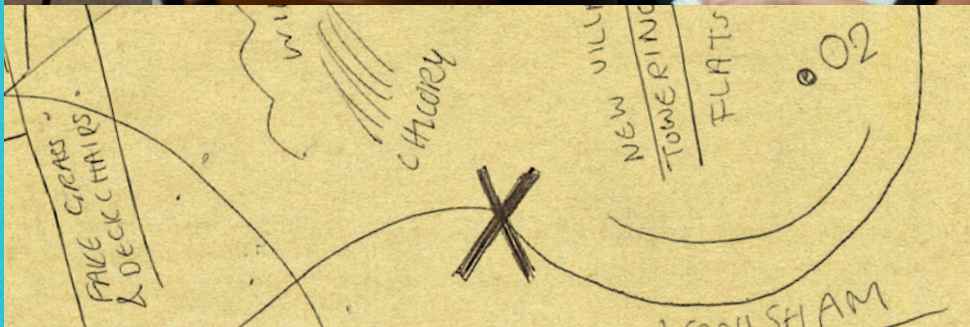


Complicité

constraining all the pieces into a
filtered light space



Complicité Does A Level Drama

Documenting the process

Complicité's extraordinary ensemble of Associate Artists and theatre-makers took their A Level Drama. We have gathered extracts from the Company members' written work in which they reflect on the process.

We challenged our team of practitioners and theatre-makers to create two new, devised pieces of work under A Level conditions, with the supervision of teacher Dawn Morris-Wolffe. The aim of the project was to experience A Level Drama from a student's perspective and to demystify the process of devising for teachers and pupils – to share the Company's working processes with insights into physical training and play. The team also completed the written component of the course, all undertaken in the Company's trademark spirit of playfulness, curiosity and risk taking.



The ensemble of nine theatre practitioners had 25 hours across two weeks to devise their performances before touring their works to London schools. They began the process working together as one group, guided by Dawn through the requirements of the devised unit of A Level Drama. In the afternoon of the first day, they participated in a three-hour workshop led by Complicité Co-Founder and Associate, Annabel Arden, in which they were introduced to Complicité's processes and practices.

To draw further links between theory and practice, the ensemble watched a recording of one of Complicité's earliest works, *A Minute Too Late*, from 1984. This inspired them to go back to the roots of Complicité's practice for their own making process, to create with 'whatever they could find in the room'.

A Minute Too Late is one of Complicité's earliest pieces, first performed in 1984 and revived for the Company's 21st anniversary in 2005. The outrageously funny, unbearably touching guide to death and bereavement was inspired by funeral parlours, Bow Cemetery and personal experience. The original production, devised by Jozef Houben, Simon McBurney and Marcello Magni, and directed by Annabel Arden, toured the UK, Europe, USA, Chile, Peru, Columbia, Ecuador and the West Indies. The piece is set in a representation of a graveyard and features slapstick, mime, verbal humour and surreal dance sequences.



Photos: Sarah Ainslie



A Minute Too Late, 1984



pot & spoon

actors
ON
LADDERS

As a starting point the ensemble brought different stimuli into the room in the form of text, objects and images. They then split into two groups working around different stimuli.

Archie Backhouse, Bea Pemberton, Catherine Alexander, Clive Mendus and Simon Lyshon were drawn to the short story *The Poisonous Rabbit* written by Italo Calvino. They devised a piece, *Marcovaldo and the Rabbit*, as a stage adaptation of this work.

Jack Harrold, Joyce Henderson and Meghan Treadway were inspired by a blog post, *A Green Roof in Greenwich*, written by 15-year-old, London-born conservationist and wildlife writer, Kabir Kaul. They used the writing source material for their piece, *The Garden of Sedum*.

Designer Jida Akil worked with both groups to create and refine set and costume design for the pieces.

In our *Complicité Does A Level Drama* video you will follow the two groups along the way from their first introduction to the project, through choosing stimuli and devising their pieces, and finally to meeting their audiences. In this resource you will get some insights into the anticipation, anxieties, and thought processes of the Associate Artists as they journey along the A Level devised theatre unit.

From the Company members' written work, we have gathered moments where they **reflect on links between theory and practice** in their process.

