

# Making The Encounter

## A guide for teachers and students

This pack has been written as a starting point for students watching and writing about *The Encounter*. It is intended for use alongside the online resource *Making the Encounter*, which can be found at [www.complicite.org/theencounterresource](http://www.complicite.org/theencounterresource), and which brings together a mass of material collected and created in the twenty years Complicite and Simon McBurney have been thinking about making the show.

Each activity in this pack refers to material on the online resource, so students will need access to the internet to complete tasks. Online material is indicated throughout this pack **like this**. Tasks can be done alone, and the questions can be answered in writing, or the tasks and questions could feed discussions in class.

This pack is by no means exhaustive, and we hope that by following the exercises in it, your students will be inspired to explore more of *Making the Encounter*.

It is divided into activities to be done before and after seeing the show, and there are activities for students at introductory and advanced levels.



## The source material

- Explore the first few nodes of *Making the Encounter* and look particularly at **Petru Popescu** and **Amazon Beaming**.

What is the show based on?

What do you think its narrative will be?



## The show's themes

- Look at **Themes and ideas**. This shows the results of a brainstorming exercise Simon did early on in the process of making the production, when he was thinking through all the different elements of the book that he wanted to explore in the show.

Have you ever started making a piece of theatre by brainstorming like this?

**Task: Write down three themes that you think the show might explore.**

- Read **Workshop notes 3.4.14**.

*Note: The word 'materialist' might mean something different to what you expect. In this case, we're referring to a way of thinking about the world in which everything has a basis in physical reality, and everything can be explained by science. What's important here is that Loren McIntyre has a materialist viewpoint and the Mayorunan people, who believe in a spiritual realm beyond the material world, do not.*

- The brainstorm in **Themes and ideas** was done in 2011.

Can you see how the themes are getting clearer, and easier to explain? Can you spot which ones have stayed, which have gone, and which are new?

**Task: Pick two of the questions that particularly appeal to you. These are questions the creative team noted down because they knew they needed to answer them in the show. Keep these questions in mind while you're watching the show and afterwards ask yourself: did they answer those questions?**



## How does Complicite make its work?

- Watch **Early discoveries**, which was filmed in 2011, and read **Workshop notes 25.3.13** (from 2013).

What can you tell about how Complicite makes theatre from these two documents? Can you see how the tiny fragments of ideas from 2011 grow into a whole list of possibilities in 2013, which are then whittled down to make the show in 2015?

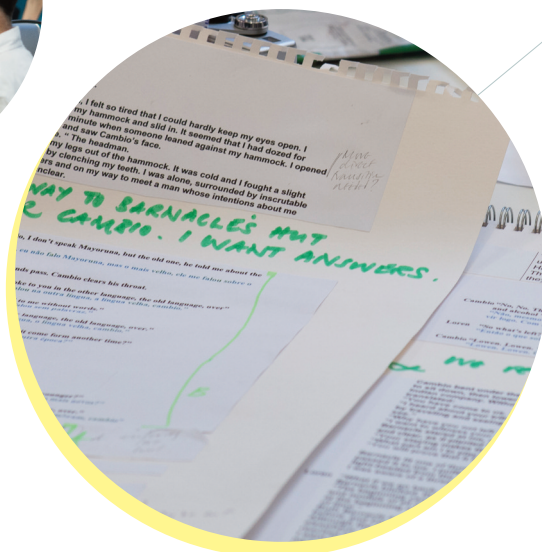
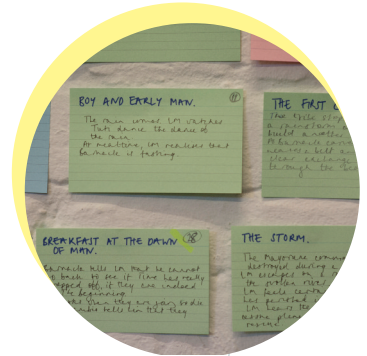
- Look back at **Themes and ideas** and **Workshop notes 3.4.14**.

Can you see how the process of asking and answering questions becomes the process of making a piece of theatre?

- Now watch the two films in **The rain dance scene**. Complicite is often described as an ensemble devising company - a company that makes its work with lots of people contributing, but *The Encounter* is a one man show. In all these films, however, you can see other people feeding in to the creative process.

What are they doing? How do they work with Simon?

