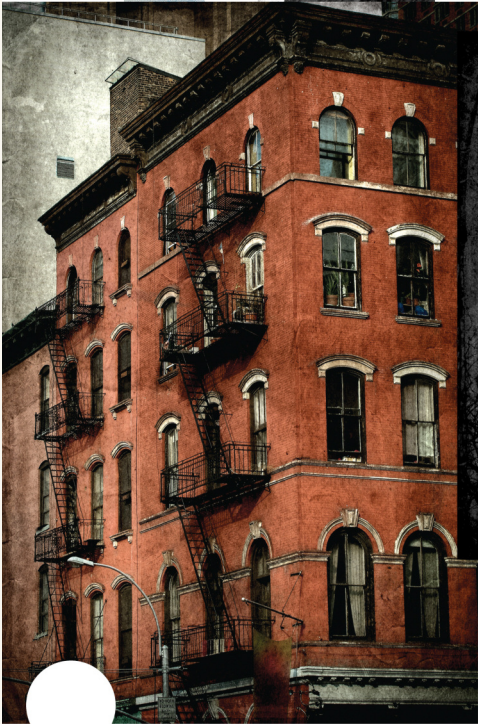


Complicite

ROYAL CENTRAL
SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



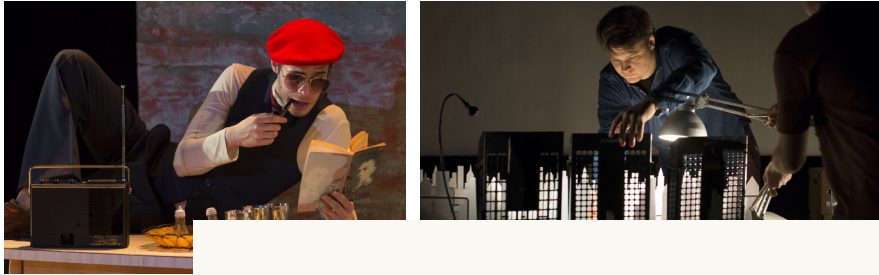
A STUDIO SEASON



Tomorrow I'll be Twenty

A STUDIO
SEASON

A STUDIO SEASON



When Catherine Alexander, founder and leader of the Acting Collaborative and Devised Theatre course at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, invited Complicite to direct her students in their graduation piece, we spent a long time talking about what the collaboration would look like.

Would we ask Marcello Magni - co-founder of the Company, whose recent work with Peter Brook and Robert Lepage, and his own show *Marcel* about an aging Clown, retains much of the simple, spare grace and all of the skillful physical comedy reminiscent of Complicite's early works - to direct? Or should we invite Kirsty Housley, co-director of Complicite's latest production *The Encounter*, to bring her skills with sound design, theatre technology and dense text, to work with the students? Which of these apparently divergent styles best represented the Company? What is a Complicite show?

The truth is that it is all of these things. Complicite's work over the past 34 years is a record of constant change and innovation, with each new work finding new ways of telling stories. What hasn't changed about the work is how it is approached: by a group of people willing to listen to the story and to hear how it is asking to be told. By a group of people who are comfortable not quite knowing where they will end up, an ensemble who come to the start of a process open to seeing where it will lead them.

In the end we decided to make three shows, directed by Marcello, Kirsty and Catherine herself - whose work with the Company since the '90s has included acclaimed productions *The Elephant Vanishes* and *Shun-kin* - three directors who we felt could speak for the Company's changing moods.