The Company used the **Theatre Green Book**, a recent initiative from theatre-makers and sustainability experts which sets standards for making productions sustainably. The team aimed to meet the Advanced Standard which stipulates that 100% of all materials used have had a previous life and be reused after. Almost 100% of all categories of materials used for the project had a previous life, being sourced from second hand shops, the participants' homes or the company's storage room and 100% went on to be reused.

Company Stage Manager Matt Llewlyn Smith commented:

“This was my first time working with the Green Book and I loved how realistic and achievable it was. Finding a second hand sheet of corrugated metal turned out to be the biggest challenge and took much longer than finding a new sheet but it felt worth it as it ended up being free. The only item we failed on since it hadn't had a previous life was a length of lilac ribbon - that really annoys me as we were so close!”

The set was limited so that it would fit into one car for touring and the team were encouraged to travel via public transport for the rehearsals and tour.

Visit theatregreenbook.com for more information.



“**Day 1** Lovely workshops with Annabel Arden and Dawn Morris, our school teacher, giving us the framework. Slight apprehension at the fact that more of the marks are actually accrued from the working notebook than from the practical, therefore the heavy hints at writing every day are already being heeded.

Day 7 We do not have enough material, what we have is incomprehensible and we have lost our way. We are in the doldrums – an equatorial region with calms, sudden storms, and light unpredictable winds.

Day 9 Terrified, we try out our incomplete work on some 6th formers who visit our studio. They help us by telling us what is clear and what is not. We go back to the drawing board for a couple of hours before we visit our first school.”

— *Joyce Henderson, Company Member*



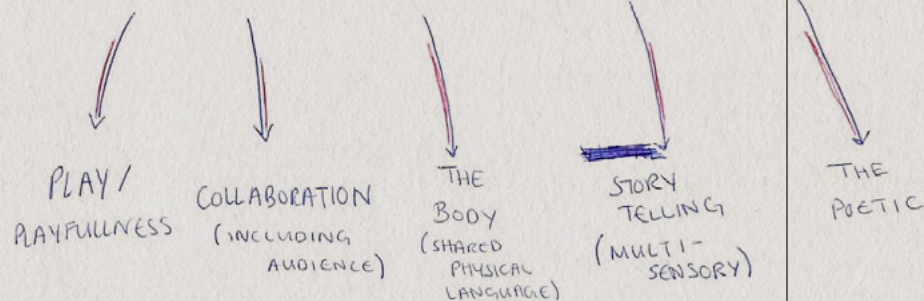


Top Tips

for the written component given to the Company by their teacher:

- ✓ Never lose touch with your practitioner! Always show relevant understanding of the working methods and aims of your chosen practitioner.
- ✓ When stating your and your group's dramatic aims, avoid generalisation, instead be specific about your own role and your part in the piece as a whole.
- ✓ Make it clear that you have understood the importance of selecting your practitioner in conjunction with the content of your piece, as this enables you to make strong connections between the practitioners' intentions and methods and the subject matter that you have chosen to explore.
- ✓ Make clear, precise evidence of applying theory to practice with specific, practical examples – model this with precise vivid examples from the rehearsal room!
- ✓ Make purposeful reference to relevant live theatre you have seen and give clear explanations of how this shaped your devising approach.

04/10
WHAT IS COMPLICITÉ ABOUT



- TAKE THE ORDINARY and make it EXTRAORDINARY

- "OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE" (T.S. ELLIOTT)

This advice and the following topics and ideas guided Complicité's journey, but they are by no means a manual of the right way to respond to your exam board's marking criteria.

