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# **The Efficacy of Symbolic Action**

**Investigating the Creation and Effect of Symbolic Action on Performers and Audiences in the Performance, *The Passion of Lady Vendredi***

**Jonathan Grieve  
Practice-as-Research MA: Drama**

(Word count: 18,531)

Under the supervision of Prof. P.A.C.Allain  
& Dr S.C.Quirk

School of Arts, Drama and Theatre  
Year of Submission: 2017

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is based on directing the performance *The Passion of Lady Vendredi* produced by MAS productions at Soho Theatre in 2016. The style of *The Passion* is an immersive live music gig and performance art ritual that draws strongly from Haitian vodou dance. The performance centres on work with my collaborator Nwando Ebizie as cult music icon Lady Vendredi and featured a live band playing original compositions set to traditional Haitian rhythms.

The focus of my Practice as Research is the creation of Symbolic Action and its application and efficacy in the research environment and in performance. The working definition for Symbolic Action is an action that causes a change in the participants. It is a coded action that contains the information necessary for a transaction or an exchange between the participants to create an intimate, spontaneous and self-aware experience. The artistic research on *The Passion* followed two simultaneous paths: the first is a vertical path inspired by Jerzy Grotowski and explored how a Symbolic Action or a ritual sequence has a tangible internal impact on the performer. The second, a horizontal path, is based on the methodology of Guillermo Gómez-Peña to create contemporary gods and demons. Transactional Analysis (TA), a system of social psychiatry founded by Eric Berne, formed the theoretical framework for Symbolic Action. TA views the transaction as the most basic unit of social intercourse and is particularly useful when working in the theatrical form of immersive theatre where the creation of meaningful interactions between the performers and the audience is crucial. The

efficacy of a Symbolic Action is measured by whether it has caused a change in the energy and consciousness of the participant: this I have called 'Being a Part of Things'. The other measure of efficacy is whether the participant has achieved a level of autonomy defined as awareness, spontaneity and intimacy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work on *The Passion of Lady Vendredi* began in 2012 and has involved far too many people to mention here. Not only that but it was a group effort centred around my artistic collaboration with Nwando Ebizie without whom there would be no show or thesis and whose work is featured heavily in these pages. My on-going thinking process is inspired by weekly breakfasts with Dick McCaw. The work is deeply inspired by the members of the ensemble: Moss Beynon-Juckles, Jennifer MT White, Ignacio Jarquin and Fabiola Santana, who are dear friends and collaborators and whose commitment and individual contributions were profound and life changing. I am also extremely grateful for the musical work of Gerardo De Armas Sarria, Randy Lester, Duncan Hillman, Rosie Turton and Gabor Halasz. The technical realisation would not have been possible without Carrie Hitchman our production manager who ably managed the crew of Shane Button and Hannah Myra French. Zsuzsa Parrag's generosity and knowledge of Haitian vodou and teaching of the dances was critical in the realisation of the project. I would also like to mention the late Jolanta Cynkutis who first taught me Grotowski's *exercises plastiques* and provided me with the practical experience to begin to create the theatre I wanted see. Credits are due to David Luff our producer at Soho Theatre and the producers at NitroBeat, as well as the trust and support from Clive Lyttle at the Arts Council England. I have to thank Professor Paul Allain and Dr Sophie Quirk for their support in the realisation of the writing; coming from a practical background it was not easy to translate this work to an academic framework and they

have trusted my knowledge and experience. A special mention to JJ whose expert secretarial skills were crucial in Berlin. I have to express deep gratitude to my mum, dad and brother Judith, Stuart and Christopher Grieve who have been especially supportive and understanding during what has been a very intensive process.

## **A Note on the Text and Audio Visual Material**

For the sake of clarity words that are part of the Practice as Research (PaR) working terminology are capitalised. For example the names of the training practices: The Elements, The Plastiques. This is in order to make it clear that the word is not a reference to the general concept i.e. the element is water but the practice is the Elements. Similarly the names of the vodou dances Yanvalou, Petwo etc. are capitalised but words such as vodou and lwa are not, because they form a part of the reference material rather than the working practice. The spellings of Haitian Creole terms vary quite radically across the literature of the subject area and I have taken the liberty of choosing the spellings that my colleagues and I tended to use in rehearsal or written communication. The spellings of vodou and voodoo are not used interchangeably; I use 'vodou' when referring to the religion as practised and 'voodoo' when referring to a stereotyped 'Hollywood' version of the culture.

I did not anticipate the complications of video documentation for Practice as Research when filming immersive performance. Due to financial and time limitations the video references are to different performances and this has meant that a number of entire files are

included in the USB memory sticks. I apologise in advance for the time the reader may need to take to view them.

Video of performances and training are included courtesy of MAS Productions © 2016.



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## **Preface**

*This thesis will explore a production I created for the professional stage, The Passion of Lady Vendredi, developed in rehearsals through 2015 and early 2016. I faced a number of challenges in using a commercial production as a vehicle for Practice as Research (PaR) in theatre. The first of these is the results-driven process. The Passion of Lady Vendredi (The Passion for short) was funded by the Arts Council of England and was commissioned by Soho Theatre. Accordingly, I had to navigate between my natural instinct to experiment and the demands of a commercial producing house. In addition was the simple fact that I have been working in experimental theatre for over 25 years, and creating immersive/interactive and participatory performance for the last 16. It has been a huge challenge in this research to leave out many practices that are important to my process. Therefore this thesis does not deal with the daily vocal training, musical composition or overall dramaturgy and instead focuses on the main question of the practice of Symbolic Action. I have also chosen to leave out certain research areas including the field of immersive performance and the anthropological work of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner on ritual and Symbolic Action. However I would like to briefly touch on these areas to provide some explanation and context.*

*I began devising immersive, interactive and participatory performance in 2001 in part inspired by La Fura Dels Baus production,*

Manes (1996)<sup>1</sup>, who Artangel director Michael Morris acknowledges as a key influence<sup>2</sup>, and Robert Wilson's installation *HG* (1995)<sup>3</sup>, also cited by Felix Barrett<sup>4</sup> of *Punchdrunk* as important for his work. However the more formative influence on me was the early acid house raves organised by *The Mutoid Waste Company*<sup>5</sup> in Kings Cross, London in the late 1980s. The commonly explored themes of intimacy, sensuality, ritual and transformation are also a link between *The Passion* and immersive theatre in general. However, where *The Passion* differs from these is in its hybrid emphasis on the music gig and performance art as influential cultural and stylistic forms. Our engagement with aspects of traditional Haitian vodou dance and ritual to create an ecstatic experience is also innovative, as is the use of Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis as a method of organising the performer-audience interaction on a psychoanalytical level.

I would like to acknowledge the influential work of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner with regards respectively to the concepts of efficacy in ritual and theatre and Symbolic Action. I chose not to take an anthropological approach either to the creation of *The Passion* or my writing. Nonetheless Schechner's theory of the braid-like<sup>6</sup> connection between the efficacy of ritual and the entertainment value of theatre is

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<sup>1</sup> La Fura Dels Baus, *Manes*, Three Mills Islands Studios, London, 1998

<sup>2</sup> J.Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan Education, Hampshire & New York 2013) pp.155-7

<sup>3</sup> Robert Wilson/Hans Peter Kuhn, *H.G.*, The Clink Street Vaults, London 11 September 1995 to 15 October 1995

<sup>4</sup> Machon 2013, p.159

<sup>5</sup> See the Mutoid Waste Company website at <http://cargocollective.com/MutoidWasteCo> (Accessed 16/04/2017)

<sup>6</sup> Richard Schechner, *From Ritual to Theatre and Back: The Structure/Process of the Efficacy-Entertainment Dyad*, *Educational Theatre Journal* Vol. 26, No. 4, Dec, 1974, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland), P.469

*relevant when he says “In all entertainment there is some efficacy and in all ritual there is some theatre.”<sup>7</sup>*

*This is discussed in chapter 5 in the context of Transactional Analysis and the practical pedagogy of Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña.*

*Victor Turner’s work on Symbolic Action is extensive. For Turner, efficacy in ritual is activated via Symbolic Action: “Symbols are triggers of social action and of personal action in the public arena. Their multivocality enables a wide range of groups and individuals to relate to the same signifier-vehicle in a variety of ways.”<sup>8</sup> Rather than analysing Turner’s work per se, the focus in this thesis uses Turner’s notion as a starting point to explore how the physical performance of such an action leads towards a performer to audience transaction.*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.480

<sup>8</sup> Victor Turner, *Symbolic Studies, Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 4. 1975, (Annual Reviews Inc., Palo Alto, California) p. 155

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### *The Passion of Lady Vendredi* and the Field of Research

The idea for *The Passion* began in 2012 when I formed MAS productions<sup>9</sup> with my collaborator, lead performer and composer, Nwando Ebizie<sup>10</sup> (NE). The performance centres on her persona as cult music icon Lady Vendredi ‘a mythopoetic super heroine and vodou priestess pop star from another dimension’.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the thesis I will use Gómez-Peña’s term *persona* instead of *character* to refer to the *dramatis personae* in the production. The fundamental difference between the two is that a *persona* is a “living metaphor”, a ‘composite collage of your own political, religious, social and sexual contradictions and concerns’<sup>12</sup>, and is in opposition to the theatrical representation, naturalism or psychological realism implied by the term *character*. This distinction is important for my work as will become clear.