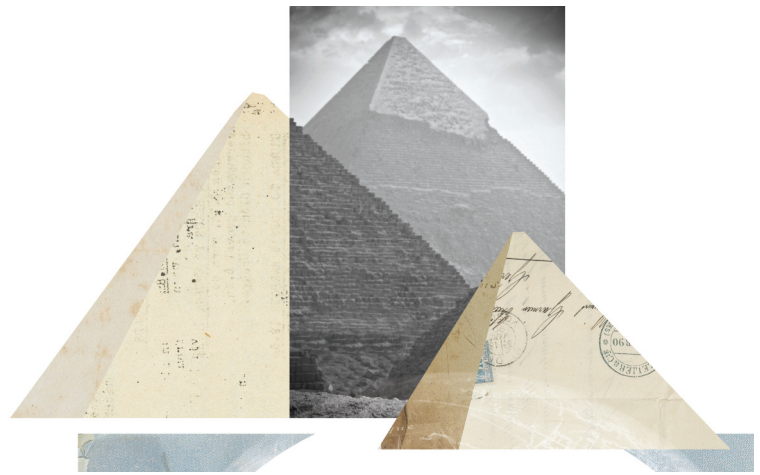
The results of their work look very different, but they all started in the same way. This resource describes some of the exercises and activities each Company used in the devising process, but any of them could have happened in any of the rooms.

We hope you'll find them useful in your own devising, and that *A Studio Season* will give you a better understanding of what it is that makes a 'Complicite show'.

February 2017



Maktub



Writer Gilles Aufray worked with director Marcello Magni to adapt the novel *The Alchemist* for the stage. The narrator is key figure in his play, and getting this voice right was a focus throughout rehearsals.

A narrator's function is to make the story appear, then exist, and then advance, taking the spectators swiftly from one place to another. But a narrator's function is also to make the spectators see the images that make up the story. One of the challenges actors playing the role of narrator face is to make the audience hear and follow the story but also to make them see it: to make them see the words.

Here, Gilles describes a series of exercises which build on one another to expand the possibilities for narration on stage.

1: Words can be seen

To be seen, words have to come out of an image.

Tell a story, or read a simple piece of text, but first try to visualise the objects, characters or actions before speaking the words. Only when the image is clear in your mind can you say the word or the group of words - which are then nourished and coloured by the image from which they come.

In this first part of the exercise, you can take as long as you want to visualise before speaking.

Repeat the exercise - as many times as needed - but now try to visualise quicker and quicker, speeding the telling up as you go.

Now tell the story with the natural rhythm of narration, making sure to visualise everything before telling it.

continued...



Maktub *continued...*

2: Jazz

Using the same story or piece of text, continue to visualise before telling but now see if you can discover the story as you tell it. It is like a jazz piece: the text seems to be invented at the time it is being said - only the present exists. The actor does not seem to control the course of the story.

If this is difficult, imagine you're describing a dream in which images reappear like waves that the teller does not always control. Try and bring this quality to the story you're telling.

3. Beware the meaning of words

It's easy to fall into a pattern of saying words with an intention, tone of voice and emotion that match the meaning of the words. The meaning of words naturally dictates the way we tell them but this can be dangerous. The meaning imprisons the actor who then imprisons the word within only one possible meaning.

Take a short text, or even a sentence, and say it as if it were:

- a happy and/or wonderful event
- a sad and/or tragic event
- a fact

Here are some examples of sentences you could use in this exercise.

- *Hooded figures begin to appear, Bedouins watching over the caravan. They bring news of danger. The caravan falls silent. There is a sense of fear in the air.*
- *I don't want to change anything. I don't want to change my life, because I don't know how to deal with change.*
- *Our men don't always return; the desert takes them from us.*
- *Within half an hour, the 500 tribespeople are dead and their commander is condemned to death without honour.*

Discuss how these different tellings affect the audience, and see if you can use this exercise to subtly change the delivery of your narration.



4: From page to stage

Get into groups of four, and give each group a short story.

You could use this, from *Maktub*:

A man, under the midday sun, is digging a hole in the desert. This man has the reputation to talk about life in his own manner, in other words to be a kind of poet.

A camel driver walks past and asks him:

- What are you doing?
- I'm digging a hole, replies the man.
- Why are you digging a hole?
- To find the 10 gold coins which I buried around here last month.

