

MTC Education Teachers' Notes 2015

I CALL MY BROTHERS

by Jonas Hassen Khemiri
translated by Rachel Willson-Broyles



16 April – 1 May
Southbank Theatre,
The Lawler

Notes prepared by Meg Upton

MTC MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY **EDUCATION 2015**

BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE...

This section of the education notes gives general background to teachers and students about what to expect: What is live theatre? What is the story of *I Call My Brothers*? Who are the characters? Who are the actors and key creative team? What type of theatre performance is *I Call My Brothers*?

THE EXPERIENCE

In the theatre we share stories which differ from TV, DVD, film, books, magazines, podcasts and other media. In the theatre, stories are told by real people in real time before a live audience. Each performance of a play is different to any other as it is dependent upon the time, the actors, the technical equipment and, very importantly, the audience. You can't re-read a live theatre performance or copy it to see again and again. Each performance exists only once. The performance you will see of *I Call My Brothers* will differ from the one performed before and the one performed after, which makes it special and unique. Your role as an audience ensures its uniqueness. As students of theatre, you are advised to carefully prepare to see the production so that you can capture that unique, one-off experience and be able to reflect on it in detail.

SYNOPSIS:

A car has exploded in central Stockholm. Words like "suicide bomber" and "terrorist" flash by on the news and burst into people's consciousness. Amor wanders the streets. He has a mission – to replace a broken drill bit for his cousin – but he is shaken by this new paranoid city where police fill the streets. Act normally, he tells himself. But what does normal mean? Who is a potential suspect? And doesn't it feel like all eyes are on him?

During the course of twenty-four intense hours, we see the world through Amor's nervously flickering eyes. Sometimes it is difficult to know what is actually happening and what is only the creation of Amor's increasingly feverish mind.

I Call My Brothers is a potent play about what happens when paranoia seeps into our blood and makes us see our self and others differently. *I Call My Brothers* asks the audience to confront its impulses to divide the world up into 'us' and 'them'. Who are they? Who are we? And is our fear a self-fulfilling prophecy?

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Director	Nadja Kostich
Set & Costume Designer	Marg Horwell
Lighting Designer	Rachel Burke
Sound Designer	Darrin Verhagen
AV Designer	Michael Carmody

THE CAST

Amor	Osamah Sami
Shavi/Salesman/Ensemble	Ray Chong Nee
Ahlem/Tyra/Supervisor/Ensemble	Alice Ansara
Valeria/Caroline/Ensemble	Joana Pires

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT – Jonas Hassen Khemiri

'Finding a balance between what is humorous and what is serious...sometimes you may be laughing but you aren't sure why you're laughing' - JHK

Jonas Hassen Khemiri (1978 -) is an award winning novelist and playwright with both Tunisian and Swedish heritage. *I Call My Brothers* was first written as a short novel and later created into a play, touring to Norway, Germany and New York. The English translation is by Rachel Willson-Broyles.

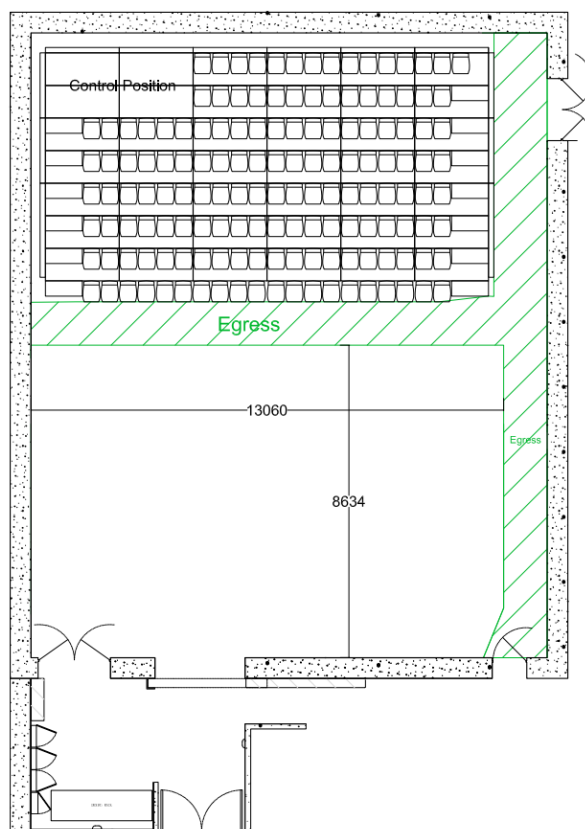
- You can watch interviews with the playwright talking about *I Call My Brothers* at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La_tAY_vNkQ and <http://europenowblog.org/blog/213>
- You can read more about his novels, articles and plays at this link: <http://www.khemiri.se/english/biography>
- You can read an excerpt from the play at this link: <http://www.asymptotejournal.com/article.php?cat=Drama&id=32>

THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

I Call My Brothers will be performed at Southbank Theatre, The Lawler in April 2015 and will then tour to schools across regional Victoria in partnership with Regional Arts Victoria (RAV), to Geelong Performing Arts Centre and to Tasmania.

The Lawler is a studio theatre with a flexible seating plan and provides an intimate actor-audience relationship. The configuration in the Lawler used for *I Call My Brothers* will be end-on, replicating the performance space for the regional tour.

The performance you see may be quite different from the one that many other students will see. For instance, in the Lawler there will be theatre lighting, audio visual design and quite powerfully amplified sound. This will provide an added level of stagecraft to discuss in your analysis and evaluation of the non- naturalistic elements of *I Call My Brothers*.



SETTING

The setting and context for *I Call My Brothers* is originally the city of Stockholm. In its translation to the Australian stage the setting is a modern city, possibly Melbourne. The ambiguities inherent in the play mean we are sometimes uncertain as to exactly where the characters are. The main action, however, takes us through the city across 24 hours, simultaneously we journey through the mind of Amor. The contemporary context is made evident through the use of language and the use of technologies such as mobile phones.



STOCKHOLM CITY

STRUCTURE

I Call My Brothers is a scripted play. Director, Nadja Kostich, describes the structure of the play as follows: *There are six pillars of the play. These include: Intro, Outro, four Interludes and the four Scenes in between. These are an important reference as to how time can be understood.* In the script the structure is presented as follows:

1. SCENE 1—INTRO
2. SCENE 2—SHAVI
3. SCENE 3—INTERLUDE
4. SCENE 4—AHLEM
5. SCENE 5—INTERLUDE
6. SCENE 6—VALERIA
7. SCENE 7—INTERLUDE
8. SCENE 8—KAROLINA
9. SCENE 9—INTERLUDE
10. SCENE 10—TYRA
11. SCENE 11—OUTRO

The named characters (see cast list above) have understood roles within the scenes. In the Interludes the cast (aside from Amor) are called Amplifiers and taken on an ensemble and/or chorus role. As an audience we watch 24 hours in a performed time period of 80-85 minutes. Time is compressed, sometimes it is disjointed, and sometimes it feels as if it is on hold.

STYLE

I Call My Brothers is highly non-naturalistic. It is multi-locational, plays across time – past and present – and requires the cast to play a range of roles (with the exception of Amor who is a constant character). Using narration and story-telling as its main structural device, the play also draws on Brechtian devices such as direct address and *Verfremdungseffekt*, Brecht’s classic distancing or alienating effect, reminding the audience they are experiencing theatre. It has elements of Chorus in the Interludes, whereby the performers comment on aspects of the action and story. The play relies on a minimalist set drawing on elements of Grotowski’s transformation of object. You may also notice the use of stylised movement and repetition of movement motifs that recall key themes and ideas within the story. The production also juxtaposes Arabic and English at particular points and this is worth considering with regard to its purpose and effect.

LANGUAGE

The writing in *I Call My Brothers* is not necessarily naturalistic dialogue. Examine the following extract from Scene 6: Valeria.