*The Passion* is a love and sexual healing ritual with the overarching poetic theme of the transformation of pain into beauty. It is set in an all female cult called The Daughters of Manifestation and uses the experimental style of performance art possessions climaxing with the ritual sacrifice of a male figure Papa Ito, played by Ignacio Jarquin, who symbolises Lady Vendredi’s rapists and abusers. The performance

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<sup>9</sup> See the company website for more information: <http://www.mas-productions.org/> (accessed 12/09/2016)

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix A for cast biographies.

<sup>11</sup> From publicity material see <http://sohotheatre.com/whats-on/the-passion-of-lady-vendredi/> (accessed 11/10/2016)

<sup>12</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Exercises for Rebel Artists, Radical Performance Pedagogy* (Routledge, New York & Oxford, 2011), p.156

featured a four piece live band playing compositions mostly written by NE set to traditional Haitian rhythms.

We pursued Haitian dance, music and ritual due to NE's Nigerian Igbo heritage and the historical connection of the 'Ibo'<sup>13</sup> people to Haitian culture. The ensemble is variously from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cuba, Angola, Portugal, Mexico and the UK, including three members of mixed cultural origin. However, *The Passion* is a cross-cultural production as opposed to an intercultural one, in that the ensemble was formed not because of their ethnic heritage but because of their personal connections to both the company and the work.

*The Passion* relies on neither multicultural nor intercultural strategies. Instead I have employed Gómez-Peña's cross-cultural pedagogical strategies to address the complex area of cultural identity and identity politics. This approach is closer to what Rustom Barucha calls the "intracultural":

I believe that the "intracultural" – the interaction of local cultures within the boundaries of a particular state – as opposed to the "intercultural" – the exchange of cultures across nations – needs to be re-instated at a time when globalising forces are in the process of homogenising "indigenous" cultures everywhere.<sup>14</sup>

The journey from conception to realisation of the project took over four years. The timeline (Appendix B) lists the main activities since 2013. However it was not until 2015, due to the complexity of the fields of research the company was engaging with, that I decided that to continue

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<sup>13</sup> Igbo is the spelling used in reference to Nigeria, and Ibo is the Haitian Creole spelling.

<sup>14</sup> *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Edited by Patrice Pavis, (Routledge, London & New York, 1996) p.200



effectively with the work the academic context of PaR was necessary.

The fields of practical and theoretical research shown in Figure 1.

include:

- Jerzy Grotowski's physical training, especially the *exercices plastiques*<sup>15</sup> (The Plastiques) and more broadly verticality.
- Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance art methodology or 'Radical Performance Pedagogy'.<sup>16</sup>
- The training of Haitian vodou ritual dance and rhythm with dancer and choreographer Zsuzsa Parrag<sup>17</sup> a German/Hungarian teacher who studied in Port-au-Prince with Florencia Pierre, a vodou mambo.
- The reading and application of Transactional Analysis, a system of social psychiatry created by Eric Berne<sup>18</sup>, provided the theoretical framework for the research.

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<sup>15</sup> For a video reference to the *exercices plastiques* see the Jerzy Grotowski Practitioner page on the Routledge website: <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/actortraining/practitioner-grotowski.asp> (accessed 3/7/2016)

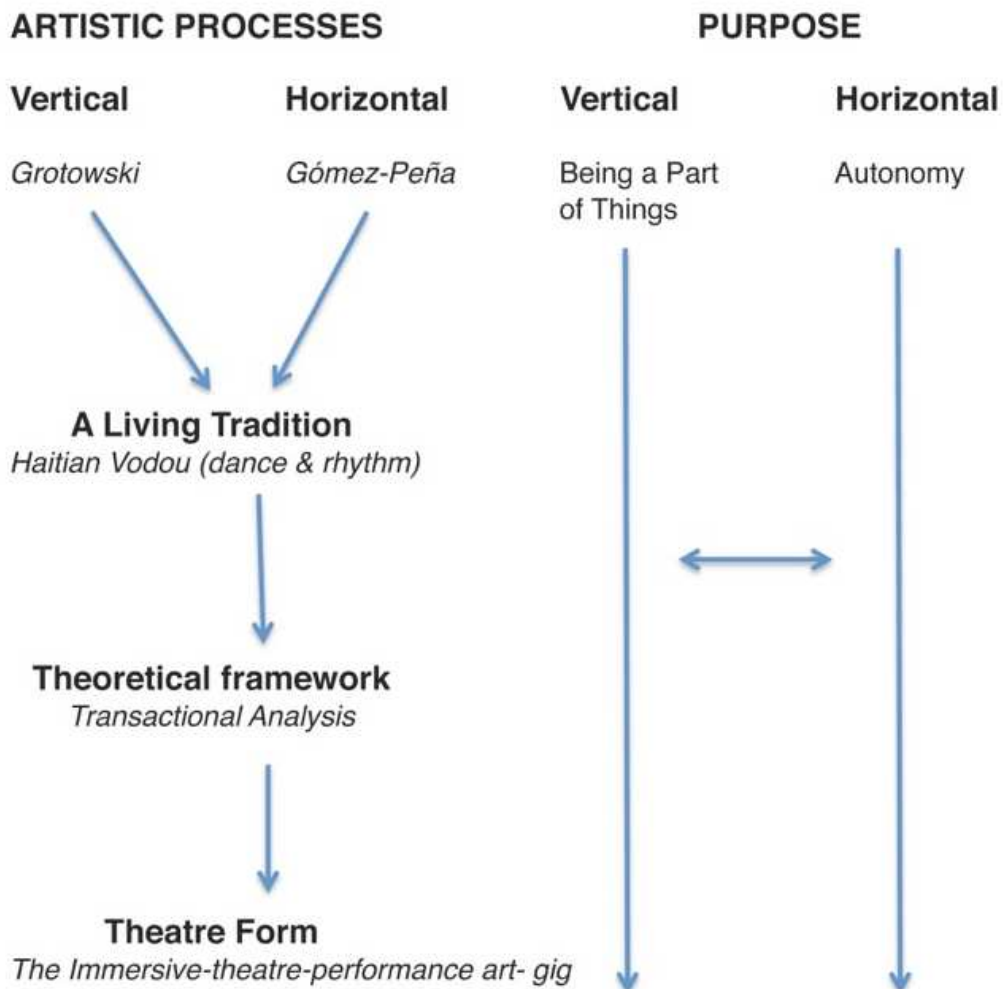
<sup>16</sup> His methodology is fully expounded in his book: Gómez-Peña 2011.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix A for her biography.

<sup>18</sup> For a complete outline of clinical principles and practice see Eric Berne, *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (Souvenir Press (Educational & Academic) Ltd, London, 1975).

**Figure 1.**

**THE FIELD OF RESEARCH IN SYMBOLIC ACTION**



The focus of my PaR was the creation of Symbolic Action and its application and efficacy in both the studio research environment and in performance. My working definition for Symbolic Action is an action that causes a physical or emotional change in the participants (performers or audience), or more evocatively, a change in energy and consciousness. The Symbolic Action is coded and contains information necessary for a transaction or exchange between participants that creates an intimate, spontaneous and self-aware connection taking place in the here and now of the performance.

The artistic research on *The Passion* followed two simultaneous paths. The first, inspired by Grotowski, is characterized as a vertical path, and explored how a Symbolic Action or a ritual sequence has a tangible internal impact in altering the consciousness and perception of the performer and the audience. Verticality<sup>19</sup> as a technique emerged during Grotowski's Art as Vehicle phase. In 1986 he moved his work to the Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale Pontedera in Tuscany, Italy. Here, he focused on distilling elements of ritual techniques that had an 'objective effect' on the Performer, as Grotowski described it. Verticality is concerned with the inner transformation of the performer's energy. This will be explored further in Chapter 2.

The experimental process combined Grotowski's physical training, the Plastiques, with six vodou dances in order to develop a methodology rooted in a contemporary rendition of Haitian vodou ecstatic ritual. This will be explored in Chapter 3.

The second path, discussed in Chapter 4, is defined as a horizontal path and is drawn from Gómez-Peña's methodology. I first worked with Guillermo Gómez-Peña in 2003 at a two-week residency at The Centre for Performance Research in Aberystwyth, Wales. After this I devised an immersive performance art piece using his methods. Gómez-Peña helped on the project by providing his workshop training document that was published two years later in his book *Ethno Techno*<sup>20</sup>. I have

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<sup>19</sup> For a full description of verticality see Thomas Richards, *At Work With Grotowski on Physical Actions* (Routledge, London & New York, 1995), pp.124-26

<sup>20</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Ethno-Techno*, (Routledge, New York, Oxford, 2005) pp.95-135

gradually honed and incorporated his exercises into my own training, teaching it in both drama school and community settings.

During the research and development phase of *The Passion* I reworked his ideas into what I call Exploitation Art. This involved the use of cultural symbols represented by props, costumes and make-up to create contemporary vodou gods known in Haiti as lwa.<sup>21</sup> The physical images of the personas are emotionally and politically charged in a way that has a tangible external impact on the performers and audience.

