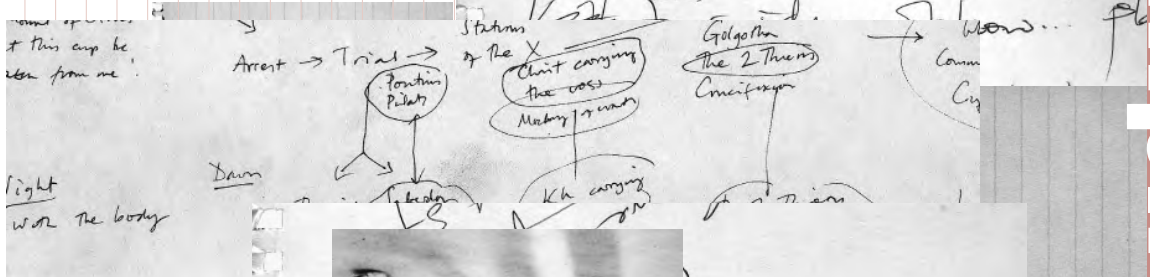


Complicity

TEACHERS NOTES - DEVISING

4 or 5 people that have seen.



4 or 5 people have seen.

Kate For idea



Kate For
Joseph



Making up a...



Moment of terror

Night

Christ on the Mount of Olives
'let this cup be taken from me'

Night

work the body

CONTENTS

Introduction

> | DEVELOPING DEVISING SKILLS

Games

Ensemble work

Space

The language of movement

Tension

Rhythm

Creating characters

Working from text

> | THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Roles within the group

The creative environment

Keeping records

Reading aloud as a group

Choosing a subject

Exploring a subject

Gathering the material together

Consolidation

Presentation

*Everything moves.
Everything develops and progresses.
Everything rebounds and resonates.
From one point to another, the line is
never straight.
From harbour to harbour, a journey.
Everything moves... as do I!
Joy and sorrow, confrontation too.
A vague point appears, hazy and con-
fused,
A point of convergence,
The temptation of a fixed point,
In the calm of all the passions.
Point of departure and point of destina-
tion,
In what has neither beginning or end.
Naming it, endowing it with life, giving
it authority
For a better understanding of what
Movement is.*

Jacques Lecoq. August 1997



The Chairs rehearsal. photo: Sarah Ainslie

Introduction

Complicite's work ranges from adaptations of writings and short stories through reinterpretation of classic texts to major devised pieces. When Complicite start rehearsals for a new production the responsibility for creating the work is taken on by the whole Company. This includes performers, directors, designers, stage managers, writers and other specialists such as composers and puppet and mask makers.

The long process of exploration allows the performers to free their imaginations and bodies and find a particular approach as a Company. Each show demands a specific process which is a response to the material that is being explored and each process grows out of play and improvisation. The collision of individual personalities with a chosen subject makes for the distinct atmosphere and energy of each show.

It is for this reason that this pack is not exhaustive; it does not represent a fixed system of work. It is important that each rehearsal process is unique: Complicite would never attempt to replicate a process of work even when reviving an existing production.

The pack introduces exercises which will prepare students to create their own devising process which is specific to the theme or material they have chosen. These exercises can be regularly addressed in lessons before the devising process begins to help develop a devising reflex. The pack is designed to be dipped into as and when needed, to stimulate curiosity and pose questions. It aims to show how to achieve the progression from small improvisations, games and exercises to tackling larger topics, themes and improvisations. The emphasis is always towards devising - so it is important that students are free to develop the games and exercises in their own way: to add new rules and explore different dimensions. This in itself will stimulate the reflex to create, compose and devise.



“to imagine, to compose, to suppose, to guess, to purpose, to mediate, to describe, to depict, to scheme, to contrive...”

Definition of devise, Chambers Dictionary

The pack is divided broadly into two sections:

> | DEVELOPING DEVISING SKILLS

This area of work outlines skills that may be useful for your students to draw on when devising. The exercises should be seen as on-going preparation and can be used when appropriate.

> | THE CREATIVE PROCESS

This looks at how we might approach a devising process and includes thoughts from theatre practitioners and other artists. The pack cannot suggest one process but this section draws together some thoughts, hunches and ideas.

‘The compositional process in theatre has parallels with all artistic endeavour. One of the things we can do is suggest thinking differently about it. For example, that there are things to be learned not only from writers, but also painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, composers and choreographers when beginning to consider how you might encourage your students to approach creating an original piece of work.’ Simon McBurney



The Kiss - Auguste Rodin © Tate, London 2001



Le Baiser (The Kiss) - Constantin Brancusi



Space

Space is a provocation that can propel and shape a piece of theatre. When a sculptor takes materials and moulds them into a form they are manipulating space, making it meaningful and expressive. Actors in a theatre space can also manipulate and use the space to create meaning. Learning the language of space gives the theatre maker an endless number of possibilities.

Begin by looking at the work of architects and sculptors. The characterisation of the two old people in *The Chairs* began with a conversation about Brancusi's earthy sculpture of *The Kiss* and Rodin's impossibly romantic sculpture of the same name. Give your students titles and ask them to create their own sculptures with their bodies. Discuss how they are using space. Perhaps the sculptures can be explored to create characters and scenes.

Take your students to explore different structures and buildings and the spaces within them. Ask them to create fragments of performances which are site specific. They could be inspired by the shape and atmosphere of the space itself, or by the daily activity that is contained within it. For example, a revolving door is an exciting space with a very specific purpose. What dramas and stories could evolve from an exploration of different doorways?

As your students become responsive to actual spaces and the themes they provoke they could explore the following exercises which look at concentrating space, finding emotional spaces and then at composing sequences which incorporate all these ways of using space.