AMOR: *This isn’t over, he thinks: I don’t need to go home, he thinks: I can go anywhere in the world but then he ends up going north after all and later he finds a good parking spot just a few meters from his door and he comes home to his kitchen and takes out the bag of food and the bread that’s gotten mushy and the cucumber slices that have become limp but the thermos coffee is still warm and now I don’t have to make a lunch, anyway, and then another workday starts and another and he goes to work and he comes home from work and he says hi to co-workers in the break room and his life goes on and sometimes he thinks that he should call and say that he’s gotten over it, that he’s moved on, all he needs to do is pick up the phone and dial her number, and just as he’s about to do that, just as he is standing with his phone...* (Excerpt from Scene 6: Valeria)

DISCUSS:

Discuss the ways language is used within this excerpt.

When is first person narrative used and when is third person narrative used?

Why are these two voices constantly juxtaposed? What effect does it have?

What locations, places and actions are talked about?

How do you imagine this would be performed?

CHARACTERS - four performers play the following roles:

Amor – a young man, friend of Shavi, in love with Valeria, Tunisian heritage

Shavi – a young man, friend of Amor, married to Nina, father to Petal

Ahlem – cousin to Amor, grew up with Amor, now lives in Tunisia

Valeria – a young woman, childhood friend of Amor’s

Caroline - a young woman, late 20's, works for Animal Rights

Tyra - an older woman, Amor's grandmother

Supervisor - special agent/undercover police officer, on surveillance

Salesman - early-mid 30s, works in a large department store

Bullies – school yard bullies who pick on Amor

Amplifiers – Chorus members in the Interludes



Things to consider before the seeing the play:

In preparation for seeing the production of *I Call My Brothers*, consider what you know about the following:

- What does the term **brother** mean to you?
- In what contexts have you heard/used it? What do you think it will mean in the context of the play?
- Consider the meaning of **family**. What duties and obligations do families have?
- How many different religious/spiritual faiths are you aware of?
- What are the key beliefs and observances in these faiths?
- What is racial profiling? Who would use it and for what purposes?
- What is the media's role in society?
- What do you know about Tunisia, its people and its history?
- In terms of theatrical styles what do you know about non-naturalism and do you recognise particular conventions and elements in this performance?

Watching the Performance

When you see the production, heighten your awareness of everything, watch and listen carefully. Give yourself time to get used to the style of the production. There may be aspects you haven't experienced before. If you have time at the end jot down:

- Things you saw – characters, set items, costumes, lighting states, props, actions
- Things you heard – music, sound effects, lines of dialogue, words
- Things you felt – delighted, shocked, disturbed, amused, mystified, saddened, angry, curious
- The things to see, hear and feel can be transferred into a written response. You can apply them to the dramatic elements, conventions, and theatrical styles and give direct examples from the production.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE PLAY

The following information is provided in order to contextualise some of the stimuli, ideas, images, concepts, and symbols that are present in the production of *I Call My Brothers*. They are offered as beginning points to further research you may wish to do.

The Swedish Elections, 2010

Khmeri's play references the 2010 national Swedish elections. As part of its platform leading up to the 2010 election, the Sweden Democrats (SD) party stated that it wished to cut political asylum and family reunification immigration by 90 percent. The Sweden Democrats leader Jimmie Åkesson wrote in an opinion piece for the social-democratic tabloid *Aftonbladet* that the growth of the country's Muslim population "is the greatest foreign threat to Sweden since the Second World War". Demonstrators sought to silence Sweden Democrats, an event that led to violence.

Read more about the Swedish election of 2010

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_general_election,_2010

The Swedish Bombing

The following is an excerpt from a BBC news report on the Swedish Bombing in 2010
Sweden has had a narrow escape. If last weekend's suicide bomber's plan had worked, his multiple explosives would have caused mass murder amongst Christmas shoppers in Stockholm.

Swedish investigators have concluded that the Iraqi-born bomber, Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, had three devices and was probably aiming for maximum casualties. In the event, he triggered two explosions - a car bomb and one on his body - but he was the only one to be killed.

Pointing to the fact that the second device went off in a relatively quiet street, Sweden's chief prosecutor Tomas Lindstrand said it had probably gone off prematurely. *"He had a belt, he had a rucksack and he was carrying something and all these three things were bombs. And probably he did something by mistake. "And it's a qualified guess, I think, that he aimed to explode these bombs where there were many people gathered,"* he said.

Read more at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-11986037>

Political Responses to the Bombing

Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt held a press conference on 12 December 2010, where he said: "Saturday's events in central Stockholm leads many people to ask whether Sweden has become less safe. What occurred is unwanted and unacceptable. We must safeguard the open society where people can live together side by side." Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt posted a message on Twitter on 11 December 2010: "Most worrying attempt at terrorist attack in crowded part of central Stockholm. Failed — but could have been truly catastrophic." Swedish Security Service spokesman Mikael Gunnarsson said the agency did not increase the terror-threat level after the bombings: "And apart from the e-mail we didn't have any other indications or threats that this would happen."

Hassan Moussa, imam of the Stockholm Mosque, condemned "all forms of attacks, violence, fears and threats against innocent people, whatever the motive or pretext" in a statement provided to Swedish news agency TT. On 14 December, he issued a fatwa against the suicide bomber: "It's forbidden to approve what has happened or try to justify it. Those who accept it or justify it are as guilty as the perpetrator himself."

Muslim Council of Sweden chairman Omar Mustafa said in an interview, "This is an attack on Sweden and on all Muslims in Sweden." Ben Mahmoud Rahmeh, imam and chairman of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, and the Islamic Federation of Sweden issued a press release condemning the attacks: "Attacks like this have been carried out earlier in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities (such as in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Spain and the UK) and then the Muslim scholars and theologians' position has been unanimously against such attacks. Also, important Islamic institutions and Muslim inter-governmental organisations, such as Al-Azhar University, the European Council for Fatwa, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, have all been united in that all terrorist attacks against civilians and innocent people is strictly prohibited and that it is not permissible to oppress, harm or intimidate others." After the press release was issued, the attack was condemned during Friday prayers at the Stockholm Mosque.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Stockholm_bombings

CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

What are the central concerns of these articles and excerpts?

How is the content reported? What language is used?

Discuss these in relation to recent demonstrations around Australia between Reclaim Australia and Rally Against Racism (<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/reclaim-australia-demonstrators-ignite-hatred-over-an-issue-that-doesnt-exist-20150410-1mh5bk.html>)

What is not said? Whose voices are not represented? Are these issues more complex than the way the media portrays them?

Racial Profiling

Racial profiling is commonly understood to occur when an institution or organisation uses race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offence. In early 2013 Victoria Police made an out of court settlement on the grounds they had used racial profiling practices in their dealings with young men from the Flemington community. The case lasted five years and was finally concluded at the highest judicial level, the Federal Court of Australia.

You can read more about the case at the following links:

The court settlement: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-18/police-agree-to-new-procedures-to-combat-racism/4524770>

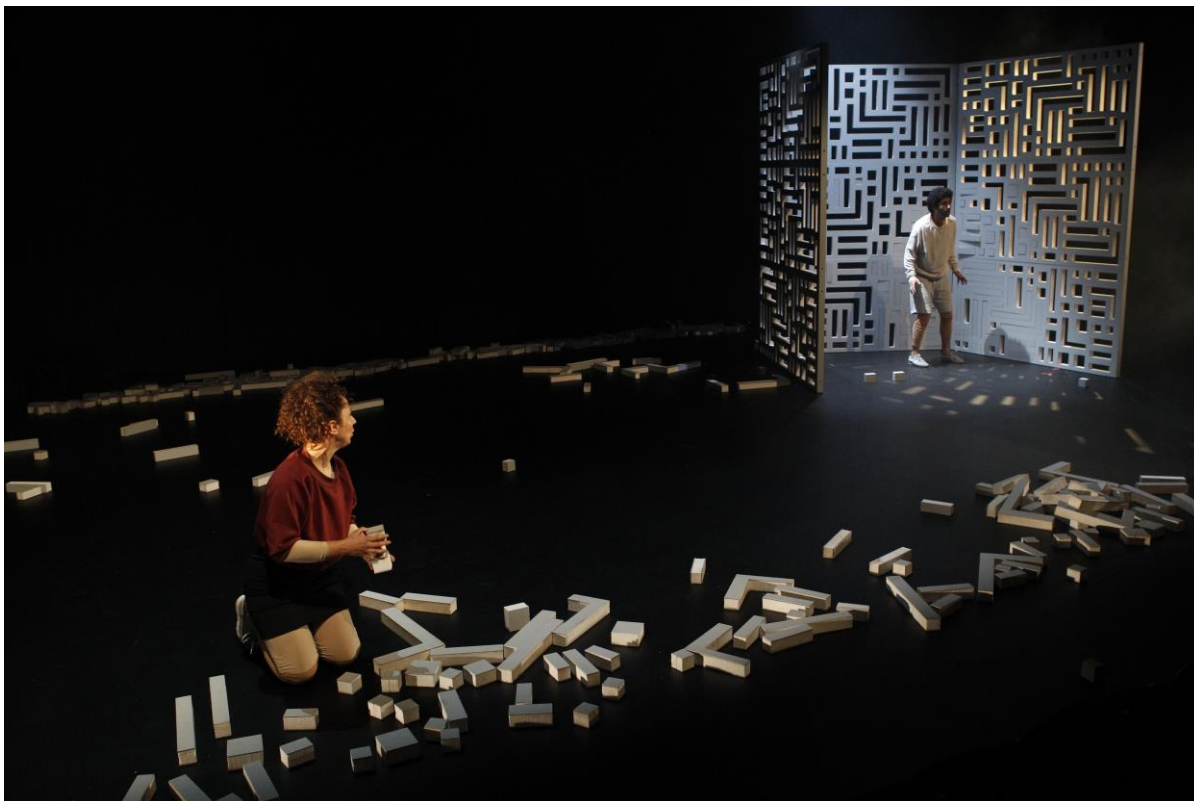
Racial Profiling: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-12-31/victoria-police-admits-racial-profiling-a-problem/5179312>

