

Lyrical MC – A Conversation

Friday 7 March – Unicorn Theatre

Chair: Alda Terriciano (AT)

Panel: Kristine Landon-Smith (KLS), Sita Brahmachari (SB), Amit Sharma (AS), Emily Hunka (EH), Nasima Begum (NB), Noel Greig (NG), Michael Judge (MJ)

AT: ...and then we have Nasima Begum

NB: Um, I worked with Tamasha a really long time ago now, sort of doing the projects that everybody's seen today – that was me once upon a time ago so now. It feels very strange to be back here talking about it when, um I had to do it one day myself. I'm also at the moment writing my own play and working with Theatre Centre.

AT: And then we have Noel Greig...

NG: Hello, I'm a freelance playwright and I've worked with many companies and more recently, well, in the last ten, fifteen or twenty years with a range of companies that work with young people, I've worked with Theatre Centre which many of you know and I've worked with quite a few people on this panel on projects that are not dissimilar to this one.

AT: Thank you very much. Now, I don't know how you feel about it but because I have my vision of London is of a laboratory, what you do in a laboratory is exercises and I'm not going to ask you to shake your legs or your arms or anything but I would like to have 5 minutes just to activate some parts in our bodies....

- EXERCISE led by Alda -

(People worked in pairs and person A was told to talk about something that was important to them while person B was told to completely ignore them. Then they swapped roles and one spoke about something very important to them and the other was very interested and engaged in what they were saying)

KLS:lost – I kept sort of stumbling over what I was saying.

AT: Stumbling and lost. So you lost what was important for you because you were talking about something that is very important to you

KLS: Yeah yeah.

AT: And you lost touch with that. That is very interesting.

Dominic Hingorani: I think there's something about that – about making sense - when nobody's listening the narrative ceases to make sense in some way. And so it becomes difficult to following what you're saying, even though it's really meaningful to you.

AT: May I ask the people who were “listened” to, the people who were actually – how did you feel?

Hannah Charlton: You just got validation, response it was lovely it was like basking in somebody wanting to hear what you said.

AT: So it was lovely and it was like making your story richer?

Hannah Charlton: Yes and all the feedback from the facial expressions and actually, sort of, how you egged me on and encouraged me and made it sound like what I was saying was interesting.

Staff member from Talawa: And it's that thing of having somebody, you know, who's concentrating when you're speaking – it puts a value on what you're saying so you don't feel inferior to them or just the fact that somebody is really paying attention to detail – how you feel.

Michael Judge: I actually felt quite different actually because even though I'm sure Jatinder would be an excellent listener irrespective, there was an element – it was disingenuous...

[.....recording fades...]

MJ: ...only responding non-verbally how you're responding. So it forces you to clarify and interrogate and go deeper into certain points because you've got...the conversation.

AT: So that's interesting – to go deeper into what is important for you, so learning probably something more.

MJ: Well, you have a response so you react to it, you step up in one moment or you step in another direction in another moment.

Alex Darbyshire: I felt it was kind of a bit, it made em – you get ever more open and ever warmer and also a lot of pleasure in telling the story as you see the response.

AT: Well, thank you very much – oh sorry, please...

Chris Elwell: You can feel a bit vulnerable because actually you asked us to talk about something that is important to us. I know Ian but I don't know him that well and I suddenly realised I was talking about something that I needed to - it was quite, you know - personal and I was trying to find a way of communicating that to someone who I know – but don't know - I think that's also important, that actually, the topic you gave us. You know, I wasn't talking about latte coffees, do you know what I mean? So in a way it's the topic that you choose so as a result I felt we had a deeper understanding of each other through the exercise. But that connection was actually quite vulnerable.

AT: So there is a vulnerability but then there is also an empowerment?

CE: Yes.

[4: 2: 39]

AT: Now, why I wanted this exercise is because, I thought, in a way when I saw the show last week I had three words that came to my mind and actually one word is a compositional word simply because I don't know the expression in English. English is not my first language so maybe later on you can help me with that, but the first one that started ringing in my head was POWER. And in a way, the power of listening or not listening and something that can seem quite simple – how this concept of power links to violence. In a way when we look at power in the context of language, we know that language – and violence in the context of language, we know that language is an imposition of meaning and that is the way we occupy language – we subvert language, we we we make dialects, we make slangs – that is the way we occupy a territory that is imposed on us in a way. So, when I saw the show, this, you know, this idea of power came to me and of subversion of that power. I would like to throw this word as a dice and anybody on the panel might like to pick it up?

MJ: I think that language is a power and when you take away the usual form of words, quite often you can make contact in a more direct way. So for example - just trying to find the right one...

AT: In the context of this show?

MJ: When some of those young people were speaking a language I felt really drawn – to looking at them - their facial expressions – to pack a language - a spirit I think of what they were bringing – what they were giving which I think if you're only listening to words that you're familiar with and if it's English and you hear the words - you don't attend the person as much.

[04:4:20]

AT: Kristine – do you want to...?

KLS: It's very interesting this thing of power and position, because I remember this – well I say this example quite a lot but we did a residency in a school in Birmingham, and you know, 80-90% of the class that we were working with were you know - Bengali girls yet the dominant culture in that classroom, as one of the teachers said to us was the white English culture. Although the 80% capacity were Bengali girls. And when we went in and started working with them, you know, the first session we did with them - they were in their language in language – the teacher did say to us after 2 or 3 sessions that the culture of that classroom had shifted completely. And I think that it is about giving a position and how the power can be imbalanced if in a sense people are not given a chance to take position.

AT: And to listen. Anybody?