Playing with Objects, Space and Perspective

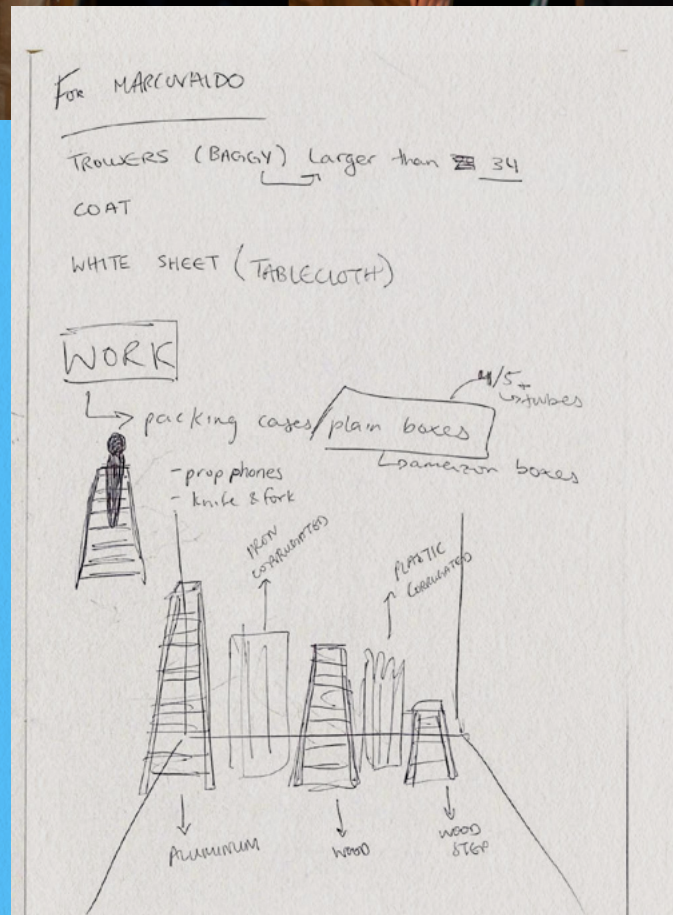
“We listed things and places in the story. We reflected that for Complicité the definition of place is particularly broad. It includes metaphorical and emotional spaces. For example, in *The Poisonous Rabbit* places include “the unattainable world”, “the gloved hand of the fireman” and “inside Marcovaldo’s coat”. We brought objects into the devising space including the corrugated Perspex sheet, a toy rabbit, a ladder, a metal rack and started physically creating the places and spaces of the story... We asked which eyes are we looking through and how do the places appear to them? The hierarchy of the Amazon warehouse was starkly presented by the foreman being at the top of the ladder and the dinner table became a precipitous slope with Marcovaldo at the bottom.”

— Catherine Alexander





Photo:
Sarah Ainslie



“Mime helped us create multiple spaces in a small space... We needed to create an underground station, a bus stop, a journey through an urban landscape, a massive superstore and a rooftop space where we could see into the distance. All this from just the use of our bodies and one object which was a frame, one metre wide and 1.5 m high. It was easy to move so it became different objects as well...the objects that the shoppers in Ikea bought, the boundary on the rooftop as well as the staircase...”

— Joyce Henderson

“We had thought from an early stage it would be good to have a piece of corrugated roofing which could serve as many things (in the way Complicité do). We initially had a sheet of plastic skylight which we added to with a sheet of corrugated iron. These served as a window, a tram side, a table in the hospital, a table in Marcovaldo’s house and a sloping roof... We brought ladders in and they became integral to the piece both as a performance area (we operated the Bunraku [Japanese traditional puppetry] rabbit on the top step) and as something to safely lean the roofing against. Catherine suggested we use a long rope to define the outer edge of the performance space. I had an aha! moment when we were trying to create the roof spaces. I suggested the four of us grab the rope and dynamically move it into strong lines and diagonals to suggest the angularity of a multitude of intersecting roof lines.”

— Clive Mendus

Play and Clowning



Photo: Sarah Ainslie

“At first we decided to just get up in the space and start to make things directly lifted from the text. We worked quickly to make small moving images based on the stimulus. From this exercise we found a fun clowning game where we created flowers using our whole body. It began with Meg calling out all the names of the Flowers while Joyce and I made quick physicalisations of the plants based on our impulses. For instance, my response to Purple Toadflax was to make quite a pompous and performative shape of flower. This game turned into a scene in the show in which Meg, as Kabir, explores all the different wildflowers of the roof garden as Joyce and I make them with our bodies. We wanted to bring in the sense of play and clowning we had seen in *A Minute Too Late* ... so for this scene we developed the idea that our two clowns were in contest to be the most accurate and know-it-all about the flowers.”