Discussion:

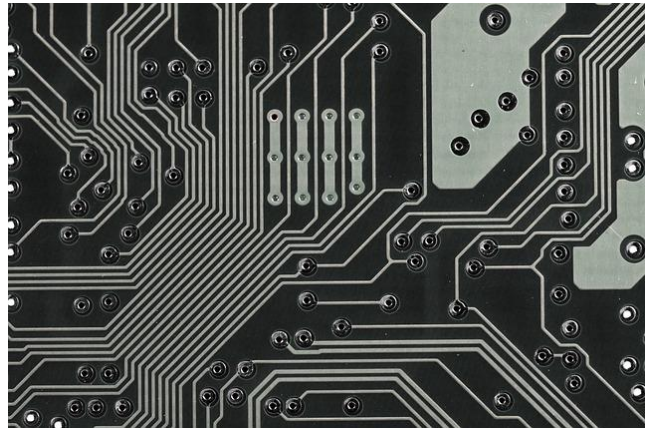
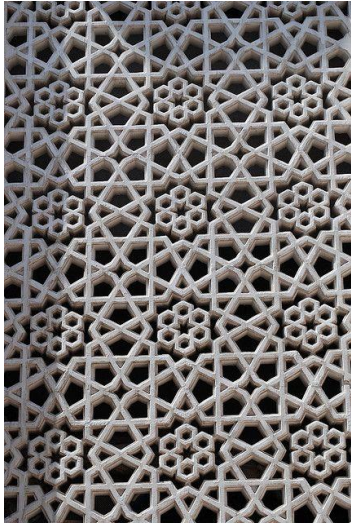
Having read all the above material, what issues does the court case raise for you?

Were you aware of the case? Do you think it is significant?

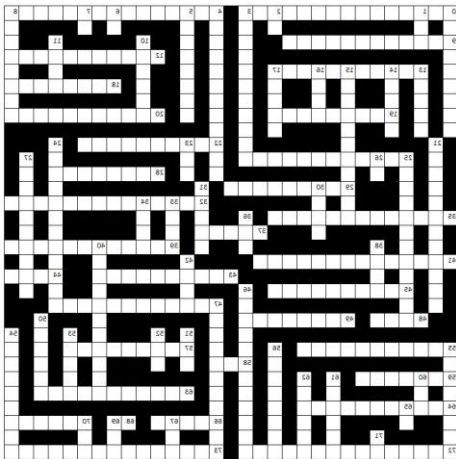
How might racial profiling impact on community building?



METAPHOR AND SYMBOL...



1 H																	2 He								
3 Li	4 Be											5 B	6 C	7 N	8 O	9 F	10 Ne								
11 Na	12 Mg											13 Al	14 Si	15 P	16 S	17 Cl	18 Ar								
19 K	20 Ca	21 Sc	22 Ti	23 V	24 Cr	25 Mn	26 Fe	27 Co	28 Ni	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br	36 Kr								
37 Rb	38 Sr	39 Y	40 Zr	41 Nb	42 Mo	43 Tc	44 Ru	45 Rh	46 Pd	47 Ag	48 Cd	49 In	50 Sn	51 Sb	52 Te	53 I	54 Xe								
55 Cs	56 Ba	57-70 * Lu	71 Hf	72 Ta	73 W	74 Re	75 Os	76 Ir	77 Pt	78 Au	79 Hg	80 Tl	81 Pb	82 Bi	83 Po	84 At	85 Rn								
87 Fr	88-102 ** Ra	89-103 ** Lr	104 Rf	105 Db	106 Sg	107 Bh	108 Hs	109 Mt	110 Uun	111 Uuu	112 Uub														
		*Lanthanide series										57 La	58 Ce	59 Pr	60 Nd	61 Pm	62 Sm	63 Eu	64 Gd	65 Tb	66 Dy	67 Ho	68 Er	69 Tm	70 Yb
		** Actinide series										89 Ac	90 Th	91 Pa	92 U	93 Np	94 Pu	95 Am	96 Cm	97 Bk	98 Cf	99 Es	100 Fm	101 Md	102 No



ACTIVITY:

Discuss what each of these images is or represents for you.

Re-consider your responses when you encounter the set in *I Call My Brothers*

INTERVIEW WITH THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

The cast and creative team spoke with Meg Upton in Week Four of rehearsals

CAST & DIRECTOR

What is *I Call My Brothers* about? What story does it tell?

Nadja:

I Call My Brothers is about a young man who is linked to an event that has been cast as a terrorist act. This young man looks a certain way, and fits a description of the racial profile of a terrorist. The young man carries out some simple, everyday tasks over a period of 24 hours throughout the city, ones that mean he ventures past the point of the explosion. This takes him into a place that involves a reckoning with himself, and an inner journey that places him under considerable pressure. The young man, Amor, examines himself and his relationships and from this point, he reaches outward. He reaches out to his friend Shavi, his 'brother', and he responds.

How does this production play with TIME?

Nadja:

In the play, time is very complex. It jumps in a heartbeat and that is what happens in a person's mind. So time mirrors the inside of a person's head. Ostensibly we've spent 24 hours in Amor's head, and 85 minutes in real performance time. In this production, inexplicably, time leaps into the past, into fantasy, and the logic of the narrative doesn't necessarily follow, but the piece is very clearly structured. There are six pillars of the play. These include: Intro, Outro, four Interludes and the four Scenes in between. These are an important reference as to how time can be understood.

Each of the four Interludes takes us deeper into the swirling state of Amor's mind. And each of the Scenes introduces a particular character in his life that enables something else to emerge. It seems to me Amor is searching for something known, because in the present he is in unfamiliar territory. For Amor this is frightening. He goes back to the past in order to seek comfort. Slowly, over time, Amor loses his grip.

Osamah:

Amor mentions time in a way that concerns a person's way of making sense of the world around them. When you encounter trauma or a really challenging event one of the next best things is to anchor yourself in place and time and to describe it. When I encountered a catastrophic personal event I kept looking at my watch even though the moment was so awful. I do feel that at that time it is one of those struggles where we want to know where we are and what time it is. So, in the play, time becomes very important for Amor. He deals with the events by acknowledging time and place, but he isn't necessarily signposting time to the audience.

How would you describe the world that we are invited to enter?

Osamah:

I think the world is almost as complex as the mind itself. Our minds are busy. The outside world is that which is processed in our minds. That is the world of this play.

Nadja:

As the story unfolds we realise that the people and relationships in Amor's world are in his head.

Alice:

There are different worlds within scenes and these blur. You think you are in one world but then realize you have slipped into another world.

Whose story is it, or are there a number of stories?