The camel driver looks at the desert, an infinity of sand, and says:

- But you should have taken something as a marker to be able to find them again! A tree or a rock.
- I took something as a marker, the man says.
- What is it?
- The shadow of a cloud, up there.

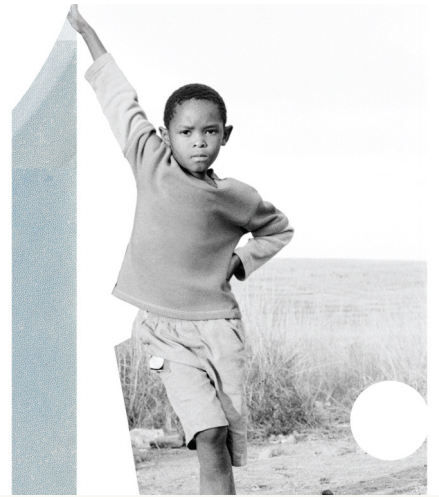
- The first actor reads the story, discovering the story as they read it.
- The story is then read by the second actor who, having listened to it once, now knows it and can read it knowing the end of the story.
- The third actor, who has now heard it twice, has to stand up and then tell it, beginning to make the story his or hers.
- The fourth actor, who has now heard it three times, has to perform it.





Maktub

A STUDIO
SEASON



Tomorrow I'll be Twenty

Tomorrow I'll be Twenty tells the story of 10 year old Michel, growing up in 1970s' Pointe Noire, Congo. The show's assistant director Martins Imhangbe talks about key moments in the development of the piece.

Getting Started

Before we started rehearsals, we asked each of the company members – including the designers, me, and the director Catherine - to read the book and to prepare a three minute 'personal response' to it. This response could take any form – they could talk about the book, they could perform something they'd prepared, they could bring in some research and present that – we really asked them to go with whatever came naturally.

On the first day of rehearsal, that meant we already had lots of practical ideas to start exploring. The responses were very different from one another, but several things came up more than once, including dancing and great '70s music and it felt clear that these things would end up in the final piece. After we'd watched all the responses, we wrote down the things that we remembered most vividly, figuring that anything that stood out and stuck with us would be worth keeping.

The things we'd written down then provided us with a plan for the next few days of devising as we worked our way through each of the ideas, playing around with them to see if they would turn into scenes we could thread together to make our show.

The Sapeurs: finding a chorus

Throughout the piece you'll spot The Sapeurs, a group of somewhat shady but always elegantly dressed men, who are a kind of 'chorus' in the show.

The idea of the chorus goes back to Greek theatre traditions, and it can be an incredibly useful device in theatremaking, particularly when you've got a lot of story to tell and not much time to tell it. (We had a 300-page novel and only an hour on stage!) The chorus can exist slightly outside the world of your characters and your central narrative, meaning they're not bound by the same rules, and we used them to move the story forwards swiftly, to comment on the action, and to provide tonal shifts when needed – for example bringing a bit of light comic relief.

We knew that we wanted a chorus of some kind, but we also knew that we wanted them to fit into the world of 1970s Pointe Noire – they couldn't just be any group of people. We spent time researching the period and the country, and discovered the Sapeurs, which stands for the *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes* or the Society of Ambiance-makers and Elegant People, a Congo subculture made up of men who turn the art of dressing into a cultural statement, and abide by an extravagantly gentleman-like code of conduct befitting the clothes they wear. Sapeurs are still around today, but were particularly prevalent in the '70s, and when we found out about them it was a light bulb moment – we knew they would make a perfect chorus.

continued...



Tomorrow I'll be Twenty *continued...*

Locations

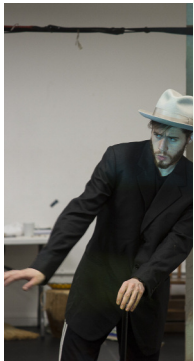
One of the first things we did in rehearsals was to focus on the locations the novel takes place in. We went through the text and identified the places that came up most often, and which we felt were going to be key to how we told the story. We chose:

1. Michel's home
2. School
3. The market place
4. Uncle Rene's house
5. Under the mango tree

We then 'staged' each location in three different ways.

