

DV8

PHYSICAL THEATRE

Can We Talk About This?

A work conceived and directed
by Lloyd Newson

National
Theatre

Education pack for schools

The tasks and exercises in this workpack are intended for students between the ages of 16 and 18. However they can be adapted for higher education students.

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Photo (Seeta Patel) by Oliver Manzi

Further production details

nationaltheatre.org.uk

Can We Talk About This?
Co-produced by Théâtre de la Ville and Festival d'Automne, Paris, National Theatre, London, and Dansens Hus Stockholm.
An Artsadmin associated project.

Director
Lloyd Newson

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The production

This production of *Can We Talk About This?* had its London premiere at the National Theatre on 9 March 2012, following a world tour

Performers

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KIM-JOMI FISCHER
ERMIRA GORO
HANNES LANGOLF
SAMIR M'KIRECH
CHRISTINA MAY
SEETA PATEL
ANWAR RUSSELL
IRA MANDELA SIOBHAN

Production Team

Conceived and Directed by	LLOYD NEWSON
Assistant to the Director / Company Manager	ELIZABETH MISCHLER
Set and Costume Design	ANNA FLEISCHLE
Lighting Design	BEKY STODDART
Video Artist	TIM REID
Choreography	LLOYD NEWSON with the PERFORMERS
Research and Development / Choreography Assistants	ERMIRA GORO, HANNES LANGOLF, IRA MANDELA SIOBHAN
Production Manager	JAMIE MAISEY
Technical Stage Manager	TOM PATTULLO
Stage	MATT DAVIS
Sound	EAMON WALSH
Re-Lights / Operator	BEN DODDS, RICHARD GODIN
Video Programmer / Operator	KATHLEEN POWELL
Researchers	LISA MARTINSON & LLOYD NEWSON with ANKUR BAHL, SHEHERZAD KALEEM, ANSHU RASTOGI
Interview Editing	ANKUR BAHL & LLOYD NEWSON with the COMPANY
Preliminary Sound Editing	HANNES LANGOLF with RACHEL PHILLIPS, ANSHU RASTOGI, WENDY HOUSTOUN, HELENA ARENBERGEROVÁ
Sound Editing	ADAM HOOPER & JOHN AVERY
Honeyford Sound Mix	GARETH FRY
Voiceover Artists	SHIV GREWAL, CHETNA PANDYA, BRUNO ROUBICEK
Executive Producer	EVA PEPPER
Operations Manager	LOUISE ELTRINGHAM
Administrative Coordinator	AMY JANE CLEWES
Press	CLIÓNA ROBERTS

DV8 is grateful for the generosity of the individuals and organisations that have allowed us to use their experiences and contributions in the making of this work.

Lloyd Newson on *Can We Talk About This?*

Can We Talk About This? is a verbatim theatre work investigating the interrelated issues of freedom of speech, multiculturalism and Islam as manifest in Western democracies.

In looking at Islam and freedom of speech, particularly in light of landmark incidents in the West – Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Theo van Gogh’s murder and the Mohammed cartoons – inevitably the topic of multiculturalism arises. The term *multiculturalism* within the context of this work and as used by most of our interviewees does not refer to the positive day-to-day experience of living in a multi-ethnic society, which I certainly endorse, but those local and governmental policies that actively ‘promote, retain and sustain’ minority cultural and religious values.

Understandably multicultural policies were initially introduced to combat racism, discrimination, promote cross-cultural understanding and encourage a sense of shared citizenship. However, these same policies have also enabled 85 Sharia Councils to operate within Britain. These Councils, or courts, do not offer Muslim women the same rights as Muslim men. Why does Britain sanction a parallel quasi-legal system that doesn’t offer Muslim women the same rights it confers on non-Muslim women? Issues like forced marriage, ‘honour-abuse’ and first-cousin marriages within Muslim communities are constantly ignored by politicians for fear of upsetting ‘cultural sensitivities’. Have well-intended multicultural policies inadvertently ended up betraying the very minorities and freedoms Britain ought to be protecting?

In 2009, Gallup, a respected polling organisation, together with the Centre for Muslim Studies surveyed 500 British Muslims about their attitudes towards homosexuality. Of the 500, zero per cent said homosexuality was ‘acceptable’. How does multiculturalism then work for gay Muslims?

If I mentioned these issues or others associated with Islam, be it in conversation with academics, or friends at dinner parties – people who generally share my left-leaning politics – many either avoided the subject, doubted my motives for raising such topics or denied the evidence completely. Yet these same people would have no hesitation in discussing and questioning practices within Catholicism and Judaism if they believed them to be inimical to human rights.