> Exercises:

Begin by experimenting with exploding and constricting the space your students are performing in. Sometimes playing against the realistic space can make a piece much more theatrical. If you make the space bigger you are encouraged to use bigger gestures and voices.

continued->



Crown Woods School residency, photo: Simon Annand

The Street of Crocodiles workshop, photo: Phillip Carter

> Concentrating the space

The following exercises look at how to concentrate action and focus a performance. They usually provoke a very imaginative and lively use of space: the performers are so close together that there is an energy and contact - they work together.

> Real spaces

1. Begin this work by giving your students themes which inhabit very small spaces (real or imaginary): 'stuck in the lift', 'prisoners in a tiny cell' or 'there were ten in the bed...'
2. Ask the students to create very short scenes which explore physical proximity and how people respond to being in limited spaces.

> Using a small space to re-create a big world

Use rostra of about 150cm x 250cm for this exercise, or mark out this size space on the floor with tape. This is the performance space for this exercise and the only rule is that the students have to stay entirely on their rostrum (not even one foot on the floor).

1. Introduce the exercise by suggesting vast themes which embrace huge landscapes, and changes of landscape. These could include a James Bond Style chase sequence or the volcanic explosion at Mount Vesuvius.
2. In groups of five or six get your students to explore their theme on this very small stage. Get them to explore how to create a sense of space in a very small playing area.

> Working in big spaces

In Complicite rehearsals the Company often works with 6ft. bamboos. The following exercises help to create a dynamic spatial relationship between performers, as well as improving movement and co-ordination skills.

They encourage performers to be bold and expansive with their movements.

Using bamboos can help students to explore the creation of physical spaces as well as discovering how movement can express emotions, atmospheres and tensions. Working with bamboos formed a huge part of rehearsals for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and gradually became an integral part of the production.

> Exercises:

Complicite usually use 6 foot garden canes. Try to find canes that are very straight.

1. Give each student a bamboo which they hold vertically, ten centimetres off the ground.
2. Get all the participants moving around the space without bumping into each other, keeping their bamboos exactly upright and the same distance from the ground. Encourage them to enjoy the sensation of being very precise.
3. Ask the participants to get into groups of three (without talking) and to continue to move together as a group. Then ask them to change leader with each change of direction, while staying close together.
4. When the students are moving and concentrating well together, get them to experiment with different speeds and rhythms, changing the configuration of their group (3 abreast, single file, triangle) as well as the distance between their bamboos.
5. The leader can also lead changes in the position of their bamboo to create different shapes. Look for different qualities of movement.

It is important to keep the ideas and movements simple and precise. It is the togetherness of a group moving their bamboos exactly as one which is most effective. Watch each group in turn and see what works best.



The Caucasian Chalk Circle rehearsal. photo: Simon Annand

> The space between performers

1. Ask the students to get into pairs and to take one bamboo cane between them. They should hold the cane between their forefingers, exerting a little bit of pressure to keep the cane secure between their fingers.
2. Ask the pairs to move about the space trying not to let the cane drop. Encourage the use of eye contact (but no talking) to communicate.
3. As the participants begin to be more sensitive to each other encourage them to make their movements more daring. Is it possible to sit down, roll along the ground, change the speed or rhythm whilst still keeping the cane link?
4. Gradually get a whole group of pairs working in the same space. Encourage the students to be sensitive to all the other pairs and to avoid clashes.
5. Try to get all the pairs to create spaces, shapes and rhythms together as a group: to be daring, to weave in and out, under and over other people, to play together and be imaginative.

> The space of emotions

1. Divide the group into two. One half improvising with the bamboos, the other half watching. The students could take a bamboo each or continue working in pairs.
2. Throw in words for the students to explore through movement and manipulation of bamboos. This could mean the movement of laughter, anger, calm or fear.
3. Get the students who are watching to talk about when the space and movement is expressive or truthful, and when not.

In these exercises the use of bamboos give students a meaningful way to play with space. A starting point for exploring how to create theatrical spaces which contain meaningful emotions and atmospheres.



Mnemonic rehearsal, photo: Sarah Ainslie

Games

We make up ball games. One of the most important aspects of playing ball is that you make up the rules, for example that everybody has to touch the ball before you can try for a goal. You make up rules that do two things: one that they involve everybody; weak and strong players alike. The weak players have to be integrated not just by being kind but by making rules that insist they are. The other is that you have to accept a degree of competitiveness and aggression. It is actually necessary to get that out of people so they get it off their chests at the beginning of the day and also it's part of the energy you need to make a show. You mustn't be frightened by each other's aggression and competitiveness.

Annabel Arden, Co-founder, Complicite

Try to get into the habit of preparing your students for collaborative work. Warm up together, stretch and most importantly play games. Find games that you all enjoy and can participate in energetically. Games that make you laugh and get competitive and sweaty. Invent new rules, twists and turns. Play games that encourage the notion of a team, not just individual skill.

There is often a time pressure in a devising process, especially in schools, but games should never be omitted. The element that is always present in Complicite rehearsals is the playing of games.

To enjoy play, at first simply for the pleasure of participating then gradually for the sheer joy of playing on stage, is crucial. If a performer enjoys their performance, the audience are likely to enjoy watching.



photo: Arsenal Football Club



The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol rehearsals, photo: Simon Annand

Students are often self-conscious and feel awkward about practical work. Games are a good way to combat this: they encourage team work and spatial awareness, physical and verbal co ordination, rhythm and timing. Good games are completely involving and participants forget they are honing these skills. A good game immediately puts a group into a state of readiness and makes the step to doing improvisations much smaller.