In Transactional Analysis (TA) I found a parallel between Eric Berne's psychiatric analysis of social interaction and my practice in Symbolic Action. The first key principle from TA that I have used to analyse Symbolic Action is Berne's simple observation that the transaction is the most basic unit of social intercourse:

If two or more people encounter each other in a social aggregation, sooner or later one of them will speak, or give some other indication of acknowledging the presence of the others. This is called the transactional stimulus. Another person will then say or do something which is in some way related to this stimulus, and that is called the transactions/ response.<sup>22</sup>

This is particularly useful when working in the theatrical form of immersive theatre where we, as artists, are obliged to create meaningful interactions between the performers and the audience. The second key principle that I have used is Berne's structural analysis of Ego-states. He divides the Ego into the Parent, Adult and Child. This division emerged historically from clinical practice and denotes what Berne describes as

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<sup>21</sup> Lwa is more accurately translated as spirit rather than as god; however within the process the working language reference in creating the personas was a god or a demon. For a full explanation of the origin of the lwa see Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (Thames and Hudson, London & New York, 1983), pp.27-33

<sup>22</sup> Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (Penguin Books, London & New York, 1964), p.28

“phenomenological realities,”<sup>23</sup> by which he means that they are experienced as mental states with their own specific behaviours, gestures and vocabularies. Ego-states “may be described phenomenologically as a coherent system of feelings related to a given subject, and operationally as a set of coherent behaviour patterns; or pragmatically, as a system of feelings which motivates a related set of behaviour patterns”.<sup>24</sup> Within the context of Symbolic Action the phenomenological, operational and pragmatic relate to different levels of experience for both myself as a director/researcher who observes and directs and for the performer who executes and experiences the action. In Chapter 5 I will analyse the performer and audience transactions in *The Passion* using this method to identify which Ego-state initiated a transactional stimulus and which one responded.

Phenomenology is too wide a subject to approach in depth in this thesis; however Mark Fortier’s explanation in his book *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction* neatly summarises my research approach: ‘Phenomenology’s primary concern is with the engagement in lived experience between the individual consciousness and reality, which manifests itself not as a series of linguistic signs but as sensory and mental phenomena.’<sup>25</sup> From a phenomenological perspective I cannot know what a performer is experiencing and to judge or intervene directly in the experience is potentially harmful to the creative work. However

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<sup>23</sup> Berne 1961, p.24

<sup>24</sup> Berne 1975, p.17

<sup>25</sup> Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction* (Routledge, London & New York, 1997) p.

what I can know is what I see the performer do: their behaviour and the actions they make (the technical performance of a dance for example); on this operational level I am in a position to intervene and direct them. Nonetheless my experience as a director enables me to intuitively connect the two together. I can pragmatically place the Symbolic Action that the performer creates within the performance as a whole in a way that makes sense to both of us.

The efficacy of a Symbolic Action is measured by whether it has caused a change in energy and consciousness. This change enables the performer to connect to something beyond their subjective experience. Accepting that the scope of this thesis is too narrow to explore transpersonal or spiritual experience I acknowledge their phenomenological significance and have called this aspect 'Being a Part of Things'.

The other measure of efficacy is whether the performer has achieved a level of autonomy in relation to their colleagues and the audience. Berne defines this as a process: "The attainment of autonomy is manifested by the release or recovery of three capacities: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy."<sup>26</sup> These two measures of efficacy are addressed throughout the thesis.

The research methodology used in this thesis is in the form of written feedback from both performers and audience regarding their personal experience of training, rehearsals and performance. I also use in-depth interviews with specific performers exploring their experience

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<sup>26</sup> Berne 1964, p.158

from a phenomenological perspective, that is to say where:  
“Phenomenology emphasises the role of the senses...prioritising sensations, feelings and other emotional phenomena...”<sup>27</sup> The entire rehearsal process was filmed as reference for myself as director. Contained in the appendix is specifically filmed documentation of the training performed by Nwando Ebizie (NE), sections of which demonstrate that the performer is undergoing internal changes in energy and consciousness that are only accessible to the observer on an operational level<sup>28</sup>. Full video documentation of the performance is also included in the appendix.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Allain and Jen Harvie, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*, (Routledge London & New York, 2006) p.224

<sup>28</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Full Possession* 01:11:20 mins

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Distinguishing Features of Symbolic Action**

The intention of this chapter is to delineate the ideas and practices that inform Symbolic Action as a creative activity, and specify the criteria that determine its efficacy. The term Symbolic Action is a phrase intended to capture the processes, practices and concepts outlined in the field of research. It contains the vertical or interior aspect that relates to the phenomena of the subjective experience of the performer. This includes the use of memory and imagination to embody symbolism that leads to changes in physically energetic, emotional states and the resulting shifts in perception and awareness. The other side of it contains the horizontal or exterior aspect that relates to the way a performer presents the physical image of themselves. From an operational perspective this includes: conscious behaviour, physical actions that are immediately understandable to an audience and the use of costumes and props to create meaningful symbolism. I am perilously close to the area of semiotics,<sup>29</sup> however Symbolic Action is concerned primarily with the impact a symbol has in its facilitation of a transaction between participants.

### **The Yanvalou, Verticality and Embodied Symbolism**

The internal concept of Symbolic Action is exemplified in the Haitian vodou dance the Yanvalou that Grotowski worked with during his Art as

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<sup>29</sup> Semiotics did not form a part of my research and although Gómez-Peña's work draws extensively on the use of signs and symbols I will keep strictly to Transactional Analysis as the reference point.



a Vehicle phase<sup>30</sup> and which was incorporated into his opus Action.<sup>31</sup> As part of the living tradition of Haitian vodou ritual, the Yanvalou is the dance and the rhythm that begins the ceremonies of the Rada rites,<sup>32</sup> it is '*the rhythm par excellence, played and danced for all the Rada lwa*'.<sup>33</sup> The American dancer and vodou mambo,<sup>34</sup> Katherine Dunham, provides a very evocative description of the Yanvalou, describing it as a prayer that induces a type of ecstatic meditation: "The dance is decidedly soothing rather than exciting, and one is left in a state of complete receptivity. It is in this state most often that contact with the loa occurs."<sup>35</sup> Grotowski's interest in the Yanvalou was not for its communal ritual<sup>36</sup> function, but for the connection between the distinctive spinal undulation of the dance that symbolizes the serpent lwa Damballah, and how this movement accesses a 'primary energy' by acting on what he calls the 'reptile brain.'<sup>37</sup> He suggests that there is enough detail and precision in the dance, as a practice separate from the ritual context, for it to be used objectively by the non-Haitian-vodou performer to achieve similar results as if it were being performed in a ritual context: "When I refer to ritual, I speak of its objectivity; this means that elements of the

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<sup>30</sup> See Richards 1995, p.115

<sup>31</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, Eds. Richard Schechner & Lisa Wolford (Routledge, London & New York, 1997), p.415

<sup>32</sup> The Rada rites refer to a family of spirits also known as the root lwa, relating directly to the original gods and deities from Dahomey, contemporary Benin in West Africa.

<sup>33</sup> Gerdès Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1996), p.25

<sup>34</sup> The Creole term for a vodou priestess.

<sup>35</sup> Katherine Dunham, *Dances of Haiti* (Center for Afro-American Studies, Berkeley: University of California, 1983), p.61

<sup>36</sup> See Richards 1995, p.122

<sup>37</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook* 1997, p.296

Action are the instruments to work *on the body, the heart and the head of the doers*".<sup>38</sup>

This objectivity of ritual as an instrument to work on the performer is condensed in Grotowski's concept of verticality: "The question of verticality means to pass from the so-called coarse level – in a certain sense, one could say an "everyday level" – to a level of energy more subtle or even toward the *higher connection*."<sup>39</sup> The notion of a transformation of energy is what is most relevant to Symbolic Action. In verticality, the focus is on what Thomas Richards, Grotowski's chief collaborator during Art as Vehicle, describes as an inner descending and ascending of a subtle energy.<sup>40</sup>

With Symbolic Action, however, the focus is on the embodiment of symbolism through a structured, technical physical process that requires eidetic attention, that is a vivid application of the imagination in relation to the physical actions. The Yanvalou is a technically challenging dance, the details of which I will explore in the following chapter, "Its characteristics reside in the undulation of the bust, taking the shape of sea waves or the crawling walk of the serpent."<sup>41</sup> In preparation for the performance the Yanvalou formed the basis for the Purification Ritual, which was a private ritual performed 20 minutes before the audience entered. On a day-to-day level it enabled the performers to move from the stress experienced in the dressing room to the quality of lightness and flow necessary to begin the performance.

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<sup>38</sup> Richards 1995, p.122

<sup>39</sup> Richards 1995, p.125

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Edge-Point of performance* (Documentation Series of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski, Pontedera, Italy, 1997), pp.40-41

<sup>41</sup> Fleurant 1996, p.151

One simple example of a Symbolic Action from the Purification Ritual is a visualised shower (see video reference).<sup>42</sup> You begin by imagining taking water in your hands and pouring it over your face and body. The action is repeated a number of times until the bending of the knees and the movement in the spine become the spinal undulation of the Yanvalou. This internalised Symbolic Action combines the intention of purification with the visualisation of being by a pool of fresh water and cleaning yourself. The imaginative process is articulated on a technical level through linking it with the undulation. The dance itself had a pragmatic role in the work and we employed it to open and close a particular exercise, a work session and the day. It functioned as a safety valve, the association of water with the soothing nature of the undulation allowed us to return to our normal lives without harm.