Due to our desire to be tolerant, and perhaps because of post-colonial guilt and a fear of being labelled racist or Islamophobic, I feel there is a liberal blind spot, a lack of voices speaking up for some of our most basic freedoms, particularly when it comes to discussing Islam and multiculturalism. Criticising aspects of Islam isn’t a blanket condemnation of a whole religion, nor a denial of the right to practise a faith; neither should any religion be conflated with race.

How does the West support progressive Muslim voices that want a modern and moderate version of Islam which offers equality to women, homosexuals and tolerance towards other faiths? If we don’t, won’t or can’t discuss aspects of religions that are oppressive, as we do in debate over secular matters, how does a society, or community, develop?

“Nothing of importance will not offend somebody, somewhere.”

In addition to archival material, we interviewed a broad cross-section of prominent people who had first-hand experience of the interwoven themes of multiculturalism, free speech and Islam. One of the many questions we asked our interviewees, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, was whether they felt censored living in the West. Why shouldn’t Muslims be allowed to protest against the Mohammed cartoons, lobby for Sharia law, denounce homosexuality or demonstrate during homecoming parades of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan without fear of arrest? Similarly should non-Muslims be allowed to criticise, without fear, aspects of Islam they find offensive, as they have done with other religions?

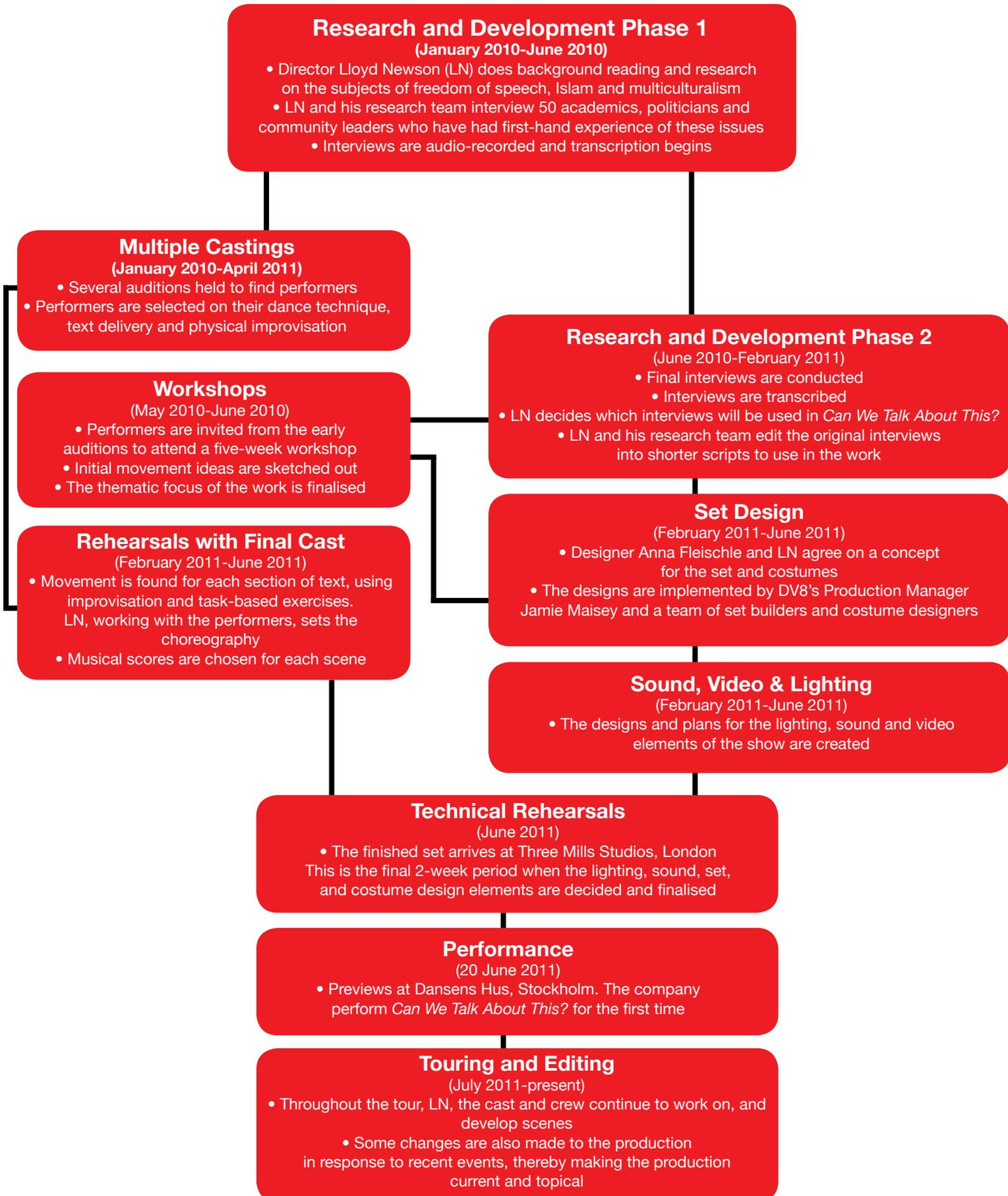
But who defines what is offensive and on what grounds? As one of our interviewees succinctly noted: “Nothing of importance will not offend somebody, somewhere.”