Staff member from Talawa: When some of the people were talking in the languages I didn't understand I actually felt powerless as even though I could look at the facial expressions and the body language I felt like I'm not actually sure what you're saying, I don't actually know what message you're trying to get across to me and erm I think it's quite interesting to think about the fact that, that might be how or that is how other people and young people as well who have created these slang terms that older

generations don't understand, that if you don't listen – if you're not listening as you said Alda, the, the person feels powerless that you're not listening to them but at the same if there's a cultural barrier or a language barrier that needs to be broken down – that who holds the power there and that's something that does need to be looked at because young people live in a much more multicultural society than we've grown up in and the dominant culture was British, was English and it's not anymore and who holds the power in the schools at the moment and how can we change that – how can we empower more people to feel that they are being listened to and that they will be heard?

SB: When I was listening to these audio tapes of these young people, I felt powerless sometimes to understand and part of the process of listening was getting the tape and rewinding rewinding rewinding and making sure it was the exact phrase or the exact word because it wasn't my language. Even the languages which were not another language than English just ways of speaking English, different poetics to the way I speak English, so that was very important to me that I got that exactly right.

But there was somebody, a critic that came to the first night of the show – a friend of the company and somebody I know personally and she was going to come and talk as part of this conversation and she came up to me afterwards and she said – “I can't respond to this work” and she's very qualified – she's a critic – she's seen a lot of theatre, “I can't – I don't feel I can respond to this work and I hope you don't mind me being honest in saying that”. And I thought that was a very good thing that she actually said she couldn't respond she said “I couldn't understand it, I didn't understand enough of it, I couldn't hear it, I couldn't listen to it and therefore I don't feel I can write about it” and while I was talking, a local man, a man from the Oval came with his two young children and said “that's amazing – that's the best piece of work that I've ever seen and my young people want to join this group” and so she stood and she listened to him and she said “you see the thing is that well, I say to you I can't respond to this work”.

So, for me in terms of writing it, it was a challenge to myself say I can't even understand everything that's being said here, even as the writer. And in terms of being an audience what I wanted to do was to challenge the power balance and the expectation that for me, that boy that understood that bit of Somali that was spoken, that was very important to me in the audience that he understood and even if the rest of the audience didn't understand and that made them feel uncomfortable, that that is the new power balance that we have to grapple with.

EH: I think that there's a challenge there, I think that what struck me about the play and watching the play and seeing our young people respond in that play is that there is an element of power that they achieve from being able to say “this is our voice” but it's not enough. Because what that play is doing very brilliantly and every time I see it I feel like crying and it's particularly that bit at the end when they talk about the white people in their houses in Newbury and it's like paradise but like “oh, okay I gotta go now”. It's also about being trapped – it's about saying “yes this is us” and yet you're still confining us in a line, in a school, in a classroom, in our languages and so I think it's more about saying this is a piece that gives young people back their power, because it does partly, but it's also a challenge to say, well, what can we do about it so that the next generation of young people in our schools are not trapped or confined inside culture or inside language.

And you know, some of the stuff we try to struggle with and work with in Rewrite is to say how we can make sure that some of those young people are transcending and becoming powerful? And I think it's really really really hard and this play's brought it home to me really strongly but just, I'm interested about that, that as an audience, it

might be that there's a powerlessness and um but I think there's also a powerlessness with these young people and how do we find a way so that the young people are really taking, becoming the new generation and leading the way? I don't know.

[06: 0:10]

NG: Sort of following on from that but just in terms of watching those young people here and now doing what they've just done so wonderfully. I think that one of the big problems we have now in our society is that there is a great confusion about two words – power and leadership and I think the two get conflicted and I think the two have very different rules to them – power and leadership. Power as is operated generally around us is not for good and leadership is a very fine thing. And just watching those young people and not having been party to the process but we saw the results of the process so I think we can feel the process, what I was getting is, yes, there's all the stuff about empowering them – power and good power, but actually, it's all leadership, leadership, leadership. And what I saw was there there is a sense of well, leadership as something that is fluid and can go round in a circle and it doesn't have to be collected in one person's hand. Obviously we saw that there was some internal leadership there – the 3 young women in the centre, but actually the leadership is handed over all the time – all the time, all the time, all the time. And I think if they've had any experience of this and in our work, how do young people have that experience, it can and must be around experiencing what true leadership is and once you've had that experience, nobody can take it away from you and nobody can take it away from you and I think it's a word that we tend to not use. We use power and powerlessness and all the manifestations of it such a lot, whereas actually we should be encouraging in ourselves and in young people leadership, so that's something that went through my head when I was watching the performance.

[06:1:56]

AT: we have also, a few people from the audience – this gentleman first?

Dominic Hingorani: Yes, absolutely, I agree with that point and I think, I think um, in terms of form and context that are married very beautifully in this piece and that's one of the things that makes it's very powerful. They're allied; they're very engaged with each other. But I just wanted to come back a bit in terms of what Sita was saying – not engaging with the piece – surely one of the functions of the piece is to show us the limits of our understanding?

So I just thought that was an interesting critical position to take because that's surely one of the strong themes of the piece that we can find the limits of our understanding if we are to understand in the wider sense of the community – a diverse community - then that's one of things we must recognise if we're not in a mono-culture so I just I just take issue with that critical position that was all. But certainly in terms of the form and I was thinking in terms of the form and how the languages are mixed and how they move around the group and they share different languages and that becomes no bar to meaning in a way but also the way the form of it and in a way the collaborative nature of it that Noel was saying is a wonderful thing in itself – to explore – almost a model for behaviour – it's very interesting isn't it?

AT: “A model for behaviour” – that's interesting.

Sara Wajid: It wasn't the way, the power so much as authority, I was very surprised how much authority the actors had when they were speaking their own language cos the idea of speaking Punjabi at my school when I was a little girl would have mortified me, in front of a room full of other kids, but they were acting with quite a lot of authority. But then I noticed that erm some of the students that were sitting behind me in the audience were sniggering when people were speaking foreign languages and then I thought people were nervous of what might happen.