### **The Ghede, Horizontality and Symbolism Made Flesh**

In contrast there is no connection in the literature between Gómez-Peña and vodou. However, horizontal is a word that I have heard him use in workshops<sup>43</sup> when referring to working methods that facilitate equal and intimate relationships between participants. The connection is the corporality of the living image (tableaux vivant) as the Symbolic Action made flesh, and how that affects the relationship between the performers and audience.

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<sup>42</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *The Shower*, 00:02:54 mins

<sup>43</sup> I attended a 10-day workshop to performance with him at the Centre for Performance Research, Aberystwyth, 2003.

The exterior horizontal concept of Symbolic Action can be best represented through a family of lwa called the Ghede who personify the gods of the dead. The dance for the Ghede is the Banda that, according to Dunham, “falls halfway between sacred and secular”.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the Yanvalou it is “officially a funeral dance and may be private and ceremonial, with cult supervision, or free, secular, and public, depending entirely on the wishes of the family of the deceased.”<sup>45</sup> Referring back to Grotowski’s de-contextualisation of the Yanvalou from its ritual context, Haitian culture has already partly done this with the Banda. There are many types of Ghede but the most famous one, who has, one could say, been detached from the ritual culture, is Baron Samedi who makes frequent appearances in popular culture<sup>46</sup> including the James Bond film *Live and Let Die* (1973). Ghede’s cultural exploitation is horizontal inasmuch as it deals with the surface image of the lwa. It connects to Gómez-Peña’s methodology of creating politically charged performance art personas that utilise a complex mix of image, contradictory stereotypical actions and improvisation.

The internationally recognisable image of Baron Samedi is his top hat and tailcoat, dark glasses and face painted half white and half black, symbolising one foot in life and the other in death. However his anarchic behaviour and drunken telling of coarse sexual jokes contradict his morbid image. Deren describes him as “The lord of eroticism which,

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<sup>44</sup> Dunham 1983, p.10

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The website horrorpedia brings together some of these pop culture appearances: <https://horrorpedia.com/2013/10/15/baron-samedi-and-haitian-loa-folklore-religion> (accessed 14/09/2016)

being inevitable, is therefore beyond good and evil and is beyond the elations and despairs of love. Of this he is neither proud or ashamed.”<sup>47</sup>

The basic movement of the Banda dance is a sexually suggestive circling of the hips that unashamedly celebrates its erotic nature. When Parrag first taught us the Banda, the technical aspect of the dance was passed through quite quickly and improvisational gestures were emphasised. There is a feeling of liberation to the gestures of smoking a cigar, snorting cocaine, bumping and grinding the hips and simulating sex. This attitude contradicts the serenity and seriousness of the Yanvalou and instead stresses the horizontal elements of spontaneity and a physically intimate connection between participants.

Gómez-Peña’s provocative and irreverent attitude to socio-political power structures is paralleled in the Ghede, who is known to interrupt the rituals of other important Iwa. Like a deathly court jester, he picks up on people’s weaknesses, confronting the religious with obscenities and humiliating the arrogant. Each performer created their own Ghede from a combination of Gómez-Peña’s exercises and employing the exterior and structural elements of the Iwa. With the Ghede these elements are the theme of death, a symbolic costume, stereotypical gestures, an irreverent character and spontaneous interactions.

Nwando Ebizie’s (NE) version of the Baron (see video reference)<sup>48</sup> used Gómez-Peña’s notion of the reversal of power. Her Ghede was a reverse minstrel, transforming herself from a black woman to a white

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<sup>47</sup> Deren 1983, p.102

<sup>48</sup> Appendix C Media: Video 1. *The Ghede*, 1:22:12 mins

man and referencing the racist overtones of the black and white minstrels. To complicate this idea further she drew upon her English cultural identity as a black woman brought up in the north of England; invoking the 'spirit' of Bernard Manning as a traditional northern 'racist' comedian to subvert the image. The scene was structured by the audience slowly dressing her in the Baron Samedi costume as she sang and improvised comic routines inspired by her interactions with them. As a white audience member painted NE's face white, she interjected commentaries on the image that was being created: "my grandmother always said I was pretty for a darkie". Or as she admired a woman's blonde hair: "give me some of that white woman hair".



Illustration 1. Nwando Ebizie as 'The Baron', Soho Theatre, London, UK, April 2016 Photo: Dimitri Djuric

The energy for the Symbolic Action in this case was not coming directly from the Banda dance but from bringing the image to life. It required NE to fully commit to the persona and constantly bounce off the audience to create her improvisations. The horizontal approach is a complement to

the internalised verticality of the Symbolic Action. It relies on putting together the persona as an externally articulated creation, the image made flesh, and on the performer's commitment to the horizontal improvisation with the audience.

## **The Transaction**

The complex interactions that take place during the Ghede scene are based on the theory and practice of Transactional Analysis. *The Passion* falls into the artistic genre of immersive and interactive theatre, and this thesis covers one aspect of the form, the interaction or transaction between participants. The first general question that I posed myself was: what happens in this interaction? Berne approaches this in a simple and structured manner:

The value of the term transaction is that you're committed to something: you're saying that something is exchanged. Whereas if you use interaction you're saying, "I don't know, I'm only going toward it." Transaction means: "At least I got to the first stage. I know that when people talk to each other they are exchanging something, and that is why they are talking to each other."<sup>49</sup>

My next question was: what is being exchanged? Berne's answer to this is based on a theory of social intercourse. In summary, the human being requires sensual stimulation in order to develop physically and emotionally; lack of stimulus can stunt their growth. This translates broadly into the need for recognition, the need to have another person acknowledge that they exist. Berne uses the stroking of an infant as the example for this exchange and states: "If you are not stroked your spinal

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<sup>49</sup> Eric Berne, *Beyond Games and Scripts* (Random House, 1976, New York), p.17

cord will shrivel up.”<sup>50</sup> In his view, a simple greeting ritual of *hello-hello* is performed between two people as an exchange of strokes and does not in itself contain any information. It represents an economy of transactions essential for maintaining a healthy psychological balance in an individual and their social relationships.

To arrive at the complicated horizontal transactions in the Ghede scene we begin from very low risk two stroke transactions. The first significant transaction in the performance happens in the first scene (The Opening Ceremony) when the performers make an offering of popcorn to the audience in honour of the Iwa Papa Legba.<sup>51</sup> This transaction takes place within a formal ritual, which from Berne’s point of view “is a stereotyped series of simple complementary transactions programmed by external social forces.”<sup>52</sup>

According to Berne, ritual is the least complex of social transactions because “The form of a ritual is Parentally determined by tradition.”<sup>53</sup> Formal ritual is procedural in its construction and does not require a spontaneous response from the participants for it to function. The structure is to a large extent known in advance or at least easy to anticipate. The Symbolic Action of offering popcorn is straightforward for the audience to respond to. This is fundamental to creating an immersive ritualised experience: the simpler the transaction the more efficacious it is. The audience is able to engage in the relationship with the performer without dropping their social mask or exposing

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<sup>50</sup> Berne 1964, p.14

<sup>51</sup> Appendix C Media Video 2. *Earth - Offering of popcorn*, 0:22:26 mins

<sup>52</sup> Berne 1964, p.34

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



themselves. Nonetheless they receive the benefits of social intercourse (stimulus and recognition) by being invited personally to be a part the performance. Chapter 5 addresses the transactions between the ensemble and the audience in detail.

## **The Aims of Symbolic Action: Autonomy and Being a Part of Things**

The aim of this method is to receive permission or consent from the audience to involve them freely in the performance event. In Berne's terms, this feeling of freedom is defined as autonomy and is broken down into three elements: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy. The ritualized journey of *The Passion* begins with the proposition that the performance is happening here and now; the audience do not need to suspend their disbelief because the performance is not set somewhere else at some other time. As Thom Andrewes notes in a review of an early version of *The Passion* in June 2015: "This was not the representation of a ritual, but one that was actually occurring, in which we were present as actors: a ritual that, without our complicity, would fail to achieve its intended function."<sup>54</sup>

Awareness, as Berne argues, "requires living in the here and now, and not in the elsewhere, the past or the future."<sup>55</sup> The pragmatic fact that the performance is 'actually occurring' and contains elements for the audience to respond to means that they are confronted with choosing

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<sup>54</sup> <https://thebitingpoint.wordpress.com/2015/09/22/live-review-lady-vendredis-urban-rites-battle-cry/> (accessed 3 October 2016)

<sup>55</sup> Berne 1964, p.158

their responses. Spontaneity, in Berne's analysis, means the freedom to express oneself from a range of options: "It means liberation, liberation from the compulsion to play games and have only the feelings one was taught to have."<sup>56</sup> Intimacy, within the immersive ritual context, means an intense, spontaneous empathic response to the performance. Intimacy starts to arrive when "social patterning and ulterior restrictions and motives begin to give way."<sup>57</sup>

The transactions with the audience occur on a horizontal level; on the vertical level is the transpersonal aspect, defined here as Being a Part of Things. As a phrase it refers to a range of phenomena such as a feeling of connection, going beyond oneself and perceptual visions or hallucinations particularly in relation to trance and possession. This field of experience has only phenomenological significance because of the operational difficulties of determining whether transpersonal inner states are verifiable through observable behaviour, and whether they are consistent pragmatically: in other words, whether as a director I can direct them into the montage of the performance.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.160

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.17

## Chapter 3

### The Six Elements: an experimental process for creating Symbolic Action

#### 1. Applying the Field of Research

This chapter presents the research into verticality and Symbolic Action and its application in practice. It is in the form of a report describing the narrative of the process. Due to the challenge of portraying the nuances of live performance in written or visual documentation it is essential to refer to the notes to Appendix C containing the media files of the training and performance.

