip on the block, shouting loud, cut my teeth in the mainstream, actor parents, well-educated, good communicator. So maybe all those things combined got me to the table, I don't know, but I think somebody was

probably quite nice to me at some point, got me on to a table back in the day when Channel Four were like tarting a few of us around, um and then there was an initiative for presenting. And I still have the tape, Allan, of all the disabled people auditioning to be the presenter for Freak Out, 1999's Freak Out. Made by a company called Rapido, who were obsessed with smut. They called all the men that worked there Rapidophiles. They all say things like have you seen this bit of porn where the man with the ten inch dick slaps it, winds it round the neck of the woman. My wife left me recently, I don't really know why. And I remember thinking, have you just heard yourself, man, you've become a Rapidophile and you don't even know. 16:38.0

Anyway. Channel Four commissioned a company who made Eurotrash to do a fun disability programme, knocking out all the politics because everyone was bored of worthy and the politics. Now I get what they were trying to do, right. I get it. Talk about throw the baby out with the bathwater. They threw the whole fucking family out. I was really desperate to make my mark and get on telly and saw this as a stepping stone. Right? And I fucking went for it hard. I was determined to get that job. I did everything in my human power to get that job, even voodoo. Um, and I got the job. Boy have I got one for you Allan, you probably won't want this on the thing but um..

A: Go for it!

M: So they had two people each time and they'd go look, have a look at all these Barbies, oh look there's Becky in a wheelchair, take the piss out of it all and we'll film it. And they were looking for chemistry. Do you want to know where the least chemistry was? The one where Ash Atallah and Barbara Lisicki had to do it together.

A: (Roars of laughter)

M: You'll get all the resonances of that! I've got it! On tape! Kinda painful to look at. Because there's so much going on. Anyway..

A: Ash should have been a good fit with them. He was somebody else who wanted to do, to make disability television without, without the politics.

M: I think, you know, some of them saw the politics as the reason they weren't getting the commissions. And also what was sort of 'not cool' about disability. And the people who were driving the politics didn't see that that was happening. So I do think there was a space and a time in '98/'99, I do think there was a space for blowing it all out of the water. I don't think that Freak Out was the answer, but it certainly was a catalyst for some change. They made some hideous mistakes, obviously the biggest one being getting Bernard Manning in to do, to do comedy. Um, you know, highlights of the result of that involved Richard Reisers's charming wife, um, calling me, screaming 'You're a racist!' at me at the Graeae 21st party, and I, I lost my shit with her, I took her apart. It was like, just because you guys didn't become part of this, there's no need to call me a racist. Yes, Bernard Manning's a racist. And that was, I realised at that point, you know, they blame the presenter for everything, deal with it, you know, just deal with it. Because that's how it is. You know, the bottom line is if you didn't, if I *really* didn't agree with it I shouldn't have been in it, should I? Anyway, but I was looking at the long view. Anyway, me and Ash..

A: People outside television think the presenters run things.

M: I know, it's weird isn't it?

A: And..

M: But I'd have thought that was going to be the beginning of a beautiful, rocky but hopefully potentially beautiful relationship. It wasn't, and it came and went very quickly. And, you know, I felt scarred afterwards. And I had a bit of a bad rep among a lot of more militant crips. And probably fair enough, you know. But that got me in with Channel Four. And I very quickly went up to factual. I thought nah..And I got asked if I wa.. No that was it, around that time I was doing the freak show stuff. And I'd done 'Sealboy Freak' at Chat's Palace. And then, because I'm good at marketing, and selling, decided to do it at the ICA. And they did like..

A: Tell us a bit more about 'Sealboy Freak'. Tell me in a bit more detail.

M: Okay, so I didn't get, I did an audition for The Bill and they loved me, LOVED me at the audition. I went, they called me in and did ano..,I did two extra scenes, it was all going to kick off. I was going to be in The Bill! And that phone just didn't ring. And I said to Hettie, my agent, call em up, it's been 10 days, should have heard by now. And she said, oh no the problem is that your character needs to drive. I said they probably missed the 'Full driving licence' on the front page of my CV then Hettie, I think they've chosen the wrong excuse there, don't you? Oh yes, I see what you mean, she said. And we both realised that was what we were up against. Me being Mr kneejerk reaction thought, right, that's it, I'm never going to have a career in television, it's all over, fuck them all. And thought, right I'm going to do my own fucking work. And at the time I was interested in freak shows
0:21:24.6

The only time I ever say pictures of disabled people in writing was at freak shows. And they all went, no,no, no, you can't touch that with a barge pole, it's the pornography of disability and at that point I thought of the Camille Paglia critique of Andrea Dworkin's first wave feminism 'all pornography is women hatred'. That was critiqued, I mean I'm not saying it's not, it's just that it was critiqued by the feminist movement, I was a crip, fuck it, I'll critique freak shows. And I found quite the

opposite, I found a much more layered experience of disability, you know, fiscal independence was actually part of this, now hold on a minute, in the '30s everybody. So let's look at this. And I looked at it. And then I saw him. In a picture. A man with flippers. I thought 'Ah, I'm gonna do a play about *him*. Because you know what can never be taken away from me, with a phone call from The Bill, this part. D'you know it can never be given to anyone else, this part. It was because of that rejection of the Bill that I wrote this. So I went in, researched, I went to Coney Island, I met Dixie Zigun, I got a little flavour of that, he's the Mayor of Coney Island, the owner of the sideshow there..

A: I'll get that from you later.

M: Yeah.. I came back, I wrote my play, I asked Ewan if he'd look at it and dramaturge it, he savaged it, I rewrote it, he savaged it, I rewrote it, then we were like let's go and do it at Chat's Palace, did it at Chat's Palace, you know, a sort of fledgling version I suppose. And I, you know people quite liked it. And so I decided to do it at the ICA, rewriting it and then do it in disability arts festivals, nice cheap easy show, just me and a suitcase. Um, so I've sort of ended up doing it around. Then a guy who'd done a documentary about disabled women's sexuality, called Paul Sapin, and me found ourselves talking and he said, you wanna do a documentary about freak shows? And I was like, yes, I do. And we went to Channel Four, he went to Channel Four with me, you know I came in flapped my flippers a bit and said 'Yes, I can speak English' and went away again. And then he pitched it. Three hundred and twenty five grand. That's how much we got. So we made a film.

Channel Four insisted that five grand of that be spent on interviewing the Chapelle sisters, conjoined at the head twins who have nothing as you've, well if you see the documentary it's the weird bit because it's got absolutely nothing to do with the subject. They just wanted pictures of the joiny heads. I'm really annoyed,

because that five granda could have been spent on me interviewing Priscilla the monkey girl and Melvin Burckhardt the first human blockhead, both of whom died at that point. So I could have been the guy to get the last interview from Priscilla the monkey girl, a hirsute freak show performer who was called the monkey girl because she was also African American. And she married the alligator guy. I mean, please! You know anyway.

So we went off and made this really quite Arty film, because Paul's really arty. And in it he said, look, I know you've already written Sealboy Freak. But in the narrative of the documentary if we go to Coney Island and you get inspired to do a weekend, go, this isn't so bad, then you write the thing, then we'll go to Edinburgh and that'll close it. So, you know, little bit of falsity. It was only false by one year. And it was sort of true. We were kind of televising what had actually happened the year before but pretending it was now.

So we did that. And he, you know got the resources and they basically paid for my run, the documentary basically paid for digs and my run, which I did at Theatre Workshop because at the time they were promoting disability artists. And so I ended up doing Sealboy Freak in Edinburgh. As part of, both in real life and as part of the documentary um. And then we did that doc and it went quite well.

A: What was it called?

M: It was called 'Born Freak'. And that came from the commissioning editor. Note to all people reading, who may think that they need to pitch a documentary. Always leave one gap. The commissioning editor needs to feel that they have creatively done something, they love doing the title more than anything. Let them have the title you hate, because it gives you the money. We learnt that.

A; Like among writers there's a thing called the Producer's Mistake.

M: What's that?

A Leave something in the script that really needs fixing. Because then the producer will fix that and not fuck about..

M: With all the other stuff.

A: If you don't put anything in, they're going to fuck about with something else.

M: Like when you're going to Glastonbury, you leave a small amount of drugs to be discovered by the security. And then they take it and you wink and they go, go on then. And they know you're smuggling in far more and three people, but they don't care because you gave them an eighth of weed.

A: Right. 0:26:45.8

M: Anyway, sorry, so I got to that point, 2002 we're at now. Um, and by this point I was living in Teddington with my wife Patou, all very middle class, lots of BBC producers on the platform going into work every morning, I thought I was some television douchebag, um, what was the next documentary,. Trying to get acting work. Couldn't. BBC didn't wanna know for some reason. But bubbling under was Every Time You Look at Me, but I didn't know that at that point.

And then, then I had like two years of like back to back telly. Channel Four decided they wanted me to do voiceovers, so I ended up doing voiceovers for these horrific reality programmes where the typical line would be 'Rachel's really pissed off because Dave didn't put the top back on the margarine'. Really important stuff, right? Em, but they kept me on a retainer, so that they paid me ten grand a year to not do voiceovers for other people. Right? And er then I got a second documentary commission.. I thought I was the dude, you know? And this one, this

one's called Happy Birthday Thalidomide and had a budget of two hundred grand, because it was a year and a half later. And, it was the other story that I had to tell, which was, you know they were still using thalidomide in Brazil, it was used in, this was twelve, however many years ago now, just sniffing around oncology, um you know ten million terminally ill cancer patients being prescribed thalidomide. It was just beginning the trials, now it's proper, you know policy, um and so me and Kit Flitcroft, who was the guy that I met in Richmond who just lived locally, but was a right old rogue. And we went and made the documentary there. So I was doing the voiceovers, I was doing the documentary, was mister sort of factual, disability factual over at Channel Four. Then I got a call from Ewan Marshall.

A; I remember that thalidomide thing. I think it's one of the best things you've done.

M; It's because it's real.

A: The point at which you were talking to the guy who'd taken his daughter's compensation payments to build a swimming pool that she couldn't get into

M: Yeah.. Yeah!

A: You were so close to clocking him!

M: Yeah!

A: You really were. Like, knowing you and knowing ..

M: I was.

A: And..

M: Interesting though, his son..

A: There was all that emotion in it.

M: Huge, real emotion in it. Yeah, but there was real emotion in it.

A: Which gave it real power.

M: I remember it, there was a really weird bit during that, he said look, you know, when you do documentaries, they like to catch the real and if they know you're the sort of performer who can do real and still perform and carry those two things simultaneously, they've got gold because that's the stuff of a good documentary. And he said look, we're going to show you some, the woman in here that we're going to interview is using Thalidomide. It's in the house. And you're going to look at it. And I want it on film. Can you handle it? I said, of course I can handle it, can you handle if I burst into tears or kick the wall, he said well we were hoping for something like that. I said well I can't promise anything, I'm not going to fake anything.

I walk, we go to this house, it's a breeze block shack in the middle of a favela with no windows and a rag where the door should be. Right? This woman is in abject pain, she's got leprosy, right? Abject fucking pain. Only the most heartless thalidomider would resent someone using it as a pain.. She's not going to have kids. Anyway, the camera's on my shoulder, I can feel it burning the back of my neck, you know we walk in, I sit down and they show me the thalidomide. And I'm looking at it and I'm waiting for all these emotions, and they're there but I'm really confused and it and Kit pushes it, it's like so what are you thinking. I was going oh, you know, I was just looking, I just turned to the camera and said well it's not how I expected but it's pretty fucking weird to actually hold the drug, you know...

It was, it was kind of weird, you know, so he caught all those wonderful moments, you know, that are real, and the stuff of real, when it's real the audience feel it. We all get a little chill, you know, it's amazing. 0:31:23.9

Anyway, so, I did that and then Ewan called up and said, yeah, we're gonna do some ten minute short dramas, you're gonna do one with Saffron Burrows. She at the time was this drop dead gorgeous like model. Ended up doing this fun thing which is the classic old wives' tale, urban myth of the guy that finally scores, he goes back to his old estate and the girl that he always fancied is there and she's available and she says how about it and he's like fucking hell I can't believe it I haven't got any condoms. And she goes well go and get some condoms, come back here. And he rushes out not really looking where her flat is in the estate. And it's like the North Peckham Estate or something. And he runs and gets the condoms, turns round and there's just this vast expanse of estate and he has no idea where she lives. The end.

So we filmed that, lots of fun. They all looked at these five to seven different ten minute dramas with all different disabled people in them and thought we'll have the bloke with flippers from that one and the little girl Lisa Hammond from the other one and Lizzie Mickery will write the script. She was delivering lots of dramas at the time and they wrote 'Every Time You Look at Me', and then we ended up being in this one point two million film for BBC 2 called 'Every Time You Look at Me' with Ewan Marshall producing, Ulrich Riley, black director of relationship dramas directing and um we made that.

So that was 2003, I guess it would have come out in 2004. Um, it was Lisa's, I mean it was fine and everything, I'm not knocking it, but I was the reactive person, she was the proactive person in it. Um, but it was good, you know it was a milestone really. We snogged and we made out, so anyone says it's the first kiss,

you're wrong, ours was. Um but they've forgotten it now. It rated as BBC2's highest drama for audience satisfaction that year. Emn, and any non-disabled actor who'd been given the lead in a new film that was that popular would have automatically gone through the grooming station of the BBC, where you would have got your episode of Cracker, your small part in a returning series. And if that worked out well, they'd promote, and if it didn't they'd fade away. But it always happens with ev.. But of course somebody at some point about a year later suggested me for a programme, this is verbatim, and the head of casting said 'Mat Fraser? Oh no, we've done Mat Fraser. Um, very very painful words for me to hear. Because what she meant was we've done his impairment. We've done short arms. I was like yeah, okay, I get it.