Alice:

There are a number of stories but in the end it is Amor's story.

Joana:

Amor's story frames the whole play.

Would you talk about the making/creating process?

Nadja:

The play is based on a letter written by the writer in response to a particular political incident. So it stems from a strong gut reaction to a particular political incident. In the room we used that as a starting point. We experimented, created motifs.

Alice:

The making process was very physical in the first instance. We began by establishing a physical language and Nadja had a lot of action words taken directly from the play that were written out and spread around the rehearsal room. We used these to work on finding a common physical vocabulary for those actions.

Joana:

We used a lot of improvisation.

Osamah:

What Nadja does is put you through a grueling process where you need to hit certain emotional layers. Once she is satisfied you have gone there, then it gets nice and physical on the floor. Some directors go straight to the emotional truth and the physical stuff can get missed.

Joana:

We worked from a playful and instinctual place both inside and outside. We considered where we felt things in our body, how they pulled us in certain ways and how that may inform the action. We concentrated on creating the physical world first and were 'off book' from day one. Not having the script in your hand helps free you to create rather than getting caught in the head.

Osamah:

From day one, each day I walked in, I felt this play has been a large and difficult puzzle, a series of pieces that we are constantly working with. You think 'that's right' and then you unjumble it and try again. Each day it's a puzzle.

Nadja:

It is an ongoing learning process with this play. We keep on integrating the movement and the puzzle pieces, making them integral to the story.

What challenges does the set design offer you as performers?

Nadja:

It has been about finding the right intention and the right times for using and interacting with it. Our process has been one of making the set part of the fibre of what we are creating and not something that is just on the outside.

Joana:

We had to clarify our intentions as to what all the blocks of wood were. I found myself being accustomed to them and enjoying their texture and softness, but you can't do that. You can't become too familiar. The set pieces need to keep being alive in the work.

Ray:

The set also has to be malleable in order to meet the needs of the different worlds in the story. So it has an important function. The show is also touring so it needs to be given the features of a chameleon so it can transform.

What are some of the theatrical styles in the production?

Joana:

There are elements of Ann Bogart's Viewpoints process.

Ray:

There are strong Brechtian elements. The direct address, and I suppose the Verfremdungseffekt, the reminder by Amor that we are watching his story, or versions of his story.

Nadja:

I suppose if you think about Grotowski, we have taken a very organic, physical and emotional response to the script, using the actor, and using simple set pieces. It all comes from the script which is linked to world events, and we have responded to that with human gesture – surrender, prayer, suspicion. We've drawn on these significant human gestures and repurposed them

Would you describe it as physical theatre?

Ray:

It is very physical but it isn't Physical Theatre because the script is the starting point.

Nadja:

In Physical Theatre often text comes second. In this work we are trying to bring the physicality out of the text. Perhaps not as much as I thought it would be because it is *stiller* than I had originally imagined, although there are quite busy bits and there is abstracted movement. We have also tried to integrate the set into that physicality. We take those gestures I talked about before – surrender, prayer, and suspicion. A lot of the time we play

these as real gestures and at other times they are performed out of place as Amor's mind starts to break down.

What are some of the key ideas being explored in *I Call My Brothers*?

Joana:

Isolation, mental health issues.

Nadja:

Suspicion. The personal and the political. The fact that your face and your skin is your calling card to the world and by the world. Those gestures we evoke – surrender, prayer and suspicion – these are human gestures but they are also key words that the play is examining.

Alice:

I think it is about racism and racial profiling and it asks, 'What are the various ways that you can get on in a culture that is suspicious of you?'

Osamah:

For me the play is about the struggle to live, to be, to be yourself, to be a brother, to be a son, a functioning member of society.

Ray:

There are three central ideas that I think the play is exploring. The concept of the criminal versus victim, the lover versus chemistry, and reality versus fantasy.

What do the design elements offer in terms of creating the world of the play?

LIGHTING: Rachel Burke

In terms of lighting it wouldn't be right to portray this story naturalistically on stage. We are going for a much more abstracted world. In terms of creating time, we wouldn't create a realistic sunlight but the feeling of brightness will be there. We take the essence of what is described in the world of the play and stretch it in some way. If you look at the image board (in the rehearsal room) there are images of great violence, great serenity, great beauty, and so the design elements consider these dichotomies and wrestle them into shape, taking on their own form.

In considering the lighting for the play, I consider both the personal and political. Having said that I think that everything we do and think is political. The personal is political and that is very evident in this play. It is also a very complex world that is busted up. All the bits are there and you know it can be put back together, but we ask how will that happen? So my lighting design is influenced by this complexity, and the fractured world that Amor inhabits. It is abstracted, not literal.

AUDIO-VISUAL: Michael Carmody

The design of audio-visual component has been about the interludes. It functions to heighten the stakes within the story and it does so by making complex the interludes, layering them. The video riffs off the aspects of chemistry that are present in the script - the formulas, the equations and the periodic table of elements. I've responded to the chemistry

and elements of the bomb, and the chemistry and elements of the mind and the body. They are all in a mix. I have particularly zoned in on the volatility. The sequences I have created play with different forms of instability and volatility, like chemicals being experimented with. I kept on thinking about the chemicals in the mind and the thought that Amor's mind is misfiring chemicals all over the place.

COSTUME: Marg Horwell

One of the influences for the costume design is 'normcore'¹. *Seinfeld* is a pure form of this style of fashion. It is the most basic of basic fashion. I have also drawn on Identikit images which build faces using colour, shape, facial feature, hair, headwear, clothing – very recognizable characteristics of people. If you erase all the fine details of a person you would only see these recognizable things.

We have also been exploring skin and skin tone. So we have adopted the style of sporty sweats from Kanye West's new Adidas new range, which matches skin tone with the sports attire. We have investigated how society talks about skin colour even in a politically correct way. When we talk about skin we tend to use terms like darker skin, olive skin, fair skinned and by being politically correct we have lost a very functional way of talking about skin. In essence people are a mash of lots of different skin tones. Interestingly, Emoji just released six different coloured skin toned emojis but they attracted controversy as people wanted the company to also create emojis that represented gender and disability. Very interesting!

So the costume design has considered how people describe and are described by others. How suspects are characterised if a crime is committed, and how they are described and these things add up to something and this something is compared to what we may consider 'normal'.

Rachel Burke: It is fascinating, with Marg's design I have become acutely aware of how you see a piece of clothing - someone in a hoodie, a kaftan, or a hijab – and how those shapes take on meaning beyond just their function, because of what we consider to be 'normal'.

Marg: I was also influenced by Polly Borland (<http://www.pollyborland.com>) who has created famous images of stockinged faces, bunnies, morphing bodies and the blanked out bodies.

SOUND: Darrin Verhagen

Sound works in a number of ways in *I Call My Brothers*. Firstly there is diegetic sound, sound that exists in the environment Amor is in. Sometimes that is physical sound and sometimes it is memory like a story that has happened to him and we *hear* that world. This sound is more literal and functional and activates the space.

Then there are other forms of sound, which are less diegetic, such as a droning or sustained sound indicating something is not quite right, these are a metaphoric representation of what Amor is feeling and they are up for debate about what they mean. I find sound

¹ **Normcore** is a unisex fashion trend characterized by unpretentious, average-looking clothing. "Normcore" is a portmanteau of the words "normal" and "hardcore".

interesting with regard to how it binds and to what it binds in a production. It isn't exact. When I hear the sound in the rehearsal room it may anchor itself to something – a movement, a piece of dialogue. When you hear it in the theatre it may anchor itself to something else. Sound is intuitive and is linked to how we personally experience it. The audience is part of that process.

The other form used is the more traditional musical elements - pieces of music functioning to allow the story to progress. These are more about momentum, rhythm and energy rather than being emotionally prescriptive. One of the things we found early on is because the script is so sophisticated with its moods, we have to be careful about falling into one tone. The sound needs to be nimble enough to move with the script.

The main anthem that inhabits all the Interludes is something I wrote first, aiming to nail the territory of the play. It very much has a sense that there is something meaningful going on. It began as rather portentous (very solemn). The challenge was to work out how to pull back from that portentous feel. In the end I added drums and this was an interesting revelation. By adding rhythm to the anthem, it removed the ominous feel and that let the audience off the hook – they didn't need to feel so sombre. Sound is critical and to a degree it is its own world. It does its own thing.



AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE...

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

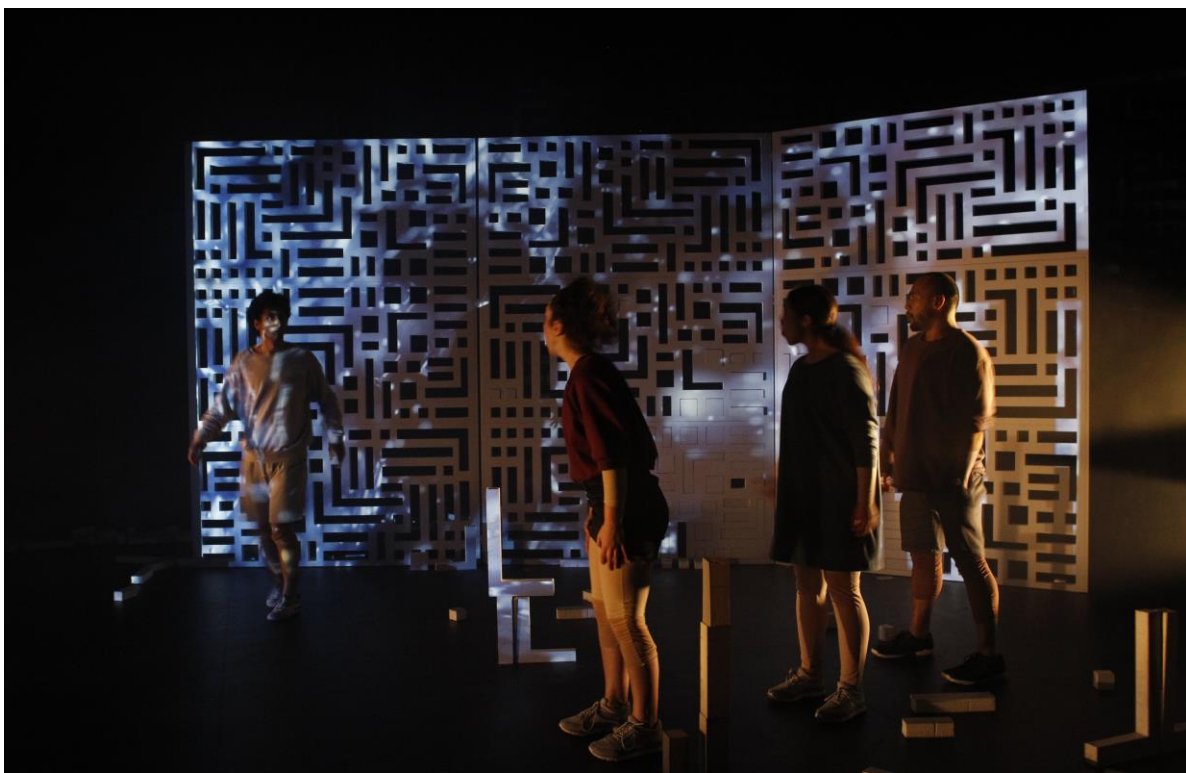
The following questions and discussion points focus specifically on *Drama Unit 3, Outcome 3 - Analysing Non-naturalistic Performance*. The Outcome requires students to respond to a live production from the Playlist, firstly as a written SAC, and then later as part of the Drama Written Examination in November.

Key knowledge

- The ways in which non-naturalistic performance styles and conventions are used in performance
- The ways in which characters are represented in non-naturalistic performance through the actors' use of expressive skills
- The ways in which dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft are manipulated to enhance non-naturalistic performance
- Drama terminology associated with performance styles, traditions, and practitioners from contemporary and cultural traditions relevant to non-naturalistic performance.

Key skills

- Analyse the representation of characters within a non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse and evaluate the manipulation of dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft within a non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse non-naturalistic performance styles within a production
- Analyse and evaluate the use of expressive and performance skills in non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse and evaluate establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship in a non-naturalistic performance
- Use drama terminology appropriately to analyse and evaluate a non-naturalistic performance.



The World of the Play

When you first entered the theatre/performance space, what world did you feel you were entering?

- What aspects of the performance space indicated a particular world?
- What did you begin to imagine or predict? What were you curious about?
- What was initially very familiar? What felt strange? Why?
- At what point do we as an audience enter the characters' world?
- At what point do we exit the world of the play?
- How would you evaluate the way these two points in the story were conveyed?
- Were they clear? Did you want a different beginning or ending? Why?
- What is the GREATER world of the play? What is the IMMEDIATE world of the play?

Jonas Hassen Khemiri set his play in Sweden. It has had a production in Germany and recently in New York. The production team have re-imagined the play for an Australian audience.

- What could be considered Australian about *I Call My Brothers*?
- Consider language, cultural references, the types of characters represented.
- Does the story transcend locality and culture? Why?

There are different worlds within scenes and these blur. You think you are in one world but then realize you have slipped into another world – Alice Ansara, Performer

- Select a scene from those listed under Structure earlier in these notes
- Discuss how the introduction of that world occurred
- Discuss how it may have become blurred as the scene progressed
- What may have caused the blurring – structure, use of expressive skills, conventions, elements, stagecraft?
- Was it clear when an Interlude occurred, a scene began/ended? Discuss how this was achieved using expressive skills, conventions, elements, stagecraft.

I think the world is almost as complex as the mind itself. Our minds are busy. The outside world is that which is processed in our minds. That is the world of this play – Osamah Sami, Performer AND *Each of the four Interludes takes us deeper into the swirling state of Amor's mind* – Nadja Kostich, Director

- Discuss these comments
- Do we only have Amor's perspective or are other perspectives present?
- Select a moment or moments from the production where you feel that we had powerful insight into Amor's thinking
- In particular how is the word SWIRLING evoked quite specifically in the performance?
- How was this achieved in the performance – dialogue, expressive skills, conventions, elements, stagecraft?
- How did these moments capture the non-naturalistic style of the production?

In the play, time is very complex. It jumps in a heartbeat and that is what happens in a person's mind. So time mirrors the inside of a person's head – Nadja Kostich, Director

- Analyse and evaluate how the world of the play dealt with TIME
- When was now? When was the past? Find some clear examples.

- How does the structure of the performance assist in indicating TIME?
- How does the treatment of time contribute to the non-naturalistic styles of the play?

So, in the play, time becomes very important for Amor. He deals with the events by acknowledging time and place, but he isn't necessarily signposting time to the audience –

Osamah Sami, Performer

- Analyse and discuss this comment.
- Do you recall the character of Amor making statements about time?
- Did you have a sense of time passing, time reversing, time hovering?

Structure and narrative

In dot form write down the plot of *I Call My Brothers* – what happens first, then what etc.

- Is this difficult to do? Why? Discuss the plot in terms of TIME

The immediacy of Jonas's language...you have to be right here in the moment with these characters...and that is part of the joy of the ride – director, New York Production

- Discuss this comment
- Did you feel that the language of the play created a sense of everything being 'in the moment'?
- What examples can you give?
- Discuss the difference between linear and non-linear narrative.
- Would you describe this production as linear in nature?
- Were there elements of both the linear and the non-linear? Identify these.
- Analyse how the structure of the play enhanced the non-naturalistic styles within the production.

There are a number of stories but in the end it is Amor's story – Alice Ansara, Performer

- Do you agree with this statement?



Theatrical styles

I Call My Brothers is considered to be 'non-naturalistic' in style. This section explores what aspects of the production are non-naturalistic, and what conventions of more specific theatrical styles are present.

There are strong Brechtian elements. The direct address, and I suppose the Verfremdungseffekt, the reminder by Amor that we are watching his story, or versions of his story – Ray Chong Nee, Performer

- Analyse and discuss the use of Brechtian devices in the production
- How was direct address used? By which characters?
- How did this impact upon the actor/audience relationship?
- How did this impact upon the inter-relationship between the characters?
- What is meant by Verfremdungseffekt?
- Was this effect present in the play? Find two or three specific examples and describe them – movement, use of space, use of dialogue/voice etc.
- Were there other Brechtian devices?