— Jack Harrold



Photo: Sarah Ainslie

“The next day, Joyce provided the Latin names and heights of each plant. To develop our ideas further, we used this information as part of the competitive game. Jack then vigorously flapped a piece of fabric as Joyce physicalised “clinging to the soil in the wind,” in an ultimate attempt to win the game. Playfulness, therefore, informed a key scene in our final piece.”

— Meghan Treadway

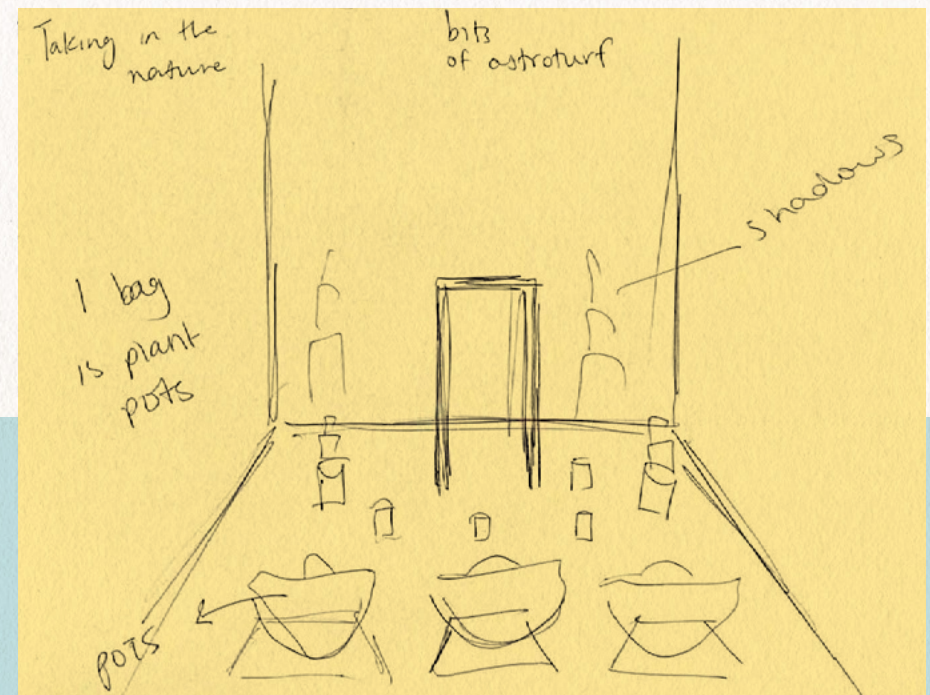
“One of the Lecoq principles that can often be seen in Complicité’s work is the idea of push and pull – opposing forces that work together to create conflict. We used the push and pull in the movement of the transition; Joyce pushing me out into the space created the wind.”

— Jack Harrold

Design Process

“The design process was informed by playing in the rehearsal room. Experimenting with the functionality of different objects meant we could focus on how an everyday item could be used in new and unexpected ways. It also allowed for us to merge aesthetics and dramaturgy. In trying to achieve sustainability, we learned that less is more. The choices of props, set pieces, and costumes on stage were driven by what the performers needed to tell the story rather than just how the space would look. Designing for a devising process evolved to become an extension of the performers themselves rather than a backdrop for the action.”

— Jida Akil



Creating Soundscapes

“Jida bought in a load of props in an Ikea bag to experiment. Meg and I began playing about with those, making the sounds of the roof garden out of them. Meg discovered that rustling the leaves of a plastic plant sounded like a bird taking flight, and I found an electric razor that sounded like bees buzzing. We also used our bodies to create the sensation of breeze and of insects scuttling about.”

— Jack Harrold

“It was successful because the person blindfolded was blown away by thinking there were birds around them and that there was wind and trees rustling. When they opened their eyes they saw that the objects used were all plastic. This was a cracking light bulb moment for Meghan, who then decided that all the sounds of nature, should come from plastic objects. (This gave us another layer in our dramaturgy — a nod to one of the environmental problems being caused by plastic.) Our experiments with sound became the final scene of the piece.”