Simple children's games of ball, tag, skipping or tongue twister games are ideal. Play whatever your group enjoys most and as they become good at it get them to develop and refine the rules to make it more difficult.

I like the games. They're so useful. You think 'what's the point, what are we doing?' and then you realise it's all about co ordination and teamwork... it's great that we all work together now, a lot better than at the beginning. Crown Woods Student.

> Blindfold cat and mouse

1. Divide the group in two. One group stands in a large circle to mark the edge of the playing area, and to stop the blindfolded players from leaving the space. The other group put on blindfolds.
2. One of the blindfolded players is named the cat and the rest are mice.
3. This game is about maintaining perfect silence and listening. The cat must listen very carefully and attempt to catch all the mice. The players are not allowed to stop moving for more than a few seconds. If a player is attempting to walk out of the circle somebody in the wall must turn them gently and whisper 'circle'.

> Developing devising skills
Inventing games

1. Divide your students into groups of about six to eight and give each group a few objects: a rope, a ball, a couple of chairs or waste paper baskets.
2. Ask them to invent a game using the objects they have been given and, as they play it, to refine and re-write the rules.
3. Get the students to present their games to each other.

> Questions

- Which game is most appealing and why?
- What makes a good game?
- What is the structure of the game?
- Is there a clear end point and a clear winner?
- Do different players have different roles in the game?
- Does the game develop any particular skills?



The Street of Crocodiles workshop. photo: Philip Carter

Our improvisation skills as a group were non-existent, we'd spent a year sitting in a year eleven room writing theatre studies and this teacher came along and said 'Right, I want you to improvise'. We refused to do it for about four sessions. Hampstead School Student

Ensemble Work

All the work that Complicite does in the rehearsal room leads towards the actors working together intuitively and instinctively. The Company are able to improvise their way seamlessly out of most situations without an audience realising if anything out of the ordinary has happened.

This makes the work rich and exciting to watch and perform because the level of communication and teamwork is so high. There is no way to fake this ensemble feeling. It takes many months of playing games, doing physical exercises, improvising and working together.

> Exercises:

Play co-operation games, particularly those in which there are physical problems to be solved. These are crucial for building a sense of ensemble.

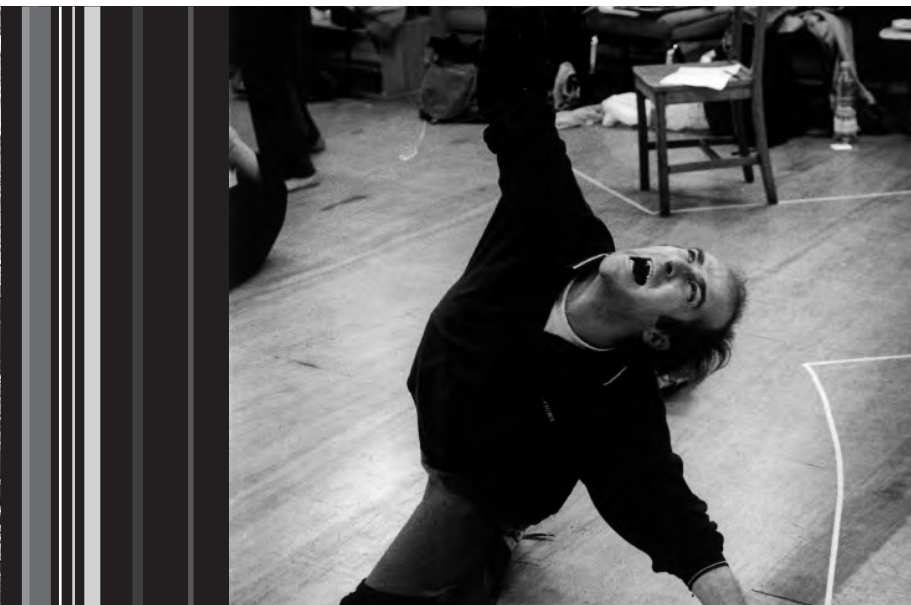
1. In groups of five or more, move to the four corners of the room. Get the participants in each group to knot themselves up in a ridiculous position. For example, they must all hold one individual's ankles and at the same time link arms with a neighbour. Then, without breaking their position and contact, they must move to the opposite corner of the room.
2. Cross the room without losing physical contact with the group, but this time only one person is allowed to move at a time.
3. Cross the room with two people not being allowed to touch the ground and with the rest of the group not using their arms to carry these individuals.
4. Move together as a group without touching, so that from the outside you can't tell who's leading.
5. Simply ask the group to walk in space. Frequently the group ends up walking in a circle, or dispersing as two individuals take different decisions simultaneously.

It is important that the group should move naturally, not in a choreographed line or holding hands. They should begin to

continued->



Detail from Pieter Bruegel's Dulle Griet.



The Caucasian Chalk Circle rehearsal. photo: Simon Annand

The language of movement

This work begins to explore how to express the inner rhythm and quality or 'dynamic' of objects and the natural elements. In music 'dynamic' describes the volume and sound of a piece of music, whether it is played softly, quietly, staccato or loudly. The dynamics in music are the part of the written score that a musician interprets, they allow each person to play a piece of music differently.

We also use dynamics in theatre; the dynamics of movement. These exercises can help us understand and portray atmospheres and environments. We may discover that we don't need to show an environment itself because it can be reflected in an actor's body. Similarly an exploration of different objects can lead to physical characterisation.

The exercises outlined in this section are challenging, so it is important to work towards them gradually by doing lots of physical games and exercises with your students.

> Exercises:

> Materials

It is useful to start this work by exploring the movement of materials. They are directly observable and the improvisations are short and often very amusing.