I felt like some of the actors were picking up on some of that sniggering from the audience and I felt they could be in quite a vulnerable position and I felt quite sort of uncomfortable and um sort of protective towards the – particularly – there was only one white actor wasn't there on the stage, particularly when that actor was speaking, the kids in the row behind me were sniggering quite a lot and I felt really anxious about that and I sort of, but then other times, when people were speaking their own language they had so much authority so, and I like that, I like seeing that, you know, sort of and I'm pleased and impressed by it but equally quite uncomfortable about the vulnerability.

AS: Yeah, I mean, I was sitting with Emily just over here and em I think it was on the row that you were sitting on and there was a Somalian boy where Jatinder is sitting right now and when Shakir was speaking, he was laughing and his mate turned round to him and said to him "what did he say" and he did a translation as Shakir was speaking. And it's interesting that we're talking about power, because a minute later, the teacher went "shhh" because the teacher weren't listening and it was so clear what he was doing – it was just so clear, and we can talk about giving young people power, but actually that's indicative in a way of that we treat young people, that we're not really listening to what they're saying and it's something that you – Sita – you talk about in the after show talks, and that was a classic case because he was loving it – his language was on stage and his mate's connecting with it.

NB: that is the most ironic instance of that but I'm afraid there were others – school groups, naughty boys being naughty...

AS: Yeah, yeah.

KLS: And yesterday, Sara, we had that in sharp relief and the kids were very exposed and through the performance they got very angry – we absolutely had that clearly yesterday

SB: and as a result in the after show talk, um well, basically I decided just to talk to them about that and we didn't ask the young people to talk because they were over-exposed to that. But in a way, their journey absolutely mirrors that journey, because when they started, together in those 2 groups, you know, like Shuang and Aldo and Shakir, when they used to speak their own languages, the other group used to snigger and laugh so they've been on that journey. So it's a very very direct communication with those actors and that audience when it's a pure school audience because they've been on that journey when they were the ones who were doing the laughing and everything and now they're experiencing that which is a very exposing situation which I don't feel comfortable with either but they have had to learn a lot from that process and actually Sarah particularly at the end wants to go and attack the audience, you know, but she was the one that was doing it before to those children.

Angela McSherry: Can I just say something about the sniggering? I see that as a note of nervousness on the part of the person who doesn't understand the language and it's a defence mechanism and it's embarrassment rather than an aggressive action, I would say...

EH: but it's also – I was sitting there behind and it's also a lot of laughter and there was somebody next to me who got really angry, but also to recognise, but maybe Amari can tell me whether I'm right on this, but I do a huge amount of work all over London schools, particularly in south London, you know talking about experimenting, the lab, the melting pot – London is a shining example to the world of inter-culturalism, multiculturalism, but that is a common experience in school - every day. EAL children, children from other backgrounds, they go into school and they are racially abused basically, I speak to children all the time, and they say, "well, I've been here 4 years but I don't speak at school because every time I open my mouth they laugh at my accent". So in a way, this play should be the beginning of a discussion and I don't know what your experience is cos you've been through school, now you're at college, so?

Amari Harris: Yeah, so yesterday when you said like about the children sniggering it didn't like, I didn't bother, like it didn't I didn't like really feel sympathetic for Aldo and Shakir because when you see it in schools, you sort of like, I expected it to happen, I thought it was a more realistic, a more realistic err, feedback. Because I mean if people are just silent and don't really say anything about – I wanted, I like to hear the audience express it like – especially teenagers – that's why I was so interested in teenagers coming to see it because before that we just had adults and small children and like you didn't really get the realistic reaction to it – it was sort of like, ooh, this is a bit fake, but, and there – that's how it really is at school – how they react to it.

Angela McSherry: This is what I wanted to say before – after the sniggering thing. We know language is about power and um dominant languages are about more power and it had echoes for me of 'Pinter mountain' and language thing where a language is suppressed as a direct way of controlling the people. But I was also interested in the kind of dichotomy in this – there was a character who was desperately trying to learn English so that she could access the language properly and become the doctor and was obviously trying to do it through Shakespeare. But it was interesting wasn't it that she needed to acquire that language, she knew she was going to have to acquire the dominant language if she was going to get anywhere in this society. So on the one hand we encourage and applaud people speaking in their own languages and in this kind of performance, calling it empowering, but of course the other message we're sending over and over is you have to access this culture in some way through its language – you have to be able to speak it and do it otherwise you can't access the culture and the power that goes with it.

AT: That's very interesting because actually because the second word that obviously was activated after I saw the show and that has been repeated over and over during the first part of the conversation is UNDERSTANDING. Now this is a very loaded word because it's a question of 'why do we need to understand?' do we want to understand to control or do we want to understand to learn? Yeah? So it's the same word, but there are many attitudes towards it and for me, in a way, what's also interesting about this piece – going back, which is important – the piece, and what we see here – language was involved, we didn't so much have action – I mean we had the dragon, we had some movements, but in general we didn't have so much action.

Now we all know that theatre is not only words, although, the tradition of English theatre in a way is very much text based, so in a way I felt that the play was challenging the British / English canon of theatre from within by involving language in this impossibility of understanding, but then what a release in this impossibility of understanding every single word is actually human contact. And so what was happening, I think with the young lady who wanted to be in Shakespeare was also this repetition of “I know English, I speak English”, so she had English – she couldn’t speak it but she had this knowledge. So I would like to throw, to the panel, but also the audience, what can be the attitude towards understanding in the theatre context? Please, Jatinder...

Jatinder Verma: I think, it’s slightly worrying this – one thing is that both in terms of power and leadership, we can’t be, we can’t avoid the context, I can’t avoid the irony of having seen that and all the way now we are speaking in English. And that’s how we will discourse and we have to. That’s the territory we are in, so we’re looking at finding – how do you manage to, be it Dari, or Urdu, or Punjabi or whatever other language: how do you find your place? Within what has to be or is however arbitrary for you – the law? But within that, it seems to me that one of the things that we have to be extremely careful about is that – yes to an extent, other senses open up – when you don’t hear the work but it’s a mute point what the consequence of those other senses are, in other words, I suppose the thing that really worries me is that I can sit through and hear Latvian and Serbo-Croat and those sort of languages of which I have absolutely no access and it’s the musicality of those languages.