The process of developing the training for *The Passion* took place over a number of years, the aim of which was to facilitate a creative process for the performer to generate embodied Symbolic Action. The practices involved are the Plastiques,<sup>58</sup> a physical training developed by Jerzy Grotowski, alongside ritual dances from Haitian vodou. During the R&D Period 2 stage of research the Plastiques were developed into a re-invented version known as the Elements taught to me by Jolanta Cynkutis<sup>59</sup> in the early 1990s. In the Elements, the Plastiques are used as an imaginative way of embodying images and associations related to elemental qualities. In the Production Period of research the Plastiques were linked to six dances and rhythms from Haitian vodou dance. The resulting training was then used by the performers to create Symbolic

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<sup>58</sup> Appendix C Media: Video 4. *The Plastiques*, 00:43:10 mins

<sup>59</sup> For more on Jolanta Cynkutis see a biography here: <http://livingmyth.com/restraints-jola/> (accessed 6 October 2016)

Actions for their personas. Figure 2. below, chronologically presents the sequence of research referenced in the text.<sup>60</sup>

Fig. 2 Chronological Sequence of Research

DATE	EVENT	RESEARCH
<b>Relevant prior research</b>		
1990-3	Trained with Jolanta Cynkutis	<i>The Plastiques aka the Elements</i>
1993-2007	Director of Para Active Theatre	<i>Research into the Plastiques</i>
<b>The Passion: research &amp; development (R&amp;D) Period 1</b>		
July 2013	Haitian dance workshop led by Parrag, London, UK	<i>Haitian vodou dance training: Yanvalou, Ibo, Petwo &amp; Banda</i>
	2-week R&D: rehearsal process	<i>Research into vodou Iwa Performance art possessions</i>
Nov 2013 to March 2015	Haitian dance workshops with Parrag, London, UK	<i>4 workshops:</i>
<b>The Passion: R&amp;D Period 2</b>		
Oct 2015	2-week R&D: rehearsal process and two performances, London, UK	<i>Training company in the Plastiques Yanvalou, Ibo &amp; Banda dance styles Re-invention of the Elements Creation of physical scores for performance art possessions</i>
<b>The Passion: Production Period</b>		
Jan 2016	Audition of Cuban Santeria percussionists	<i>Research into Haitian vodou rhythm</i>
February	1-week Training with Parrag, Berlin, Germany	<i>Haitian vodou dance training: + Mayi &amp; Kongo Research into vodou possession</i>
	4 open training sessions, London, UK	<i>Yanvalou &amp; developing The Purification Ritual</i>
March	2 ensemble training sessions, London, UK	<i>The Six Elements: analysis of the Haitian dances and rhythms</i>
	3 weeks research, training & rehearsal, London, UK	<i>Haitian vodou dance training Creation of the Six Elements Finalised physical scores for performance art possessions</i>
April	3 weeks of performances of The Passion, London, UK	

## 2. The Plastiques

The Plastiques formed an essential part of the training for my first theatre company Para Active (1993-2007) and were used in this research as a means of creating embodied action for the performer. The technique is based on pragmatic principles, that of isolating the joints of the body: the head, shoulders, chest, pelvis, knees, feet, elbows, wrists

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix B for complete timeline.

and hands in relation to the organic anatomical direction of the movement. Each movement emerges from the central axis of the spine and is intended to fully engage the whole body. The primary focus is on the physical impulse as the basic unit of action, and as an expression of a performer's spontaneous action or reaction to a stimulus (sensation, emotion or thought). From a technical point of view contact and direction form the basis of the intention behind a physical action. The performer sends an impulse from one or more of the joints in a specific direction to make contact with an object or a partner in the space. After working through the main directions of each body part the performer then connects each impulse to form a rotation in the joint. The impulses function as fixed details in relation to the larger more flowing movement of the rotation. The combination of all the body parts creates a physical training that contains both structure and improvisation, as Grotowski describes it: "step by step, we began to envisage these plastic exercises like a '*conjunctio oppositorium*' between structure and spontaneity."<sup>61</sup>

*Conjunctio oppositorium*, or the meeting of the opposites of spontaneity and discipline, is a key principle of the Plastiques that corresponds respectively to horizontality and verticality. The efficacy of the training lies in maintaining the vertical discipline and precision of the movements whilst giving life to their horizontal spontaneous performance. This is achieved through improvising the direction and the dynamic of the impulse in relation to a partner in the space or to an image or memory. In the performer's struggle with improvising the fixed

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<sup>61</sup> From the author's personal collection: *Exercises*, by Jerzy Grotowski, published in *Dialog* N.12 December 1979 (translated from the French and Italian versions by James Slowiak), p.6

movements they start to let go of the formal shapes and create original fixed repeatable actions based on the image or idea they are exploring.

The Plastiques as a training and a technique form the basis of Symbolic Action on a vertical level. The R&D Period 2 of research focused on re-inventing the Elements training by combining the Plastiques with imagery of water, air, earth and fire. This was used to generate personally meaningful actions for The Opening Ceremony. The Production Period of research focused on developing the Elements by combining them with six Haitian vodou dances. My aim was not to repeat the already symbolically charged dances but use them to create new material by embodying the specific energetic characteristics of each dance. This was achieved by a detailed analysis of the central movement of the dances and then by combining them with the Plastiques and the Elements to form a new training.

### **3. The Elements: the Plastiques and the Yanvalou**

#### **3.1 Narrative of Events: Haitian vodou dance training 2013 to 2015**

MAS productions' work with Parrag began in August 2013 at the inception of *The Passion* during the Arts Council funded R&D Period 1. The focus at this stage was on the learning of the Yanvalou, Ibo, Petwo and Banda dance styles. The Yanvalou training was used to create The Opening Ceremony for the show. We also began our explorations of the vodou lwas: Papa Legba, Ezili Freda and Ezili Danto through creating choreographic possessions. We subsequently organised and attended Haitian Dance workshops with Parrag five more times over two years

and in between worked on the dances by ourselves. In February 2016 the majority of the company travelled to Berlin for an intensive week of training before the rehearsals began for the full production at Soho Theatre.

### **3.2 Rationale: the re-invention of the Elements**

The Arts Council funded R&D Period 2 was undertaken in October 2015 and would become the foundation for the final production. It was during this phase that we explored the version of the Plastiques that was created during Grotowski's paratheatrical phase<sup>62</sup> in which the images of the four elements are the imaginative stimulus for improvisation.

Rather than reconstruct them, I decided to recreate the Elements in our own way through layering together the Plastiques, the Yanvalou and the image of water. The framework for this was the Yanvalou that formed the choreographic structure for The Opening Ceremony and carries within it the traditional association with the quality of water, symbolically embodied in the evocative undulating spinal movement. Water, air, earth and fire naturally associated with each part of The Opening Ceremony. Fig. 3 shows the structure of the ceremony and the related element. The Opening Ceremony<sup>63</sup> begins with a libation, a blessing using Water and a salute to the musicians. The drawing of the veve, a magical symbol representing the Iwa Papa Legba, was performed choreographically and associated with Air. The offering of popcorn to the audience was associated with Earth and connected to

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<sup>62</sup> For information about paratheatre see *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, eds. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (Routledge, London and New York, 1997), pp. 205-246

<sup>63</sup> Appendix C Media: Video 2. *The Opening Ceremony*, 0:23:09 mins

Papa Legba as a symbol of fertility. The violent energy of the killing in the ritual sacrifice was associated with the quality of Fire.

Fig. 3 Structure of the Opening Ceremony and Associated Element

STRUCTURE OF THE OPENING CEREMONY	ELEMENT	RHYTHM/DANCE	PHYSICAL CENTRE OF MOVEMENT	LWA
LIBATION	WATER	YANVALOU	SPINAL UNDULATION CIRCULAR	PAPA LEGBA
SALUTATION TO THE MUSICIANS				
THE VEVE	AIR			
THE OFFERING	EARTH			
THE SACRIFICE	FIRE			

### 3.3 Process: research into combining the Plastiques, image and action

The training structure begins with the Plastiques and moves through the Elements in a continuous flow. When the performer is working inside each Element they develop the quality and use this to create actions that are, on the whole, fixed on the level of impulse rather than as choreography. The training always walks a line between discipline and improvisation. In order for the training to remain both technical and personal the performer has specific elemental imaginative associations of their own that link to specific movements. This then leads to the creation of structured physical actions that contain the performers' personal associations. The result is an internally efficacious organic shift in energy that is visible in the embodied impulses and patterns of movement. The training developed and varied as the work proceeded, below are a few examples of exercises, images and actions for each Element. Full descriptions are in Appendix F.