1. Look at objects and materials you have around you - a ball being bounced, a jumper being dropped, a plastic bag unfurling after being scrunched, a sugar lump dissolving in a glass of water or a match being struck.
2. In groups of three or four, ask your students to carefully observe and then re-create with their bodies the movement of these objects. Encourage them to be precise and specific. This exercise isn't about inventing new movements but about observing and re-creating what they actually see.

If someone is successful in expressing a dynamic you will know immediately. It can be funny to watch an accurate movement because of the surprise of the human body appearing so alien.

> Developing devising skills

1. Get your students to look carefully at the movement sequences they have created.
2. Ask them if they can see a scenario in the movement they've made. For example, perhaps a group recreating the movement of an unfurling plastic bag looked like a group of gossiping old women.
3. Give each group a suggestion of a simple scenario like this. Get them to recreate exactly the same movements or dynamics but to add very subtle changes which transform the movement into a short scene.

> Elements

Looking at the elements takes this work one step further. Here the students can observe directly to a certain extent but also need to introduce a certain amount of imagination. For example, you can begin by exploring the air currents in a room and then gradually move on to recreating a hurricane.

1. Take the word 'wind' or 'air'.
2. Ask you students to explore what happens to their body when it is walking into a strong wind. Change the

continued->



photos: Arsenal Football Club

Tension

A good piece of theatre, game of football or athletics meeting has an audience sitting on the edge of their seats, even holding their breath. If there is sufficient tension the spectators don't get bored, look at their watches or think about what to eat for supper. All too often the theatre we see isn't like this. So, what is it that makes a show compelling and involving?

Physical action alone can help to inject tension into stage action. When an actor's body isn't engaged the whole drama becomes saggy and turgid. But when actors engage physically and work hard an audience is immediately more interested.

Simon McBurney often introduces the following exercise into the rehearsal process to add physical tension to the vocabulary. When a particular tension is introduced into a scene it can spark it into life.

> Exercises:

> The seven levels of tension

1. Begin by exploring both ends of the scale so that your students know where they are travelling from and where they will end up.

2. Get your students to work in pairs and one at a time to take all of the tension out of their body (they should end up lying on the floor). Their partner is there to check that there really isn't any tension left. This is tension level 1.

3. Then get the same pairs to try the opposite. Get them to make every single muscle and sinew of their body tense. This is hard work so don't let them hold the tension for more than a few seconds at a time. This is tension level 7.

4. Now explore the scale from 1-7 and observe what changes occur from stage to stage. Work by getting students to move around the space gradually injecting more tension into their bodies. Most people will arrive at a level of tension that feels incredibly natural to them.



> Tension in a scene or story

It is incredibly complex to analyse how tension operates in a scene or performance. In some genres: horror movies or thrillers for example it is suspense and fear which drives the drama. But what else can help to keep the tension high? Here are some things which students could consider:

- Leave things unsaid, unshown or unresolved.
- Keep the audience on their toes by surprising them occasionally.
- Think about using inappropriate tensions.
- Think about the connection with the audience. If scenes become private between the performers they can become slack and uninteresting. Remember there is not only tension between the performers on stage, but between the performers and the audience.
- Look at storytelling techniques. How does a good storyteller or stand up comedian keep the tension high?
- Think about when a friend tells you an anecdote. What kind of language, gestures and eye contact do they use?
- Think about conflict and how and when to resolve it.

> Exercises:

1. Get your students to tell short anecdotes to each other in pairs.
2. Get them to tell their story to the whole group without changing any element of how they tell the story. (Their partner can keep an eye on this).
3. Discuss the techniques each person used. How effective were they? What were the things that made a story compelling? How much of it was to do with content and how much was about the performance?

Changing the wheel

I sit by the roadside.

The driver changes the wheel.

I do not like the place I have come from.

I do not like the place I am going to.

Why with impatience do I

Watch him changing the wheel?

Brecht.



The Caucasian Chalk Circle rehearsal. photo: Simon Annand

Rhythm

In rehearsals we frequently refer to rhythm. By this we mean the beat (or heart beat) which maintains the flow of an improvisation or particular piece. In a finished piece of theatre the rhythm is infinitely various and complex, however it is extremely useful to raise consciousness of the concept of rhythm by beginning with a much simpler idea.

For example, by imitating the beat of a jazz band with only the voice. It will become very clear when the rhythm is dropped, a beat is missed or a cue is not picked up. The same principle applies to all theatre. There is a musical quality to theatre, as inexplicable as music, which has its core in the concept of rhythm.

As an experiment, get a vocal jazz rhythm going and then get your students to tell a story in words, but maintaining the precise jazz rhythm. The notion of picking up cues and keeping the improvisation going rhythmically will rapidly become even more apparent. Simon McBurney

> Exercises:

1. Stand in a circle and get your students to throw a ball across the circle concentrating on maintaining a steady rhythm like a heart beat.
2. Then ask your students to experiment with making the rhythm as varied and surprising as possible but without dropping the ball or losing the control.
3. Ask them to think about introducing moments of suspension or acceleration, and also to think about the quality or dynamic of each throw. For example a throw could be gentle, staccato, or aggressive.

> Developing devising skills

When you watch a scene or improvisation created by your students which feels flat, refer back to this ball throwing exercise. Ask your students to experiment with the rhythm in the scene to make it more complex and surprising.



Archive photographs.

> Exercises:

The preparation for this exercise can be given as homework as it takes some time, though it should be fun.

1. Get your students to think of the name, age and occupation of a character. A character who could exist in the present day and in this country. Also, ask them to think of three adjectives that describe their character, for example scary, practical and insecure.
2. Ask the students to find a costume for their characters either by raiding their friends' and family's wardrobes or by visiting jumble sales.
3. Arrange a session where your students can arrive in costume and in character. Stand in a circle and introduce all the characters to each other. Then begin work on their physicality as a way to find out more.
4. Ask your students to walk as neutrally as possible in the space. It may be that the costume they have chosen already influences them about the way their character moves.
5. Then starting with the feet and working up to the head, lead your students through an exploration of how their character could move.