For the people that are speaking those languages – it isn’t music, it is text and it’s history, it’s statement, it’s fashioning the world. How do I access that? All I hear are my ears and my eyes, and so one gets into this – this sort of thing where you have the dominant language and the other musics of the other languages and that’s about all. But the point of it is that those languages are your soul – that’s your history – that’s text, in the way in which, here English is text – it’s everything for you. It shapes your world; you’re the architect of your world. I don’t know how I can come to an understanding of someone for whom that is the equivalent sense of it, of language.

[08:4:50]

KLS: But this is why in a way – I mean Sita’s conversation about the critic who couldn’t understand it. I mean, I feel that you can have – you can have a... I mean let’s go back a bit – in terms of this practice, the use of language, I think, has been extremely powerful, if we’re using that word, as a tool – that for me is what I’m doing – the use of a language of a particular individual is a tool to giving them a position so that when sometimes you hear them speaking their language and they are speaking with an authority. So in a sense what you’re intuiting from them, you’re intuiting in a way an authoritative performance which is equal to the person who is speaking English so in a sense we’ve got to one level where actually you’re, where you’re not having little incidents like this where the Somali is translated and the teacher is saying “shhh” so at least those experiences could be eradicated so one’s moving forward slightly.

And I think, in terms of, for me, I think, you know we did *A Fine Balance* recently and we used a Turkish actor, his his his language was in there with the Gujarati, with the Punjabi, with the Hindi. Why did we do it? Because actually it gave him a position as an actor, it it it was part of the melée - a lot of people couldn’t understand the Punjabi, the Hindi, or the Turkish but actually the people who didn’t have to understand every single word, then could receive the English text from the people who were speaking the English text but they could then also receive all the other things I guess that were going on

around and that were making up that quite complex piece of work. So in a way, I have an optimism I think perhaps, around, around that and how far one could travel that path.

AT: But it's also quite interesting what you mentioned before about the nervousness of the children behind who were laughing, you know, because they could not understand. Because that's interesting as well, because if we look at the process of understanding as process rather than an end result. Instead of getting to what is the meaning? This kind of theatre forces you to the process – what is the process? How do I engage? What is the weakness that surfaces in me?

So in a way, that's what quite interesting and I kind of connected it to the idea of power – that critic who controls the word by setting things in the right place and analysing and dissecting and then reforming the word – was in the process of weakness so if we translate this to the political arena that is the one which somehow in a way you have brought before in terms of what is then the action, the action for then empowering these young people etc. that is quite interesting for me. Yes, understanding in terms of respecting the tradition, the soul but also the process and that's somehow I think it 's quite interesting that some of the words that we are using now with regards to the show are the same words we used before for our exercise – ANGER came before, VULNERABILITY. So how do I make myself, how vulnerable I am, the moment I expose what is really important for me like when we were talking about our own very important story and the act of not listening. So 'understanding'. Is the understanding already just listening? That's my question.

Staff member from Talawa: In terms of what you're saying, Alda, as well, in terms of listening I think that children learn to listen obviously from the older generation and the first time I picked up on the sniggering was actually as soon as they heard the African accent of the beginning: "let me tell you a story" and it's immediately "oh this is supposed to be funny" and because that's what they've seen or what they've been told – that they weren't so much sniggering at the language, but the first time I noticed the sniggering was the African accent and I think it's something to say that we as the older generation have taught the younger generation that it's funny to laugh at people or it's okay to laugh at people who are different from yourself and that's something we have to deal with. We have to take responsibility for what we have taught young people because they're just responding to things they've already seen.

[09:4:38]

Richard Vranck: Firstly, I don't think we should be bothered with critics because they are an inferior life form. But my main point is that it's a very sophisticated piece because as you've said before it's very much concentrating on the words, it's not particularly visual – it could be a radio play, could be an 'Under Milk Wood' and because it's the background to those words that's great. But it's the fact that it's taken from verbatim tapes which is something we really should remember. There were bits of perfectly good English there, right? Spoken English which I found difficult because it was street English - it was people at verbatim level so in a sense that's another language itself. You could have had that entirely in English and you still you would have found it difficult.

I've done about 30 different countries doing theatre in English for people learning English all over the world – obviously that was especially scripted for that audience so this started from a much more difficult place and is even more admirable for that and also of course if you're doing stuff that is staged, there are so many visual clues you can give about words and whether an audience of Mexicans or Pakistanis they laugh at the

same place, they get the same things, the light bulb goes on at the same place -if you're doing specifically theatre for people learning English. But this, I thought was especially admirable because it was just bare words with young actors too – to get to the level on those terms was fantastic.

AT: Before I – I just wanted to ask Nasima...

NB: I just wanted to say, I think, with understanding, it comes on so many different levels, so even though we couldn't understand what they were saying we could see on their faces, we could hear it in their voices what they were trying to say to us. The one person I found really difficult to understand was – the sort of...

KLS: Katrina – the Latvian

NB: ...and the Chinese...?

KLS: Shuang

NB: I found it really difficult to understand what she was saying because she was speaking quite fast and you could see she was getting quite emotional as well sometimes because she found it frustrating that nobody could understand what she was saying. But from her voice and from her face you could tell what she was trying to say. And even through sometimes we sort of – we're all talking about acceptance here, we're all talking about how we should understand these different cultures but in a way this is how it's always going to be, in a way, because even if somebody was to walk in here right now and they were dressed in a very, I don't know, a very eccentric, way and we would all look and we would make that person feel – 'oh I stand out, I look a bit different' and that's how it's like for these kids.