A: I've heard that story from more than one person who was at the meeting.

M: Yeah. I wish I knew who that was because, you know, like I (...) To Steve Perret, the school bully, punched me in the kidneys because I wouldn't give him my place at the lunch queue and I peed blood for two days.

A: What , who it ws that said that?

M: Steve Perret. No at school.

A: You were saying you wished you knew.

M: No, I wish I knew who it was because I'd like to go and forgive them.

A: Right. Who it was that said that? Well, Ewan would tell you.

M: Because I'd lke to go and forgive them, because I forgave Steve Perret.

A: Right.

M: For years I harboured the desire to beat the living pulp out of him. And then I thought, what has to happen to you to be the person that punches the weakest person in the school in the kidneys because he won't get out of your way for the lunch queue? How unhappy do you have to be for that to happen? You know and I saw, you know what it is when you suddenly see the bully is actually the bullied, you know and it's his parental upbringing that's the problem. Etcetera.

So. But it really really hurt and I, and it sent me AARGH off I went,. Fuck you, um I toured, I just did disability arts festivals, did a lot of shagging, Allan, for which I'm not proud. You know if I had to meet another able-bodied, attractive, able-bodied, liberal, middle-class girl who was just dying to fuck one of the cripples, you know, I ploughed my way through them Allan, ploughed my way through them. And I feel awful about it, because it was all behind Patou's back. But I had stuff to work out, it's not an excuse, it's just part of the reason, doesn't make it right, it was wrong.

Um, so I was doing that, honing my skills, I wrote the follow-up hit, 'Thalidomide the Musical', it was at that point I was nurturing the Arts Council, I was learning they like to develop an artist, so you've always got to put in slightly more the next time. I did, we had a reasonable success with what was, had unbelievably bad taste horror comedy musical. Um, you know they did a mini-tour of studio theatres and the like. Um and, where've we got to there, it's about five.

And I was rather unhappy in my marriage, it has to be said. We'd moved to Teddington and all I had to respond to as an artist, I had to come home before the party was finished, because you'd get the overground train to fucking Teddington. There was no 'I'll just take the night bus home', there was no night bus. My whole life stopped at eleven thirty. And you know, all the good talking gets done at one in the morning. And all I had to respond to as an artist was this kid, twelve year old,

negotiating his motor-powered sports car. And I was dying inside. And Patou, my partner, who was like, 'I want us to move to Salisbury, where I can become a complete ecologist'. Well, we obviously had started to want different things. She also really hated a schmooze party. And you know what a schmooze party is, it's a party where you only go because you hope you might meet that director or that producer. And it's false and it's horrible, but it's part of the business. My ex-wife is not a liar, she can only speak the brutal truth to people's eyes. It's part of her charm and I love her for it. But she became a liability at those parties. She'd get drunk and say what she really thought about the propaganda spewing out of our mindfuck screens as she sees it. That's not gonna help me get a job.

0:37:54.3

A: Yes

M: So, all of that was going on. Um, we had a couple of ruffles in the relationship. Then out of the blue I got asked to be in a play about a thalidomide.. a failed thalidomide cabaret singer. In New York. So of course I went. As a sideline to this, my cabaret work, which I had been continuing, and I'd gone into, I'd left disability cabaret behind because one of my friends from Live Art had said oh they need a host and I've suggested you. What is it? It's for this new burlesque show. What's burlesque? 2003. Um, ended up, I was like hooked, empowered sexy ladies calling themselves feminists but I got to look. And, you know, it's a celebration of, you know, wobbly bits and real women and not the Cosmo ideal and - kind of fitted in with my aesthetic. Um and it was a real fantastic refresh. So I sudden.. And I was quite good, and they quite liked the sort of irreverent cripple guy. And then before I knew where I was I was regularly hosting burlesque shows in, in London, because, because burlesques just hijacked cabaret overnight it seems to me.

So that's my background. So, and it's not that well written this play, the Flid Show,

I'm like, a Canadian, how dare he, he can't use that word. Anyway, I read it and I thought no, no this is rather good. It's about a guy who, when he sings songs from 1962, the year he was born, he uses, his Mum committed suicide from the guilt and his sister was his carer, but he actually doesn't need the help, he just likes the routine. And then she introduces him to her best friend who's a a nervous doctor. And they have a mad love affair. Then she prescribes thalidomide to a young cancer patient. And he freaks out. Then he comes back. And then she goes you know there's a vigil in Germany for all the thalidomiders, I've been asked to speak at it, I think you should come. No, I never will. And of course the conclusion is he turns up, he walks onto the rostrum behind her while she's doing the speech and takes over and everything's lovely. The end. Okay? 0:40:02.6

Um, I thought it was a little cheesy. Alison Wilde, who came to see it at the time, who happened to be in New York, said, you created a new model of disability, the tragedy model.

Anyway, so I did that. And I met Julie. And, you know, I fell instantly in lust. We didn't do anything, we met on the sta., I was moonlighting and we met on the stage of the Coney Island freak show doing a burlesque show. It literally was the beginning of the Freak and the Showgirl. Um, great show, huge amount of attraction, I must, I know I fancied her. Because I taught her how to do a rear naked choke, which is how to choke someone out and kill them. And I only ever did that with women that I fancied. Um, she is bored in her marriage, her husband is about to come out as gay and she suddenly meets this really articulate English guy who teaches her how to kill someone and then leaves. She was smitten! I was smitten. I was having a hard time with Anna Winslet, who was my co-star in The Flid Show, because she wasn't sticking to script and it was really pissing me off on tour. And Patou didn't give a fuck 'cause she was looking, too busy, had her nose in Scottish Herbs, the book. Fine. Good luck to her.

Um, so I started saying to Julie, I'm having a really hard time with this, she's like but you're a bouffon and she's a clown. She was speaking my language and we started emailing every day and it's lethal 'cause once you get in the mind it's, it's too late, you know we can all withhold physical attraction but once you get, once you fall for the mind it's over. And I found, I started to find reasons to go to New York, I've got to go and do this show.

And you know then we were sleeping together, then one day she said just stay at my place. And I did. And I spent three nights in her bed at her house and I thought I'm coming home to Patou, this is really dishonest, I have to say the words. I walked, I thought, I always used to get in at six in the morning and be home by seven and Patou would get up at eight, so I thought I'll wait till about three o'clock. But she knew. She's a woman. Intuition. Suspicion. I walked through the door, she said, you're fucking her aren't you? I went, yeah, but more than that, I'm in love with her. And I hated to say that. There followed the worst three months of my life. 0:42:31.7

Pain. The tears, and we hate hearing the people we love cry, but the worst tears I've ever heard are the ones that she cried within the bath about an hour later. That was really difficult. But, you know, life is life. We agreed to split up, I went back to America, this time I stayed for a month, and really liked it. I had visions of living there, but that would be impossible, I came home. She said, okay it's over between us. The next six months we agreed to live together as friends. And then I started to help her with her dating, she was using dating sites but woefully self.. - the potential for harm and trolls and stuff was so awful. She was acting out a bit because she was an abused person, so that was her routine, was to put herself in very vulnerable situations and allow herself to be abused, went to a few sex clubs, did some really dodgy stuff, you know. Um I felt just awful. But then she met this nice guy Stuart, who also wanted to be an ecological hippy. And I said no, this guy's quite nice, he's alright.

Anyway, I kept toing and froing and then one day she said can he move in? You're in America all the fucking time. And we'd agreed to sell the house, but house prices were really bad and we were gonna wait for a year. So I said okay. So Stuart moved in to that house and I offloaded the last of my guilt and I went to live with Julie. So around this time I wasn't doing anything artistically, 'cause life was getting in the way bigtime. So I was trundling on, doing the odd, you know cabaret gig or, I mean, I did a cage fighting documentary in 2004, which was a hundred and ten grand (a year life?) after the two hundred gran one. And the guy, who I loathe, Harry Lansdowne, he's now head of programming for BBC3, I believe, um got classic fucking BBC exploiter sneering down his nose at the working, the the the subject of televisual output. And it became apparent that the documentary wasn't going to get made unless I allowed myself to become the subject of the documentary. So from me going high, cage fighting, it's actually not so bad let's go and have a look, and authoring it, it became 'Mat Fraser's quest is to be the first disabled cage fighter in Britain'. And I was slightly aware I was whoring myself. And, you know, I ended up actually having a cage fight with a seventeen year old. Cor bloody hell the owner of that must have been worried for insurance, a cripple and a seventeen year old illegally potentially hospitalising each other in a cage that he owned. There was a little discussion backstage, certain moves were not gonna be allowed to combat that. And to safeguard my face. I didn't want to have my nose broken.

0:45:33.0

Anyway. I did that, but at that point I knew I didn't wanna do another documentary. Because if that's what they'd become, I didn't want in. So that, you know all these things were happening roughly around the same time. And so I'd come off that, come out of Britain, into thought, thinking.. I started off acting in Every Time You Look at Me and now I can't get an acting job and they want me to be in shit documentaries and they don't even want my voice anymore. And all this.

And Julie was like 'come to America!' And she is royalty in burlesque. So she said I want you to host my next show. And it was rammed! And I was good. And everybody loved me. And I got everyone to bark like a seal. And was really politically incorrect around my disability. But in the way that I do it, the owning it.. way. Not let's make fun of other people who are not like us. But I'll make fun of myself and it's really cool, don't you think this is a cool way to clap, why don't you all try it. I only respond to (SEAL NOISES) you know and all of that. And they loved it, they couldn't believe what they were seeing and I was the new crip.. I was English and new and they were bored with all their hosts. So overnight I became like one of the most popular hosts in New York. And as I said to Dirty Martini, that happened, she said, yeah, well you married into royalty didn't you? 0:46:49.8

Um. So that, so, you know cut to 2006,7,8 was all about me being in New York and developing my cabaret persona and really working that . The Flid show came and went, it was the equivalent to a pub theatre kind of level. And it was okay, got okay reviews, I got a great review from Charles Isherwood, Mat Fraser is a seasoned and charismatic actor. That's a nice pull quote, you know. The rest of the sentence I couldn't use, however, considering he's such a fucking cripple or whatever it was.

Anyway, so I've turned my back.. So then I went back to Britain. By this time we were just about to sell the house. And the, one of the guys from the company that had been the production company that had produced the last documentary was now in a Eleven Film, his name was Joel Wilson I got a, I heard a rumour there was going to be a drama in Channel Four, a pretend documentary about one of those things where you put people on an island and see if they can survive. But I knew, see what had happened was, me calling it like it is, I'd pissed off a lot of people in Channel Four. And now they were in bigger positions,. You learn, you learn. And I know who it was, I know exactly who it was, it was that little shit Robert who was Alison's assistant back in the day, was now in drama. And I just wasn't getting a nod. They wanted nine fucking disabled actors, or six disabled actors. There

weren't that many who could do the job back then. And I was like, they're gonna call me. And they didn't call me. And I realised. Somebody there doesn't like me. So I did what Mat Fraser always does. And I just looked in Contacts, found the name of the production company, called them up and said hi, I know you're looking for disabled actors, I know you won't be able to find enough, please let me come in and talk myself into the show. They laughed and went okay, come on in.

I came in and the woman went, hi Mat, d'you remember me, you used to sell me drugs at university. So I couldn't believe it, and then I saw the desperation in their eyes. They'd got the commission, they thought everything was going to be wonderful, but they'd auditioned everybody and only four of them were good enough. For them, at that time, I'm not commenting on other actors. They wanted, also they didn't, you know, because Jamie was around, Simon was around, they were wonderful actors, but they only wanted a specific kind of.. They were casting for impairments.

So I talked myself into it. I just talked myself into it. I left that meeting half an hour later having got the job. Because I said, look, I can do the job, I'm good at what I do, you need an older person, write it for me, I'll help you write it, around, you know around my impairment or what have you. Um but for fuck's sake can we all agree that I should be in this fucking programme. And they basically went yeah, okay.

So I talked myself into the..so, you know. And that really stuck with me, Allan. So the person who said no had a grudge against me, so I just went round him. And I've always done that ever since, and I probably always will. Um, sorry and it worked the first time, why wouldn't it work again. And is it fair that because I said to somebody clean the fucking mops out of the disabled toilet you wanker, right, it's not a fucking storeroom for mops or something, get your fucking act together, because that's how charmingly I can be sometimes. And I just said it to the wrong

person one day. But is that right or just? No it isn't. I was saying the right thing at the right time. And you know, so anyway.. 0:50:38.2

It's kind of stuck with me. To my detriment probably but anyway. So I got that and in 2009 did that. Julie was doing..

A; What was it called?

M: It was called Cast-offs. And, you know it had its moments. I was lucky, because the episode I did was written by Jack Thorne. I think. It was slightly better written than some of the other episodes. And I got to flex my muscles a bit acting and stuff. It was good. Me and Kiruna actually sparked off really well together, worked well. We kind of fell out after that.

A: And who?

M: Kiruna Stammell. Little dwarf actress. Australian. Anyway, we did that and that was fun. Thought it might lead to getting some acting work in a Channel Four drama. Did it fuck. Um, it was around that time they discovered paralympics and you know, the rest is history. Um so that takes us to 10, I moved into my flat, I'd finally divorced from Patou, we split up, she got her hippy house in Brighton, they're very happy, and they've got a dog and an allotment and everything's wonderful. And I've found a flat in W.. In Lambeth North, just south of Waterloo, with London sirens and the trains and, I've never lived so centrally in my life and I have to say I love it, I absolutely love it.. I was working a lot in cabaret, I could walk home, you know it's really starting to cook. Um, and that takes us up to 10.