- First we described each place, choosing text from the novel and adding our own words to create a scripted description which the narrator would speak at some point in the show.
- Then we brought each space to life with our bodies, becoming the people or objects that fill each location – for example in the market place the cast became stall holders, shoppers, beggars, thieves, etc. populating the space with all the hustle and bustle of daily life onto which we could then add action.
- Finally we created soundspaces for each location, at first simply using our voices and then, as we got clearer about what we wanted, working with our sound designer to find sound effects we could use. For example, under the mango tree, Michel and Lounés watch aeroplanes flying overhead, so the noise of planes was obvious here. Once we'd got these sounds, it meant that we could very quickly evoke the space of 'under the mango tree', taking the audience there without having to do much more than simply play the sound of a plane.

If you're doing this in your devising process, you need to think carefully about when to use each way of suggesting a location. Obviously if we just played the sound of a plane the first time the boys are under the mango tree it wouldn't be very effective – you need to use all three (or more) ways of evoking space at different points to allow an audience to understand the story you're telling.





Tomorrow I'll be Twenty

A STUDIO
SEASON

War & War

War & War is an epic story, which takes in 2000 years of global history. Associate director Jesse Fox discusses some of the strategies the company adopted in bringing the text to the stage.

Editing text

War & War isn't perhaps your most obvious choice for a theatrical adaptation: it has hardly any dialogue and instead has long, sprawling sections of text where meaning is slowly revealed and the plot is often obscure. To tackle this, we used the following exercise several times:

- Split the cast into small groups, each with photocopies of the first section of the novel to read.
- Each group then chooses five key moments from that section, asking themselves: what are the events that take place? What is essential to tell the story?
- Next, they cut their five key moments out and stick them onto a big piece of paper, creating their own miniature version of the novel. If needed, they are allowed to reorder their five moments - the most important thing is that the story is clear.
- Each group then presents their proposal, reading out their version of the text. A discussion with the director and the whole group follows: which passages of text are singled out as crucial by most or all groups? Where are the differences?

- Pulling together the most useful propositions from our different versions, the director leads the cast in assembling a master edit of that section of the text. The cast then stick down the amalgamated final version on a big piece of paper. This forms our first draft of the show's opening.

Every time we did this we found that there were sections of the text that weren't crucial to developing the plot but which we didn't want to lose for some reason - usually because they contained beautiful language or imagery. Be tough: cut these out if they aren't helping you to simply tell the story of what happens, but save them in another pile somewhere and come back to them later, when you've built your basic structure and you want to start decorating it.

continued...



War & War *continued...*

Telling epic stories

Another challenge *War & War* presents is that it includes a number of seriously epic events, like a volcano exploding, and a church burning down. We were working with a small budget and knew that we would need to find ways of showing these massive events simply and without expensive scenery or technology.

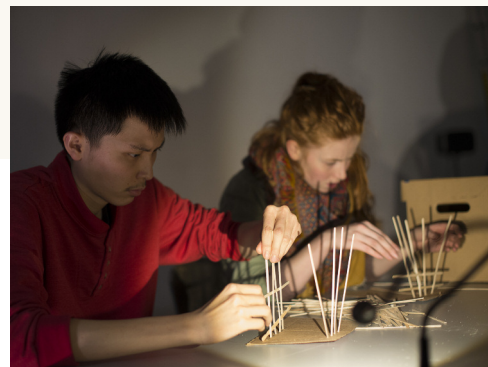
The show is set in an archive and from the start of rehearsals we had surrounded ourselves with 'archive things' - books, papers and office equipment including an old Overhead Projector (OHP). Quite quickly we realised that the OHP could be the solution to our problems - we could use it as a shadow-puppetry and projection tool, and show some of those 'unstageable' images that way, but it could also help us make our story clearer. Because the OHP belonged in the world of the archive, it could help us capture the sense of a story within a story: we could build a separate world distinct from the main action of the play (in the archive) and yet clearly connected to and coming from the main action.