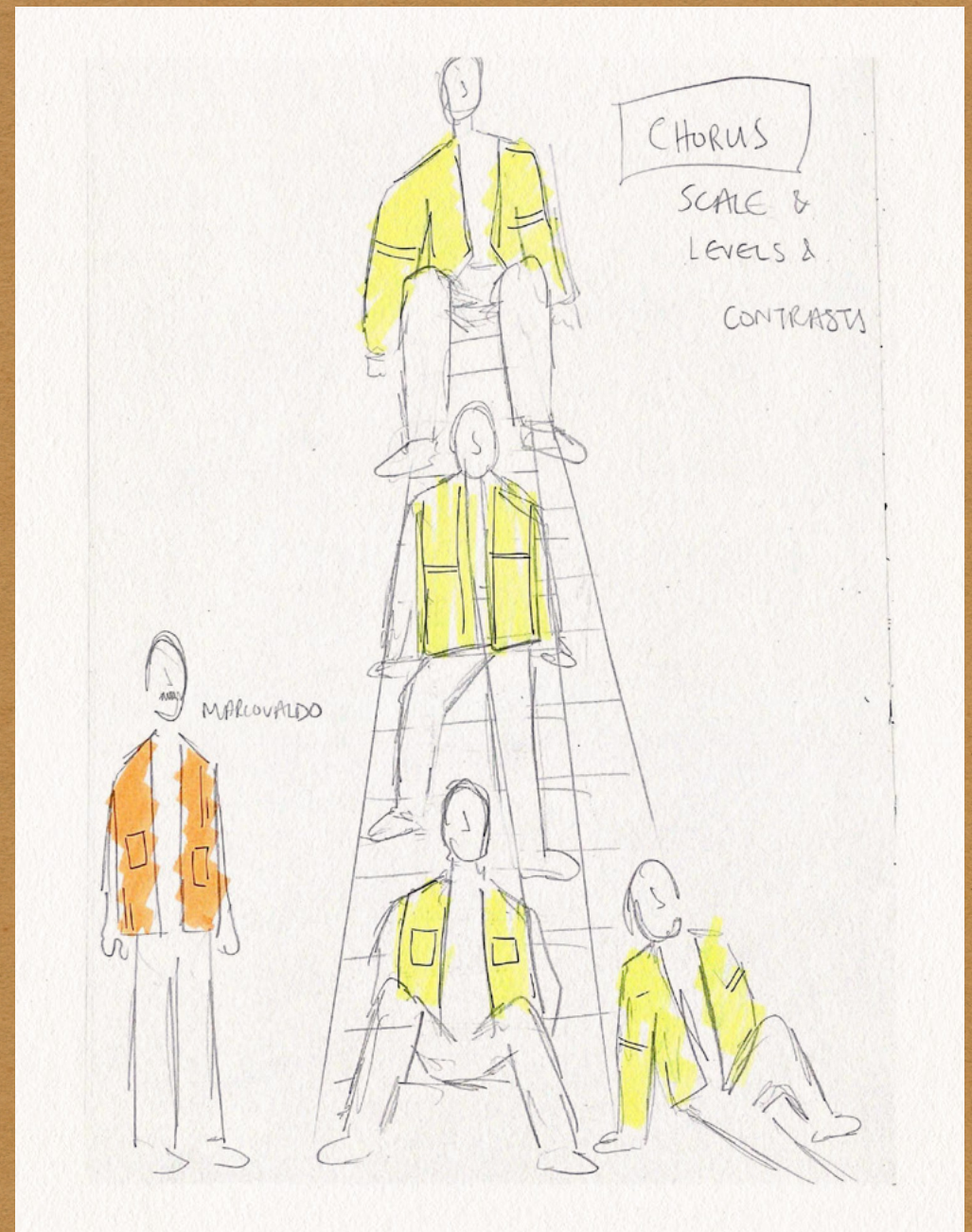
— Joyce Henderson



“Our next step was to create a soundscape for the entire piece and to write it down as a visual ‘score’ on a long piece of paper. This allowed us to select which perspectives in the story we wanted to be most vivid/in focus for the audience ... Some of our final staging choices came out of this exercise, such as Signor Viligelmo (Marcovaldo’s boss) always appearing at the top of a ladder so his voice could shout commands from on high and the chorus moving together as a flock (something we learnt from our Complicité workshop) creating a satisfying sense of the ambulance sound travelling on a journey around the space.