Um And about that time Julie, slightly earlier, cut back a year, Julie had said we need to do a project together, cause at that time we couldn't really manifest our real desires, so we channelled it through art. I said, yeah, yeah sure, let's do a project.

Thalidomide the Musical worked well, me expanding to allowing myself to work with one non-disabled person. Let's see what it's like. And she said why don't we just do Beauty and the Beast. And it was like a light bulb. First I thought, ah, of course, fairy tales. Adaptations for disability. Then I thought 'Bitch!' How could you have that idea and not me? I'm the disabled one. I should have thought of that. But I thought hats off, you thought of it.

And then we found this Extravagant Bodies festival in Croatia. That was a weird one. And we went. And we knew we had something, we just filled it full of acts that we had and put a bit of glue round it and called it Beauty and the Beast. But we knew we had something. We knew the bit where she holds his hands, and I do that sort of wonderment of being touched acting. And I could feel everyone go. And I thought this is so Disney, but let's use it, let's use it.

Anyway, that was there and then around eleven we said let's, we polished it up and did it in New York for all our burlesque friends. It was like if you like a burlesque live art version of what we could do with that story. And it got reviewed. In the New York Times. And the last sentence was, 'blahdiblahdiblah but coming from these two artists I would have expected a lot more. Right? Very fair. And we thought, right, let's do a lot more. And I said, at this point I, I've come from theatre and I wanna work with a director. I don't think we can do this without an outside eye. And she was against that 'cause technically strippers and performance artists don't use directors. Um, but then I went to Devoted and Disgruntled because I had my eyes set on Phelim McDermott, because we'd both agreed that Shock-Headed Peter was one of the best things we'd seen. And we had to go round the circle saying why we were there. And most of it was 'because I want theatre to be better' and all these Guardian type - no offence chaps but middle class people saying these (general?) things. And I said cause, I only came because we want you to direct our next show 'Beauty and the Beast'. And everyone laughed. And he laughed. But unbeknownst to me he felt really put on the spot in front of all his

peers. I hadn't meant to, I was just being honest. And it made him call me up and go, okay, what is this Beauty and the Beast. Then we had the meeting. And what happened was me and Julie tried to explain Beauty and the Beast to him as a couple with one of their favourite stories, they take each other over, they finish each other's sentences. And he pulled back. And he watched Mat and Julie try to explain Beauty and the Beast. And he went, I'll do it, but only if it's about you two as well. I wanna use old-fashioned technology, like an overhead projector, cause I'm sick of fucking 3D computer imaging. And I want it to be about you two and Beauty and the Beast in parallel.

We looked at each other and thought. 'That's bloody weird. Great! Let's go!' We handed it over to Phelim. Then we applied for Arts Council grants, failed on two of them, got the third one. And then in September 2013, we totally, we'll have to go back and do the Paralympics, we ended up rehearsing for two months and ended up doing it at the Young Vic, and the only reason we'd done it at the Young Vic was because ever since I was in Andorra in 2001, David Lan the artistic director always used to say hello to me in the Young Vic café, which is one of my local cafes, because I live round there. And it had just become habit that he always said hello to me. And one day, and then when we were doing this Beauty and the Beast, I said have you ever worked with Phelim McDermott? And unbeknownst to me, they had tried to get Phelim in to direct three times, and every time administratively it had fucked up and they felt really guilty about it. So of course, we were the beneficiaries of that guilt. And it all came together beautifully. It was like yeah we really should do another disability *and* we should work with Phelim *and* this is quite a good project. It was easy for him to say yes let's do it. 0:56:53.2

So we ended up doing Beauty and the Beast at Christmas at the Young Vic. Which was amazing. And we got good reviews, so good that our local theatre in New York said we've just got a hole, a company's just dropped out for next March, d'you wanna come and do that show? We said 'yes!' And booked that in. So that was

the, that theatre thing.

Cue back to late 2011, Jenny Sealey goes, I've just secured with Bradley Hemmings from Greenwich and Docklands Festivals the directorship of the opening ceremony of the Paralympics. And I'm calling everyone I know in. I said, I'm too busy doing my own things, but, so I can't be infused into the infrastructure of all the plans, but if you need a host or a bit of fluff on top, just call me a few weeks before and I'm your man. And I ended up being the warmup guy. I did 15 minutes to 65,000 people before the television cameras were switched on.

A: Oh really!

M: Yeah, That was really fascinating. Fascinating because, I dunno if it's my ego Allan, I'm prepared to accept that it might be, I just think it's about performing. And I walked out on stage and felt instantly at home. I thought, no I was literally born to do this, I could do a hundred, five hundred thousand. There's no amount of thousands of people that I will get scared in front of, not think that I can talk to them like I'm in my living room. It was fun, super fun, we got to meet Stephen Hawking, literally bumped in to Stephen Hawking, almost fell on top of Stephen Hawking in the vomitorium, Julie was there, some great things happened, it was the wonderful time that it was, you know we'd spent a lot of time yesterday talking about how we were on the front pages of every paper for two weeks.. D'you remember that? It was mad. I watched sport on television every day for ten years, I've never done that in my life before or since. When Dave Weir won that third gold, it was amazing. And as Ade Adepitan..

A: Best moment of all was when George Osborne came in..

M: Yeah, and was booed roundly.

M;: But I remember Ade Adipetan telling me, because by that point he'd become a sports correspondent. And he said he was in the room when all the correspondents were watching Dave Weir. And he said it was extraordinary, because when he won, the place erupted in a way it didn't even erupt for the hundred metres or.. He said it was unbelievable. It was great, wasn't it,. And it's literally all turned to shit since, hasn't it?

0:59:29.1

Um, so that happened, and in ele.. Something amazing happened in twenty eleven that I can't remember what it is, but we might come to it. But I had a run, I had a really amazing run, I went from the Paralympics, it seemed to me, to Beauty and the Beast to Beauty and the Best again in New York. Now in January that year, Sideshow the Musical was revamped. I know, all things to do with freak shows. I got myself an audition, they offered me chorus, seven fifty a week, half the time I'd have to have my prosthetic arms on to double as somebody else, right. Minus agent commission and digs and on tour, basically being in the sidelines and I thought, you know what, I don't wanna do that. It's Broadway! It was gonna go to Broadway. But I knew it would make me unhappy. So I didn't do it and instead did Beauty and the Beast. So I didn't take the commercial decision, I took the artistic one, because there was no guarantee at that point that Beauty and the Beast would be anything. Note to self and all other artists: when we start chasing the dollar, or what we imagine is the audience response, we have lost our soul, we have to do the art that we want to do and then the rest will either happen or it won't. But at least we have our integrity intact.

So, I, we did Beauty and the Beast in New York. And it was better even. Because we'd already done it in London and we were enthused and it was really magical. And Ben Brandtley...Over here, four of your seven have to like a show before it's a hit. You know, the Guardian, Independent, the Times yaddah yaddah yaddah. In America, just the New York Times have to like it. And if they like it, it's a hit. And

if they don't it's a failure. The end. It's so unfair. And they came to see it on the second fucking night when it wasn't ready to be seen. And the whole next day we actually took our two puppeteers to a spa the next day 'cause we'd been working twenty-four seven, and we were company, owning the company by that point and Julie said we should take our workers to the spa for a day spa. And in the taxi home we got a text from Phelim going you should read the New York Times. We were like, oh crap. And we read it and it was the best review they'd ever given for any theatre production ever in the history of the New York Times. People for three weeks afterwards were contacting us going I don't believe what I've just read. That guy never says that stuff. He said, watching this show is like falling in love. I mean it was, you couldn't get a better review, right. It was great, because it meant the rest of the run was a sellout and we almost made our money back. Only came in at a couple of grand under. Which is real success, you know. 1:02:22.0

Anyway, unbeknownst to me a woman from LA was in New York, thought I should go to the theatre tonight, it's what New York's all about, I'll read the reviews, saw that review, decided to go, went to it, the second she saw me on stage it triggered 'Oh, yeah, my friend's auditioning freaky people right now in L.A. I should probably tell them about this guy, he can act. The next day I got an audition for American Horror Story. I actually had to run back to England, get back on the drum kit and go out to Germany with Graeae to do another run of Reasons to be Cheerful and I got the call while we were getting bladdered in one of those weird German hotels where there were no other guests, but it looks like the Hitler Youth used to holiday there, we were in Bavaria or something and they've just gone (GERMAN ACCENT) 'Yes, you can use bar but be quiet, you know, we were all like (LOUD INARTICULATE NOISES), you know like Graeae on the lash, fifteen of us really going for it and I get a call and have to go outside to the corridor and I'm speaking to casting from L.A.

And I don't fucking know what American Horror Story is, I had to look it up on YouTube to get the acting style to do the audition right. And it goes we'd like to

offer you a part. Well, tell me a bit more about it, I said, drunk, in Germany, having drummed with me Graeae buddies in the other room, wanting to get back to the party. Tell me a bit more about, well the co.. And, what? Non-disabled actors are playing some of the freaks? Mmm. I dunno how I feel about that. I'm gonna need twenty-four hours to think about this, okay. And there was silence on the other end of the phone. No one had ever. Ever, I mean I didn't know what I was doing, they were like err, okay. And I put the phone down on them. And the next day I said so I've got this situation and they were WHAA, all the young guys, all the young kids in the company were going American Horror Story, what are you doing? I said, ooh, I've obviously missed a trick here and I looked it up and yeah, it was like the second most popular series in America, second only to the Walking Dead, the zombie thing, and Game of Thrones. Right. And so I called back. Yeah, I am quite keen. They said alright, we want you to talk to the guy, they wanted to tattoo, they wanted to fit me as a square peg into their already existing round hole. And I said, no, what you're looking for is the guy, the tattooed man, you've found out he can't act and now you want me to play his part, well that's not going to work. You have to make him a seal boy, because that's what I do and then I'll agree to be tattooed and we call him the Illustrated Seal Boy. And you get your tattoos, I get authenticity, I know how to play it and believe me it'll be better. Go and look at your history. Look at my body, look at the history, you'll know I'm right. And then we can discuss.

So again, they had to go off and come back. And they were like, yeah okay, we'll go for it. Now we want you tattooed completely from head to waist. I went no, not doing my face. Again, we'll have to come back to the..they were like who is this fucking guy? Who does he think he is? But I knew. I thought in the way that Joe Pesci was offered Goodfellas, but he had a job, he was like so you want me to do five minutes in a film and give up my entire career? No, write me a bigger part and maybe I'll do it. Did you know that's what happened?

A: I didn't

M: Yeah. He was like, fuck that! I don't wanna be a fucking cameo in your film and lose my twenty year career. So I did a bit of that and I said no. I knew, cause people had told me, I knew there's some agency in my face. I know my money is my hands, but I also know the combo of the face and the hands is a conundrum for a lot of people. Plus you get it all in one shot, one tight shot, in a mid close-up you can have the impairment and the face, right? I know, I get that, done enough telly to understand. And I knew, for my career and my longevity that we needed to see my face. So I just held out. They were like ALRIGHT! They got um. I feel sorry for Meryl Streep's daughter who came in halfway through the series having to play my partner and they decide she runs away from home and he, the father tattoos her as a punishment for going with a tattooed guy. She just got tattooed on the face, because they still had that hangover of wanting to see a tattooed face. I tell you, I was in makeup with her. I'm fucking glad I didn't do that.

But anyway, so then, so all of that was sort of happening while we were putting Beauty and the Beast to bed and then, so that was March, in May I got offered it and in July the twelfth I found myself in a hotel room in New Orleans about to spend six months there, which is what I did. And, you know it was a hugely amazing experience, it was the culmination of my freak show journey, I think. It started with that's the guy! Stanley Berendt, when I'd been pissed off by the Bill, that's the guy, I'm gonna do a thing about a freak show. And I stuck with it all those years.

Because I knew, Allan, I knew deep in my bones, that if I hung on long enough, someone with a big budget would actually put their fucking money where their mouth was on a freak show project and actually cast freaky people in the roles. I didn't know that we'd be the extras and not the main, and I thought we would remake Freaks. I thought that we were gonna with the BFI and Channel Four Films were going to remake Freaks. But we made American Horror Story instead. It got

done.

And you know, I learnt a lot my lessons, I wasn't a militant guy telling them to get the mops out of the disabled toilet this time, I shut up, I just did my job. I sat there and watched out where the power structure was and who was the boss and who had the ear of the boss. And all of those things and I Macchiavellianly played the entire situation. I wailed with pain in my first few weeks because I, there, I thought, wonderful, I've now got a job where I'm standing on the sidelines of a depiction of *my* history, while non-disabled people go, you don't know what it's like to be a feak, with their plastic drawers. No you fucking don't mate. And I do.

I thought this was going to send me mad. So I emailed Ewan. I said this is sending me mad. He said look at the numbers, shut the fuck up, do your job, stop moaning, think about how you don't like it afterwards when you've got all that money in the bank and all those people are like 'Yeah, we liked that guy, maybe he could do this acting' and I thought oh, oh yeah.

So, and then because I can act and I was one of the few actually deformed people that can act, they gave me a bigger role. And then Jessica Lang said to Ryan Murphy, I can only assume, I don't have physical proof of this, you know this is called Freak Show, we should probably have one of them be my partner or a lover of something at some point. Let's use that guy. 1:09:27.0.