### 3.4 Training Exercises: the Elements

#### 3.4a Water

##### Exercise

*Beginning with the Plastiques wave in the hand, imagine that the hand is water. Bring the quality of a flowing stream to the movement, soft with no staccato impulses. Allow the undulation from the Yanvalou to spread into the whole body.*

##### Image

One of Jennifer MT White's personal associations with the quality of water:

WAVE/The one drop that expands internally, so feeling waves throughout the body...Feeling the whole space as water as ocean, you are in the waves, the constant waves that can take you anywhere - this was most effective for allowing new images to appear each night.<sup>64</sup>

##### Symbolic Action

The improvisation with the movement and the image was used to create poetic actions of a blessing or a consecration. NE's Symbolic Action for water is documented in Appendix C.<sup>65</sup>

#### 3.4b Air

##### Exercise

*Bring the feet together in a narrow stance, staying soft in the knees and the body. Allow the hips to be loose and gently swing, to bring you on and off balance. Use the loss of balance to initiate the movement.*

##### Image

*Imagine being blown by a gentle breeze that builds into a hurricane.*

##### Symbolic Action

Gods, spirits and demons in all traditions are given magical symbols to represent them. The vodou lwa have symbols that are normally drawn on the floor in corn flour: "Each loa has his special symbol or veve. The basic form, and certain details, are traditionally fixed. The

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<sup>64</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 1 JMTW Soho Evaluation

<sup>65</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Water*, 00:11:40 mins

crossroads is the sign for Legba; the heart is for Erzulie....”<sup>66</sup> The images the performers created formed the Symbolic Action of the individual semi-choreographed veve.<sup>67</sup>

“**Air wind**= Dropping into a plir in 1st and turning up to standing. Four corners. Clear directions in space marked by angles and straight arms cutting through the space, pointing the hand and spinning. One hand has the sign of the horns marking separation and the other the sign of the unicorn, marking unity. One movement is like a chopper with both signs cutting into space. The sign of unity draws circles on the ground the sign of divisions cuts everything in two or more.”<sup>68</sup>

### 3.4c Earth

#### Exercise

*Your body is trapped inside the earth, as if you are buried alive, in very compact mud and the only part of the body that can help you to get free is the head and the stronger the impulse that you make the sooner you will get out.*

#### Image

**Earth**= Floor suck, packing the earth onto my head with my hands.<sup>69</sup>

#### Symbolic Action

The body as an offering, a giving of yourself or a surrender. This was converted into the transaction of the ritual offering of popcorn to the audience.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.4d Fire

#### Exercise

*Imagine a flame in the palm of the hand spreading through the whole body. Your body is damp and the hand is starting to spark. The fire gradually dries the body out and grows into a raging forest fire.*

#### Image

**Fire**- The fire in one hand, the heart in the other. “Possession” of the body into ecstatic trance through fast breathing.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Deren 1983, p.194

<sup>67</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Air*, 00:13:04 mins

<sup>68</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 3 *MBJ Mamatrix Persona*

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Earth - Offering*, 00:14:00 mins

<sup>71</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 3 *MBJ Mamatrix Persona*

### **Symbolic Action**

The quality of fire led to the creation of the Symbolic Action of killing, a wild slashing, and a drawing of blood that was used at the end of The Opening Ceremony to symbolize the ritual sacrifice of Lady Vendredi.<sup>72</sup>

## **4. The Six Elements: creative research on the Plastiques and six Haitian vodou dances**

### **4.1 Narrative of Events: preparation for rehearsals, October 2015 to March 2016**

We felt it was important to work with musicians who were experienced in African Diaspora ritual musical practices and as there is no Haitian community in the UK, and due to the crossover between vodou and santeria rhythm, we auditioned two Cuban percussionists from the santeria tradition. Together we analysed the different rhythm parts from transcriptions of the Yanvalou rhythms<sup>73</sup> while additionally listening to studio and field recordings.

During the intensive week of training in Berlin with Parrag, in addition to the Yanvalou and Petwo dances, we learnt the basics of the Mayi and the Kongo. This in-depth training period enabled us to work on the technical quality of each dance in detail. On our return from Berlin we ran four public training sessions at Soho Theatre. They were used to develop the training structure for the Yanvalou and what was to become the Purification Ritual. Two sessions took place at Regents University

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<sup>72</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Fire - Sacrifice*, 00:14:50 mins

<sup>73</sup> We used musical scores documented in the book: Gerdès Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1996)

involving the ensemble and the percussionist focusing on working out the technique of the dances in relation to the traditional rhythms.

#### **4.2 Rationale: the creation of the Six Elements as a physical training method**

In March 2016 we went into full rehearsal. My artistic instinct was to link each of the Haitian dances to an element with the aim of developing the Elements training further. The early stages of rehearsal were devoted to the sequences of training (the plastiques and the dances), where we trained and analysed each dance alongside the percussionist. This was followed by abstracting from the dance, what we believed to be, the central or signature spinal movement. This was achieved through using two or three basic steps from each and creating exercises that would help us to arrive at the specific quality. Over the period of training we associated the six dances and rhythms with six elements and six vodou lwa.

The problem I had created for myself was how to approach the vodou dances in a similar way to the Plastiques. The aim was to achieve *conjunctio oppositorium* and maintain the vertical discipline of the Plastiques and the dances while performing them with horizontal spontaneity i.e. improvising. The associations are represented in Fig. 4

Fig. 4 The Six Elements

ELEMENT	RHYTHM/DANCE	PHYSICAL CENTRE OF MOVEMENT	DIRECTION	LWA
WATER	YANVALOU	SPINAL UNDULATION CIRCULAR	UP AND DOWN	PAPA LEGBA
EARTH	MAYI	SHOULDERS	FORWARD	AZAKA
AIR	KONGO	PELVIS	SIDE TO SIDE ∞ SIGN OF INFINITY	EZILI FREDA
METAL	IBO	CHEST	FORWARD	IBO
FIRE	PETWO	PELVIS	FORWARD	EZILI DANTOR
SPIRIT	BANDA	PELVIS	CIRCLE	GHEDE

#### **4.3 Process: combining the Plastiques, the Elements and six Haitian vodou dances**

The training structure for the Six Elements is similar to the description of the Elements in 3.3 and maintains the aim of developing embodied Symbolic Action. However the complexity of the training is increased by the abstraction of the central physical movement, this spinal movement is used as the basis for each Element. With Yanvalou/Water, for example, the percussionist plays the Yanavalou rhythm and the performer responds by finding the movement of the undulation. The percussionist then improvises according to an abstract musical interpretation of the image of water and the performer, following the rhythm, brings the undulation into their whole body seeking to embody the quality of water. Each dance and Element is worked through in the same way until we reach Banda/Spirit where all the Elements are combined to initiate free improvisation. The aim of the improvisation is to generate material for the performance art possessions. The training sequence would last approximately 12 to 15 minutes and the

improvisation could last for up to 30 minutes.<sup>74</sup> Below is a summary of the research.<sup>75</sup>

#### **4.4 Training Exercises: the Six Elements**

##### **4.4a Yanvalou<sup>76</sup>**

As we saw in Chapter 2 the Yanvalou had the affect of slowly bringing the energy of the performers up to open the work and gently bringing it down to close the day. The association with water was strong at this point and the refreshing calming quality was immediately effective. During R&D Period 2, we found that the ecstatic effect of the training was causing the performers to leave rehearsal in a ‘high’ vulnerable emotional state. Parrag advised us to employ the dance in order to bring everyone back to a state of clarity.

##### **The Dance and the Lwa Papa Legba**

The Yanvalou is performed at the beginning of the Rada rites and relates to a number of different lwa. However our association was with Papa Legba who is depicted as an old man with a limp and a walking stick. Legba is the first spirit to be called because he “is the link between the visible, mortal world and the invisible, immortal realms.”<sup>77</sup>

##### **The Central Movement and Direction**

The distinguishing aspect of the Yanvalou is the undulation of the spine, beginning in the coccyx it moves upwards vertically and then descends. In its association with water NE says: “Working with Yanvalou is like taking a dip in the water...I literally feel like I’ve been cast in a

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<sup>74</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *The Six Elements Improvisation*, 00:52:26 mins

<sup>75</sup> Full descriptions are in Appendix F.

<sup>76</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Yanvalou*, 00:16:30 mins

<sup>77</sup> Deren 1983, p.97

beautiful pool.”<sup>78</sup>

NE’s analysis of how she has begun to embody both the technical aspects of the dance and the element of water is significant because it demonstrates how both sides work together. First of all with regards to the direction of the undulation she says “It is a circle but it is also vertical...what is important...is this feeling of verticality...that something begins from the floor, through the feet and flows up through the whole spine.”<sup>79</sup>

The vertical movement is supported by a second movement that begins simultaneously in the pelvic floor that captures the wave and

Begins not as a circle...but as a compression up through the centre.... You need the flow of tension through the core as an upwards motion to rise up and then crest the wave at the front - then there is a RELEASE...If you release, something brings you back round to begin the circle again.<sup>80</sup>

#### **4.4b Mayi**

##### **The Dance and the Lwa Azaka**

The Mayi dance is from the Mahi nation in Benin and is connected to the agricultural lwa Azaka, so we naturally associated it with the element of earth.

##### **The Central Movement and Direction<sup>81</sup>**

The spinal movement begins with a gentle forward rocking of the pelvis partly initiated through the shoulders, known in Creole as “Zépòl, meaning “shoulders” (that is, “work the shoulders” from the French, *les epaules*).”<sup>82</sup> The constantly repetitive rapid thrusting pattern<sup>83</sup> of the

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<sup>78</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 5 *NE Performer Evaluation*

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Mayi*, 00:22:06 mins

<sup>82</sup> Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom* (University of Illinois Press, USA, 2005), p.112

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

shoulders initiate a small forward and backward tilting in the pelvis.