Obviously this solution is very particular to this show and if you're looking for good ways to evoke epic events this won't necessarily be right for you. Think about the style of your piece, and the objects that are already there. Can any of them be repurposed to help you tell your story?

We started playing around with the OHP and our initial experiments made it clear that, compared to some of the more sophisticated equipment used in the show (laptops, video projection, etc.), the OHP evoked a sense of low-tech simplicity. For this reason we decided to use the OHP to tell the section of the story that is set furthest back in the past.

We also found it really successful making images out of objects that were already in our 'archive' so we restricted ourselves as to the materials we could use. This restriction actually made us more creative, and we found lots of great images just through playing around with things we had in the room. These included:

- A boat on the sea, which was created by holding a Tupperware container full of water just above the projector's light box, gently rocking this to create waves in motion.
- A sunset which we made by cutting a circle out of a piece of paper and placing it on top of the light box so only a circle of light is projected. We then moved the paper across the lightbox to give the feeling of the sun sinking towards the horizon. We also added colour to the image by moving clear sweet wrappers past the projector lens.
- A darkening sky was made by pouring sugar and coffee granules over the lightbox so that the light was gradually obscured by accumulating blackness. Once the entire image was blacked out we played with tracing the outline of a volcano in the granules.

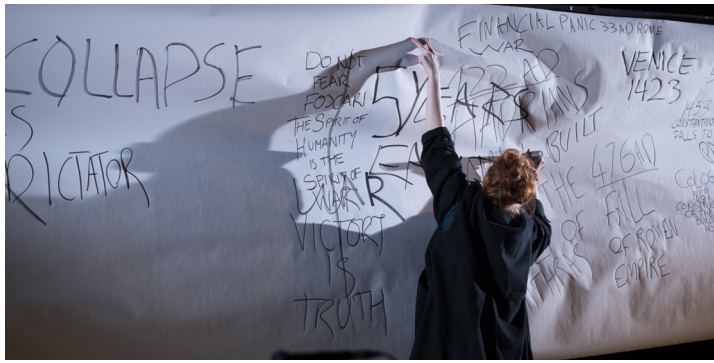




DO NOT
FEAR
FO SCARI
THE SPIRIT OF
HUMANITY
IS THE
SPIRIT OF
WAR
VICTORY
IS
TRUTH

War & War

A STUDIO
SEASON



Designing the Shows

All three shows are designed by Bethany Wells, in collaboration with student designers Rose Harris, Alice Simonato and Keziah Drew. Bethany has worked in many different theatrical settings, including making site-specific and mobile productions. Here she shares some strategies and advice for designers working with devising companies.

In scripted work, my first collaboration is often with the script itself, and the ideas that emerge upon reading that. I'm often sent a script before meeting with a director, so will already have a sense of the parameters we'll be working to, and questions we'll work on together e.g. how will we interpret stage directions, any specific settings/props mentioned that we will need to create. When reading scripts, I'm always looking for a guiding structure, an architectural or dramaturgical shape to respond to, spatially.

Often with scripted work we will have pinned down certain elements, or created a rehearsal set, so the actors are working with a knowledge of the design from Day 1. Devised work is more fluid and dynamic, with fewer decisions taken in advance, and I'll always plan to spend more time in rehearsals, just watching and thinking. Instead of having a finished design or model before starting rehearsals, I'll create sketches, possibilities, palettes of visual research, and ideas of spatial exercises to try out during the rehearsal process. It's more of a facilitating role, and can allow you to input closely into the structure, or dramaturgy of a piece, especially with site specific devised work.