Hannes Langolf in *Can We Talk About This?*
Photo by Fiona Cullen

Creating *Can We Talk About This?*

The journey of the production



Interviews with performers

Ankur Bahl in conversation with Hannes Langolf and Seeta Patel

Ankur Bahl was on the research team and in the original cast of Can We Talk About This?

AB: How did you get your job with DV8?

HL: I went through the normal audition process. I filmed myself improvising in the studio, submitted it to the company, and got invited for a two-day audition. We were about 50 people. I then got invited for a five-week workshop. After that, I was offered a job to be part of *To Be Straight With You*, which was five years ago. Last year, Lloyd Newson (DV8's Artistic Director) decided to employ me again for this project.

SP: I auditioned for *To Be Straight With You* in 2007. I don't think I was experienced enough to know what to offer in that audition, especially using the techniques Lloyd employs in his process to emulate verbatim texts. So I didn't do that project. Then for *Can We Talk About This?* Lloyd was looking for someone with a similar ethnic background to me. This time I came in with a more relaxed attitude to the audition, I worked with Lloyd for a morning and was subsequently offered a job.

AB: What training have you had?

SP: My training is in Bharatanatyam, which is a South Indian classical dance style. It's very intense, but in a different way to going to dance school for three years. My training was over twenty years, but not on a daily basis. However, I've come to understand that it's equally valid and gives me a different set of experiences.

HL: In that sense, my training was more institutional, in a traditional way. I started dancing when I was young. When I turned 20, I went to the London Contemporary Dance School for two years and then did an apprenticeship called D.A.N.C.E. (Dance Apprentice Network across Europe) for two years, getting first-hand experience from different choreographers.

AB: Where do the words come from in *Can We Talk About This?*

HL: The words come from interviews that have been conducted with politicians, writers, journalists, and intellectuals on issues concerning multiculturalism, freedom of speech and censorship in relation to Islam. The words in the show are taken from those interviews, which were edited in a collaborative process led by Lloyd. We learned those words and try to represent them as honestly as we can on stage.

AB: And how is the movement made?

SP: The movement is a collaborative process between the dancers and Lloyd. It's an improvised beginning, then, slowly and gradually each movement is selected and shaped by Lloyd depending on what he sees and thinks captures his vision for the work.

For example, within one of my roles, Lloyd wanted to use hands and a gestural vocabulary. Through my improvisations Lloyd found movement he liked and we worked together intensely, in a fairly linear fashion with the text, to build up a sequence. Different sections of *Can We Talk About This?* focus on different physical concepts and ideas, depending on the interviewee and what they are saying.



Hannes Langolf in *Can We Talk About This?*
Photo by Matt Nettheim

Interviews with performers

Hannes Langolf and Seeta Patel

AB: Has there been a situation where you didn't agree with artistic decisions or intellectual arguments that Lloyd was making in the work?

HL: I think it's normal and important with a subject matter that is so complex that people have different views and opinions about it, and it is at the heart of the argument of the work that we can and should be able to discuss those points of view. Lloyd is always with us on tour and in our daily rehearsals, along with physicalising corrections, we sit together, discuss the show, raise current, relevant political situations and discuss improvements to the work.

SP: Yes, I definitely appreciate those minutes that we spend just talking about the work; it's probably one of the nicest parts of the day, once the show goes on the road.

HL: Of course, Lloyd makes the final decisions, because, in the end, it's his voice and vision, but I do feel he is very generous in sharing his thoughts and listening to our opinions and input. Ultimately we all support the argument and the ambition of the work. Otherwise I don't think we would be there.

AB: Hannes, you were in DV8's previous work, *To Be Straight With You*. What did you learn from that experience that you've been able to use in *Can We Talk About This*?