Um so one day when Jessica came on set, we'd all been placed into the scene, you know tech crew arrive, art department dress, extras are put in, then the B actors are put in. Then they do a camera rehearsal. Then they call in the star. She came in, and she'd always say a polite hello to everyone. She came up and kissed me! Out of the blue. And I thought, something's up there. Sure enough, a week later I got episode six and I was like fuck me! I'd literally become the lead for half that episode. Um so I thought, oh, Ewan was right. And I played the rest of the six

months out. What I kick myself to this day for, was I got all like ooh I'm a TV actor. And I sort of like sunbathed when I wasn't working. And strolled round New Orleans. What I should have done was thought, I have a small window after this, and I need to write two things that could actually happen in my time off. Cause I was only working three, four days a week.

And I didn't. I just smoked half of New Orleans' marijuana, girl scout cookies - ridiculously strong pot. Wonderful. But it doesn't make you write a lot of things down. Makes you watch a lot of television. Um, so I did that. And, I'm a bit shamefaced today. I sort of half wrote Freak Blood, and the not very good screenplay that I've recently written that will never get made. And quite right too., But I didn't put my efforts into thinking, you know write something where the disabled character is the father or the secondary character, you know be sensible about what's really likely to get commissioned where we are right now in culture.

You know, I think back to writing with Rick Lander on Brixton Hill in the nineties, when we wrote our screenplays together. The very first thing we wrote was a three-part full-length tragedy, with fifteen disabled people as the protagonists and it was set in mediaeval Italy. We didn't know the naivete of that, you know. Um, but I did now. And I'm kicking myself for not doing that. But I didn't, and had a really good time.

Made some friends, you know Kathy Burke is now a friend, um and she's a wonderful woman. She really wants to help,. But what can she do? Em, you know lot of people said oh you'll be in the repertory company now, you've knocked it out the park, you fucking showed you're a great actor and now you'll be in the American Horror Story repertory company. But I wasn't. You know. I have an email that says to the contrary from the top man. Which I am gonna keep. But, you know, that hasn't come true, I didn't get the work. They faltered when it was outside of a freak show environment. Ah, but we don't see him as neighbour, we don't see

him as father, we don't see him as lawyer, you know. All the roles I think I could quite happily play

So we were back to square one. And I went mad. I went fucking mad. I said to Julie I don't want to do our shows any more. I just wanna be a telly actor. It's gonna happen for me. This thing that I've always wanted is finally on the threshold of happening. I need to put all my energy into it, I do not want to do fucking getting my dick out at The Box at three in the morning.

Um, it depends what head I've got on. 1:12:51.1 With the right head on, I'm doing wonderful disability arts deep in the belly of the beast. With the wrong head on, I'm having a miserable time. It depends what head I've got on for that job. And I had the head that would find it miserable. And every single morning for a year, my first waking thought was I wonder if he's emailed me. I wonder if I've got the email. It's a cancer. It's horrible. When I t.. At the end of Beauty and the Beast, when we finished the get out, you know, locked the van, I turned to Julie with tears in my eyes and I said Julie, I'm the happiest I've ever been in my whole life. And I was at that point, because we had delivered, to critical and commercial success, the apex of my efforts in terms of convincing people about disability from the stage. And it was an inclusive piece, I'd moved on from my separatist ways,. You know, it was theatrically new in terms of form. I was so proud of it and still am. And here I was, three months after having finished American Horror Story, miserable as fuck, back to where I'd been in 2008, fucked off with the British for not giving me any acting work. Only this time, you think it's bad at the BBC, you think their expressions of masking how they can't find it in their understanding to cast a mutant in a non-mutant role, you try doing that at CBS in LA, mate. WOOOH!

So February this year, was it this year, or was it last year? I forget now. Pilot season, because I got a manager off American Horror Story, whose partner is Peter Dinklage's, the dwarf from Game of Thrones actor. So he's got all the connections

and I got great auditions. Nobody wanted to give me a job. They all said I was wonderful, but they blow smoke up your arse at an audition, I should have remembered that from the Bill, um, but no, nobody wants to give me a job there, nobody's interested. Well they are interested, but it's too much trouble to work out how to do it. So you know, I almost lost the plot, I lost the fucking plot. Became depressed, but I didn't own up to it, started smoking far too much pot, so I was disconnected, um you know it was. I was due for a spiral down, we're only talking a year and a half ago. To be honest, it didn't end till about four months ago, I don't think.

Um, you know other things happen, we, we almost got an off-Broadway run of Beauty and the Beast and then it, just as we were about to sign the contract, the equivalent of main house at the Young Vic, or Old Vic even, something swank(..) Or the National even. And it was big. And they didn't, they lost their bottle. They say, virtually got the email that says I'm sorry, you shouldn't be treated like this. And I just emailed back, well don't treat us like that then. We didn't get it.

So, you know. And the bottom line there is, you know, Britain, they don't mind a bit of flipper and penis onstage, it's all in the name of modern drama, after all we had Romans in Britain, didn't we. You know, we can take it, even in the arts centres in Cumbria we can take it. But you go outside of New York in America and you try and ask somebody to tolerate a mutant penis, a mutant who's got his penis out onstage and it ain't happening buddy, it ain't happening, even at the most experimental places, they couldn't take it up 'em, sarge.

And um ,that was a bit sobering too. That was like, so this big hit can't get a booking. Alright, whadda we do now? You know. Then I got American Horror Story and I forgot all about that for a year and a half.

But anyway, we've now got a booking for December. But um , er, you know um, so

American Horror Story, so that all happened. So I realised, so I went and did a disability evening at the Writers Guild of America, thinking.., and I got there and it was just their friends and relatives, we've been there a million times, Allan, a million times. And Head of thing can't make it but they've sent their assistant, we're familiar with that one as well, aren't we. And so I was, like, really? But then I looked at the writing and it was pretty damn good. And Peter Farrelly was one of the directors, he's from the Farrelly Brothers. And they always have a disabled person in their film, always. Admittedly with questionable taste around it, but they go there. Um, and he was directing..

A; I don't think it's questionable taste actually..

M: I love .it

A; I haven't got a problem with it.

M: Me neither, I love it , cause he goes there and fucking sticks his chin on it.

Anyway, I ended up being directed by him in the best scene. That was fun. Then I got awarded the (SAG Aftra?) Media Access Award, ie most prominent cripple on telly last year award. And it was full of a bunch of arseholes saying charitable things about Down's syndrome. And I was, I could feel the vomit rise again. And then Peter Farrelly accepted his award, and he was just like, guys, it's not difficult, just put them in the fucking show, okay? Everything else takes care of itself. And I thought fuck him, somebody's speaking sense. And I said I have to, told my manager I've got to go and talk to Peter Farrelly . He said, yeah, go and talk to Peter Farrelly. I said mate, thankyou, I thought I was gonna lose the plot there, but thanks, somebody finally talked some fucking sense. He said, siddown, let's chat.

1:18:38.8

I became his buddy overnight. I talked to Melinda his wife, we got on, we were culturally attuned, he liked me, I liked him. He said, take my card, call me next time you're in LA. I called him, he said it's bro night, come to bro night. I said can my wife come, he said no dude it's bro night. So I go to bro night at the poshest restaurant in fucking LA, opposite the guy who's just won the Emmy for the script of Mozart in the Jungle, and sandwiched between the Farrelly brothers. And they obviously do this every month and have done for some time. And I'm like, whoa, their stories, I can't compete. So I, I have to tell stories about getting my dick out at The Box, because at least I can compete on that level, I can at least interest them with my wacky stories, you know, about how I looked up and Leonardo da Caprio was filming me. And how weird that's gonna be if I ever meet him again, you know and all of that. Hahaha, they loved it.

So he turns to me and he goes. In a few weeks I've got something going on, I want you to come in and read for something, I think you might be, I'm not sure, you know one of those things where he didn't say anything but almost said something? That is currently my only lead, desperately.

Um, so I'm really bringing us up to speed now. So, I went back to LA in March because I wanted to see him again. And he said, come here, if you come to LA we'll talk. About this role I've got in mind. I get there, he goes, yeah, I've got no time mate I can't meet you. I felt WHAAAT, he said but don't worry, I'll make it all up to you in Vancouver in September and October. Now to me, that sounds like he's gone from thinking I might be right for a role, deciding I'm right for a role, to thinking I've got the role, to planning me to be in the role, But there's no proof is there? There's nothing, there's nothing at all. So then, just recently, because I now subscribe to Deadline Hollywood, oh my god what a vile magazine that is, but it does tell you about all the new commissions as it happens on the floor. Peter Farrelly and this other guy sign massive deal, straight to series, no pilot, for new

comedy show about an alcoholic psychotherapist who keeps falling off the wagon and his wacky bunch of clients. New sitcom. So I think, so I email him. Is that because it says starts at the end of September, you know how things get pushed back by years often, right, so I think I desperately need to know, you can't send a third email with no reply, but I'm going to anyway,. I don't care. Cause I had sent another one going I'm coming back to LA and I got a two worded response: Fuck off, from him. Then five minutes later, Haha, only joking, come and see me. So he's, I like him, he's a nice guy. He's a nice guy.

Um I go, is this congratulations dude, is that the thing you were talking about? Is it still September/October, just checking you know dates and blah. And he's like, mate I can't tell you anything right now. We're just trying to find the lead. Soon as we've got the lead for it we can announce the whole thing and I can tell you lots more. But yes, we're still looking at September and October in Vancouver. That was two days ago. So, we'll see, eh. We'll see what goes on. But he, and I'm..

A: But he's saying we're still looking at September in Vancouver and he's already said to you see you in Vancouver. That sounds kind of promising

M: It does sound promising.

Now, the meanwhile was, after Thalidomide the Musical, so I'd done a one-man show, then I did the two-hander musical, I thought I want to write a proper play inverted commas, with characters and an interval. So stupid, right. What have I got left, I've done freaks, I've done thalidomide, what's left. Elvis. My other one true love. Elvis. So back in 2006 with my friends from Disability Cymru, cause I was doing a bit of acting training for one of the actors then, with them, the Elves in Portcawl, Elvis Convention, I said to Gwennan and Rob Young, my two friends who I stay with in Cardiff, shall we go to the Elves, just for fucking fun. We went and I thought, yeah, yeah, yeah I'm totally gonna set a play in a Elvis Convention, this is

wild.

And I got bogged down in Elvis facts, read all the Elvis books, produced the most turgid piece of Elvis trivia that nobody is interested in, and Ewan told me exactly what that was. Um and then all the splitting up happened. So I put what was the sort of attempted second draft down and I didn't pick it up until about two years ago. Of course, I saw it in the cold light of four years later, I saw exactly what was wrong with it. Um and started to rewrite it and it became the piece that it is now. And I've just this year been spending the whole year rewriting and rewriting and editing and rewriting and polishing and editing. It must be about the sixth draft by now.

Um and I showed it to Ewan. I said I want to do this now. I want you to direct it. And he said, it's too naturalistic for me. man, I'm not really interested in the naturalistic stuff right now. But it's a good piece, and, although I think it's too long, and does need cutting down, it's good enough to show to literary managers. Go. Go out there, do it. So I then did a seven thousand word edit on it, cutting two entire scenes. Cause I looked at it again and realised, we don't need them. I'm a bugger for exposition. So I took out all the exposition. The stuff happens anyway, you don't need to hear the guy say that that's what's gonna happen. 1:24:23.6 I feel that.. No! We'll find out by watching you. Um So I've done that. And then of course, the climate's different now, Allan. You know, I said at the end of Beauty and the Beast, the Scottsboro boys was a big hit musical up in the big house, we both finished on the same night. So there was a big party at the Young Vic and David Lan stood on a drunken table and said: and you guys, one of us, looked at me and Julie, said, brilliant stuff, brilliant stuff. We wanna hear what's next. Make sure you tell us. So I saw him last week and I said, hey David, remember when you said that thing. Yeah.. I took that as a commission. And it's finished and it's ready now. And he laughed, and I said no, I'm just being cheeky, I said can I give it to Sue Ellis, your reader of new writers. He said, yes, and address it to me as well. I

want to read it too. In that weird, earnest way that he has. So I bit the bullet and I've sent it. Now they might come back and go, mate you are sorely deluded. You can't write. Fuck off. I'm ready for that. If they say it, they said it. I am ready for what it is, I'm ready for that, I can handle it. I know that I got to be a better writer, writing it, and writing the screenplay. I don't know if I'm good enough. But I know I'm better and I know I want to keep getting better. And I'm in my fifties now and I always knew I wanted to morph into being a writer. I'll always be a show-off. I'll always want to be down centre stage. My natural place, as far as I'm concerned.

Um, but I'm slowly realising actually. I always got into acting for two reasons. My ego, and wanting to be an actor. And disability activism. Really, it really was fifty fifty. And I know now that all of my activism has to be in writing. Because that's what's needed now. That's what's needed. The ego part, I'll still take, you know, if I'm offered Star Trek Five, I'll take it, you know, I'm not gonna be, but, you know what I mean, I'd love that. But, if I'm a writer, got to be one of these new disabled voices. I have to be. What else are we here on the fucking planet for? If we've got strong belief systems our work should be a product of our belief system.

So I sent it to him, it's been a weird two days, right. Then I remembered Vicky Featherstone, who directed me in On Blindness, a piece of shit about a bloke, a deaf guy wanking over a blind woman, um, that was a half-baked idea written by somebody who didn't know what they were talking about, that we were all in. We all think we were the thing that was bad about it. But we've all talked since, and we've all gone, no, no I was the thing that was.. Hold on! It was shit!