**Task:** Write approximately 250 words about the way Complicite makes its work.



## A practical task

These exercises offer an introduction to creating soundscapes with everyday objects, and to thinking about when and why you might want to use sound in your work.

In preparation you'll need to amass a collection of objects which make sounds. Try thinking broadly about this, don't just bring in obvious things like musical instruments. Try crisp packets, hair brushes, water glasses, sellotape: what noises can these things be made to make? Play around with objects as a group: how many noises can each object make, and what do they suggest to you?

### Before doing the exercises, warm up with this game.

1. Give one person in the group an object, and ask the rest of the group to close their eyes.
2. The person with the object then makes a series of noises with their object.
3. Everyone in the circle should then try to describe what they're hearing. Where could it be? What could be happening? What does it make you imagine?
4. Repeat the exercise but, this time, the person making the sounds should add a line of text. For example, if you're rustling a crisp packet, say something like, 'The children stretched their hands out to the fire to warm them.'

Discuss these two versions as a group.

**Which version, with text or without text, is more powerful?**

### Now move on to the task.

1. Choose a section of text. It could be from *Amazon Beaming*, or it could be anything you're working with.
2. In small groups, identify at least four moments in the text that you could add sound to.
3. Choose objects to make these sounds with. Challenge yourself: try to use a range of obvious and less obvious objects. For example, if you're illustrating someone reading a newspaper, think about using something other than a newspaper to make the sound.
4. Read through the text and decide who will be narrating: it could either be one person all the way through or different members of the group taking different lines.
5. Think about who should make each sound, and where they will be while they're making it. Think about the picture that you're making onstage.
6. Lastly, think about how you're going to make the sounds - specifically, do you want the audience to see the sound being made or not? How do you think it will change their experience of the sound if they see it being made?

Rehearse your scenes, and perform them to the group. Discuss them.

**Were the sounds necessary? What did they add? Were there too many, or too few? What did you find interesting about the scenes?**



## Developing character

- Think about the characters in the play.

How many different characters are there, and how many do we actually see on stage? Why do you think *Complicite* chose to have some of the characters stay as recorded voices and some of them brought to life by the performer?

- Watch [Kirsty Housley](#).

What does Kirsty tell you about why some characters are 'seen' onstage, and why some are only heard? Why did they decide to make the show a one-man show?

- Kirsty also talks about the ways the two main characters develop over the course of the show.

**Task:** Write approximately 250 words about what happens to the Actor (Simon) and to Loren during the show, and whether or not they are changed by what happens to them.



## Set design

- Read [Michael Levine](#).

What does Michael tell you about working with *Complicite*? What was his inspiration for the set design for *The Encounter*? And why do you think, even though the production is set in one of the most untouched natural environments on the planet, Michael has chosen to use only man-made materials and props?

**Task:** Write 250 words on *The Encounter's* set design.



## The show's impact: can theatre make a difference?

- Watch [This is our Land](#) and listen to [Rebecca Spooner](#) (this is a 20 minute audio interview so might be best as homework).

What's happening to the Mayoruna? What are they fighting against? How does the show contribute to their fight? Can theatre make a difference?

- Now watch [Crude](#).

What is Liberate Tate protesting about? How is what they're doing different to the way *The Encounter* addresses political issues? Do you think one approach is more effective, or more interesting, than the other?

## Creating a script

- Explore the nodes around **He began workshopping the piece with collaborators.** You can see that there's an intertwined process of talking, thinking and experimenting practically going on all the time, but there's also the process of creating the script. Look at **Working towards a script, Adapting the text, Chapter 9: The Witnesses** and **The Witnesses script.**

**What can you say about the stages of making the script that the team went through?**

**Task: Focusing just on Chapter 9: The Witnesses and The Witnesses script, pick out 5 lines or sections of the book that didn't make it into the script. Why do you think they weren't used?**

- Now look at the interaction between the two characters (the Actor is called Simon in this early draft of the script).

**Why are some lines given to Loren? Who is the Actor, what is his role? Are there lines in this section that you think you would assign to a different character?**



## The use of sound in the show

- **Workshop notes 29.9.14** ends with this paragraph:

*Through a couple of small explorations, we come closer to the notion of Simon stepping away from narrating Loren and into being Loren, becoming him as the audience watch. They can project character onto him. Along with more use of pre-recorded sound, maybe as the piece progresses we should use increasingly less live-generated sound?*

- Watch **Kirsty Housley.**

**What does Kirsty tell you about the ways in which the creative team decided to differentiate between Simon and Loren? Did you spot this in the show? What effect does this choice have on the audience?**

- What about the line from 'They can project character onto him'?