HL: I progressed in my knowledge about quickly making links between words and movement and putting

them into action, which takes a specific concentration, especially during the creation process, where you are wired up to an iPod and you have to repeat, immediately, the words you hear from the interviewees.

I felt like I could push further in this work. This time, I was there from the moment of the birth of the idea, the scripting, and the interviews. I also got insight into how decisions are made about the set and music, and had influence in all these different levels, which I don't think I would have had the capacity to do last time.

AB: Audiences always ask how you are able to talk and move at the same time with equal precision. How do you do it?

SP: I skipped and used to sing while I was skipping.

AB: To build stamina?

SP: Stamina was the main thing. We also get vocal coaches who assist us on how to use our voices and core muscles to help with this.

HL: It also requires rhythmical work. You need to be analytical about where you place each word in relationship to the movement. Then, it's lots of rehearsals, repeating it and figuring out, every time, how you can make it better, make more sense of it.



Seeta Patel in *Can We Talk About This?*
Photo by Oliver Manzi

Interviews with performers

Hannes Langolf and Seeta Patel

AB: DV8 operates in the space between theatre and dance. Which parts of your job make this like a dance company and which make it like a theatre company?

HL: It operates like a dance company in the fact that we have training everyday, we train a lot in ballet and contemporary dance styles. There is an acknowledgment that we all need to know our bodies well to accomplish the work.

AB: And as a theatre company?

SP: The link to theatre is through the text. The type of text used by DV8 is verbatim text, drawn from real people, which reflect their psyches, their principles and thought processes.

AB: Lloyd says his work is about combining meaning and movement, could you outline how the movement connects to the text?

HL: The movement language is not always an obvious translation of the spoken word. Often it's more an underlying commentary or it helps highlight the character and tone of the speech. It is important that the movement supports what the interviewees are saying, to lend a poetic strength in order to distinguish characters, highlight important information and drive their argument forward.

SP: There is a lot of information in the text. It's only after watching it night after night that I start to see the connections. I can't imagine what it's like just seeing it once and going away.

HL: But, it's great that with a subject matter that is so dense, that the work itself, on a movement base, on a visual base, is equally complicated.

AB: So then, what impression do you hope the audience takes with them?

SP: I feel that this work is not about taking one specific thing away with you. That would be reductive. It's about opening your mind and trying to hear the information.

HL: An audience member said to me, "I'm going to go home with the programme and start accumulating evidence about the issues you presented." Her wanting to know more about the subject matter, for me, really accomplished what the work intends. It's great if people can be informed about the issues, because that's how we can have intelligent conversation.

AB: What do you say to somebody who says the piece is Islamophobic?

SP: Focusing on the negative aspects of some interpretations of Islam isn't a commentary on the whole of Islam. We're focusing on particular aspects, such as

freedom of speech. It also depends on your definition of what Islamophobia is. For me there is enough variety in the interviewees and opinions expressed that I don't feel it is Islamophobic. If you want to hear nice things about Islam, I have no doubt many of us would find aspects of Islam to be positive about.

AB: What's the hardest part of your job?

SP: Not sleeping enough (*they both laugh*). All the practical things – being tired physically, having long days and lots of travelling – but I can overlook those things. They're not important in the grand scheme of things. The hardest part is to continually implement the daily corrections and keep hold of the old corrections. You have to be really focused and really logical about how to do that because it can get on top of you.

HL: For me, the real challenge is to manage a balance, where you give yourself completely to the work, and perform in a transparent way to bring the human details across, but to also keep it from taking over your life. I find that really hard.

AB: Finally, what advice would you give to a student who wants to work for a company like DV8, or do work like they saw you do in *Can We Talk About This*?

SP: Be generous, open, and fearless in terms of creating movement. It's especially true in this company where so much movement material is generated through the performers' improvisations.

HL: Also, don't expect any shortcuts. See what needs to be done; hear what you need to work on, what you need to improve, what you need to change; realize what the workload is, and then actually go away and do it, and don't make any excuses.

It's a privilege as well, that you are involved with a work where you have the responsibility to represent real people's voices. Almost every person we play on stage, in their own way, fights for freedom of speech on a daily basis and addresses delicate issues about Islam and multiculturalism. Many of the people featured in the production received death threats, abuse, were violently attacked or even killed. These are serious issues and it is an honour to be involved in a production that uses artistic mediums to highlight political and social issues that involve us all.

Interview with Anna Fleischle, designer

What was the design brief for the set of *Can We Talk About This*?