One thing I always remember is because the school I went to was Bengali – everybody was – you were lucky if you met somebody who wasn't Bengali and now I feel like I can see how when a teacher used to walk in how lost they used to feel because all the students used to speak Bengali and the one thing I grew up with was the teacher always saying 'speak in English, speak in English' because that's the universal language. 'You're in this country, this is the language you're supposed to be speaking and now I can really understand how the teacher must have felt and how lost they must have felt because listening to the kids, they've got their own sort of secret language and this is how they sort of communicate with each other, this is how they communicate with everybody. But the big picture is once you leave school, once you enter the real worlds; you're going to be judged on how you speak English and whether you are good enough because of your English.

SB: ...like Jasmine does that in the play: 'I speak best Shakespeare'

MJ: Yeah, I just want to respond to that because I taught Nasima English and Drama at school many years ago and I think it is about understanding and I think as a teacher, it's about nervousness and fear. The laughter, if it comes from nervousness it's because you don't understand if it's not part of you and it can make you frightened and again the question is how you respond to that, how you address that/ For me, as a teacher in an English classroom, um, the objective was clearly to teach the power of the English language, so you can write to your MP, so you might take up a position of power in the

English government so you might make some changes that will affect you, your community and move things forward.

In the drama classroom, I remember walking round and everyone was speaking Bengali and they were often 'on task', they were doing the work but I was like – I have no pow... - 'I don't know what's going on – I am lost – please speak in English' and that was it, I was forgetting about theatre and I was just like – 'are you speaking in English?' And then, partly it was working with Sita and Kristine it's about having the confidence as a white man that was in a classroom that was 100% Bengali, having the confidence to say 'ok, I have an understanding, we're working together, I don't understand everything that you're saying but I've got a feeling and got like an approach' and you have a contact so they might then say 'oh sir, sir, oh you don't understand – I will try and tell you.' So it's about understanding to overcome fear and just have a sensibility and a confidence.

AT: So, acquiring...

Pat Cumper: Um, we were talking about power – let me just go back to that a little bit – it does seem to me that the two most powerful people in this are Sita and Kristine because you were telling us about that incident with the man who had AIDS and that you decided not to include it because he had AIDS and the deciding to take that out – that's considerable amount of power.

SB: Yep

PC: ...and I wondered how you decided to approach that responsibility –

SB: Yep - well I decided to take it out because...

PC: and just one other thing while I can still remember because I've been sitting here trying to remember what I want to say – the other one was that um, that it seemed to me that when it worked most powerfully was when the stories were almost universal. That sense of a struggle between generations or trying to fall in love or something like that and you were talking about how it goes on from here and I just wondered if that might be where it goes. So that's it and but I was really interested in how you approach that power.

SB: Can I just answer that first question? And it's a bit, a bit about what Sara was talking about, about the vulnerability of this work, which I hope, I hope you see that I felt very vulnerable in that process as a writer, you know, doing that and I didn't take that process lightly...

Pat Cumper: that's kind of what I wanted to know...

SB: ...and that was actually the reason why I didn't put that in the play. Because a lot of the work that we did in classrooms Kristine was improvising with the young people in a very public way and they knew what we were doing and we were going to record it and we were going to do a play etc. But the nature of his interaction with me, was not a public interaction, it was a private interaction. One of the reasons why I said that today, in a way I did feel a bit afterwards maybe I shouldn't have said that in a public space, but I sort of said that today for Emmanuel, because in those after show talks it's a very difficult thing to do those after-show talks because, in a way, because they are not actors, they are young people, it's a much about what they get out of that after-show

talk, in a way, as what you get and we've seen them really grow in that process of understanding what you understand.

And Emmanuel, over the last few days has been a bit low, you know, as a person – you know, who knows why, what the stories are behind that – that's another play, but he has and I told him that because I wanted him to know that his character in the play is really important because it wasn't really coming across that he was the writer of the play and err something about Emmanuel also reminds us a little bit about that boy. So, for me, it was important that he understood something about that story.

PC: No – I was just asking Kristine what she thought about the power? How do you take that power?

[11:2:50]

KLS: Um, god, it's a good question, um, for me, because I'm so, sort of, um, when I work with those students, I mean we had this a lot when we went into schools, you know – Michael has very bravely admitted your own sort of fear or vulnerability around working with all those Bengali kids who didn't, who were speaking Bengali. Now for me, whether it's my intercultural sensibility, or whether it's because I've done so much work around that or whether – I don't know what it is – that intuition, I don't seem to have that fear. So in a way, it is completely natural for me to go in and say, you know “play your grandmother”, “but uh, she speaks Eritrean Miss!” “Yeah, yeah, ok – so do it in Eritrean, I'll be in English, ok let's go”, you know and I don't have any fear around that. So in a way, for me, when I'm working in that way, power doesn't somehow come into it. I'm just...

PC: You're empowered.

KLS: I'm empowered and I feel in a way, they're very empowered, um, and I don't quite know what it is I do but I just feel instinctively somewhere along the line err I have an intuitive understanding of, I don't know, how you give people a position through their cultural identity. But it doesn't feel as though I'm being powerful in that.

PC: I was just being slightly provocative.

KLS: Yeah, no, no no.

PC: I just wanted to hear about the process.

KLS: Yeah.

[11:4:24]

Amari Harris: For me, um, the hardest thing in the play, was um, that scene where I had to talk Jamaican and um my parents are from Jamaica and um when um Amit and Kristine first gave me the part and said “Amari, can you talk in a Jamaican accent?” I was like, I was proper horrified, you know and you can ask Amit – I didn't want to do it, I didn't think I could do it and um everybody else didn't think I could do it and then um when I tried I kind of I knew I could do it but then I kinda like didn't want to and then um I done it and it was very good.

KLS & AS: It was!

KLS: Well, we'd already heard you, you see, we'd captured that; we'd heard it – that brilliance of that and that's why we asked you, yeah.