In the Interludes, the ensemble become Amplifiers, a chorus like group who arguably comment on, react to and seem to verbalise the thoughts in Amor's head.

- Discuss this idea. Do you agree? What else are the Amplifiers?
- How does the ensemble use and manipulate movement, voice, space and actor/audience relationship in these moments?
- How do the Amplifiers enhance the non-naturalistic styles in the performance?

In Physical Theatre often text comes second. In this work we are trying to bring the physicality out of the text – Nadja Kostich, Director

- Analyse the use of physicality in the performance of *I Call My Brothers*
- How did the actors use their bodies?
- How did they use the space at particular moments in a very physical manner?
- How did they interact with the set in a physical manner?
- Evaluate how effectively physicality contributed to the non-naturalistic aspects of the production.

In the interview the director and the cast talk about a movement vocabulary and about creating particular motifs. Some of the stimuli for these were words from the world of the play and the script – suspicion, prayer and surrender.

- Recall how these words were presented through symbolic gesture and movement
- Did you notice any use of repetition? Why would movement be repeated?
- What other movements or gestures do you recall?
- Were they created by particular characters?
- Analyse and evaluate the use of gesture and movement in the production and how it contributed to the non-naturalistic styles.

Some of the international commentary about the play *I Call My Brothers* refers to humour and comic aspects

- Did you find humorous or comic moments within the production?

- Select two or three examples and analyse them
- How was the humour or comedy achieved – character based, physical, verbal?

Were there aspects of **other theatrical styles** present in the production? Describe, discuss and analyse these.



Characters and use of expressive skills

Expressive skills – voice, gesture, movement, facial expression

Performance skills – focus, timing, energy, actor-audience relationship

There are four performers in *I Call My Brothers* who play nine characters and a chorus of ‘Amplifiers’. As you discuss, analyse and evaluate the characters, something to consider is concepts of perspective, reality and unreality.

It is the story of a character who is desperately trying to act normal and the more he tries, the less efficient he is – Playwright

- In detail discuss the character of AMOR
- How did performer Osamah Sami use his performance and expressive skills to create the character?
- Were there different versions of him? With different characters? In different movements? How did you **FEEL** about this character? What emotions did he evoke?
- Would you agree that the character was trying to ‘act normal’. How did the performer use his expressive skills to do so?
- Evaluate the use of direct address and how it may have contributed to creating the character.

In the production the character of Amor uses Arabic. While some of this scripted not all of it is, and some directorial and dramaturgical choices have been made here

- Analyse and evaluate how the use of Arabic contributed to creating the character of Amor
- Analyse and evaluate how the use of Arabic captured some of the themes and ideas in the production

We considered where we felt things in our body, how they pulled us in certain ways and how that may inform the action – Joanne Pires, performer

- Discuss the concept of being pulled in certain ways
- Was there a sense that the characters were controlled or urged by internal motivations?

Our process has been one of making the set part of the fibre of what we are creating and not something that is just on the outside – Nadja Kostich, director

- Analyse and evaluate how the performers used the set
- Who moved it, when and why?
- Did there appear to be a set of rules or conventions for this? Were these clear?
- Discuss the director's comment. Did the set and its manipulation by the performers feel 'part of the fibre' of the performance?

In the production four performers play nine characters. What is transformation of character? What are some conventions used for transforming character?

- Discuss and analyse whether the actors **transformed character** to create these different roles
- If they did transform, how did they use their expressive skills to transform?
- Did they use different costumes or props?
- What **physical and vocal characteristics** did you identify as belonging to Shavi and then to the Salesman?
- To Valeria and then to Caroline?
- To Ahlem and then to Grandmother Tyra?
- How was CONTRAST used? Was it used effectively?
- How was SPACE used? Was it used effectively?
- Did the performers use the SET to suggest/transform different characters?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of how one performer played two different characters
- What is the REVEAL about Grandma Tyra? Did you guess this?

The performers take on the roles of AMPLIFIERS throughout the performance of *I Call My Brothers*. They share narration in the Interludes.

- What devices did the performers use to move from playing an Amplifier into playing a character?
- Select two moments/scenes from the production and analyse how the performers used expressive and performance skills to create this role
- What is the significance of the name of these roles – AMPLIFIERS?
- What does it mean in a literal sense? What could it mean in a metaphoric sense?

Use of stagecraft

In this section, the focus is on the use of specific stagecraft elements. The first aspect to consider is how stagecraft is used to create the different scenes and Interludes – the exterior world and the world inside Amor's head.

SET & PROPS

The set is a large three sided frame with cut out pieces that can be removed. Earlier in these notes a series of images were presented to consider before and after you saw the production.

You may like to return to these.

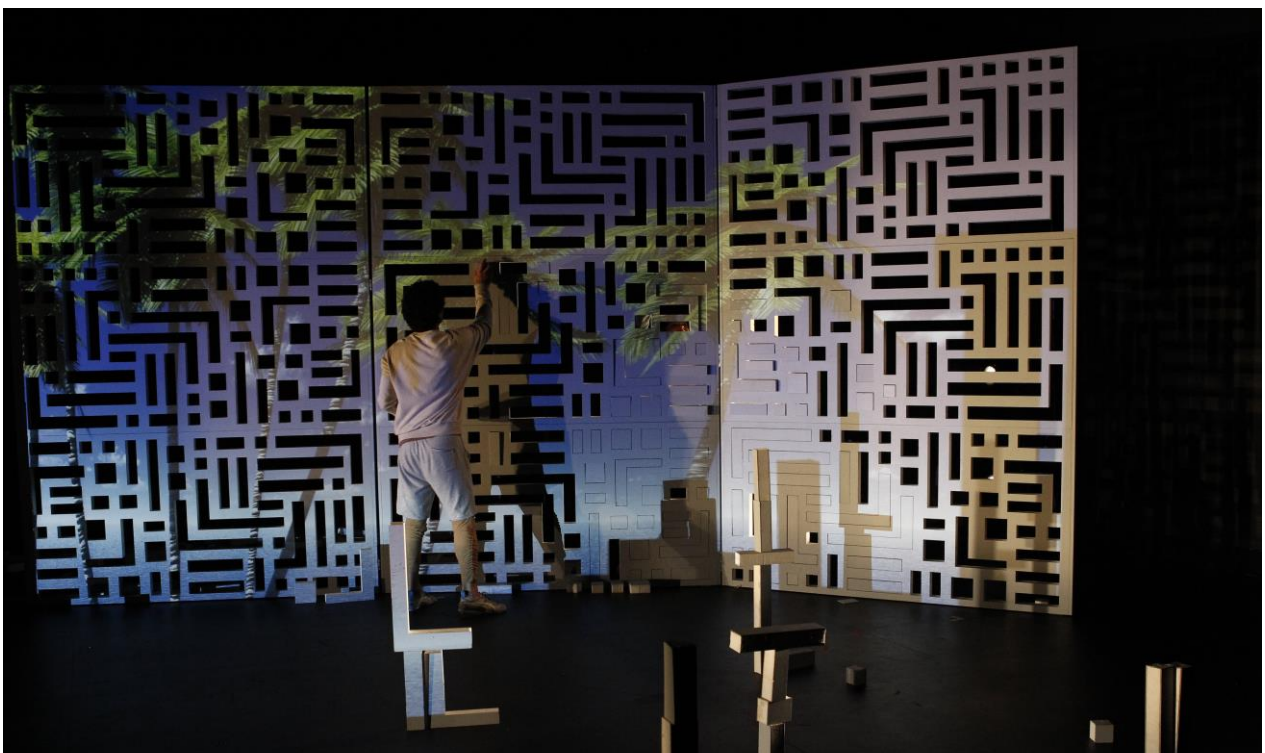
- Describe the texture, palette, aesthetic and function of the set
- Discuss and make a list of what the set may represent and symbolize within the world of the play – for Amor, for us, for other characters?
- Discuss how it offered both challenges and opportunities to the performers
- Analyse and evaluate how it contributed to the non-naturalistic styles within the play.
- Discuss how LIGHTING and SET worked to create different moods and atmospheres.

The set also has to be malleable in order to meet the needs of the different worlds in the story. So it has an important function – Ray Chong Nee, performer

- Was the set malleable?
- Did you 'see' different objects and ideas within it?