We wanted it to be a space that was not abstract, but rooted in something very real. The idea, very early on, was that it was something like a community hall, or a conference hall, or a courtroom, so it could represent all the sorts of places where the interviews and stories are taking place, and be neutral enough to host them all.

Can you talk us through the set?

I wanted the set to be something that is quite open and doesn't overpower or take away from the performance.



The set is a space that feels like it has been around for a while, that's had a slight sense of history, and might have been altered a few times in order to accommodate what it is now. For example, the back alcove gives the notion of spaces that are slightly awkward, and were not designed for what they are used for now, but organically evolved.

It feels like a space within a bigger complex, so there are quite a few doors that lead to the next room, and that's where the light comes from. There are quite fluid entrances and exits and different ways of coming into the space.

I wanted it to have a very real feel to it; the detail becomes very important. It's not the type of detail you notice straight away. When you walk into a room, the first thing you're checking out is not "where are the light switches, and how's the cabling running?" I did a lot of research; it's very important you have these things right or else it won't look like a real space.

Some of the ideas came from images I liked, and some of the details, like the projections and video screens, came from a very specific need of the work. We put lights behind the vent and windows to create different kinds of atmospheres. Lloyd and I talked about sight lines and the mirrors provide at least a glimpse of what's going on, so you don't feel like you're losing things at the side.

I really wanted to have a surrounding that, even when you tour the piece and you go to very different venues, the space remains feeling like it's integral in itself. So the wooden proscenium arch, from a very practical point of view, makes sure the space has a frame to it.

One of the major features of the set is the moving back wall. Can you tell us why you've used it and how it is achieved?

When we started off designing this set, I wanted it to feel like it was closing in on you. You start off with something that has lots of possibilities, and you end up with very little space – kind of, against the wall and feeling like there might not be anywhere to go. The performing space makes a subtle comment: Can we talk about everything, or is our space to speak, and to live, and to move being reduced?

The trickiest thing was to make the wall move very slowly so you don't see it moving. There are

big motors behind the back wall that drive it. I didn't want there to be tracks in the parquet flooring, because that would give the game away. So, there are tracks running on both sides of the floor, which are hidden by a darker border. Two wheels grab into the track and the whole wall is supported by lots of other wheels that run down over the flooring. It has to be set to a certain speed. You have to programme it to make sure it matches the running time of the show; and you need to know that you hit certain lighting points.

Your first design was based on Lloyd Newson's early plans to use 3-D projections. Lloyd decided that wouldn't work so you had to redesign the show. Was it difficult to abandon your designs, and start again based on the needs of the production?

A: That's something that happens in a creative process, you have an idea and you try it out and it doesn't work, and as soon as Lloyd told me about the projection, that he had to abandon that, I felt we really had to throw the

Interview with Anna Fleischle, designer



first design out completely and start afresh, and I really enjoyed that process. I felt really liberated. I felt rooted in Lloyd's ideas, and what he wanted to say. I knew what kind of space it is, and it came quite easy. Within four days I completely redesigned it.

The costumes are very ordinary, was that difficult to achieve?

A: The costumes were tricky, I have to say. You've got all these characters that are real people, you've got performers changing characters all the time, and the performers don't always look like the people they are portraying. Lloyd and I both felt that we didn't want it to be a massive costume-change scenario. So, a costume needed to be something that could very believably be worn by the interviewees, but we weren't going to be prescriptive about it. On top of that, it had to be fine for everyone's physique and different choreography. So it makes it quite a bit more difficult than doing costumes for a traditional theatre piece. It's a lot of trial and error.

If a student watching this production wanted to follow in your footsteps and become a designer, what training would they need, and what advice would you give them?

A: As a designer you need to have a lot of technical knowledge, because you're touching on architecture, interior design, furniture design, fashion, so it's a lot of different disciplines. I went to Central St. Martins, where I did a degree in theatre design. The great thing you learn at college is the artistic side of things. You learn how to get your ideas, and how to find a way of putting them into a design. But I don't think what you learn at college is enough. My advice would be to do a theatre design course – they are usually based within art colleges, but at the same time get as much experience as you can assisting designers, and learning technical drawing on the computer. Most students who work for me, learn that on the job.

Tasks for teachers and students

Clarifying what the work is about and identifying underlying themes

- Write two paragraphs describing what *Can We Talk About This?* is about.
- As a group, discuss and list at least eight issues or themes raised by *Can We Talk About This?*

Your notes

- Why do you think the piece starts with the question “Do you feel morally superior to the Taliban?”

Your notes

- What statistics do you remember from the production? Why was it important to use these statistics in the work?

