

ON DIRECTING  
Simon McBurney, 2002

Over the time that I have been working with Complicite what happens in the rehearsal room has changed enormously, yet certain elements are always present. The constant fooling around; the immense amount of chaos; pleasure as well as a kind of turbulent forward momentum. Nothing is off limits apart from not turning up.

It is often extremely unstructured, though paradoxically quite disciplined. The room is crammed full of stuff; on the walls pictures, text, photographs, videos, objects, clothes and paper everywhere... But this is by no means a consistent picture. Often we reach a moment when there must be nothing in the room at all. It has to be bare, empty and uncluttered. So when rehearsing a piece I do not have a method, no single approach. Ultimately the material dictates each rehearsal.

People often ask where we begin. We always begin with a text. But that text can take many forms - I mean it can equally well be a visual text, a text of action, a musical one as well as the more conventional one involving plot and characters. Theatre, says Aristotle, is an act and an action. Action is also a text. As is the space, the light, music, the sound of footsteps, silence and immobility. All should be as articulate and evocative as each other.

I have often heard people say that as a company we are fascinated by action and image. But that is only because what people DO must be as clear as what they SAY. I do not mean that what they do must copy language. But just as poetry is central in much of the theatrical cannon, so what people DO can also be couched in its own poetic transformation. In *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* we were encountered the problem of the representation of the protagonists, Jean and Lucie, making love in a barn. All our solutions were either embarrassing or clichéd, until under the pressure of the final weeks we suddenly seized the planks we were holding to represent the barn they were in, and started to fling them around the rehearsal room. The wall came apart and planks flew across the stage and we found the dynamic of love making transposed into the explosion of the space and the movement of the objects.

This is an example plucked at random from years of graft. Most of the time such moments of revelation or discovery are rare. And there are more weeks of despair than seconds of elation. In such moments I long to be told what to do. Or to disappear down the corridor and play with the curtains or dive into the makeup box, and let someone else decide for me. A piece of theatre is, ultimately, in the hands of those who are performing it. The actors. It is they not the director who must have the whole piece in their every gesture, hearing the meaning in each word. And to do that I think, as an actor, you have to feel that you possess the piece. And to possess the piece you have to be part of its creation. Involved intimately in the process of its making.