Some things to consider could be:

- > The distance between their feet.
- > The length of their stride.
- > Whether their feet are parallel or turned in or out.
- > If they walk with the weight on the front or back of their feet?
- > Which part of their body they lead with?
Head, stomach, chest.
- > If they give the impression of being pushed/pulled from the back or front?
- > Whether they roll their hips.
- > If they seem to defy gravity or are prey to it.
- > If they resemble a particular animal.

Get your students to explore and experience all of the options but especially the sensation of changing the usual way they move their body. Get them to explore and then to decide on the particular way that their character moves.

Urge the students to be bold and definite with their physicalisations. These can always be toned down later but it's important to feel a physical transformation.

> Developing devising skills

1. Use these characters in simple improvisations.
2. Set up a simple situation which could be 'waiting at the doctor's surgery' or 'arriving at the cinema and finding a seat'. These are good situations because they are often silent and involve simple interactions with other characters. They provide a way of looking at the creation of a physical text.
3. Set up a simple space with chairs and perhaps simple props and get a group of students to improvise the situation.

Ask the students watching these improvisations to discuss the different characters they have seen. How does the physicality of a character inform an audience about their emotional state, occupation or status?



Working from text

Complicite have used a wide variety of inspirations for their devised shows. *Put it on Your Head*, an early show about the British at the seaside, was inspired by a cache of flowery bathing hats found at Brick Lane market. However, more recently the Company has used substantial texts to devise from: Bruno Schulz's short stories, Daniil Kharm's poems, plays and stories, and novels by John Berger and Torgny Lindgren.

How do you begin to transpose these texts into images, sequences or scenes?

An A level student spoke of not having any stimulus. Their teacher loudly disagreed: 'We gave you so much stimulus, so many books and sources'. The student replied 'Yes, but it was all too intellectual, we didn't get what you wanted us to do with it'.

So it seems that the ability to access the stimulus, to be able to understand and be inspired by it is central to devising.

The first step is for a group to understand a piece of text, then to agree what it means, what the important events are, and what things they like about the text.

For devised work Complicite usually employs a writer who will work on the text before the rehearsals begin. This work often involves dividing a text up into events that the actors can begin to work with. The writer is involved at every stage of the rehearsal process and gradually develops a script from improvisations.

The Company often uses the following exercise in rehearsals to attempt to unravel and understand sections of text. If a few different pairs or groups do the exercise it is interesting to compare how different interpretations can be.



Light rehearsal. photo: Simon Annand

Roles within the group

When your students begin to work together on the devising process they will naturally gravitate towards different roles. Some students may be active and positive performers - comfortable and happy improvising, others may prefer research, directing or writing. It is a shame that within many examination frameworks students are marked on their final performances. This goes against the nature of most theatre where leading roles naturally emerge with their supporting characters or chorus.

Most professional theatre practitioners admit that equality in the devising process simply doesn't exist. John Fox of Welfare State writes about the inevitable arrival of complex bureaucracy when working on big projects and also the need for a leader; one person who is ultimately responsible.

It may be useful for your students to define the different roles that need to be filled, and to get them to take responsibility for different aspects of the process.

We pick a team that can work together and that is ideal for that gig - but we often write the work round the needs of the people we choose. It's like a good band. We provide the tunes but the soloists explore harmonies and we love to write work to incorporate imaginative engineers, or wonderful sculptors, people we can enjoy creating with. Then in practice we all learn from each other through observation and consultation and helping each other. As the work grows, in practice, on the best occasions it feels like being inside a great rolling planet of creative fission.

John Fox. Engineers of the Imagination - Welfare State Handbook.



Mnemonic rehearsal, photos: Sarah Ainslie

The creative environment

When I know I'm going to do a script, I'll go to the stationery store and buy a notebook with eighty or a hundred pages in it, where you rip the pages out of the ring file, and I'll say, 'OK, this is the notebook I'm going to write Pulp Fiction or whatever in.' I also buy three red felt pens and three black felt pens. I make this big ritual out of it. It's just psychology. I always say that you can't write poetry on a computer, but I can take this notebook places, I can write in restaurants, I can write in friends' houses, I can write standing up, I can write lying down in my bed - I can write everywhere. It never looks like a script; it always looks like Richard Ramirez's diary, the diary of a madman. When I get to my last stage, which is the typing stage, it starts looking like a script for the first time. Then I start making dialogue cuts and fixing up things that didn't work before.