Anyway, she then went, she directed it and then went up to be the artistic director of the National Theatre of Scotland, Really developed Robert Softly-Gale's work and a few of the Scottish disabled voices. She's now the artistic director at the Royal Court, where April, Ewan's wife, has delivered a play or two. I said they do new

writing, do they ever have any disability plays? She said good god no, I don't believe I've ever seen one there. And so I said right.

A; Nabil Shaban was in a piece at the Royal...

M: Yeah, but not..writing, you know the writing.

A; No, it wasn't disability writing, no.

M: And er so I got Vicky's email and I sent it to her yesterday. And then last night I went to the National, on behalf of Graeae as a patron, to talk about the fucking Paralympic legacy, and I actually said the word ' And it's all turned to shit' on stage, and I thought, really, Mat, again? You've done it again. You know, it's what I think. And Rufus was there, Rufus Norris the artistic director, who said the thing about the National Theatre should be theatre for the nation. And I said oh, I'm gonna take you at your word mate. Can I send your literary manager my play? And he said, yes, but cc it to me as well, I want to read it. And a woman who was there, it gets better, there was an Indian woman there who was talkin to my Mum, my Mum came.

My mum's an actress, been around the block a million times. And she goes, oh this is soandso, she directed me in the Cripple of Inishmon at the Leicester Haymarket. She's now the artistic director of the National Theatre of Wales. I said can I send you my new play? It's pretty much, Welsh people will identify with this play more than probably any other sub-demographic of Britain, because the Elves is the biggest, the Elvis, the white working class comfort that Elvis provides, I just said a few key phrases and she said, yes, send it to me tomorrow.

So,in the space of four days I've just sent my play to the Royal Court, the National, the National Theatre of Wales and the Young Vic. They may all come back Allan and say it's shit, don't ever send us anything, Mat. Fine, if that's the case, I'll move

on right? Um, I will keep going, I'll go to Southwark Playhouse. And if I have to, we will do it at the Oval House. But to be honest it will be...

A; A play set in an Elvis convention's gotta, surely gotta be a..

M: I mean, you know it's basically me establishing a status quo which I then fuck with. And it's my hatred of the old guard. It's an illustration of Steve, who's a sexist homophobic racist, he's hysterically funny at first, then we realise what that really means, you know I twist it, twist the knife, not.., but I've just seen Yerma at the Young Vic, the Lorca adaptation with Billie Piper in the lead role. About a woman who's thirty-eight who goes crazy because she can't have a kid and wants one. And it's brilliant, Allan, it's just absolutely brilliant. Once the reviews come out you won't be able to get a ticket. Off the first preview they immediately extended for two weeks. It's that good. And as I watched it, I realised, my favourite thing on stage, I like lots of things, I like fluffy musicals with third year drama students, you know,, but my favourite thing on stage is when I can see the human condition under intense crisis exposed and done well. Nothing gets better than that. And my play is not that. My play is, reads like a sitcom, then there's some serious bits and we all learn a bit of a lesson at the end. Um, and it's lots of fun, but it's serious as well. But it's not, it ain't no Yerma. So I'm a bit nervous that they'll come back and they're gonna go this is trite and it doesn't say anything. But, you know what? Fuck it. If that's what they say, that's what they say. I feel really good about delivering it. Just writing 'The End' feels great. It's a tough thing for a writer to write. I know you, I mean I'm talking Granny suck eggs shit here, you're a writer and you have been all your life so you know this. I'm only learning it now. But the feeling of liberatikon of actually writing the end and it really being the end, is extraordinary. You sleep longer, you know, it's amazing, really.

A; You talk about you doing too much exposition.

M: Yes, I was.

A: A thing we discovered when I was writing with Stuart is that I tend to say 'well' much too much 'What about this?' 'Well, I think so and so.' But that's easy because like you can just whack em in and then go through dum dum dum, tighten the lijne, take it out, tighten it, that's not a problem.

M: But if anybody goes, the thing I've learnt, as a general thing, if you want your thing, let's say your play, your film, your piece of art to be about a certain thing that you care passionately about, you can not talk about that thing. The end. It can't be about that. It has to be illustrated in the rest of it, that's why I set it at an Elvis convention and not a cripple convention, don't want to watch in-house people talking in-house. Wanna see stuff break away and be wrong and I dunno.

A: I've come to realise that the reason that 'Inmates' works is that it's not about disability.

M: No, it's about human relationships.

A: It's about friendship.

M: And also, it's a trapped situation, which is the basis of so much good drama. When people can't escape the situation. Situation comedy's meant to have that rule, isn't it? People are in a trap. And of course the greatest British sitcoms are the traps of class. And we watch people trying to escape the trap.

A: The greatest are the traps of family.

M: Yeah.

A: Steptoe and son..

M: Is both of those in one. Traps of class and family in one. I agree with you. Steptoe is about as good as it gets.

A: Steptoe and Only Fools and Horses. There's a certain kind of comedy that you can write at a particular point where there's a very strong and very positive zeitgeist. Both of those are about somebody who wants what's being promised, but they're never going to get it.

M: Frasier is the same, but with different aspirations. Wanting a woman. Never, ever gonna get one, you know. I love it. I love good stuff.

So, you know, um, life's good right now.

A: He's not so.. American sitcoms are always so determined to be positive. Frasier's better than many on that.

M: I think it's the best-written American sitcom. Seinfeld was great in its day. Like you, I loathed Friends. Like you say, no-one's ever that fucking nice.

A: I couldn't, I tried to watch Friends, several times, all the young people were watching, my friends' teenage kids were really, I'd put it on and, like after about twenty seconds I'd just be climbing the walls and think I cannot stand this.

M: Yeah. Yeah. No, you're right, that hideous positivity.

A: So I'm not in a good position to generalise about Friends really because I could never stand it long enough to actually judge it totally.

M: You know, I wish in a way that I'd stayed in Britain. And done, you know, done a little bit here, little bit there. I'd probably be in something now. Embedded in the background of EastEnders or in the occasional thing. Or maybe I wouldn't. Maybe I underestimate how shocking my visage is. You know, I'm not just a dwarf, I'm not just a wheelchair user, I'm a fucking screaming mutant with weird flippers. However, I do know, I've learnt so much in the last five years, and I know, I think I know how to get it right. 1:35:40.1

Trouble is, I'm fifty-four now, not thirty-four. I could do, it's fine, it stops me from wanting the lead. You ain't gonna get the lead when you're in your fifties. That's fine. It's better, be a character part because right now, people aren't ready for disabled leads unless it's really extraordinary.

But they are kinda ready for someone's Dad to be disabled, or the guy in the café, or the incidental characters that pop up, that are but don't worry, it's not about them.

A: A thing that I realised, I've never really made use of this, but, writing characters beyond disabled characters, you write parts for older women, not very old women, there's kind of grandma parts around, but women ..

M; Fifties and sixties, yeah.

A: Fifties.. It will be stunningly cast. The number of amazing actresses that are just available for some rubbish sitcom. Firend of mine had a sitcom pilof done for the BBC, I dunno something about a guy who was a professional footballer or something, but there was a female part. They cast Celia Imrie!

M; Yeah. I know. There's so many of them out there. On the scrapheap because

we we just idolise yoof culture.

A: So maybe that's what you need to find, something that involves crips and middle-aged women.. Care workers..

M: Yeah. So, you know i..i..it's never-ending, you know. And Patou, my ex, who *will* put on a balaclava and charge the police on behalf of animals. Um, you know, was totally down with my militancy, the militant years as I call them, the two militant years where I lost a quarter of my able-bodied friends. Um, but gained much better ones, and I was fine with that swap. You know, she was there and nothing really more could be more militant than how she already was, so she took it all on, would go, yeah of course you feel like that, you know.

Um Julie is very different. And it's been very interesting, her take on my work. Because she's the dizzy blonde stripper with no politics, cliché, you think. She's not that at all, but that's what most people think. And she says things like, but you're not smiling. And, you know, that sort of stuff. I got a Holby City, right, no I made a Holby city happen. Fuck me, Allan, I'm sick of this. Um, right, three day thing, Ewan tipped me off, three day thing, they're gonna ask for a few disabled actors, they've got some of their writers, EastEnders and a couple of the other dramas, you're all gonna live in a weird house for three days talk to each other and at the end of it something amazing's gonna come out to do with disability. Nothing did. And actually, you know what, it was probably the kernel of getting Lisa into EastEnders at that point.

But I saw a guy called Ian Kershaw. And I liked him. And he was the only one who wanted to have a bevvy, the one who was all done, we took a few boxes of Becks into the library and we chatted it up and he says I do Holby. He called, derided burlesque as middle-class stripping. I liked him immediately. Um, and then I said, of course it'd be weird if a thalidomide guy got cancer and then got prescribed thalidomide, that'd be pretty weird. And his jaw dropped open ,and he started

salivating and he went, fuck me, it's a double medical, Holby are gonna shit themselves on that. I think we've got it, we've got it. I'm gonna write it, I'll liaise with you for like medical facts and shit, alright. They immediately bought, bit it and I ended up in Holby. So, I did an episode of Holby City. In it I had to break down and cry, in close -up. And I, it's a bit of a fucking factory there, it's not like they're gonna go okay can we all break for thirty-five minutes while Mat gets his emotions together for the shot. It was like 'Right, next thing, Go!' And so, I was talking to Julie about where one finds, as an actor, the pivotal thing. And method people do it one way, Meissner people do it another way. She said, what are you talking about? It's fucking, go to a lightbulb, keep your eyes open, stare at the lightbulb, and after ten seconds your eyes'll start crying. I'm like you don't understand at all, and she's like don't I? How many times you gotta cry in it? I went, twice. She went, right, let's do an experiment, do it my way one time and your way the other time, see if we can ssee a difference. Of course, you can see no difference whatsoever, she was right. And that's what I love about Julie. She'll come at you with that stuff that you ridicule culturally, but actually she's right. You know. And I've learnt that now and I shut up and don't ridicule any more and I accept it, and our work's getting better and better. So you know, I think we've got some good work around the corner, probably on stage. And that's really fun to do. I do wanna do my own stuff again. So does she. I wanna.. But I still want fucking.., it doesn't have to be me, but for fuck's sake can somebody give the bloody disabled person the lead and run with it, commit to it, can it be good and can we run with it and change the world, please, because I'm bored of it not changing fast enough.

Somebody said to me, when's it gonna happen, you know this level playing field of opportunity. They foolishly asked *me*. And I said well in 1997, I thought it would have happened by 2007. Now, longer in the tooth, the projection, assuming that nothing, assuming it's gonna be this slow journey, about thirty years from now? And there was that ooh. I was like, what? It's what I think. Why don't we.. Check in when I'm eighty, see who's right. Cause I do, I think it'll be that long.

It might not be, might be tomorrow. Then good. There's a lot of young 'uns out there. Things are changing. Er.. But.. So it's good, I manage not to go crazy. I'm still alive, I have a few battle scars, but they're no too bad. You know, I'm not dead like some of our compadres. Some people have committed suicide. I'll always remember that kid with the ginger hair. On the meetings, on the demos. With the crutches. Fucking committed suicide. 'Cause of the hopelessness of the projections of his life that he saw them at that time. And he just.. And it brings it home now, assisted suicide stuff, you know. We can't judge other people's quality of life. Period. We can't do it. The only person that can judge the quality of life is the person. You know.

So. There's that. Er, I'm mates with all those people that we were all angry young crips together, yourself included. You know. Since we go to Johnny Crescendo in 1995 'We need it for music venues', that whole Attitude is Everything. And now there's a disabled field at Glastonbury. I mean, things haven't changed.

A: Suzanne has *grafted* at that, hasn't she?

M: She hasn't stopped. She deserved her OBE.

A: Did she get an OBE?

M: She got something. She bloody deserved it. She single-mindedly done that. And I'm really proud of her. And I'm glad, cause she, she needed..

A: Somebody you wouldn't think that much of, and she's just grafted and grafted and grafted and made so much happen.

M: I know. I know, I know, I know. I'm really proud of her. Um, you know, that's

happened. We're still not quite seeing it on, on screen. And I remember when I asked, I went to see Carla's Song over the road at the Ritzy, the Ken Loach film for the Q and A, like before the general release. And those seats are really deep, aren't they at the Brixton Ritzy, you really sink into those seats.. The top of the back of the seats usually slightly taller than your head. And I'm a real seat sinker. And at the end we had to put our hands up to ask the questions. And of course, I knew there was no point because no-one would see my hand, cause it didn't go tall enough. So I left. And as I left, I bumped into this tiny little old man who was standing at the back with my friend. I think she was the sub-manager of the thing, she'd got me in. Oh thank you so much, and she looked really weird and awkward, and went er Mat this is um, Ken. Loach. And I, I was really moved by the end of Carla's song, I don't know if you remember the end, it's a disability ending. And I was very moved by it, was still crying. I sort of got myself together and went, oh Ken, God I love your films so much, thank you for this. How can we make disability better on screen? How can we get fucking it on fucking screen. Whadda we do? And he went, well, traditionally, when you want, you have to take means, the power of the means of control of production away from the people that are making it. 'Cause they're not changing. And historically, that's not gonna happen without a fight. And I thought, that was his, so Ken Loach told me that. And he's well, I mean, good old socialist Ken Loach, you know, means of production and all of that. Er. But he's right. 1:45:35.1

And so now, here's me...

A; I can remember at a big writers' conference at the NFT that London Screenwriters Workshop organised, one guy got up at the back and said, if you wanna get your scripts made, what you've gotta do is get into production. That was Phil Redmond.