For example, here's what I had scrawled in my notebooks after the first few days in rehearsal for each show:

Maktub: drawings in the sand / storytellers / raw ingredients / elemental / physical manipulation of objects / materials / timeless / fabric + canes / a dynamic kit of parts / tea glasses / desert oases / on a journey / creating realms of reality + imagination / How does the concept of alchemy influence how we approach the use of materials and space? / How can we constantly transform the way objects and space is used on stage to create fleeting moments?

Tomorrow I'll be Twenty: growing up in the Congo / the heat / mosquitoes / tailoring / a special radio cassette player / a briefcase / beards / communism / post-colonialism / politics + the everyday / sacks of peanuts / the sky / heat / planes overhead / sapeurs / plastic stools / film + image projection / coloured fabric / print / suits / style / rough around the edges.

War & War: archives / records / manuscript / anglepoise lights / the act of reading / conjuring images from text / moments of beauty / desks + chairs / black / shadows / manipulation of books / how can the style of the text inform the style of delivery / pulling visual poetry from a vast archive of words.

continued...





Designing the Shows *continued...*

Designing for devising requires flexibility, responsiveness and willingness to rethink and edit as you go. Not every idea the cast and director explore will make it into the final run and it's easy to get attached to certain moments, lines (or props you've spent ages making...) but the priority is to communicate the overall arc of the piece, and the design needs to serve that final version of the show, rather than getting stuck on previous iterations.

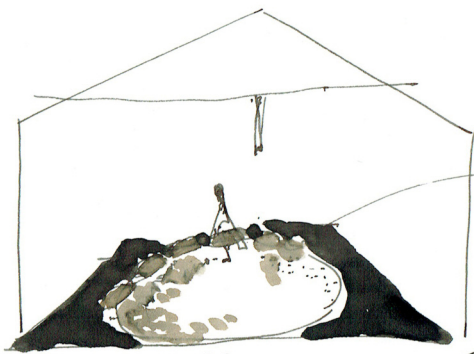
With devised work, or adaptations, you need to be responsive as well as propositional as designers. This means knowing where your own inspirations are coming from, visually, spatially and culturally, but also really listening to directors and performers and keeping closely in touch with the work being done in rehearsals as things can shift quickly.

Devising is a real-time, dynamic process; often I'll find fragments of ideas that come up at 1am, or get sketch ideas over email from directors to pursue. You need to be proactive about developing design concepts through an ongoing conversation with the director and the ensemble. To make this conversation work, it's good to be able to:

- quickly prioritise ideas you speak about with directors, and distill references to find the most relevant examples
- save all images, product links and techniques in one place, as you may need to come back to things later in the process
- quickly test an idea e.g. drawing or prototype (cheaply out of found cardboard and tape) to see if it's going to work/be affordable

As ideas can come and go, and need to be tested before they are committed to, it's good to be able to mock-up ideas cheaply and quickly, for example using stand-ins, things found on the street or borrowed items before using up lots of the budget on final items. As soon as something comes up as a possibility, you need to explore it 100% - otherwise how will the performers know if their idea works or not? - so it's good to get ahead of yourself in terms of finding a product and costing it so that if an idea you've tested gets selected, you already have an idea of how you might make that work on the stage.