Let's consider that the wooden blocks are props.

- Discuss how the blocks were used by the performers throughout the performance
- What did they become?
- Were they different things for different characters?
- Were they different things for different points within the narrative?
- Analyse and evaluate how the blocks were used symbolically within the performance, giving specific examples to illustrate your point
- What OTHER props were used in the production?



LIGHTING

Not all students will see the production at the Lawler and so not all students will experience the lighting. For those who do consider the following:

We are going for a much more abstracted world. In terms of creating time, we wouldn't create a realistic sunlight but the feeling of brightness will be there. We take the essence of what is described in the world of the play and stretch it in some way. – Rachel Burke, lighting

- Analyse how the lighting reflected TIME and how it may have constructed TIME
- Analyse how the lighting created an abstract rather than a literal world
- How did lighting create mood, tone, and atmosphere?
- What particular LIGHTING STATES do you recall that really struck you? Why?
- Did certain states complement dramatic or urgent moments in the story?
- How was lighting used during the INTERLUDES?
- Did the lighting reflect or assist in constructing Amor's mind? Discuss
- Analyse and evaluate how lighting contributed to the non-naturalistic aspects of the production.



AUDIO VISUAL

Like the lighting, the audio-visual component will not be part of the tour. However, if you do see the Lawler production you can consider the following:

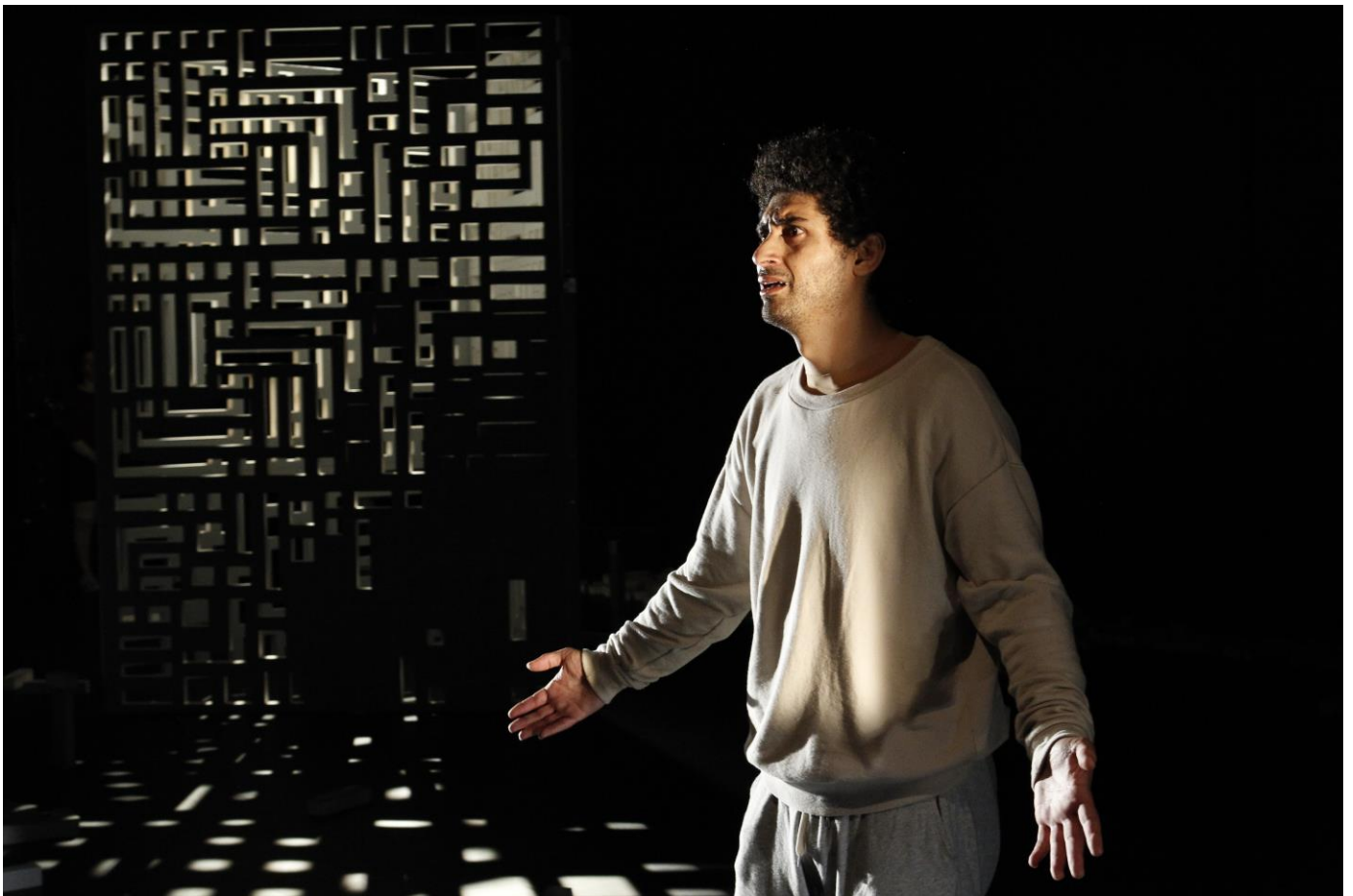
*I've responded to the **chemistry** and elements of **the bomb**, and the chemistry and **elements of the mind and the body**. They are all in a mix...different forms of **instability and volatility**, like chemicals being **experimented with** – Michael Carmody, audio-visual*

- The designer uses some very evocative words to describe the audio-visual design!

- Discuss what each term means and relate them to the narrative and the themes.
- How are chemicals and elements talked about in the play? By whom?
- What is unstable and what is volatile within the production?
- What does this comment tell you about how a designer uses stimuli to create a response?

It functions to heighten the stakes within the story and it does so by complexifying the interludes, layering them – Michael Carmody, audio-visual

- What do you recall about the projected audio-visual component?
- What colours, movement, density was apparent?
- Was it familiar, literal, abstracted?
- Discuss the designers comment about 'complexifying' and how it relates to the play
- Analyse and evaluate how the audio-visual component contributed to the non-naturalistic aspects of the production.



COSTUME

The costume designed for the production will be used in all performances including the tour. *One of the influences on the costumes is 'normcore'². Seinfeld is a pure form of this style of fashion. It is the most basic of basic fashion – Marg Horwell, Set and Costume*

² **Normcore** is a unisex fashion trend characterized by unpretentious, average-looking clothing. "Normcore" is a portmanteau of the words "normal" and "hardcore".

- Research and then discuss the use of normcore in the production
- How did it explore the themes and ideas?
- Select one character and describe their costume in detail including how it contributed to creating and maintaining that role

So the costume design has considered how people describe and are described by others. How suspects are characterised if a crime is committed, and how they are described and these things add up to something and this something is compared to what we may consider 'normal' – Marg Horwell, Set and Costume

- Discuss the term 'normal'. What costumes in the production would you consider to be normal? Who are they worn by?
- Are there particular costumes that you feel belong to certain 'groups' or cultures?
- Did Amor dress like a suspect?
- Would you say that the costumes established 'types'?

I have also drawn on Identikit images which build faces using colour, shape, facial feature, hair, headwear, clothing – very recognizable characteristics of people – Marg Horwell, Set and Costume

- Discuss how the concept of IDENTIKIT images was present in the design
- Which aspects of costume do you think best represented this?
- How did this aspect contribute to the themes and ideas present in the production?
- How did it contribute to the non-naturalism?

So we have adopted the style of sporty sweats from Kanye West's new Adidas new range, which matches skin tone with the sports attire. We have investigated how society talks about skin colour even in a political correct way – Marg Horwell, Set and Costume

- Analyse how the costume design represented aspects of 'skin' and 'skin tone'.
- How did the 'skin' costumes make you feel?
- In what way did these costumes represent or symbolize the 'other'?
- How did the performers change costume? Did they use costume to **transform**?



SOUND/COMPOSITION

The sound/composition designed for the production will be used in all performances including the tour. SUGGESTION – have one or two members of your class be the specialist sound folk – listening and making careful note of the use of sound.