M: Yeah. 'Cause that's it. So here's me in my fifties all mature and everything,

understanding, and thinking that it's writing that needs to happen, but without a commissioning editor on our side.. And so you look at the stream and famously women have positions of power in television hierarchies, but they're never the boss. They're always the next one down or what have you. Um, but you know, inroads have been made. I don't see that happening with disability. I mean Ash Atallah is about the only one, right. About the only one

A: I haven't got the greatest respect for Ash.

M: I know, but also the last time you clashed was like - fifteen years ago?

A: Yeah.

M: So, everyone changes, is what I'm saying. Em, I just, I'll tell you this because it's fun. I got the Media Access Award. It was at the Beverly Hills Hilton. The great and the good, and of course it's different with Americans, so much more money involved. It was swankola, there were four wine glasses. Right? You get the picture. I get this, and it's a hot fucking day in LA. And I'm dressed up in my nice shit. So I've got the cords on, the shirt and the waistcoat. I'm a little bit overdressed for the heat. I've had a couple of coffees too many. Um, we do the event, I talk to Peter Farrelly, it's all laddish, I talk to a couple of crips, there's like three people left, I think probably time to go now, it's three pm, started at eleven. And I cannot get a fucking Uber signal to save my life, on my phone. I'm holding the bag, the goody bag. And I've got the award under the other arm, which is heavy and made of brass. And I can't really operate my phone one-handedly. So I'm kind of having a hard physical time, trying to find my Uber, my eyesight isn't helping, the sunlight isn't helping, I'm sweating profusely and started to get a little bit fucking tetchy with the whole situation. I just want to start crying and Mummy to take me home actually at this point. I've got almost to that point. And finally I get an Uber signal. And then I hear Mat Fraser! And I look up. And Ash Atallah, of all people in the world, is looking at me with the eerrr look. From his car with three

young guys. On the street in Beverly Hills in LA. And I just look up, I go, oh fuck off, Ash! Right? Because I'm just really frustrated, I would have said fuck off to anyone who'd spoken to me at that point, right? I look, fuck off Ash, the lights change, the car goes. I never get a chance to say sorry or explain the situation. But what I do see is these three guys really shocked, looking at me, then looking at Ash, then looking at me again as they drive off. And thinking, yeah, you really blew.. Why would Ash be in LA, man? Think about that. He's doing a telly. He's negotiating the IT Crowd for an American release. He's doing something and you told him to fuck off in front of all of his new American mates. Well done, Buddy. Right?

So, that was like, yeah a year ago, I just bumped into him on Wednesday night in Soho and went Ash, I'm fucking so sorry. And he went, this is one of the guys. And I got his number. And I said I wanna call you. And he said, yeah call me. Because we're all longer and older in the tooth. And he needs another hit. Right? They all need hits. And he's not really done disability. And we were doing Yes, Sir I Can Boogie. Do you remember Yes Sir I Can Boogie? It had its faults, but it was a two season Radio Four comedy sketch show around disability, right? Very rare. We were, we did a television pilot, I've still got it. It's quite good. We were about to do a series, we literally were about to do a fucking tv series of that, with me, Darryl Beaton and that nice blonde lady who doesn't perform any more. And he went, nah, changed me mind. Why? I'm gonna do this sitcom thing with a friend of mine. Yeah, what's it about? It's set in an office. I said, that's a fucking shit idea. And I hadn't talked to him again since. Until I told him to fuck off fifteen years later in Beverley Hills. It's a crazy world. But old Ash Atallah, we've gotta, we've gotta regroup, we've gotta regroup and have another go, regroup and have another go, regroup and have another go. And he is in a position to help me at the moment. So I've got to go to him with an idea, haven't I? Trouble is, I don't have any ideas to go to him with. And I can't say please can I be in your new thing, because that's desperate. And useless and not helping. I have to say, I've got this

great idea for a sitcom. Trouble is, I don't have a great idea for a sitcom.

I have a lovely idea for a couple, a friend of mine is a Thai actress, she'll go there. She comes outta cabaret, she's very, very talented. She'll do any, er she loves to play the Asian cliché for comedy, for bad taste comedy, but she's on top of it, the way we are with our crip humour. And I thought, now there's a couple, the thalidomider who's one of those douchebag guys that buys the Thai wife. And she, those girls, the only ones that speak English over there are the ones that used to be prostitutes. That's why they learnt English. There's no other reason.

A: Oh, really?

M; Yeah. So, just so you know, not that I care, but all those women used to be prostitutes, the Thai wife of your Dave, your mate, whatever. And I just thought, all she wants is his compensation, because she's learnt about it. And he's brought her to England. And she's foul to him the whole time about his disability. And he kind of deserves it. Because he's one of those guys who thinks he can buy a woman. I saw them on the beach, it was hideous. I just thought, so I'm workshopping that, we're just gonna get together for a couple of hours and improv, and see if anything comes of it. But you know.. 1:52:17.2

Yeah, Ash was one of those people who was scared of politics because he saw politics as being a reason that people didn't want to get things commissioned and became anti-political. Then he, too, through that, you know, when you decide something like that, a lot of babies get thrown out with bathwaters don't they. And he missed out on a load of stuff that I think could've been really good.

A; He wanted to do a disability version of that Asian sketch show with Meera Syal, What was it called? Goodness Gracious Me.

M: Yes Sir I Can Boogie was that.

A: But, he wanted no politics in it. Meaning no.. nothing critical. So he was wanting to do it in a way that just didn't open the way to, to a disability equivalent of that sketch about going for an English or anything like that.

M; We did a lot of that on Yes Sir I Can Boogie. It was (...) because he would never give us the punchlines, he would always give it to Kevin Eldon and Simon Greenall. Two fantastic comedy actors. But.. we would never quite be in the foreground. You know. Um Kevin Eldon, lovely guy, gone on to be in this and that and not much else. Simon Grenall is the voice of the meerkats. He doesn't need another job for the rest of his life.

So, here's a beautiful anecdote for you. One day, Kevin Eldon couldn't do it. So they brought in this new guy. He was a Welsh guy, no-one had really heard of him and his name was Rob.. You know the Welsh comedian who'd on TV all the time, the comic actor. Rob Brydon.

A: Oh fuck!

M: Young guy called Rob Bryden.

A: Yeah.

M: He fucked up immediately by going I feel really badly about you people. He 'you peopled' us. Right? So I hated him from the start. But, you know, people change. Anyway, he was up and coming. He sat down. And Simon Greenall is, was in those days, I dunno if he's changed, fucking chippy, right? He came in one day and went some guy just tutted at me on the tube, I turned round and said, did you just fucking tut at me? Thought whoa, okay Simon, you know. Feisty character, right? Liked him enormously. He does voiceovers. And whenever we couldn't get

the punch line, or it got a bit tense, he'd break the tension by doing one of his voiceover lines. And we'd go, Oh, you didn't do that one as well, did you? It was the, what we did. And he would sometimes use 'Radion, you can smell the freshness' and we would go, 'fucking hell, that was you' and the moment would pass, it was brilliant.

So anyway, one day Kevin Eldon couldn't do it and Rob Brydon sat down. And they were sitting at opposite ends of the table. And they fucking hated each other. Right off the bat. You could just see it. So the usual thing happened. We got to the point where we couldn't quite find that better punchline. And he went 'Radion, you can smell the freshness'. And Rob Brydon just slowly looked up at him, looked him in the eye and went, Have a break, Have a Kit-Kat. Cause he did the voice over for the Kit-Kat advert. And he Kit-Katted him, right? Cause that was the most famous voiceover there was at the time. And Rob Brydon is famously the man of a million voices, he is really good at voices. And I just, you would've wanted to be there, it was amazing.

I saw Rob years later. He remembered that moment, people always remember me because of the arms, you know. And he was exactly the same. You know, good luck to him and all that, but he doesn't feel comfortable around disabled people. And when people don't it's really obvious straight away, you know. Simon doesn't give a fuck, he just wanted the money. He just wanted to be on something and be in, bless him. And Kevin, Kevin's a good guy. It's always bugged me that he never really made it, he's always been the guy with the little part in the Alan Partridge film. Or.. I hope he writes. I hope he's making his money that way.

A: He's around quite a lot, though isn't he?

M: Yeah, he's always there. He, er, so yeah I dunno.. And then, you know there was that guy Jamie O'Leary, who started doing the hidden camera stunts comedy for

Channel Four, which I wasn't allowed to be in because I was too well known. Really, how many more reasons can there be for not having me in a Channel Four thing. Em

A; They did some great stuff.

M: They did some great stuff. And it was kind of funny.

A: Even having been around disability for a long time, going UH? Did you see the one with the guide dog, where he got people giving directions..

M: Yeah Tim's work was the best in that, I thought. Tim Gebbels had the funniest sketches, I felt. The one where he's, that awful one where he proposes to the girl and the girl walks off in the shopping precinct. He gets down on one knee and goes I've got something to say to you. And they do it on a bench where there are other people and the girl just gets up and leaves. And do the other people tell him that she's left, in the middle of his, we've been going out a while now and I.. Is that comedy even, I don't know, it's pretty fucking hairy lairy. But you couldn't fucking keep your eyes off it, you know.

I love Tim.. Tim's a, an underused actor, he's really good, you know, I'm just disappointed that the stories haven't been there, like the beautiful story they put on Castoffs, his episodic story was that, he was, there was this shitty Shakespeare actor having to play blind and he's trying to get the blind guy in to show him how to be blind. And Tim, and he does the soliloquy. And it's just better than the other guy. And it illustrates, you know, they didn't really, they intercut it with other stuff going on and it didn't really, but you know.

Where's the story, the film about that happening, the play about the appropriation. I mean, why aren't these stories..? But it's so beautiful, it's so beautiful and would

illustrate everything so well. The grotesqueness of watching an able-bodied actor appropriate an impairment and wank off while they're doing it, like a white guy playing a jazz solo on a saxophone. Blue eyed soul Curtis Steiger, it's watching Curtis Steiger have a wank, it's, no, you know I say to people, and I said it at the thing, there's all this furore about actors getting Oscars for playing disabled people. Do you know how easy it is to go oh gg g gg. I did that, I said see I just did it, it's that fucking easy. It's not acting, okay. Acting is where you show that, actually you were lying and you *are* upset about something. Acting is a turn of decision in the eyes. It's not going lg gog cgegeal polsy. Fuck Off!

A: I'm gonna have fun transcribing that, Mat.

M: People find it too offensive, but yet, isn't that the bottom line? 2:00:02.4 It's not acting, it's just, it's literally mimicking like a seal.

A; But the people who are the gatekeepers don't wanna hear that.

M: I think the audience are ready for a discussion about it. I really do, I think they'd find it really fascinating. We'll just use a wheelchair user, because obviously it's easier.

A: I think for a long time disability has been a thing where actually the public at large are ahead of people in television.

M: But, it's so far ahead now that it's worrying.

A: Yeah, but.. It used to be the case, you see, that um people who worked in television said.. there weren't any, there were hardly any disabled people working for the BBC. And Joy Lale, who if she hadn't been in a car crash would have been like one of the top people in BBC Drama by now, she was really good. She supported us in selling Inmates to the BBC, and like, sort of read scripts, helped us to rewrite.

In one of the versions, we did a full-length play version of it at one point. And then, it's like we had a scene where you saw how Wayne ended up in the place, after his mother's died he falls asleep, he gets drunk smoking a joint, sets fire to the place. Um and then, what we did then was we had a scene with the neighbours where a husband and wife, the wife notices that there's smoke and says to her husband something about it, and he's sort of saying, that little cunt, fuck him! BUT we made them Deaf, you see. So we had this, this little thing in sign language. Joy would not believe, she found it completely unreal that there could be another disabled couple..

M:...Living next door.

A: That there could be a Deaf couple living next door to the wheelchair user. And I thought, if even somebody as good as Joy can't get that..

M: Yeah.

A: What hope is there?

M: Yeah. No I think, I think we should all start writing down subjects more. Because I think the audience are ready. I agree with you. They're very ready. They're super ready. They keep telling me how ready they are.

A: One family in three contains a disabled person. And it's an interesting thing, disability, disability is, like you find allies in, in extraordinary places, because.

M: Well. You know Liz's new show Assisted Suicide the Musical, there's a lovely song in it where she is protesting next to the Pope. And It's a song about, who'd have guessed it, we both don't agree with assisted suicide, you know, the strange bedfellows you find yourself with along the way. Like, you know em the feminists

and Mary Whitehouse, about pornography. They must have found that a bit odd at the time, you know. Yeah., but I'm convinced that that's what we need and, we have a responsibility to ourselves to make it as good as we can, um while also utilising all the outsider manipulative behaviour that I've got to try and get doors opened, that are firmly rammed shut through injustice. By any means necessary. Absolutely. But, we have to have good product. And, you know, we have to get it right, we can't start our film writing career with a three-part Northern Italy mediaeval drama with fifteen disabled people as the protagonists, it's just not going to happen.

A; Can I come back to..

M: Whatever you want.

A: To, to some other questions. Um, the the freak show thing, is that just a thing you did for the television programme, or..

M: No, no, that became a real thing.

A; I thought..Tell me about that.