Your notes

- Which scene’s physicality had the most impact for you in the show? Why?
- Does the physicality of the performers enhance the spoken text or distract from it? Would you have preferred to hear the text without the movement? Was there a specific scene in which the physicality helped you remember the text and what was being said?
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of using verbatim text instead of a fictional script?

Your notes

Tasks for teachers and students

Exploring scenes

- Towards the end of *Can We Talk About This?*, there is a scene in which Ira Mandela Siobhan plays an Imam who receives death threats for claiming the Qur'an might be compatible with Darwin's Theory of Evolution. What are the arguments of people who disagree with this Imam?

Your notes

- Near the beginning of the piece, Christina May performs the story of ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who made the film *Submission* with Theo van Gogh. In the scene Christina speaks Ayaan's words, while drawing all over her body with a black marker. What does this marking of the body achieve?

Your notes

- The section called 'Honeyford' is one of the first scenes in *Can We Talk About This?* where the performers rock from side to side to a sound score of schoolchildren playing. The interviewees recount what happened in Bradford in 1985, when Head Teacher Ray Honeyford was forced to resign due to his criticism of Bradford Local Education Authority's multicultural education policies. Why does the character of Honeyford, played by Lee Davern, sit in a chair while the other cast members move around?

Your notes

- Joy Constantinides delivers a monologue in which she plays Ann Cryer, a former British Labour Member of Parliament for Keighly, while holding a cup and saucer. Ann Cryer speaks of difficulties she faced in raising issues of forced marriage in the Houses of Parliament. What is the difference between forced marriages and arranged marriages? Should parents be allowed to force their children to marry partners the family deems suitable?
- In one scene four performers shuffle around the space to the soundtrack of a debate on the television show *Newsnight*, anchored by Jeremy Paxman. Why has the director chosen to use the original, taped recording instead of having the performers deliver the text?

Your notes

- Why do you think the performers shuffle around with stiff upper bodies?

Your notes

- There is a recording played on stage, in which a number of interviewees use the word "interpretation" in varying contexts. Performer Hannes Langolf uses this text as a soundtrack to the choreography. Can you think of reasons why the director has chosen a score that repeats the word "interpretation"? What do you notice about the choreography in this section?

Your notes

Tasks for teachers and students

Written tasks

- Write a review of *Can We Talk About This?*. Assess the production in terms of choreography, performances, staging, and its ability to address contemporary issues.
- Write a press release for DV8 Physical Theatre's *Can We Talk About This?*. Make sure to find a genre to describe the work. Could it be called a “dance documentary”, or “dancing testimonies”? Is the term “physical theatre” a better term than dance theatre? How do you convey the fact that the work is documentary-based, uses verbatim text, archive material and film? To serve its function as a press release, make sure to highlight the strengths of the work, and describe what an audience member can expect.
- Write a five-paragraph essay that summarises the production. The first paragraph should introduce the work and include a thesis sentence that outlines what the rest of the essay will discuss. Each of the next three paragraphs should raise one theme explored by *Can We Talk About This?* and use examples from the production. The final paragraph should be a conclusion that includes your personal reflections/opinion.
- Choose one of the stories, and recall as much specific information about what the character said and the physicality that was used in the scene. Write as detailed a description of that scene as possible.

Tasks for teachers and students

Physical tasks

These tasks were used by the company in devising *Can We Talk About This?*

Option 1

1. Conduct a short interview with a peer, friend or family member about a topic that they are passionate about. Then, transcribe the interview.
2. Choose the most important sections of the interview, and edit them together so that the remaining script is not more than 3 minutes long.
3. If the technology is available, record the interview, then edit it to match your script using a computer programme like GarageBand. Put the interview on an mp3 player. If you can record but not edit, record your interviewee reading your edited/written transcript. Download that to an mp3 player. If none of this technology is available, continue to use the written text.
4. Choose a partner and ask them to speak the text aloud as they hear it on the mp3 player or read it aloud from the script.
5. Then ask your partner to improvise physically in response to the text. Avoid movement that is too reflective, literal, or habitual. Try to find movement that complements, but doesn't fall into the trap of "doubling" the text. Choose the sections of the improvisations that fit best with the rhythm and meaning of the text and set the movement material.
6. Memorise the text and perform it with the set movement material.