AH: And the thing is, I don't, I hardly every speak like that, I mean, my mum, my Granddad, my grandparents are full Jamaican and they speak like that all the time and my mum, she doesn't speak to them like that, but when she gets angry – she speaks perfect English – but when she gets angry she speaks like that, and you hear it all the time, everywhere, all my family speaks it, but it's like um, it's kinda, when I had to speak it, it was like I kinda felt, I feel em, when I speak it, I do feel kind of embarrassed cos like it makes me think um, sort of like I don't know whether I kind of forgot my culture, or not forgot it, but I don't really know it cos um I'm sort of ashamed to speak it even though I speak perfect English.

AT: It's very interesting how it connects with Jatinder's point.

[12:0:47]

Greta Mendez: I just want to say, the thing about language is that is, we speak 60% physical. Words predominantly are used to hide and disguise, because when most people speak English I really don't know what they're saying half the time because it's a façade, it's there to hide and disguise and I can come to you in the morning and I say "good morning Alda, how are you?" and you say "okay" – your entire body language tells me if that's true or not. And so therefore the crutch that we walk on is to hold on and why you lose control is, because, it is about control and about thinking we're knowing what people are saying and in actual fact it is huger and it is much more complex and like Kristine, if you go into a room it really doesn't matter what language people are speaking cos what I did with her (gesturing behind to her partner in the exercise), is I found something that's universal to both of us which was "shoes" and you find, you have to find because we have to be that much open.

And I went to something about three or four weeks ago, which was dealing with people – deaf people, so therefore how do we access that? And we don't access it because we want them to learn what we want to learn but we don't want to learn what they want us to learn and that's why – so therefore it's a constant block and so therefore I think it has to be a lot. And it's a lot more complex than what you're saying. And I also want to finish this, everybody is not listening, no generation is listening to anybody: the young is not listening to the old, the old is not listening to the middle. Nobody is listening. So it's not just young people who are not being listened to – it's a whole listening thing.

NG: Did you say "shoes"?

Greta: Yes!

NG: Great! Because my – the word I wrote down was shoes and just to bring it back to what we saw here today, because that's the foundation of everything we're talking about – and power and understanding. I mean in terms of understanding, beyond understanding in terms of we all know what a book is (bangs book). We understand that, but actually I never quite understand what understanding is, what we mean by it.

But what I saw, what I experienced today here, is absolutely what drama can do, err and doesn't do all the time but absolutely what drama can do - which is allow us to step into

other people's shows (bangs feet on floor) and live drama is the only thing that can do it and um so how, why, why that group of people who are very very different from me, come from very very different schools to the one I went to – why was I (bangs feet on floor) able – going um “I'm in your shoes, I'm in your shoes, I'm in your shoes”, it was because of how they did it, the way they worked, the way they collaborated and it was telling us how to approach drama. Whether it's with young people or people at the National Theatre, what the process should be, a good process if you've got a good process (bangs feet on floor), we're stepping into those shoes, we're not understanding, we are, to use the word “empathising” and to, to learn to empathise with people who we will never understanding. I will never understand Nasima, although I've worked with her lots and know her, I don't understand, I will never understand her, I couldn't possibly, the first time I met Nasima, Michael and I were working on a play Nasima had written about an arranged, about a forced marriage, but because of the nature of her writing, because of the nature of the performance, we had that – you know – I was in that person's shoes! (bangs feet) and that's what drama can do and what we saw here today.

[12:4:46]

Emily Hunka: Can I just come back on that? Because that's so fundamentally important to what I believe but also what I do and why the actors there and the young people you saw there today were able to take part in the experience they did. Because it's more about just the audience empathising with them – it's about, I believe it's about them finding their space in the worlds and suddenly saying, “oh, hold on a minute – this is my voice, this is my way to communicate”. I mean talking about, going back to what you were saying about language – it can be a real barrier.

The work I do with Greenwich and Lewisham Young People's voices project and that we also do with Creative ESOL is, is about giving young people back a voice that, that challenges the barriers that are created by language, because there are big barriers – poverty, culture. Because we talk about enriching and taking part in the cultural experience, there's also something about, about being able to transcend that and move beyond that. And we use physicality, we use all the theatrical techniques that don't rely on language and we allow young people to find a space, so they can, so they suddenly, because their whole experience, even in English language classes and ESOL classes tends to be “I'm failing”, you know: “I can't do this I can't keep up with the rest of my class because I can't be – I can only be the lion in the school play”. If you enter a drama space, enter an empowering experience, suddenly, they achieve like that (clicks fingers) and it's an immediate thing and they find their voice.

And then some other people, like Amari is a very good example and Busola is another good example, I think it's fair to say, certainly when some young people came to us, they didn't have a clue as to what was happening, they were angry, they were violent, we couldn't play drama games, we couldn't even do a simple drama game because of the antagonism and I love seeing that moment when a young person like Busola suddenly says: “oh yeah, this is what life's all about, and this is how I can communicate and this is how I can show you my voice and be who I want to be and not be confined”. And so I think, you know, the whole thing of drama and that this is a play, and that it's about empathy and understanding and space and communication – it's very important.

AT: I'm taking another question or comment from the audience and then I'm going to throw my last word.

[13:2:00]

Audience member / teacher? : I just wanted to talk about the language barrier and how – and it is a very real barrier, languages barriers are very real, but I think they only exist because we assume that language is fixed. And we talked very briefly about slang or street language or whatever and it is very true that young people, especially in London have created another language that borrows from Urdu or Bengali or Jamaican patois, from a whole other variety of places. And I think if we begin to allow that form of English to be a valid form of communication, we'll find that we'll be able to understand each other much much more. And I know a sort of, a young boy in south London – he's only eight, he's EAL, he's in all the kind of additional language classes and he finds it very very hard to communicate with his teachers and his classroom assistants because he can't get that standard English that we're all speaking now. But to speak with the other eight year olds in his class he is absolutely, completely fluent in the language that they have together and I think that that's very interesting and I think we just have to broaden our minds as to what English is, to help a little bit.