M: So, on the documentary, we did a live documentary, live interview with Dixie Zegan on the stage at the freak show. And he said, and this was real, I'm like, I want to know what it's like, the experience of the freak, and it's like, well you either shit or get off the pot don't you? I'm inviting you to be in the freak show this weekend. That's how you're gonna know. And, I'm put on the back foot and I agree. And it's a real moment that's caught on camera and you can see that. And though, I did it, and we did it, I didn't enjoy the bally platform, I found that quite difficult, um , so they have the guy on the platform outside going come on in,. You're gonna see this, you're gonna see that, and you don't, you know there was a, you just

get looked at and they come in whether they're fascinated enough by your physical difference or not, you know. Um, so that's the exploitative end of the freak show. Definitely. Once, you're inside of course, the beautiful thing is that you're the one talking. And they have to listen to you. And there's an honesty about a freak show. So, you know, you don't have to wonder, I wonder if they're only here because they're looking at my arms, you *know* they're only there, right. And then, they have to listen to what you say. And, you know, a lot of freak shows resented.. So basically, I did it. And the cameras all went away, and he was like nononono, I let you and all the cameras in here for free. I want you to work the freak show tomorrow, with no cameras, all day, to pay me back. And he meant it, I was like fuck! Er..okay. So I did the show eight times. I saw lots of poor black and hispanic and drunk white people marvel at my work, I realised I had never entertained them before, I had only ever entertained disabled people and middle class people before. They weren't embarrassed about looking at my arms. They saw no shame in it. They were genuinely interested to hear about thalidomide. Of which they knew nothing. They were even more interested to hear that the FDA baned it back in the day when they used to do their job, little laugh, ooh I'm onto something. Because of course Vioxx, you know, hey, you've got us to thank for the warning on the drug thing, happy to give a little love back. Get a laugh, I think oh, this is the way to go. So I do standup. I do political standup, I explain my arms, then I do political standup, then go but I'm a traditionalist, so I'm gonna end with a feat of skill, you're gonna go wow look at that he can do that with his arms. Em so I do a bit of drumming. I do guess tht tune on the drums. It's super fun.

And I realise that I'm educating people in many many ways. Literally, about my bone structure, I know it sounds so odd that the best disability arts work that I've done in New York is at the freak show. But they were the first theatre in New York to become fully wheelchair accessible for performers. Isn't that ironic? He goes, Dick, I love Dick, he goes, look they're coming in to have a look at your arms. Fucking terrorise them if you want, I don't care. Say what you want, literally say

what you want. You can't say fuck , because there are kids there, but say anything you want. I've got their money, they're not going to ask, they're not going to have their money back once they're in. You can do what you want. Kick 'em out with your words, I don't care. So I was like right AARGH, and just let go.

And I actually thought, you know what, this is really fun. It's also brutal, so on the bally platform, the guy with the tattooed face has a mask on,. You've gotta pay for what you're gonna see, it looks like a Mexican wrestling mask, there re lots of drunk guys, It's very gang down there, some guy wanted a fight 'Right here, right now buddy'. So the dwarf guy goes, come on Mat. And I follow him in. He gives me two baseball bats, takes two himself, we're coming out there we'll beat those fuckers up. So I'm like, literally, what? So we come out and we're facing off these guys with baseball bats. Now when you and a dwarf and a guy with a tattooed face are on the bally platform with baseball bats, facing off a gang who want to fight you and you come off that, you feel like a comrade, you feel like you've never felt before, this is real, this is back like it would have been in the fifties at the circus, you know, it's a camaraderie, between community and camaraderie, and a crip feeling, you know, it was beyond the feeling of yeah we done the police in Parliament Square, it was something like that but it was not political, I mean I never talked about my disability politics backstage, only on the stage, and I dressed it up a bit. But I was just hooked. It was so romantic, I mean what performer doesn't kind of wanna run away with the circus. There's all that romantic history there, camaraderie, I was just intoxicated by the whole..there were loads of..

2:09:29.6

File Mat 007

Um, so that whole freak show thing was huge for me. And of course, Julie came down one day, with her besties, Bambi the Mermaid and Bunny Love, three blonde strippers, out for a day in Coney Island, licking ice creams and going to the freak show. And I was like, this is my new family. I've got freaks down here in Coney Island, who are accepted up in Manhattan, on the cabaret stages where I'm allowed to host, in the sold-out show with these people who are the most famous striptease artists in all of New York. What's not to like?

This is not being rejected, this is not 'oh no we've done Mat Fraser', this is very different, this is 'Wow! We love and want Mat Fraser!' Where am I gonna go? So I just dived head-first into it, didn't I? You know. Along the way we came up with our wonderful cabaret the Freakandn the Showgirl, which we toured round the world, that is gorgeous but I don't want to do any more. Um, consolidated my cabaret persona and people who know me in New York. Occasional, my favourite is the Guardian-reading tourist that against their better judgement has gone into the freak show. They are so horrified when they see me. They're like, Oh, it's that guy from Chanel Four. Oh my god, he's in a freak show now. Poor man! 'Cause I come out and I hit the outgoing audience for selling cards, 'cause you double your money at the freak show if you sell cards on the outgoing. I meet people who come out and go 'Are you okay?' With a real middle-class concern, bless them.. I appreciate that, you knoe, but it's kind of funny.

So, and then you know, as the great Frodini recently observed to me, he said Mat, when you started, back in 2000, doing this, 2001, you were literally the only born freak doing it. And it was called the pornography of the disabled, wasn't it? I said, yeah, you've done your research, it was. He said, now, with all these new kids coming in, it's like it's their new rock 'n roll. And he banged it right on the head. Because these young kids coming in, lots of deformed kids are joining sideshow. But they're learning pulling up things with nails, or their nipples, or banging a nail in

their head or flesh-hook hanging with flippers. They're calling themselves The Penguin, um, or what have you and it's, it's huge now, it's become like a rock band, sideshows. Since Jim Rose punked up the sidshow in the '90s. It's now the done thing, you look like crusties, heavy metal music, shock, strippers, gilrs, guys, rock ,. So of course it's attractive. In the same way that it would've been attractive to Sealo to run away and join the circus. 0:02:49.4

You know, lest we forget, and I always remind people, in the thirties what would it have been like to be disabled, little flippers, he was fiscally independent and kept all five members of his poor Polish family from Philadelphia clothed, housed and fed for his entire career. He was very proud of that. You know. In the seventies it had a different focus to the late forties maybe, and he went to court in 1973 to demand the right of the freaks, because they, people said we want the circus but we don't want the freakshow, it's in bad taste. And he went to court in 1973 to demand the right, and he won that year but the following year it was over.

Um, you know, so that whole freak show thing really stuck with me. And I know what it's like to be a freak. I mean, I've literally done it, week in, week out. I did, one year I did the whole summer season. Eight shows a day, six days a week for fifteen weeks or something. I mean, it was *brutal*. And I learnt the value of the single dollar. You're only paid seventeen fifty an hour there, or I was. Um, literally have to wait until you've earned your first ten bucks before you can have a sandwich, you know. You really, money so changes down there. And I'm grateful for that, because I didn't know the value of the single dollar until I did the freak show. Um. But, you know, then I transcended it. Er, then I got work in Manhattan. And they were like two hundred quid to get your knob out for five minutes and like, yeah it would take me a week to earn that in the freak show. So I started working there less and less. Um, but I'm still royalty, I'm considered royalty down there. I was the first one to come back. In the politically correct days I was the first one to arrive and go, no this is okay, it has agency, I mean let's discuss this.

I was the first one to say that in America. So I have kudos of that. Um, and then I got American Horror Story and they all came down on me like a ton of bricks. Because, poor babies, you know, people think when their world is talked about on a TV programme that it's gonna show how the world really is. It's not, it has no intention of doing that, it's a television programme. More to the point, it's a horror film. Of course it isn't going to do that.

So I got it in the neck from fucking sideshow people for it not being like sideshow really is. It was funny. But the disabled people were like, this is great. Anyway, so I have the sideshow family. Um, they don't tend to talk about the politics, well they do but in their own language. It's a different language. Um, you know, they know the common experience of being stared at when they don't want to be. Er, they know they won't, they'll be the last one to be picked for the football game, you know they've had the same experience as me and you growing up. It's just they see it in a different framework. They don't use the framework of politicised language. But they are, in their own way, political. Um, but it's very us and them. They talk about norms, you know, kinda cool in a way. There's always been a bit of separatist in me, you know. I'm not, I think we should all be inclusive. Um, but it feels great to be a bit like that sometimes. You know. And that's spread all around the world now. I mean, sideshow is everywhere now. Absolutely everywhere. Even on the Southbank, you know. Um, so I love freak shows and all of that, I did a lot of history.

In all my days, and I looked hard for exploitation, I think we can agree that Schlitzie the Pinhead was exploited, um, but I can't find anyone else that was, not one person. They all wanted to do it themselves. It's exploitative in its current. In its nature, but people have their own free will.

A; Can we move on? Oh yeah, one thing that, there was, there's one thing I remember you telling me one time,. Where you said something like I realised I could

be a part member of straight society or a full member of the outlaws. 0:07:13.1

M: Yeah, that's the dreadlocks stuff, you know. They'll tolerate the mascot, I'm being a bit cruel about everybody there

A: Start from the beginning again.

M: So if you as a disabled person use the er fashion of anti-state fashion, you become a member of that, but you're still disabled, and therefore not really a member of it. But you kind of are, but you kind of aren't. And that's the best you're gonna get. But if you're, if you go to your disabled brothers and sisters and say I wanna come on the demonstration, you are a hundred per cent part of that, it can't be taken away from you. I use to feel almost sorry for Diane Pungartnik, you'll understand why I say almost because you know her, um, but you know, no-one was listening about invisible disabilities in those days really, were they? I mean, I was, I used to joke yeah but it's not a proper one, you know, it is a proper one because disability's a social construct. Around being treated like a fucker because you either look or behave differently.

A: I got on quite well with Diane because of the epilepsy.

M: Yeah, No, I did too, I just found her really scary. She was like Billie Whitelaw in the Omen. Um, I just was frightened of her. Frightened of her wrath, constant wrath.

A: Yeah.. I don't know what happened to..

M: No, I was wondering about her the other day.. Did she just go back to Canada?

A: I didn't mean subsequently. I dunno what happened to Diane to make her that

way.

M: No. No, but she was. Anyway, um, yeah sorry, you were saying.. That thing was about, well that, and, I mean you know, I'm also, I was quite separatist in those days and I'm less so now. There are lots of able-bodied allies who do get it, one hundred per cent. And they know that they could be, like any of us could become disabled in a different way. Tomorrow. Um and they were our total allies and, um, you know, er, did we treat them equally, I don't know. I should've.. I shagged too many of them, and that's for sure. Not good, not good.

A: Fetish clubs. Tell me about that.

M: Okay.. Again, really easy. Turned away at the Hippodrome, sorry mate, they're gonna be a bit disturbed in there, actually it wasn't the Hippodrome, it was another disco. Um, was in the Record and Tape Exchange, I was dealing pot about, around about town, only to weirdos. And I got asked if I would go to Submission, this shop in Camden that sold rubber stuff. And I'm an old, I'm a perv, I'm kinky, I don't know any disabled people who don't, who are over forty who have a sexuality there isn't a kink in somewhere. I don't know of one. Anyway, um Marissa Karnesky, the performance artist was earning money in reception and she said, and she got me to a bigger network of those people, because my pot was good. And eventually I was dealing to all these rubber people all the time. And I was like, oh what's all this rubber stuff? Come to the club sometime, we'd love to have you. You know, well I've got nothing to wear, well wear this. Um, and I went. And I got hit on like four times. In the first five minutes.. I didn't think, stop to think it's because I was the weirdest freakiest person there, and that was a badge of honour there, because how perverted can you be than fucking the cripple. I just thought, fucking hell, I'm gonna get laid here. Everyone seems to smile and loves it, and there's all these naked people running around, I am in fucking heaven.

By that time, my flatmate at the time was also interested from a feminist viewpoint in power play and S and M and all that. And we decided to, we would be buddies, we weren't lovers, we were friends, but we could pretend to be a couple. So we would go to these things. And then I went to Record and Tape Exchange, I was upstairs and this guy went (...) with a big bin bag of stuff that like clinked inside, I said what's that, he said it's a prostitute, she's just shut up shop. And the whole lot's a job lot of all the stuff she used to use in her dungeon. Thirty quid the lot. I went: done! Didn't even look in the bag. Took it home, went, Jeannie, Jeannie, look what I've got. And opened this thing on the living room floor. And we fucking costumed up like the Five People. There was so much stuff in there. We gave it a good clean, but then. And so we started to go to Submission, the club, that I could get into for free because I was the dealer. Not The Dealer of the club, I wasn't like a big dealer, I'd be like I'd give three people a small block of hash each or something for twenty quid, really small fry. But it would get me in free to things. And Kitty Kickboxer, the big moment was when Kitty Kickboxer, the hottest thing I'd ever seen on two legs, walked up to me and said, well aren't you something special? I said I dunno, am I? Thinking what do you mean!? She said are you free for the next half an hour? I was like, yep! And she took me round the back and shagged me. And er I, you know, I sort of interrogated a little bit what was going on and then I thought I don't really mind, it's a fairly good payoff. Er, and just went a lot. I'd always take lots of coke, taking lots of drugs in the early nineties, 91-95, that was my heaviest drug use time. I haven't taken cocaine since '95. Or any of the other Class A drugs that we were *necking*. Um, you know, came back with one of the bouncers one time, a female bouncer, you know, lots of sort of (...) sexy stuff would go on. Um and disabled people, and then Tuppy Owens was there. And Outsiders were part of it. So there's a whole group of wannabe, wouldbe pervy crips who were part of this. And she said, yes, in her beautiful naive way, everybody hates Tuppy Owen, but actually she's not that bad, she's just a bit naive. She means well, but she totally gets it wrong, but she means well.