Tips:

- *If a performer is locked into a way of moving, try and get someone who moves very differently to improvise in front of them. The performer then has to imitate how this person moves. This can produce surprises and choreographic ideas.*
- *It may help to film the improvisation so you can better remember it and scrutinise it in more detail later.*

Option 2

1. Conduct an interview of a peer, friend or family member about a topic that they are passionate about. Then transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)
2. Select the words/phrases that are most critical to the interview. Keep repeating this process, until you're left with a couple of phrases from the text.
3. From this reduced selection, find the one word or phrase that encapsulates the feeling, or thematic intent of the entire interview.
4. Find a gesture or physical motif that best illustrates this word or phrase.
5. Create a dance exploring and developing this physical motif.

Tips:

- *This whole process takes time and can be repeated*

many times in different ways.

- This reflects the process used to create "Interpretation." Hannes Langolf performs movement to a background track where interviewees talk, and argue, about their "interpretation" of the Qur'an.

Option 3

1. Construct a 30-second movement phrase. Concentrate on linking movements together and ensure there are changes in dynamic/rhythm and spatial orientation.
2. Conduct an interview of a peer, friend or family member about a topic that they are passionate about. Then transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)
3. Choose 30 seconds of text from this interview or article.
4. Combine the words you have chosen with the movement phrase you created. This random combination might create unexpected and interesting results, even if there is only a flash of an idea that could be developed in detail later on.

Tips:

- *Often Newson will see a momentary gesture or movement that he feels has resonance for a scene, from hours of improvisation, which he later refines and develops into a full scene.*
- Ask students to confirm that the movement supports the text, instead of distracting the viewer from what is being said
- This task is also a good way of mixing physical rhythms against the rhythm of a text (i.e. you don't always have to have fast movements just because someone might be speaking quickly and vice versa).
- Encourage students to vary text delivery or movements to see how slight adjustments can change meaning.
- This exercise is intended as a simple way to explore random combinations of movement and text, and helps circumvent our inclination to "double." Ask students to explore the possibility that the movement can create a subtext for the words the words can deliver one message and the movement provides another, sometimes contradictory message; thus providing texture and complexity.
- This task reflects the process used to create the scene about Mizanur Rahman, the Islamist who was imprisoned for his role in the protests against the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Jumpstyle movement sequences were created to house music and then paired with text from the interview so that movement complemented the rhythms and meaning of the text.

Tasks for teachers and students

Discussion Prompts

- Define multiculturalism.

Your notes

- Is freedom of speech a basic human right? Does freedom of speech mean speech without limits? Should an individual be able to say whatever he/she wants to say? Should there be limits on freedom of speech to protect people's feelings and/or religious beliefs?

Your notes

- In 2008, a Muslim police officer refused to guard the Israeli embassy in the UK because he objected to "Israel's occupation of Palestine." Should his beliefs be respected? Would a homosexual police officer in the UK be justified in not guarding embassies of countries whose population was majority Muslim, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Nigeria, or Yemen because those countries have laws that are hostile to homosexuals, including the death penalty for consenting homosexual acts?
- Is it possible for a theatre work to be critical of the way some people use the teachings of Islam to incite violence against others, without being branded Islamophobic or racist? Is *Can We Talk About This?* Islamophobic?

Your notes

- Does Director Lloyd Newson, a white, Australia-born, atheist male, have the right to comment on Islam?
- Was there anything in the piece that made you uneasy? Why?
- Did you raise your hand when asked, "Do you feel morally superior to the Taliban?" Why or why not? Now that you have seen *Can We Talk About This?*, if you were asked the question again, would you raise your hand?
- Should people have the right to burn poppies at a rally honouring homecoming British troops? Should a Christian preacher be allowed to burn a copy of the Qur'an?
- Are human rights subjective? Does each ethnic or religious community have the right to decide which rights are applicable to their members, or should human rights be universal and not negotiable under multiculturalist policies?
- In one of the last scenes, Roy Brown (refer to the list of main characters at the end of this pack) references a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council, "Combating Defamation of Religion," that prevents UN speakers and representatives from talking about Sharia Law on the grounds that such speech is Islamophobic. What effect does this restriction have on the ability of the UN to comment on human rights violations that occur in Muslim countries especially those that subscribe to Sharia law?
- Look in today's newspaper and find an article relating to multiculturalism. Identify the themes that are present in the article which relate to those presented in *Can We Talk About This?*. Is a similar perspective presented or a differing point of view from those in *Can We Talk About This?*? What is your own perspective? In what way are the issues discussed in *Can We Talk About This?* relevant to what is happening in the UK on this very day?

Your notes

Main characters, in order of appearance

Martin Amis

Writer who poses the question; 'Do you feel morally superior to the Taliban?'

Ray Honeyford

Ex-head teacher of Drummond Middle School in Bradford, England. Forced to resign in 1985 amid accusations of racism due to articles he wrote about the failures of state multiculturalism.