AT: Which is what we saw on stage – precisely that. Sorry but I have this bursting thing that I have to share my third word, which is, as I said, is three words together and maybe there is a word in English that I don't know, which is “seeing with love”. Is there any word in English?

Margaret Sheehy: Empathy?

AT: But the act of “seeing with love”. We;;. I've been really thinking because this is what happened and so I saw...

SB: What's the word in Italian? What's the word in Italian?

JV: Say it in Italian.

AT: It's the same thing - “guardare con amore”, non c'e una parola, mi dispiace. So seeing with love, because what happened with me – and I need to go back to the play and I need to go back to the experience, is that by the end, and the performance I saw, was a little bit less engaging than this, because the children were a little bit more nervous, and they were a little bit – so, you know, that's something to consider as well – we are working not with professional actors, we are working with young people and we are working with people who have not been trained to appear always, more or less in the same way and having these internalised, you know, character experience etc. etc. They are there and they change all the time.

And um, and so, what happened was that the intelligibility of the play was even less, somehow precisely because the embodiment of language which is what I talked about before was less there. And yet, by the end of the play, I, I was transformed. I was “seeing with love” and that's also very interesting that towards the end of the play there is this beautiful moment where the character says: “I gave him my heart, he gives me his mouth”, “I gave him my heart, he gives me his mouth”. And so I just wanted to throw this, because the way I see it, is that power of theatre - going back to the word power - is the transformative is actually how it transforms the way we see understanding, the act of seeing, the act of, you know, and I just wanted to ask you if this is just my experience, if this, you know, how you relate to “seeing with love”. Anybody?

SB: Can I say some of the lines in the play that talk about that? If, if we would have had a trained actor that wouldn't have been embarrassed to kiss the other person, the end of the play as I wrote it was that erm, the Emmanuel character who is the writer in the play and the Roxanne character who is Jasmine, they would have kissed at that point. Because in a way, the play, it is about language and all those intellectual things we're talking about but it is also about how these young people are reaching to understand each other in a way that most adults, because we segregate ourselves as we grow older, you know in terms of social groups, educational groups, don't do. These young people, like as the Emmanuel character said, they don't have any choice – "no Islington apartheid for us" – they don't have that choice. This is the group that we are working with and we are actually reaching to understand each other, so it's not a kind of theatrical nicety that they are learning to empathise with each other, if they don't learn to empathise with each other, they don't have a class, they don't have a schooling, they don't have an education.

So for me, I'd say it was about listening, in the writing process "with love", I would listen to these tapes and I would just cry and cry because of the beauty of what they, these young people were saying - you could clearly hear – like that exercise at the beginning, that they didn't expect anyone to listen, or to understand, and I was overcome actually with empathy for them.

And I have an eleven year old actually who's just started in a very big inner city school and you know, you nurture your children and then you put them out there into this big world and you feel nervous, you know, what's going to happen to them? You know, is someone going to have a knife in school? You imagine these things and you, you know, I ask her at the end of the school day, you know – "how was school today?" And she says: "oh, yeah, you know, it was fine mum" and gives me a few anecdotes. But I, in a way, the process of listening to all of those texts, was you know, trying to get inside her head - what are the noises of the school day? What are the stories that are not in geography or history or English, but just in the playground what has she learnt from other people about being in London? So that was the "listening with love".

NG: How can you, how can you not fall in – going back to the performance again – how can you not fall in love with truthfulness on stage? What do we mean by that? And actors blab on about it all the time, but we all know – we've been to the National Theatre and seen wonderful things, but we've also seen fake. We know what fake is and we know what is not fake – when it's not fake, "not fake", now um, we got "not fake" here today. I don't know how they got there or dah dah dah. We got "not fake" – there was truth there. How can you not fall in love with them? So that's my response and that's what as theatre makers, we're wanting to find that essence of truth or that simulation of truth – truthfulness and I don't know what it means but we know it when we see it and when we feel it and we can find it with a group of young people like this or we can find it at the National Theatre when it's done right, but it's generally masked over such a lot – it's masked over so we don't get to it and here we have it and so "seeing with love" – I just get – how could I not fall in love with them all?!

[15:0:00]

AS: I, you know, I think Greta talked about universalities and I think the process that the group went through is that they had to find that universal world for themselves. So when Amari says you know, Shakir and Ali, they didn't, we couldn't connect because of the language, so we tried to connect with, 'what do you like?' 'Sport' or whatever and I think the whole group have gone through that process where they've gone okay – you're

different, I'm different or whatever, they've all been oppressed or whatever, so they've got something there, to share already and it's just communicating that with each other. And once that communication happens, then they can start working as a group, then they can start working as a company, as a choral piece of work because they've kind of, they've gone through that process of going –let's identify with each other and once they've done that, then they can work more and kind of give the performances that they've given because they completely understand each other and they've got those nuances. So when one of them speaks and 'oh god, you know' and it's maybe because one of them speaks too much, but it's because there's a connection, there's a complete connection between them all and that's...

NB: You could see how comfortable they were together and the support that was there, if one of them was struggling, I thought, the other one - the eye contact was just like, 'ok - it's your turn now', you know, 'say something!' And you could see – you could see, and this is like that sort of bonding, the performance isn't going to be as good as it could be, it's not reaching its full potential, and we as the audience – we felt it engaging because they were engaging on stage.

EH: There's a, I really – there's a quote that I love which comes from William Penn who's a Quaker from a long time ago, and he said when he'd been imprisoned for lots of different things, he said: "let us see now what love can do" and I feel about the React group and about the process and about what we do that that is a really important message. Let us forget all the stuff about you know – getting our cultural agenda right and our social cohesion, let us see what love can do because these young people like Amari said the other day in a post-show discussion, you know, we just have to work at it. You do have to work at it, but that's what came through first and that's the message to go back to – seeing it with love, and it's also about seeing what love can help us do.

AT: the transformative power...