In keeping with Complicité’s use of complex dramaturgies we added a layer of sound to a few key scenes in the piece which continued under the visual and physical play, creating atmosphere and communicating extra information. For example: at the end of the piece when the rabbit falls off a rooftop in slow motion we added a vocally-intoned drone sound from the whole chorus which added tension to the slow-motion movement and clearly indicated to the audience that the action belonged in a heightened, poetic reality.”

— Simon Lyshon



Influence of Live Theatre Seen

“A Minute Too Late was performed in a mostly empty stage and made use of a few key objects to indicate different locations (such as gravestones for a cemetery, wooden chairs for a church, a carpet for a wake, etc). This strongly influenced the decisions we made about our set. We relied on a similar, indicative use of a few significant items which each fulfilled several functions (a corrugated plastic sheet to serve first as a table, then window, then a tram; ladders to represent first floor windows, a rooftop ledge and a top floor in a packing warehouse).

We were also inspired by the boldly physical characterisation of the range of brief characters the protagonist must negotiate in *A Minute Too Late* and made playful use of this style in our piece (eg. an archetypal policeman with his chest pushed out, a stern expression and a London bobby accent).”

— Simon Lyshon



Rehearsal for *A Minute Too Late*, 1984



Photos: Sarah Ainslie

MARCOVALDO

Puppetry

“Another theatrical skill that was used was puppetry. Puppetry features in many Complicité shows including *A Dog’s Heart*, *The Master and Margarita* and *Shun-kin*. We decided to have three versions of the rabbit to show the changing perspective of the rabbit through the piece. The rabbit started out as a toy rabbit, moved by one person, this evolved into a Bunraku puppet needing three people to puppeteer it and eventually the rabbit was played by an actor. We spent a considerable time looking at the movement of rabbits. Breath was key to the puppetry: how can the puppeteers be breathing together? How does breath transfer to the Bunraku puppet? One of the key lessons learned was that the puppeteers’ point of focus tells the audience where to focus, if the puppeteers are focussed on the rabbit then the audience’s attention will also be on the rabbit.”

— *Archie Backhouse*

“Following research into rabbits, we experiment with gloves, a bag, rope. The rabbit becomes a Bunraku puppet – made with the bag that had been a pillow (in the hospital scene) and now animated with the rope stethoscope of the doctor into the ears of the rabbit.”

— *Bea Pemberton*



Photos: Sarah Ainslie



Rehearsal for *A Dog’s Heart*, 2010

Using the Physicality of Animals

“The animal study work on rabbits helped with the puppetry I did of the toy rabbit in the doctor’s office and with the Bunraku rabbit (three person operated). I also took some of the rhythms of the rabbit into the characterisation of Domatilla – the alert and sense of long ears that hear everything. This tied in to **the use of animals** by Complicité **as the basis for characters** in *The Street of Crocodiles* working from birds and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* where the soldiers were developed from hyenas and wolves.”

— Catherine Alexander



Photo: Sarah Ainslie



Rehearsal for *The Street of Crocodiles*, 1992
Photo: Philip Carter

Complicité Does A Level Drama

Original idea by Joyce Henderson

Ensemble

Catherine Alexander
Archie Backhouse
Simon Lyshon
Clive Mendus
Bea Pemberton
Jack Harrold
Joyce Henderson
Meghan Treadway

Designer Jida Akil

Stage Manager Matt Llewellyn Smith

Teacher Dawn Morris-Wolffe

Filmmakers

Joe Payne and Sophie Huggins

Rehearsal and Production

Photography Sarah Ainslie

Written resource design

Matthew Young

Produced by Complicité

Website: complicite.org

Instagram: [complicitetheatre](https://www.instagram.com/complicitetheatre)

Facebook: [/TheatredeComplicite](https://www.facebook.com/TheatredeComplicite)

Twitter: [@Complicite](https://twitter.com/Complicite)



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