### **The Element**

We used the image of a tree with the feet as roots in the earth and the sap rising to the shoulders to embody the symbolism. MBJ describes the effect on her:

Discovering the muscles that hold the shoulder blades with the spine, opening the heart, chest, ribs...A heat that I had never experienced before between the shoulder blades.<sup>84</sup>

## **4.4c Kongo**

### **The Dance and the Lwa Ezili Freda**

The Kongo is connected to the Congo nation<sup>85</sup> and is associated with the lwa Ezili Freda, the goddess of love:

Erzulie moves in an atmosphere of infinite luxury, a perfume of refinement, which, from the first moment of her arrival, pervades the very air of the peristyle, and becomes a general expansiveness in which all anxieties, all urgencies vanish.<sup>86</sup>

### **The Central Movement and Direction<sup>87</sup>**

The Kongo gives an impression of a combined African and European style.<sup>88</sup> The upper body is upright as if a crown is placed on the head and the movement of the pelvis follows the shape of the sign of infinity in a feminine movement of the hips. The quality is lightness and flow without any accent; a pulling up of the spine brings airiness to the movement, and the arms float at the side as if being held by a gentle breeze.

### **The Element**

We associated these qualities with the element of Air. MBJ describes the

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<sup>84</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>85</sup> Daniel 2005, p.113

<sup>86</sup> Deren 1983, pp.134-5

<sup>87</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Kongo*, 00:25:35 mins

<sup>88</sup> Lynn Martin (1996) *Six Haitian Vodou dances*, *Visual Anthropology*, 8:2-4, p.245



images that she was working with: “Light swing, side to side, rocking. Joyful and open to the skies...ephemeral. Something about disappearing into that weightlessness, into that big sky.”<sup>89</sup>

#### **4.4d Ibo**

##### **The Dance and the Symbolism of Ibo**

Ibo dance is from Iboland in Nigeria. The images and associations within the traditional movements are connected to the Ibo nation’s rebellion against the French in Haiti<sup>90</sup> and express the defiance of a people who would rather commit suicide than be enslaved.<sup>91</sup>

##### **The Central Movement and Direction<sup>92</sup>**

The main movement initiates in the chest in a pumping action and, according to Daniel, symbolises bullets bouncing off it.<sup>93</sup> There is a ricocheting quality in the movement that leads to an explosion of free energy: “The engine of the movement is banging back and forth, something deep within the cage of the torso that never stops. It drives you from here. IT drives you, not you pushing it.”<sup>94</sup>

##### **The Element**

We associated it with the element of metal: the arms with the palms flat symbolise the blades of a machete.<sup>95</sup> The shuffling feet, and the hands held together in fists, symbolise chains. MBJ notes the images that she worked with: “Absolute association with metal, metal work, chains and sweat. Hope in the foot patterns. Limited space, limited movement...A sense of the weight of inflicted limitation. Traveling across the space to

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<sup>89</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>90</sup> Martin 1996, p.244

<sup>91</sup> Martin 1996, p.243

<sup>92</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Ibo*, 00:30:20 mins

<sup>93</sup> Daniel 2005, p.113

<sup>94</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 5 *NE Performer Evaluation*

<sup>95</sup> Zsuzsa Parrag: Personal Communication 2014

break free.”<sup>96</sup>

#### **4.4e Petwo**

##### **The Dance and the Lwa Ezili Danto**

The Petwo dance relates to the lwa Ezili Danto, the sister of Ezili Freda. She is considered to be hot or fiery compared to her sister who is cool and watery.<sup>97</sup> As the goddess of revenge and the defender of women against sexual violence she is strongly associated with the liberation of Haiti from the French. A ceremony in 1791 devoted to her has gone down in history as beginning the Haitian Revolution.<sup>98</sup>

##### **The Central Movement and Direction<sup>99</sup>**

We isolated the basic movement of the Petwo as a forward and backwards thrust of the pelvis that involves the whole spine and the chest. There is a bound, held resistance in the body that causes friction and generates a frenzied ecstatic feeling through the heat.

##### **The Element**

Parrag describes it is a healing dance with the elemental association of fire, a fire rising up from the earth. However, at the same time it seems to be associated with war and aggression:<sup>100</sup> “Ferocity, anger, tempo always increases. Blood in the eyes. Bloody thoughts. Thoughts about murder.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>97</sup> Zsuzsa Parrag *Personal Communication* 2013

<sup>98</sup> Robert Debs and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood: the story of the Haitian people 1492-1995*, (University Press of America, London, 1996) pp. 39-40

<sup>99</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Petwo*, 00:34:28 mins

<sup>100</sup> Daniel 2005, p.114

<sup>101</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

## 4.4f Banda

### **The Dance and the Ghede Lwa**

I describe the Ghede in some detail in Chapter 2.

### **The Central Movement and Direction**<sup>102</sup>

As MBJ points out everything leads from the circling and sharp impulses of the pelvic movement: “Banda: The Pelvis as the head. Thinking from the pelvis. Direction under the pelvis. A certain type of surrender to the politically incorrect advances of the overt pelvis. Pelvis as predator, as naughty, reckless, fickle, fun, consuming.”<sup>103</sup>

### **The Element**

We naturally associated the Banda and Ghede, as the gods of the dead, with the element of Spirit and MBJ observed during the creation of the training that she felt that Banda was all the other elements in one. This led me to use it as the point of departure for beginning free improvisation.

## 5. Creating a Score for the Performance Art Possession

### 5.1 The Process

The process for creating a score followed the structure of:

- i. Improvising the Six Elements.
- ii. Creating images and physical actions e.g. Symbolic Action.
- iii. Repeating and fixing them.
- iv. Creating a short etude to structure the material.
- v. Presenting the structure to the ensemble.

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<sup>102</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Banda*, 00:39:16 mins

<sup>103</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

- vi. Repeating this process with increasing complexity to gradually form the performance art possession.

The selection of the material was the performer's responsibility, as a director my role was to judge the efficacy of the internal Symbolic Action on an operational level. On a pragmatic level I would direct the dynamics of the action i.e. the length of an action or where it is being performed in space, and connect it to the actions of the other performers.

It is a complex process that follows the subjective and irrational impulses of the performer. NE's notes and description of the development of the material show how strongly associated with the training the creative process was "I feel like all the images and the ideas come out of the vodou elements, but have been crossed with a freeing of my imagination."<sup>104</sup> The imagery is vivid and emerged already embodied, however the crucial different between the Six Elements and the Plastiques is that it would generate trance states. The ensemble had occasion to observe NE falling into spasms on the floor and losing conscious awareness. The percussionist Gerardo De Armas Sarria advised us to pour water on her as he had observed this behaviour in participants in santeria ceremonies. Pragmatically trance was not helpful in the long run and I found ways of bringing the energy of the rhythm and the improvisation down to prevent this happening. However the advantage of being able to reach this state was that it enabled NE to attain the level of internal transformation I was aiming for in the performance of the Symbolic Actions

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<sup>104</sup> Appendix E 5 *NE Performer Evaluation*

## 5.2 Analysis of the Physical Score

In this section I will focus on the development of NE's main transformation ritual from the persona Lady Vendredi into Ezili Danto.<sup>105</sup>

Within the narrative of the performance it is the beginning of the revenge storyline. What we present to the audience is a performance art possession ritual. The first part of it is performed with the song *Mama* set to a mix of Ibo and Petwo rhythms. The Ibo was used as a transition rhythm with its personal association to NE's Igbo cultural heritage. Action begins with the other performers holding and dressing her as she starts to transform. The pressing and the resistance that they apply to her body emerged from the possession training that we did with Parrag in Berlin. Her score of physical actions is performed to a Petwo instrumental composition accompanied by the ensemble dancing the Petwo.

In the interest of concision I will focus on a twenty-second segment of action that was significant for NE and marked the switch into the full the possession. This analysis is based on an interview I did with her during the writing of this thesis. I will refer to it as The Boxer Image<sup>106</sup>. For NE's full score see note.<sup>107</sup>

The Boxer Image came from the first improvisation of the Six Elements with the percussionist and emerged from the fiery quality of the Petwo. It was an image of her little brother "as a real pure burning

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<sup>105</sup> Appendix C Media Video 1. *Ezili Danto Possession*, 0:58:48 mins

<sup>106</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *The Boxer Image*, 01:08:35 mins

<sup>107</sup> Appendix C Media Video 4. *Ezili Danto Possession*, 01:07:55 mins

frustration, and that he was so angry with the world.”<sup>108</sup> The action is articulated through the Petwo dance: the feet are shuffling, pressing the floor in fury. The arms, body, shoulders and back form a “personification of internal rage.”<sup>109</sup> The upright tension of the dance is connected to his very long legs and short torso with “all the limbs very straight and stiff.”<sup>110</sup> The holding of her head and rocking like a disturbed child came from the memory of his tantrums and banging his head on the floor when he was little.