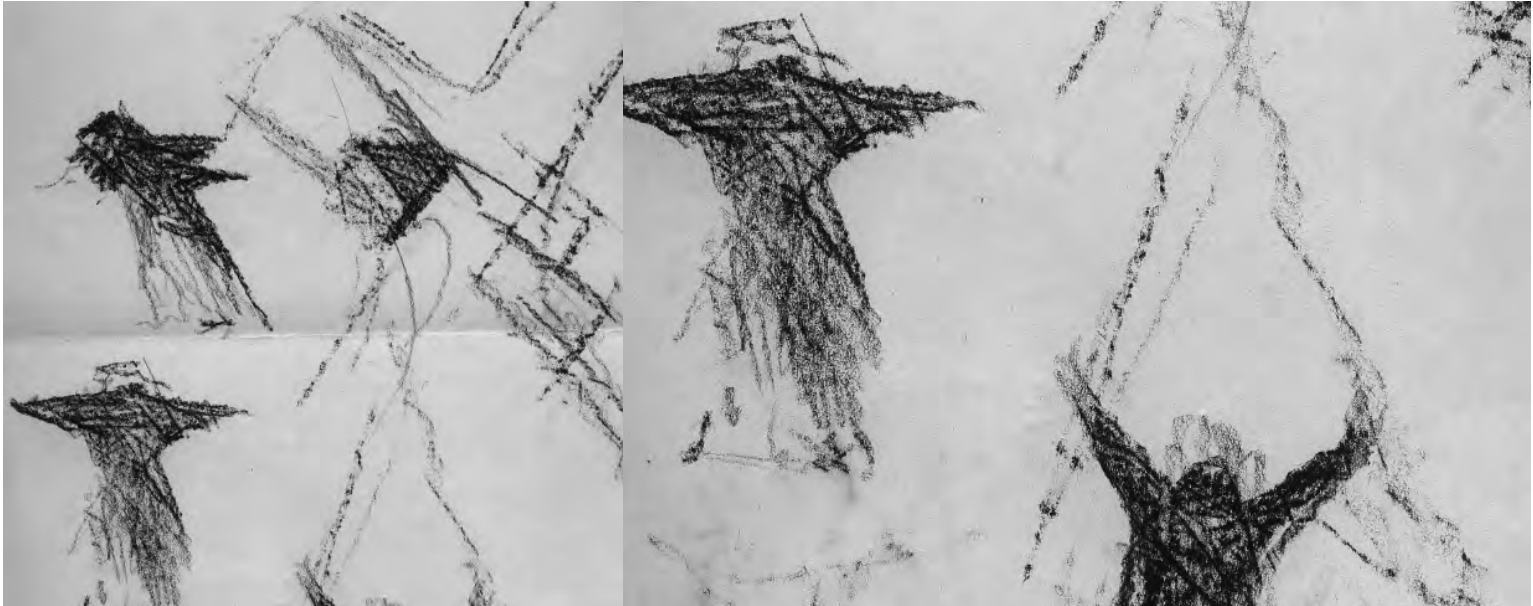
Quentin Tarantino on Reservoir Dogs> Faber and Faber Ltd.

Art demands persistent work, work in spite of everything, and a continuous observation. Van Gogh

Part of the pleasure of rehearsals is seeing a room transform from a bare space into a chaotic jumble of costumes, pictures and books. Finally the Company sift out what is needed, mark out the space and gradually a show will emerge.

In a school setting students are often sharing a space and have to set up for each session. If it is possible help each group find some space which can be theirs for the duration of the devising process to gather all their material together. Stick visual influences on walls, gather props and costumes and keep a file of written material. This ensures that valuable sources are accessible for the group to dip into whenever necessary. It can also help to stimulate individual notebooks.

Encourage them to create visual material: collages, paintings, sketches or even junk sculptures which can help to refine ideas about the look of a theatre piece, the space it will inhabit, atmosphere, colours and weight. These sources can be used directly in exercises but also for students to read and leaf through during breaks. It is a way of helping a whole company to absorb a visual aesthetic or historical information.



Out of a house walked a man... rehearsal sketches. Catherine Alexander

Keeping records

A level students often talk of 'faking' their individual notebooks. It is not wrong to put notes together for presentation in retrospect, but it is important to keep detailed records as the work is happening. This is part of the ongoing research and exploration, and helps a group to define, structure and assess their devising process as it is happening.

If possible use video or stills cameras to record improvisations, or get students to take turns at keeping detailed notes and sketches. Writing notes in retrospect is much less useful, so encourage notetaking while discussions and improvisations are actually happening. These notes can become a detailed group record to be accessed by all the students.

First morning of rehearsal... We talk about the need to build-up a library both literal and mental, of provoking images and text. The long process begins with any number of blank pages. We have no set design but Dick Bird, an exciting designer, will be working alongside us. We have no script but Matthew Broughton has done an initial adaptation for us to work from... The process is helped by the presence of a complex sound desk and sound operator, Emma Laxton. We also video rehearsals so that nothing is lost. Simon shows us a series of his drawings from the last few weeks. They are dark, expressive, bleak and are dominated by swirls of light on a brown background. They do, somehow, help us to see the direction he is taking. Steven Canny, *Light rehearsal diary*



The Street of Crocodiles Company 1998. Heather MacCrimmon

Reading aloud as a group

Reading written material aloud is an important way of sharing ideas and telling stories. Individual research can only help if a group is good at sharing and disseminating information. It is clear from Complicite rehearsals that the most powerful research is that which can be experienced and explored as a group. It is crucial that the group has a shared understanding of the central themes and images to be used.

If your students enjoy creative writing they could write pieces of poetry, prose or reminiscences. Get them to read these aloud to each other and see which elements are amusing or touching. These may be useful as provocations for scenes.

*We started every afternoon reading the stories.
We read all the stories together.* Clive Mendus *The Street of Crocodiles*

This is much more potent than simply reading silently.



Archive Photography

Nothing will come of nothing King Lear, Shakespeare

If I had not drawn so much, I would not be able to catch the impression of and get hold of a figure that looks like an unfinished clay figurine.

In the poorest huts, in the dirtiest corner, I see drawings and pictures. And with irresistible force my mind is drawn to these things.

More and more other things lose their interest, and the more I get rid of them, the quicker my eye grasps the picturesque things. Art demands persistent work, work in spite of everything, and a continuous observation. Van Gogh

Choosing a subject

It's crucial that your students find a rich seam to mine; a theme, subject or inspiration that they are all interested in. The subject matter should lead them naturally to the appropriate style and form of expression. Allow for surprises, for changes of direction and reject things that aren't functioning.