Chris Elwell: Love is an interesting word, because I loved the piece because it was subversive. Not subversive in terms of what it was presenting to us, because I come out of the world of young people's work and I have so many examples of this type of work, presented by groups of young people which is equally as powerful – maybe less powerful, sometimes more powerful than what we've seen today and what is interesting about it, is that it's subversive because – perhaps for one of the first times, the authenticity of these young people's voices are actually starting to impact upon the bigger cultural agenda of the playwrights and the artists that you talk about, that, you know, we talk about you go to the National Theatre see plays that are truthful. But we predominantly go to those sorts of places and see plays that are not truthful. Whereas I think this is a play that has truth, that, if we nurture it by putting it on in spaces and getting the critics to come along and say "I can't review this", which is a very honest thing, is to try to allow the transforming power of that voice to start impacting upon the bigger agenda. Because if that doesn't happen, we will be sitting here in twenty years time and saying the same thing.

And I am perhaps older than many here – maybe, that's not necessarily the case, I don't know, and I remember – an interesting anecdotal thing – I feel quite impassioned by the play today. I grew up in a rural community and on a farm, with farmers and stuff and I was the first person in my community that went to university and on day one, the community, the university community said to me: "What? Hell, where have you come from? What hay barn have you get out of?" I never knew that I had a broad, west country

accent and I think that, that was thirty years ago and I think in some ways it's not connected but it is connected – that these young people's voices are actually the voices of the future and they have to hang on to their voices in order to make the art relevant for the communities for twenty or thirty or forty years time when the fusion of our worlds will mean that what we're seeing today is not subversive but it actually is in the mainstream. That's why I thought the play was really interesting, because Tamasha have been brave enough, as an adult company – forgive me, to place it as part of their canon so that people are talking about it and I think is so and that's why it is so subversive in that way and I just wanted to share that.

But also just remember that actually thirty years ago, our artists with different voices – you know – black, disabled, be they, you know socially economically different from the power base that tends to dominate our society, that they too had to be given voices, and I think we didn't necessarily put our voices on stage - you see what I mean by that? I think that that's why that's really really important.

[16:0:50]

AT: Thank you very much – we have one panellist and then we have a member of the audience and then I think we have to close...

MJ: I just wanted to follow that Chris point, with saying – you know, by question that I'll take away is how do we take that phrase – “seeing with love” and give it to teachers, give it to Blair and Brown, you know - because that's a big question and it's quite hard a challenge to actually make that, make a change. But to take that phrase – to “see with love” – the moment I sort of fell in love with Ali and, who's the little boy playing...?

SB & KLS: Emmanuel

MJ: ...Emmanuel was at, when I saw it at Oval House actually in the conversation afterwards, when they were talking and you two were facilitating – but actually the power went away from you two and Emmanuel put his hand up and said “oh, I just want to say, I not trying to be difficult or nasty but actually I think Ali should say something” and Ali hadn't spoken and then Ali spoke beautifully and eloquently – I was in love with that moment – it was really from the heart and there's a quote, I think it's Shakespeare, “speak so that I may see you” and he spoke and I saw him.

AT: Thank you very much.

[16:1:56]

Dominic Hingorani: Ooh, I don't want to go after that! It was a bit on that point really, because this a performance of authenticity as well and I think it's sort of disingenuous to suggest, I think, the work that Kris has been doing around this piece to make it seem authentic, because it's a performance. So, I just was interested in the comment you made at the beginning – you made about the three girls.

You suggested, oh, we don't know what's it's going to be quite like tonight because it may be different and this of course goes back to the notion of power and control and improvisation related freedom, the authenticity idea, the freedom to speak, the freedom to feel, because obviously something is created – we spoke about this a bit – it doesn't just happen and I was just interested in how much latitude there is in the performance? How much can the process, the methodology you've created there, how much is that

allowed for them to – how much room is there in it? You suggested that the performance was moveable malleable in their hands – is that actually the case?

KLS: Um, you know now, it's a very, you know now, again, for me what is so interesting is bringing people to a professional practice, with real rigour, you know to get something like that and you know, there was a lot of negotiation around that, a huge amount of negotiation. And it is quite interesting this because, actually to sustain that level of performance, um, with as you say, non-professionals and half way through some of them might get a bit upset if they feel they're being laughed at and they might drop their performance, so there's all that to sort of – we're still managing that.

But what's really interesting is that they're starting to. I mean, they're not improvising away from the text, but they are starting now, like actors to really say "this is mine now" and ask me to move away a bit and again, in the same way, it's very tricky when actors see that and you can see something that is going to be great or you can see something that they're just going to take the wrong way but I can't give them that note yet – and that is starting to happen here. So Sarah and Busola and Nana are developing something on that "KY knowledge" stuff which is completely their own and I might have stepped in a couple of days ago because I sort of thought, 'I'm not sure, I think that is going to go too far' but actually I sort of understood that I had to just leave it and let it be and let it see.

So in a way now, I'm now on the next stage of the professional journey which I would have with any other professional actors, around where do I then step in as a director and where are they taking it. So in a way, they are taking it places, in a very, sort of very interesting sort of professional way.

AS: Sorry – just, sort of - with that rap actually, that was created in the dressing room because what we originally – do you remember?

Amari Harris: five minutes before we went on!

AS: Five minutes before - before the first, the first performance! Five minutes before the first performance we'd kind of got it down and then Amari started beat boxing and they went and they did it and I went "wow". Kristine didn't know, but I was in, you know, so I went just 'go with it, go with it' you know, and they did it and it was amazing so in a way, they've, there is a sense of that they have brought their own...

AT: Well, on this note, which is what risk-taking theatre can do and something changes five minutes before you go on stage, and allowing that change to happen, and allowing that change to make us "seeing with love".

I would like to thank everybody here: the young people who did it, the artists who worked with the young people, the wonderful panel and the members of the audience. Thank you very much for having allowed me to be in this space today – thank you.

[Total running time: 69mins, 40 secs]