**What does that mean? What difference does it make if the audience suspend disbelief and believe that Simon is Loren as opposed to projecting the character of Loren onto him? Do you think the show operates on only one of those levels, or does it employ multiple levels?**



### A practical task

This improvisation exercise is based on one Complicite did in its early explorations of the possibilities of mixing live and recorded sound in *The Encounter*, but it's also similar to something the Company did when making its 1999 show *Mnemonic*.

1. Choose a section of text (it could be from *Amazon Beaming*, or from any text that you're working with) and record it. It could be one person narrating, or a number of people reading parts of a scene.
2. In small groups, try bringing the recorded words to life - play the recording and act out exactly what the words in it are saying. The performers should be silent while they're doing this, with the recording providing the sound.
3. Now take away the recorded words. Is the story still clear?

If it's no longer possible to understand the scene, what can you do to communicate better? Keep working at your physical performance of the scene until it is clear enough for an outsider to come in and watch and understand the story you're telling.

You don't have to take the words away. Once you've got the physical storytelling perfect, try bringing the recorded 'voice over' back in.

**Do you like the effect?**

Or how about giving the text back to the performers? Can they speak the words at the same time as performing the physical journey?

**Which version works best?**

We tend to find it boring hearing and seeing the same thing on stage, so perhaps you could play around with mismatching words and actions.

4. Again, record a section of the text.
5. In small groups, develop an improvisation in response to the words, but deliberately not 'acting out' the words. For example, if the voice over describes a walk through the jungle, you might choose to perform everyday kitchen chores. Don't think too hard about it. Choose actions that don't feel like 'physical performance' but feel natural - getting dressed, brushing your teeth, playing football.
6. Now perform these simple physical improvisations with the recorded text playing over the top.

**What is the effect this time? Does an audience start to see new stories when you lay one thing over another?**

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### The influence of Jacques Lecoq

- In **Workshop notes 21.1.11**, Jacques Lecoq is mentioned. The co-founders of Complicite all trained at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris, and Lecoq's teaching has had a profound impact on the Company. In the foreword to Lecoq's book *The Moving Body*, Simon writes:

To actors he showed how the great movements of nature correspond to the most intimate movements of human emotion...

What he offered in his school was, in a word, preparation - of the body, of the voice, of the art of collaboration (of which theatre is the most extreme artistic representation) and of the imagination. He was interested in creating a site to build on, not a finished edifice.

Contrary to what people often think, he had no style to propose. He offered no solutions. He only posed questions.

Can you see the traces of Lecoq's teaching in *The Encounter*?

**Task: Research Jacques Lecoq and write approximately 250 words about his approach to teaching performers, and about how this approach has impacted on *The Encounter*.**

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# Complicite | THE ENCOUNTER



Inspired by the novel *Amazon Beaming* by Petru Popescu

<b>Directed and performed by</b>	Simon McBurney
<b>Design</b>	Michael Levine
<b>Sound Design</b>	Gareth Fry, with Pete Malkin
<b>Lighting Design</b>	Paul Anderson
<b>Projection Design</b>	Will Duke
<b>Co-Director</b>	Kirsty Housley
<b>Assistant Director</b>	Jemima James
<b>Associate Producer</b>	Poppy Keeling
<b>Producer</b>	Judith Dimant

**With the voices of:** Romeo Corisepa Dreve, Claudia Hammond, David Farmer, Chris Frith, George Marshall, Noma McBurney, Iain McGilchrist, Petru Popescu & Iris Friedman, Steven Rose, Marcus du Sautoy, Rebecca Spooner, Jess Worth and Nixiwaka Yawanawa

**Artistic Collaborators:** David Annen, Simon Dormandy, Naomi Frederick, Victoria Gould, Richard Katz, Tim McMullan, Tom Morris, Saskia Reeves

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*Making the Encounter* was created by Poppy Keeling and Tom Fynn and this guide was written by Kirsty Housley, Poppy Keeling and Dina Mousawi, designed by Russell Warren Fisher and with photographs taken by Sarah Ainslie, Gianmarco Bresadola, Chloe Courtney, Gareth Fry and Simon McBurney.

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