It is important to choose a subject or theme quickly: to make the decision and get on with the work. It is like choosing a site for an archaeological dig. The decision of where to dig is based on a hunch; an idea that is informed by the immediate surroundings. When you start digging you will always find something. It may not be what you expected, but with patience something will emerge. Stick with the site. Stay with your initial choice of subject matter.

A fresh slate was really hard to deal with for a long time; having no stimulus was really tough. It was one of the things we battled with. Hampstead School Student

Deciding a subject matter - a starting point - is something that every artist struggles with. Sometimes the discovery is effortless and easy, at other times the brain feels empty of inspiration. Ultimately we must trust that ideas and ways forward will arrive.

It took us a long time to decide what we wanted to do, what we wanted to show. By the time we had worked that out we had a about two weeks left. Hampstead School Student



Simon McBurney, Tim McMullan and John Berger photo: Simon Annand

Simon asked me whether I remembered how we began working on the Vertical Line – a show in an Underground station about a journey back through time to the palaeolithic cave paintings of animals. It wasn't long ago that we started, yet I don't remember. It seems to me it started with Simon talking about his father who was an archaeologist and the holidays he spent as a boy on archaeological sites. Or did it begin with my passion for animals when I was a boy and wanted to be a veterinary surgeon? Or did it begin with a book which our friend Juan Murioz sent us about the Fayoum portraits in Egypt? Or did it begin with Artangel finding out one could hire Aldwych tube station for performances? I'm not sure. And I'm not sure because stories usually arrive stealthily like this one did.

How does a story begin? Never by looking for a story. Stories come up from behind you and tap you on the shoulder. You look round and there's nothing there. Then, another day,

they tap again. And this time you don't look round, instead, you start remembering. You start listening to something that now won't let you forget it. Something you heard or saw or met which you hardly took any notice of at the time. A story is something which happened (even if only, sometimes, in imagination) and which wants to come back, and sleep for a while, like a dog, on the jacket of your imagination.

Words. A line of them makes a sentence. Several lines make a paragraph. But this is not what makes them seek each other out. They call to each other because they are out there in the forest alone, and once, long ago in a forgotten time, they were all at home together in a mother tongue, huddled together, inarticulate, snoring, like kids asleep without clothes on. Listen to their calls in the forest. Imitate them. Don't worry about what they mean. Meaning comes later when a pack of them come together, and they decide to go places.

Between words. That's where you run, like running between trees. Story-telling depends upon pauses. Upon waiting. The words can come from many different places – different trees from different climates. Tag slogans. Examination questions. Rock. Newspaper reports. Love letters. How-to-do-it instructions. Poetry. Cooking recipes. Run between them in the right way, making the pauses – and there's a story there, already half told.

John Berger, writer.



The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol rehearsals. photo: Simon Annand

It doesn't matter where you begin. Anything can be a starting point in theatre – a gesture, an idea, a song, a line of dialogue.

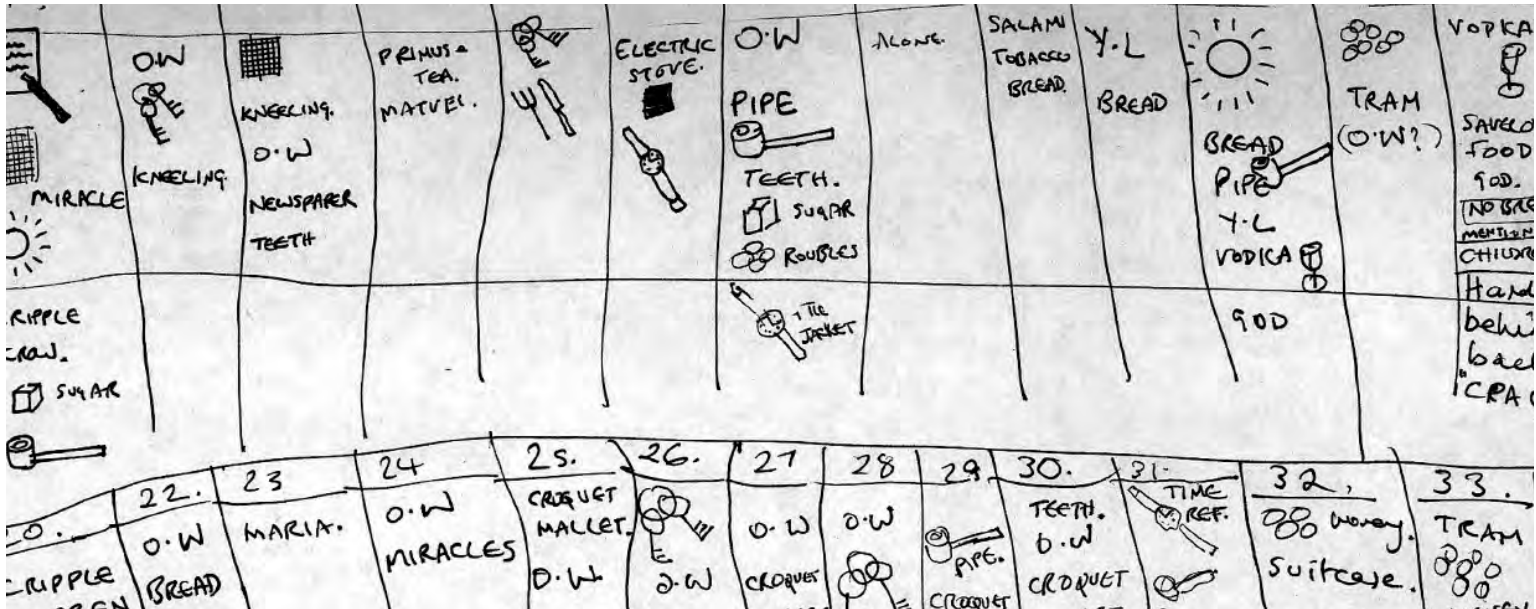
What matters is the next step – how to find the opposing force, the conflict, the tension.