Sometimes that is physical sound and sometimes it is memory like a story that has happened and we hear that world – Darrin Verhagen, sound and composition

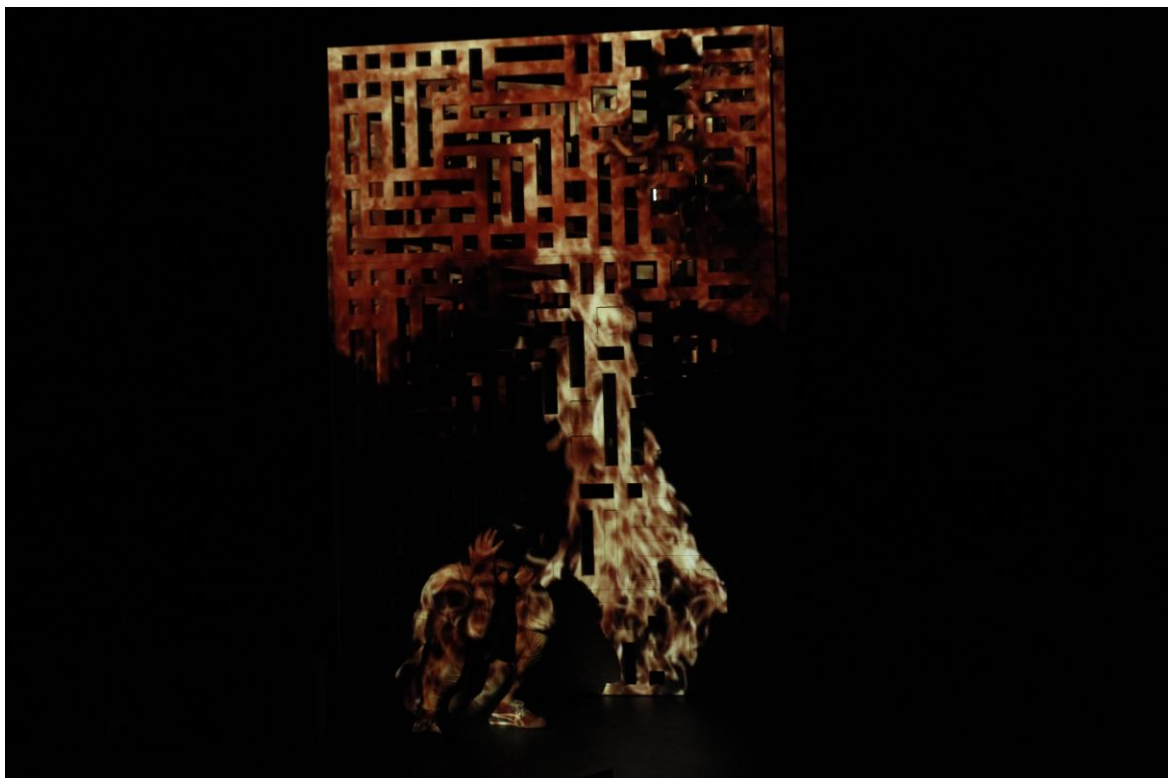
- What is the function of sound in the theatre?
- What sounds did you hear in the production?
- If you didn't notice why might that be?
- Discuss the sound designer's comment with particular reference to Amor's memory

...such as a droning or sustained sound indicating something is not quite right, these are a metaphoric representation of what Amor is feeling and they are up for debate about what they mean – Darrin Verhagen, sound and composition

- Analyse and evaluate how sound was a metaphor for Amor's feelings and emotions
- Discuss how the use of sound in these moments may have impacted our own feelings and emotions

The main anthem that inhabits all the Interludes, I wrote first aiming to nail the territory. It very much has a sense that there is something meaningful going on – Darrin Verhagen, sound and composition

- Discuss how music was used during the Interludes
- It will have combined with the audio-visual and lighting (for the Lawler season)
- How did the anthem create mood, rhythm, a sense of conflict, a sense of climax?
- Analyse and evaluate how sound contributed to the non-naturalistic styles within the production.



Theatrical conventions

As a class discuss the following theatrical conventions and their presence (or absence) in the production

- Episodic structure/Interludes
- Pathos
- Stillness and silence
- Transformation of place
- Compressed/accelerated/flashback time
- Heightened language
- Multiple perspectives/narratives/worlds
- Montage
- Direct address
- Stylized movement

Discuss, analyse and evaluate these **and other** theatrical conventions present in *I Call My Brothers*.

Dramatic elements

Discuss, analyse and evaluate how each of the following dramatic elements were present in *I Call My Brothers* and how they may have been manipulated through the use of expressive skills, performance skills, direction and stagecraft

- Climax – when, for whom
- Contrast – between characters, worlds, scenes
- Conflict – inner conflict, inter conflict, meta conflict
- Tension – dramatic, comic, tragic
- Timing – real, compressed, disjointed, flashback
- Focus – for the characters, for the actors, for the audience
- Mood – establishment of, juxtaposition
- Rhythm – in language, in structure, within scenes
- Sound – effect, music, composition
- Space – actor/audience relationship, establishment of, endowment of
- Symbol – word, gesture, stagecraft, sound



THEMES

When asked, the cast and creative team offered the following as important themes and ideas being explored within the play.

Isolation, mental health, suspicion, the personal and the political, the fact that your face and your skin is your calling card to the world, racism, racial profiling, the struggle to live, be yourself, be a brother, a son. The concepts of the criminal versus victim, the lover versus chemistry, reality versus fantasy.

- Working in pairs, select two of these ideas and analyse how they were explored within the performance
- Consider how particular characters may have embodied them or represented them
- Consider how stagecraft elements were used to represent or symbolise them
- Consider how the script may have referenced them explicitly.



NON-NATURALISTIC EXPLORATION

Use the following extract from one of Amor's monologues as a stimulus for creating a **non-naturalistic** performance.

- Carefully consider how you might create or represent all the **characters, sounds, locations and objects, the mood and tension, using symbol, contrast, and climax.**
- You could create a solo performance
- Work as a small group to create a non-naturalistic ensemble performance

SCENE 10: Tyra

AMOR: Then it was night and I would be home soon, I walked toward the subway, I saw a person standing and swaying in front of a display window, he was holding a packet of French fries in his hand like it was a baby bird, he slurred something, I kept walking, I was on my way home, I wasn't far from the bus stop when I saw the police car. The sirens were off so they wouldn't attract attention but you could tell that something was going on because the one cop turned his head toward his shoulder and called for backup and the other cop slowly placed his hand on the holster and the guy they had caught was pressed up against the bridge railing and the one cop had one hand on his holster and the guy looked afraid, he met my eyes, I saw the colour of his hair, I thought "enough is enough" and I came closer, my steps were lead, my eyes were neon, my arms were arsenic, the police officers stood with their backs to me and they were crowding the guy and he was my brother, he needed my help, they were going to arrest him, they were going to deport him, they were going to shoot him, they had forced him out of the car, the hazard lights were blinking, the police car was dark, his car was lit up, they had seen his license plate, they had suspected drugs or smuggling or bodies, they had already called for backup, and soon the dogs will be here, and the bulletproof vests and the visors and the horses and the helicopters and the batons and the tear gas and as I got closer I remembered the policeman who jumped on Houda's cousin and beat him bloody with the butt of his baton just because he talked back and the Securitas guards who broke Nasim's shin and then accused him of assault on an officer and Maribel's sister who wasn't allowed into that soul club and when she started yelling discrimination security called the police and the police came and found a bag of weed in her purse even though she'd never smoked weed in her life and she said herself that she didn't even understand that it was grass when the police took it out because she thought grass looked more like grass and less like moss and so she tried to get off by saying: "that's not grass, that's moss", and the police looked at her like she was completely nuts and much later, after she'd received the letter with her sentence, after she'd paid the fines, after she'd been nervous that her next employer would look up her criminal record, she said that the worst part was the looks they gave her when she tried to explain that it wasn't hers and she had been set up, that it was all a lie, because they looked at her with smiles that said: "Yes, we know that's what's going on, but what are you going to do about it, what are you going to do?"





Production images by Jeff Busby

Pictured throughout: Alice Ansara, Ray Chong Nee, Joana Pires, Osamah Sami