ROCKS IN ANDALUSIA



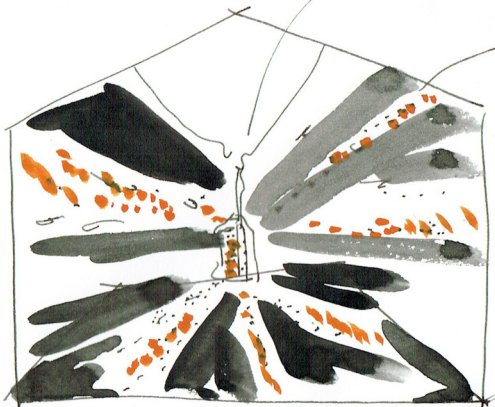
Sand bags

Sand bag/boulders

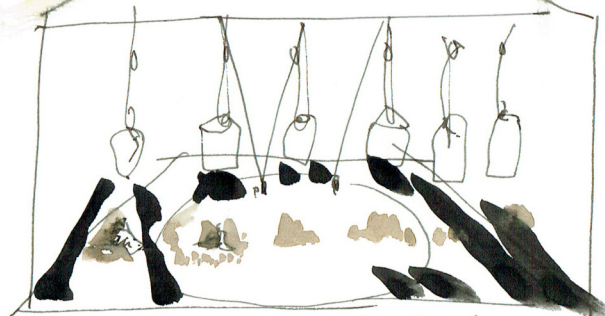
leading/stair

big moroccan lantern

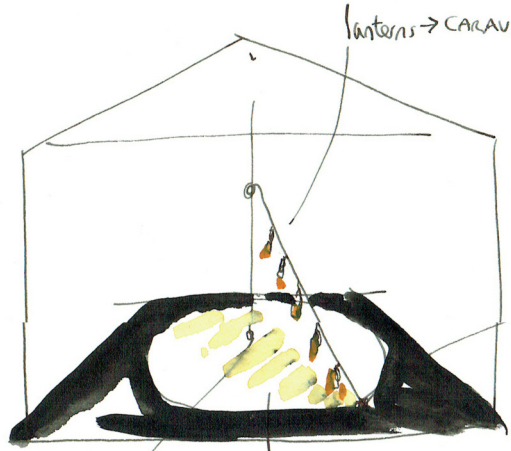
Light



CRYSTAL/ INSIDE TENT LANTERNS.



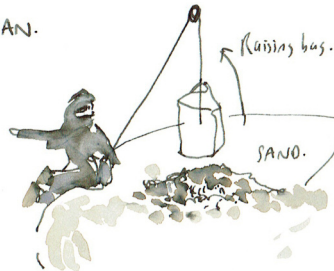
SANDBAGS → ROCKS → HANGING WEIGHTS / COUNTERWEIGHTS / Series of pulley. / hanging points TIP OFF SAND.



lanterns → CARAVAN.

CARAVAN weight

glass floor?

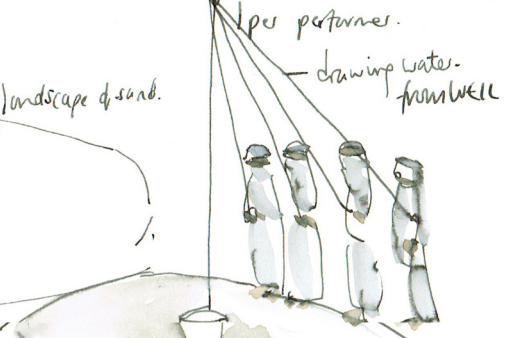


Raising bag.

SAND.

landscape of sand.

lights on a string SAND LANDSCAPE

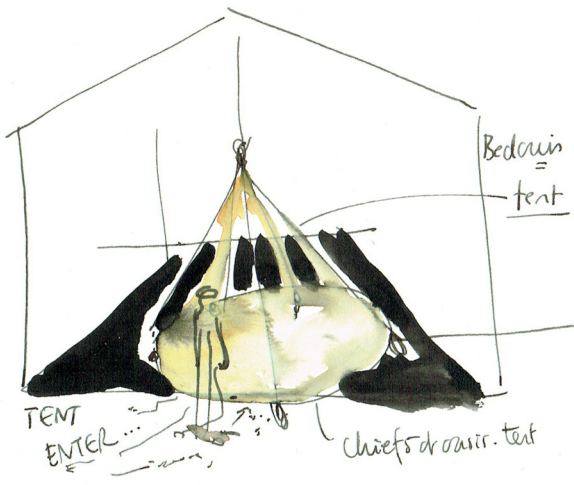


lps performs.

drawing water from well

well

WELL IN OASIS.