If someone is sitting in a chair, the scene, the act, the play will be about how to get them out of the chair. What force, what cajoling, what entreaties, what seductions, what bribes are strong enough to get that person out of that chair?

When I worked with playwrights in Uganda I started by asking about their social rituals which are complex and deep-rooted. They described rituals of birth, marriage and burial to me in great detail. I then asked them to think of a force so strong it could disrupt the ritual in question. So the gourd containing the wine which celebrated an engagement leaked; the only relative whose presence was essential to bury the body failed to turn up; the newly circumcised young man was subjected to unbearable pain which shamed his family forever in revenge for something which had happened ten years before. Seventeen new plays emerged from this process.

Once the oppositional force is established, theatre begins. The audience want to know what will happen and why. The question 'what will happen?' will engage them while the performance is in progress. The question 'why did it happen?' will engage them long afterwards.

Stephen Jeffreys, playwright



Out of a house walked a man... rehearsal sketches. Catherine Alexander

Gathering the material together

Inevitably after a period of intensive exploration and research the group will have created a lot of fragments, scenes and characters. There will be far too much material. The job of devising now involves categorising the material, linking elements together and giving them titles.

Students don't necessarily have to think about structure yet, but need to consider putting two things together. For example, if you look at a photograph of a neutral face next to a photograph of a bowl of soup, you will almost certainly see 'hunger'. As students juxtapose fragments of work, stories will emerge naturally.

Consolidation

Begin to get your students to define which elements are strongest and most interesting, which explorations are no longer necessary. Can they see a clearer direction unfolding?

Creativity is nothing more than a strategic accident. The cause of this accident... inspiration. Unless one is a crash test dummy why would one be interested in strategic accidents? Perhaps because inspiration is everywhere but creative accidents are a rarity. Inspiration encompasses all that is capable of poetic explication but it is the obsessive or focused influence which leads to a greater clarity and a more successful accident. That singularity is, for architects, landscapes. But creativity is not caused by this obsessiveness alone, we must graft this notion of the landscape with the medium of building, it is then that the Frankenstein of hybridisation occurs, the mutant, the GM idea . . . the creative accident. Steve Hardy, Urban Future Organisation, Architects Sarajevo Concert Hall, 1999

By the seventh week of rehearsal (there were a total of ten weeks) we had identified 5 main stories and 18 sub-stories. Even with a very fluid style of performance this would cause a problem for focus. The process moved inexorably towards consolidating decisions about the play's content. Repetition allows the information to be moved forward and refined. By trying things in many different ways it is possible to make a judgement about what is essential and what should be omitted. It is quite difficult to describe this process because it so often comes down to instinct. Steven Canny, Mnemonic

How I paint I do not know myself. I sit down with a white board before the spot that strikes me, I look at what is before me, I say to myself that that white board must become something; I come back dissatisfied – I put it away, and when I have rested a little, I go to look at it with a kind of fear. Then I am still dissatisfied, because I still have too clearly in my mind that splendid subject, to be satisfied with what I made of it. But after all I find in my work an echo of what struck me, and that I have put it down in shorthand. In my shorthand there may be words that cannot be deciphered, there may be mistakes or gaps, but there is something in it of what wood or shore or figure has told me, and it is not a tame or conventional language, proceeding less from nature itself than from a studied manner or a system. Van Gogh



Full Circle workshop. photo: Simon Annand

In any devising process there needs to be an overview of the whole process and what needs to be accomplished at each stage. As Steve Canny writes, the final structuring of a piece of theatre is difficult to pin down but the crucial element is experimentation. Trying scenes in various ways and orders. This is impossible if you haven't improvised and created scenes in the early stages of the process. The worst thing you can do with devised theatre is to structure everything before you start playing and improvising.

> Exercises:

This was an exercise we used for *Out of a house walked a man...* to try and put a short cabaret style sequence of 'sluchai' (stories and sketches) into an order. When we had discussed and combined our choices we were ready to improvise our way through whole sequences and see what worked.

1. Get each group of students to give every image and scene that they have created a title.
2. Divide them into pairs or threes, and ask them to put these scenes into some kind of order.
3. They must decide which scenes do not fit into their version and also outline where they can see obvious gaps.
4. Then in their groups of two or three get them to present their proposal to other students in the group.
5. Where are the points of contact between the various proposals and what are the differences? Are there any exciting new ideas, or unusual ways of approaching the material?
6. Get the group to improvise their way through some of the proposals. Get the students watching to note which sequences work and which don't. In this way the students will begin to structure and consolidate the pieces.

Presentation

When your students have a proposition - a first draft of their piece of devised theatre - they are ready to attempt a run through in front of an audience. This is really where a piece of theatre is born: where the real work begins. It is only when the students perform their piece for real that they will feel what is functioning and what is not. After they have shown their work they can listen to the feedback and respond by re-structuring and re-shaping the work. They may decide to resurrect scenes that had been cut, or feel the need to create new scenes.

Students should give themselves a deadline for when the first presentation will happen. A deadline which gives them enough time to re-work a piece in detail.

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Complicite

14 Anglers Lane, Kentish Town,
London NW5 3DE, UK
T. +44 (0)20 7485 7700 / F. +44 (0)20 7485 7701
email@complicite.co.uk

Writer Catherine Alexander
Co-ordinator Kate Sparshatt
Consultant Simon McBurney
Design Russell Warren-Fisher

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Joseph Stelmars Orchestra