Anyway, um, she's like, we do these events. And it's a fundraiser to help disabled people have sex with each other. I found it very condescending and I said, well do you have any disabled people *in* the event. Oh no. Well I said, you should, it's not right is it? She said, well, do you want to host it, and I was like yeah, I don't mind. So I ended up hosting the Sex Maniacs Ball, and then got called the Night of the Senses, for ten years in a row. We all grew up together. Um, because I was normalising disability in terms of pervy sexiness while being on stage. Everyone was having sexy fun, a few of my wheelchair using friends, Mik Scarlet would always be therte with Diane, you know a few of the other things. And er, it became a little sub-group of crips that didn't really mind the political ambiguity of being fetishised because we were getting action. Where else would we get any action? Nowhere. You know. So, it was that. I remember on Torture Garden, they called it Freak Show or something, and they really wanted to go there, and I remember thinking this is a bit borderline now. Um, but then bit the bullet and just did a, Marissa had her long arms through my jacket sleeves gag. And she strangled me and pissed on me because it was the Torture Garden.

So, that whole fetish thing, again like the freak show thing, was a sort of politically ambiguous in terms of disability politics, place where we were put centre stage immediately. And celebrated. And who's to say it was the wrong kind of celebration. I know lots of people will, and have done. But I've been there. And it's very difficult to gauge, it's ambiguous at best, it really is. And there are a lot of positives about it. I mean for fuck's sake if a perv is a perv and they have sex with a disabled person without thinking that they're less sexual, for me that's a good thing. I dunno, it's complicated. Sure, it's complicated. Um, er, I tried to persuade some of my friends to come down, the kinky ones did, the other ones didn't. You know. I met a lot of friends along the way, some of whom weren't really nice people, drugs do that. Er it was good it.. Waned and waned off, Submission became less popular and the Torture Garden took over more, it was much more hardcore, much less my scene, plus my sexual politics were different. There was a

lot of spanking going on when I started going to those clubs, it was all businessmen being spanked by sex workers and men being abused by women. Something I could happily watch in a kinky environment because it was like an antidote to society. Now you go along, it's just douchbags spanking their girlfriend. And um, it's not interesting to me politically. Um, sexually it's interesting to me, but not politically and the two have to, I can't be fully happy unless my politics are happy, I can't. We're all the same aren't we, us political people. If it contravenes our belief system, we don't feel very comfortable, really. I don't.

So, that's the fetish scene. Mik could tell you a lot more about that as well from his perspective. I ended up roadying for Mik's band and they played with Ron Athey, who is an HIV bloodletter.. That was one of the weirdest gigs I've ever seen in my life. There were just people piercing themselves, he had a crown of thorns made out of steel pins which he took out one by one and the head bleeds a lot, you just have to nick your head and it bleeds a lot. It was a wall of blood. And its HIV blood, you know, he was a very political guy in his own way. Um, and like seven people fainted in the audience. At the Tortue Garden where they were used to seeing that shit. Um, and there were disabled people around? No, there was just me and Mik mostly. Now there's a, Outsiders has blended with the fetish community and also got took over, Tuppy responded to criticism and allowed some disabled people to be on the committee. So it changed and Shital and a few other people have really moved it into what it is now. Which is still a fundraiser for profoundly disabled people to socially engage and sexually hook up. But it's run by disabled people as well. So it doesn't have that awful dogooder thing that it was painted as..

A; Shital?

M: Shital (SPELLS) An India lady who's a wheelchair user. Yeah. They still, they're doing snail racing, now, which boggles my mind. Um, you don't even wanna

know what that is. Um, but, er, so that whole fetish thing is part of my life. I feel that I've moved on from it. 0:19:08.7

I think, when I got to New York, the fetish scene is very different in New York, it's very like, good-looking people only need apply. Like that club Killing Kittens, which is, doesn't kill any kittens, but it's a sex club where they only let attractive people in. I'm like, that's not why I joined the fetish scene, mate. Au contraire. Fuck yer, you know. But, you know, I've retained a little bit of all of that. And a bit of freak show, it all pops up in my work from time to time, in various different ways. Um but for me, like the freak show, the fetish scene was a liberation. Not a, not the opposite, not a closing down of anything. It was an opening up of things. Easier to say from the (six point) heterosexual, male point of view, no doubt.

A: (Checks' Martin's suggested questions) Perceptions of you among disabled and non-disabled people. Have we covered that, do you think?

M: Yeah, but you'd have to ask them, wouldn't you? Because they're never gonna tell me the whole unadulterated truth. I know that, I know that, um, a lot of people think I'm incredibly arrogant, I'm aware of that. I know, but I don't really know stuff specifically to do with disability and stuff, I mean yes, I've used shock and sexuality in my work to get attention. Because no-one was watching or listening when I didn't. And sometimes I've lost sight of the politics of that. I know some of my feminist friends have been disappointed in some of the things I've done in the past. And I have to take that on the chin. And I do. And I'm sorry it happened, I really am. But there's only a couple of things I really regret in my life, and they're not things I can talk about, they're not the things to do with my professional life, they're things I've done as a human being that I shouldn't have done.

A: When you're in different communities.

M: Yeah.

A; Right. Are you the same person? Or do you adjust yourself to..

M: Well, I don't think any of us crips are the same as when we're together with just crips. That's a difference thing. It's just a different thing, It's you finally let go of everything, everything. I don't think I'm different with Julie than I am with those people. No, I am, I am. Cause I know, she doesn't wanna hear separatist gags that much. But I still find them amusing, because I'm childish. How many non-disabled people does it take to change a lightbulb? Who gives a fuck? That's still my favourite. I still love that one. It's such a good gag.

Um, but no, in terms of all the other places I go, I think I've managed to hone myself into the one person. I used to be terribly different. But it presents horrible, horrible embarrassments when you're caught out, you know. So be honest, be you, calm down a bit, which I think I have a bit, um and just be consistent,. And I think I have been. But of course, it's different when I'm just with disabled people. And that's just the same in a DAN demo as it is at the Society for Disability Studies in America, where they've a little bit different, awfully political, po-faced pronoun political. Um, but it's still the same deal at the pub in the evening, you know, it's still, you know, you'll have a table of crips, won't you, and someone will go look how crap I am at doing this. And we'll all laugh at them. And then we'll all show how crap they are at doing that thing or whatever, or the thing we're crap at. Good old laugh, it's so cathartic. You know, occasionally you've got guests from the non-disabled community there. But it's always at its best when you know that everyone has experienced that, and has been with you on that journey.

But apart from that, no I think I've managed to become a person that's consistently me. And that is an honest version of me, that doesn't have to hide things from certain people. I suppose I hide things from my Mum from time to time, because

she doesn't like anger, she finds it upsetting, she's seventy-seven, I don't wanna upset her any more, that's about it. No, hold on. I'm very very different in auditions. 'Cause you have to give them the cripple they need to see. You do. You do. And you know, we've all learned that it's the first thirty seconds, you know. So you have to make those count. Which is why I never allow myself to go to an audition where they don't know I'm disabled first. Ever. It's happened to me twice, I'm never gonna do it again. The look of fear and shock and fixed smile and anger flashed at the casting director, and all those thing that happen in the first few milliseconds are enough to let you know you ain't getting that job.

And it's not actually their fault. It's not their fault that society has made them like that about disability. And they would have tried harder if they'd known you were a cripple before you came in. And, you know, it's only happened a couple of times, but it only needs to happen once before you never want it ever ever ever agin in your life. It's horrible, it's horrible. You feel at your most vulnerable in those situations, But, now that I know, and these days, because I have been around a lot, most casting directors already know who I am, they just wanna know if I can do Liverpool or .. What am I talking about? I haven't had an audition for over ten years in anything! For nothing. I said to my agent, who I loathe, I can't.. I only hate Hilary Clinton more than her, of any woman in the world. And I feel bad when I hate a woman, 'cause I self-police, am I being misogynist. Course I am, probably a bit. I hope I'm not. But my agent has not got me so much work, it's amazing.

Anyway, we were having an argument about six months ago. I said, I mean, am I literally the only fucker here in Britain who hasn't had an audition for Dr Who. She went, oh Dr Who, Russell T. Davis is one of my best friends.. I said, so did I miss the email when you suggested me? The last three times the Doctor changed. Or for any other thing, I must have missed those emails. Very snidey, very sarcastic, we didn't talk for a month afterwards. But two days ago, the producer of the series just announce that for 2017 Dr Who they're gonna cast a long-term disabled

character that's gonna have a prominent part in the series. She doesn't know this, but this is her last chance. She has to get me seen for that role. And they will be wrong. They're probably already decided it's going to be a wheelchair user, and that's fine. Let them decide one of those things. But if my agent can't get me an audition for that, I'm leaving her. You know what, Lisa Hammond thinks *she's* left *me*. I emailed her five and a half weeks ago, Michelle, I'm coming to England, I've got my green card, I'm coming to England. Gonna be here from the twelfth of July to the tenth of August, I know it's the summer time when people are on holiday and stuff, but there are mid-episodic, mid-series episodic parts going, I know that, I know how it goes on the annual thing. And I'd love to be seen for a few things. I'm still waiting for a reply to the email of the 22nd June from my own agent. I've written every week, did you get my email from last week? And then the last one, wow, I've just counted, it's forty days since I sent that last email, you must be on a hell of a holiday. And if you are on holiday, I wish I would have known. I've told my manager, who's affiliated to her, I've shown him hard evidence of her negligence and he's gone, yeah alright, I'm gonna let you leave her. It's gonna be embarrassing for me though, but I'll let you leave her. Um, but as Lisa Hammond said, very soberingly last night, she looked at me and she went, yeah Mat, what you think someone else's gonna do better? I've had the same fucking agent since I was in Grange Hill, she's got me two auditions.. They don't get us auditions, Mat, they make our contract better when the person decides they want us. And your agent's just as good as any other fucker for that. Stick with her. But, I actually loathe her. And a change is as good as a rest, and I need a change. 0:28:57.2

But you know, she's got David Mitchell and Stephen Webb, you know Peep Show, as her main clients. And I know other non-disabled clients of hers who are less famous and we all laugh and say, yeah David Mitchell farts, we don't hear from our agent for three weeks, you know, because she only cares about where the money's coming from, the big money, and her big clients. And she's known for being lazy but she also has one of the best contact lists in Britain. It's no use to me if she

doesn't apply them to me, is it?

So er, I dunno why I started moaning about my agent. Probably because it's my favourite thing to do at the moment. But um, it's er, it's a tough landscape out there and I guess it goes something like that. What about my client Mat Fraser? What about him for the neighbour role. Oh, oh yes, no Mat's good but we weren't really thinking of a disabled character for that role. Oh, okay, bye. But why not? Don't you think it would be more interesting? I'd be charming and cheeky about the cajoling rather than going but you have a moral right, that's not gonna get you the gig. But what about an agent who used their fucking nonce cause they should want the fifteen per cent to go 'but wouldn't that be fun?' Don't you think it would be fun to do that? You know that kind of encouragement, my agent doesn't do that, clearly.

A: 'We weren't really thinking of a disabled character' Of course, you weren't, nobody ever does. But think what you could get from that.

M: Don't you think it would be interesting? Yeah, I mean, you've gotta appeal to the dramatist in them, right? Cause it is more interesting, frankly. What ever happened to the blind detective? It's a hunch, Sarge. It's a hunch, that's his fucking tag line. Blind detective, it's a hunch. That should just get commissioned. It's like Snakes on a Plane. Samuel L Jackson went, I'll do it, before he'd read the script. He said, but the deal is it has to be called Snakes on a Plane. 'Cause I know this is just a working title, but it's genius. You don't need the script, everybody knows what's gonna happen. It's snakes on a fucking plane. I'll be in it. So, blind detective, it's a hunch.

A: That film is worth watching just for Samuel L Jackson saying the line, I have had it with these motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane.

M: Yeah. I mean, come on.

A; It's utterly a movie that just does what it says on the tin, isn't it.

M: I think the blind detective would, too. Anyway, whatever, what I think doesn't matter, It's what commissioning editors think, and what they want is what they know. And what they know is their friend who lives in Richmond, who isn't, you know.

A; Yeah, it's the thing that I t took us a little while to learn as writers, but producers will say we want something original, we want new, we want fresh, and what they actually mean, all the time..

M: Is a spin on what was popular last year.

A; We want exactly what we're already familiar with, but just a little ..

M: Slightly different

A: A little twist.

M: Yeah. But we know that now. We know that now. And I'm still working my angles.

A; And sometimes, sometimes you find people are better than that.

M I mean, I think we will in our lifetime see a disabled person get an Oscar, won't we? Oh God. So I've got my running gag, is my Oscar.

A; If only because it's gotta happen sometime.

M: We've still got a few years left, right..

A; If only because it's gotta happen sometime that somebody's in a car crash or something between..

M;; Hahaha . No,. That's a bit camp! Before the awards ceremony. Look we got some good news and bad news. Oscar Best Actor nominees, which one of you's gonna take one for the team. 'Not me' they all run away. Tom Cruise stays because he's never had an Oscar and he never will . I joke about that, Leonardo di Caprio material, because he bought the rights to the film of Johnny Eck. Did you know that? Johnny Eck was the legless guy, that guy with no legs from the freak shows.

A: Oh, I see.

M: Very famous guy. And he bought the rights, sat on them for three years and then gave them away again, because he couldn't think what to do. MY gag was at the time, well let's face it, I he plays Johnny Eck, that's probably the only way he's gonna get an Oscar, poor love, isn't it, you know? But then he went and got one.

END