Amin Qureshi

Bradford Councillor. Led the campaign for Ray Honeyford's dismissal from Drummond Middle School alongside Mohammed Ajeeb.

Mohammed Ajeeb

First Asian Lord Mayor in the UK, Bradford 1985-1986. Along with Amin Qureshi, led the campaign for Ray Honeyford's dismissal from Drummond Middle School.

Ishtiaq Ahmed

Ex-General Secretary of the Bradford Council of Mosques. Facilitated the book burning of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford, England.

Angela Honeyford

Wife of ex-head teacher Ray Honeyford

Gita Sahgal

Ex-Head of Gender at Amnesty International, talks about her experience with Women Against Fundamentalism [WAF] and Southall Black Sisters during the Rushdie affair.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Ex-Muslim, ex-Dutch Member of Parliament. Wrote the film *Submission* with Theo Van Gogh, who was subsequently killed by an Islamist offended by the film. Ali has received numerous death threats due to her criticism of Islam, particularly its attitude towards women. Currently living and working in USA for a think-tank.

Gijs van de Westerlaken

Producer of the film *Submission*, written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Theo van Gogh.

Theodor Holman

Broadcaster and best friend of Theo van Gogh.

Flemming Rose

Editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, publisher of the Mohammed Cartoons.

Mizanur Rahman

Islamist activist sentenced to six years in prison for inciting violence during protests against the Mohammed cartoons; the sentence was commuted to 4 years.

Shirley Williams

British politician and academic. Joins Christopher Hitchens in a debate about Salman Rushdie's knighthood and if it was an offence to Muslims worldwide, due to Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

Christopher Hitchens

Writer and public speaker. Joins Shirley Williams in a debate about Salman Rushdie's knighthood and if it was an offense to Muslims worldwide, due to Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*.

Salman Rushdie

Writer. Extract of an interview with Rushdie and Irshad Manji about the problems of 'cultural relativism.'

Pat Condell

Writer, ex-comedian, provocateur. Anti-multiculturalist.

Geert Wilders protesters

Islamists protesting outside the Houses of Parliament when Geert Wilders visited the UK to talk about his controversial film, *Fitna*.

Jeremy Paxman

Journalist, author and presenter of *Newsnight*.

Anjem Choudary

Islamist, former spokesman for Islam4UK, previously Al-Muhajiroun.

Maajid Nawaz

Heads the Quilliam Foundation – a progressive Muslim organisation founded by the Government. A former member of extremist Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Ann Cryer

British, Ex-Member of Parliament campaigned against forced marriage. Speaks about problems of politicians addressing this issue publicly, for fear of losing votes and being labeled racist/Islamophobe.

Mehdi Hasan

Senior political editor of the *New Statesman*, discusses with Timothy Garton Ash during the Orwell Debate, 'What can't you speak about in the 21st century?'

Timothy Garton Ash

Author and Professor of European Studies at Oxford University, discusses with Mehdi Hassan during the Orwell Debate, 'What can't you speak about in the 21st century?'

Maryam Namazie

Director of organisation 'One Law for All,' fighting for the rights of women, and against Sharia courts/Sharia law being introduced in Britain.

Adnan Rashid

Senior Researcher: Hittin Institute, an Islamic Think Tank based in Britain.

Zena Briggs

British-Asian author received death threats from her family for fleeing a forced marriage. Lobbies for Asian women's rights.

Philip Balmforth

Worked as a 'Vulnerable Persons Officer' (Asian Women) in Bradford, England. Removed from his position due to pressure from the local council who were concerned his work was causing bad publicity for 'Bradford's regeneration'.

Main characters, in order of appearance

Jasvinder Sanghera

Runs Karma Nirvana – Asian women’s centre which campaigns against honour-based abuse and forced marriage.

David Henshaw

Producer of current affairs documentary *Undercover Mosque*, for the Channel 4 Dispatches programme.

Kenan Malik

Writer, lecturer, broadcaster and scientist, author of *From Fatwa to Jihad*.

Johann Hari

Writer and Britain-based journalist for the *Independent* newspaper.

Usama Hasan

British senior lecturer in engineering and information sciences, and an Imam. Received death threats due to his suggestion that Darwin’s theory of evolution is compatible with the Koran.

Roy Brown

Representative of the International Humanist and Ethical Union at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Talks about challenging the UN’s resolution ‘Combating Defamation of Religion,’ which prevents discussing human rights abuses in relationship to Sharia law.

Anne Marie Waters

Legal representative of ‘One Law for All.’ See Maryam Namazie.