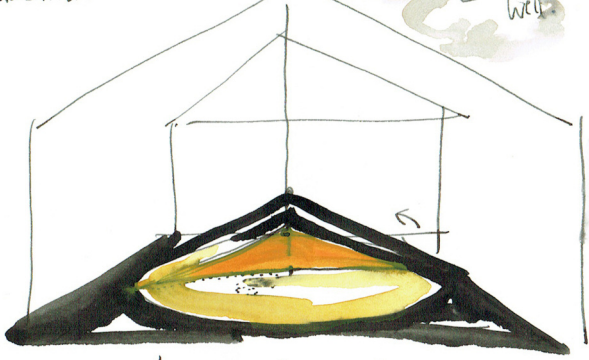


Bedouin tent

sand bags.

TENT ENTER...

chiefs drawer. tent



landscape pyramids.

LOW LIGHT ON LOW PULLEY

Maktub

A STUDIO SEASON

Student designer Rose Harris also has this piece of advice:

“

To a designer who is starting out in devised theatre, I would say: get as involved as possible. Don't let the idea of being a designer and not being trained in acting or sound or lighting etc stop you from having ideas, suggesting things and collaborating with others, particularly in the initial stages. Do your research, especially if you are using a piece of text as a stimulus - but even if you are using something less concrete as a starting point don't underestimate the importance of researching and recording any ideas and references that are mentioned at any point in rehearsals. This will give you many more avenues of possibility when thinking about the design.

With devised work, skills that will help you quickly realise your ideas are valuable, whether this is in construction, costume making, lighting, prop making etc. Devised work can be frustrating from a 'making' perspective as things constantly change and get scrapped right up until the last second, but this can also be exciting as things you make get modified and used in ways they were never intended. **There's never a boring moment when devising!**

”

Maktub

Based on Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*

Directed by Marcello Magni

Adapted by Gilles Aufray in collaboration with Marcello Magni

Music composed and performed by Olivier Aufray

Sound Design Joe Dines

Performers Archie Backhouse, Nina Bowers, Youness Bouzinab, Deshaye Gayle, Rakhee Sharma

Tomorrow I'll be Twenty

Based on the novel *Demain, j'aurai vingt ans* by Alain Mabanckou

Directed by Catherine Alexander

Assistant Director Martins Imhangbe

Video Design Cate Blanchard

Sound Design Ben Smith

Performers Mogali Masuku, Ronald Nsubuga, Tanika Yerwood, Tom Lacroix

War & War

Inspired by the novel by László Krasznahorkai

Directed by Kirsty Housley

Associate Director Jesse Fox

Sound Design Bethany Taylor

Sound Associates Aaron Brotherhood & Anthony Papamichael

Performers Emma-May Uden, Humaira Iqbal, Joakim Gunby, James Fox, Polly Waldron

A STUDIO SEASON

For A Studio Season

Design Bethany Wells, with Rose Harris, Alice Simonato and Keziah Drew

Lighting Design Johanne Jensen, with Santiago Martinez

Production Manager Ali Beale and Jack Greenyer

Company Stage Manager Hetti Curtis and Wendy Vanos

Deputy Stage Managers Anthony Papamichael, Matthew Pain and Emma Wroe

Assistant Stage Managers Gemma Martin, India Marsland and Kara Girvan

Technical Stage Manager Jose Gustavo

Sound Production Aaron Brotherhood

Producer Dina Mousawi

Assistant Producer Soha Khan

Resource pack written by Gilles Aufray, Jesse Fox, Martins Imhangbe and Poppy Keeling.

Designed by Russell Warren-Fisher.

Photography by Sarah Ainslie.

Complicite

Since it was founded in 1983 Complicite has played in more than 40 countries, winning over 50 major awards and becoming known as one of the UK's most exciting and enduring theatre companies. The Company also runs an award-winning Creative Learning programme, which includes workshops in schools and colleges, professional development and participatory projects.

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**A STUDIO
SEASON**

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