The significance of the action for NE was that it catalysed the process and seemed, on the level of Symbolic Action, to make a link between the improvisation on physical action and the possession. As she says “there was just this exact perfect moment of feeling Petwo and my little brother...clicking so clearly.”<sup>111</sup> What is interesting is that she experienced it as something enjoyable, rather than feeling the rage, and that there was a ‘pleasure in the connectedness.’<sup>112</sup> Making the links between the various aspects of the work provoked a feeling of freedom and what she describes as a flood of embodied images. This experience is important because as a director the aim is not to recreate emotional states in order to achieve a simulation of life for the audience. Instead the aim is to create Symbolic Action that visually and viscerally impacts the audience, but where the performer can function as a channel for the embodied state.

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<sup>108</sup> Appendix C Media Audio 1 *NE Interview Boxer Image*, 02:24 mins

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 04:36

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 04:58

<sup>111</sup> Appendix C Media Audio 2 *NE Interview Boxer Image*, 01:01

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*.

It seems that the associations in the dances, images and the movements were effective in provoking vivid physically experienced images that effected her emotionally and generated altered states of perception and a sensation of Being a Part of Things:

It's not like I suddenly think that I'm my brother or I suddenly feel like his spirit has entered me in a kind of magical way...it's just suddenly is like that...not in this...normal sense of reality...maybe on a more neurological version of reality...I could suddenly feel what he feels but...not in the same way as him.<sup>113</sup>

From the point of view of an artist researcher whose role is the director I take a phenomenological approach to the performer's experience. I choose not to manipulate the states of mind that the performers experience rather to look for the pragmatic means to structure them. As a researcher, NE's testimony indicates that the research and training process is achieving its aims. The work is provoking and suggesting strong personal images that arrive to her already embodied. They arrive in the context of the demands of the performance; the scene is of a possession and the Iwa she has transformed into is symbolic of anger and revenge. The actions are then ready to be put into the context of the narrative score. Her internal experience of the action is heavily symbolic and its efficacy for her is that it creates an intimate connection with the memory of her brother, and this intimacy results from a shift in conscious awareness. The two ideas of Autonomy and Being a Part of Things become allied and appear to be different aspects of the same phenomena.

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<sup>113</sup> Audio: 3. *NE Interview Boxer Image*, 03:33 mins

## Chapter 4

### Exploitation Art or How to Create a God!

#### 1. The Conceptual Approach to the Field of Research

This chapter presents the research into horizontality and Symbolic Action in the field of performance art. The idea of Symbolic Action<sup>114</sup> derives from the work of the Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña. I have adapted his practical methodology and reformulated it conceptually as Exploitation Art, a term appropriated from the exploitation and grindhouse genre of films.<sup>115</sup> I have further refined Exploitation Art as a practical process titled Self-exploitation or *Selfsploitation*. This was the primary means for the performers to create their personas.

*The Passion* was framed around the idea of imagining what a vodou ritual would be like if it were reinvented in a contemporary urban setting. This extrapolation allowed us to negotiate the uneasy relationship between the living tradition of Haitian vodou and experimental artistic practices. The dramaturgy of *The Passion* was structured as a series of transformation rituals or performance art style vodou possessions, in which the performer embodied the god: the image made flesh. Possession, as Deren points out, 'is the center to which all the roads of Voudoun converge'.<sup>116</sup> From an artistic and ethical point of view there was no attempt to replicate or ape a vodou possession. The

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<sup>114</sup> Gómez-Peña 2005, p.123

<sup>115</sup> For a definition and history of exploitation films see:

<https://www.grindhousedatabase.com/index.php/INTRODUCTION> (accessed 5/9/2016)

<sup>116</sup> Deren 1983, p.247



transformation rituals were intended as a framework for each performer to create a god or a demon through the *Selfsploitation* of the godlike and demonic facets of their own personalities. The formulation of these ‘facets of personality’ were articulated as horizontal Symbolic Actions that allowed direct intimate transactions with the audience. This chapter will use as an example Moss Beynon-Juckles’ (MBJ) development and creation of her persona Mamatrix.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1 Exploitation Cinema

The idea of using Exploitation as an artistic process came from my interest in extreme cinema. The early exploitation genre of films were documentaries that under the guise of educating the audience instead exploited their curiosity in wanting to see ‘sensationalist’, provocative and lurid content.<sup>117</sup> The exploitation genre absorbed any combination of taboo, risqué or shocking themes as suitable subject matter, often including sex, religion, occultism, drugs, racism, gore and general mayhem. Race, drugs and crime were common themes of the blaxploitation sub-genre. Blaxploitation star Pam Grier (*Coffy*, 1973 and *Foxy Brown*, 1974) had a major influence on the styling and persona of Lady Vendredi. Grier’s films were groundbreaking in representing black women as powerful and violent agents of their own destiny. Despite this,

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<sup>117</sup> *Reefer Madness* (1938) drew an audience through exploiting the fear of the effect of drugs on society. Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (1932) exploits the performers in a freak show albeit, in a more artistic way. The Italian Mondo genre took it further with *Africa Addio* (1966) ‘a sprawling brutal account of decolonization in the sub-Saharan continent’ see Dennison and Song Hwee Lim, *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film* (Wallflower Press, London, UK, 2006) p.120

Grier's powerful image is undermined by an overt exploitation of her sexuality. The tension between strong messages and low art is a characteristic of the higher quality films.

## **2.2 The Exploitation Aesthetic**

Exploitation Art adopts the seductive trappings of the mass media and then reverses them. Rather than presenting the stereotypes and clichés of socio-cultural representation in order to reinforce the prejudices of the audience, they are instead exaggerated to the edge of satire then re-presented back to the public as a challenge to their beliefs. However the aim is not to critique socio-cultural representation but to acknowledge that as a society we are all implicated in a system of self-perpetuating beliefs and dogmas. We are all victims and perpetrators in this reflexive process, and as autonomous individuals we have executive power to choose what we believe in. The primary way to do this is through *Selfsploitation*, a method of scrutinising our voluntary and involuntary participation in the promulgation of our individual ideologies that obliquely attacks the centre of our image of ourselves. Neil Luck, an audience member, picks up on this aspect of our performance in his feedback comments.

Without being didactic at all, to me it felt like the show was great in taking stances on cultural issues, but then self-sabotaged or subverting them in ways that forced me to question my own views and standpoints - it's that confusion of response that's most exciting to me, not being manipulated into conventional emotional responses, but rather being plunged into a sort of space of interpretation.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Appendix D *Audience Feedback*

## **2.3 The True Believer: beliefs and dogmas**

I was inspired by Eric Hoffer's book *The True Believer* (1951) and his existential analysis of the social psychology of religious and political fanaticism. Conceptually, I was interested in exploring the performer's own personal systems of belief and what would happen if they were taken to an extreme. What would happen if they manifested as personal gods and demons? There were a number of questions and issues to be negotiated in this process:

- How do we hold opposing worldviews in a theatre space simultaneously?
- If my beliefs are no more real than anyone else's, how do I deal with an attack on my beliefs without losing faith?
- How do we negotiate the fine lines between the individual and society, freedom and control, free speech and censorship, tolerance and self-assertion of identity?

And, in reference to the aims of Symbolic Action,

- Can a sense of autonomy and feeling part of the world, in particular having intimate healthy emotional transactions with each other, challenge the need for rigid dogmatic beliefs?

## **2.4 Ethics**

One has to be careful with the term exploitation and underline that it is a conscious process that continues Gómez-Peña's ethical considerations. The working space is a liberated environment and the process is one of a constant negotiation of the "delicate borders between risk and consent,

caution and adventure, self and other, artist and audience member.”<sup>119</sup>

As a director and researcher I adhere to a set of principles:

- The performer chooses to do the work for artistic considerations. They are not auditioned but have joined the project through a workshop or personal contact with the company.
- In all aspects of the work the performer is in control of what they do and can choose not to participate in an activity that they are uncomfortable with.

However this comes with a commitment and a challenge:

- They respect the right of other people to explore ‘thorny issues’,<sup>120</sup> images and actions that they themselves may find troubling or alarming.
- They are committed to taking risks and testing their own boundaries.

### **3. Practice**

#### **3.1 Background to My Work with Guillermo Gómez-Peña**

I first met Moss Beynon-Jukes (MBJ) at Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s residency in Wales in 2003. After the workshop concluded Gómez-Peña supported my company Para Active Theatre in creating the performance *The Zoo-oid Fight Night Experience* (2004) in which MBJ was a lead performer. During the rehearsal period we re-worked his methodology

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<sup>119</sup> Gómez-Peña 2005, p.112

<sup>120</sup> One of Gómez-Peña’s phrases that he used frequently during workshops I attended.

and combined it with our 'physical theatre' approach. The company continued its association with him over the following four years working with him as international artists in: West Bromwich, UK (2005), The Centre for performance Research (2006) and at The Arnolfini, Bristol (2007). I have taught an adapted version of his pedagogy at Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance since 2004 as a visiting director on their European Theatre Arts course. R&D Period 2 utilised this adapted version of Gómez-Peña's pedagogy as the central artistic practice.

### **3.2 The Spectrum of Belief**

Gómez-Peña's vision is based on the idea of the workshop or laboratory as a temporary utopian space that is 'highly politicised, anti-authoritarian, interdisciplinary...multi-racial, poly-gendered and cross-generational'. A space where artists 'could push the boundaries of their fields and identities, take necessary risks and talk back.'<sup>121</sup> Gómez-Peña's exercise The Spectrum<sup>122</sup> was used as a starting point for conceptual exploration of their beliefs. The ensemble was asked to stand in a line imagining two extremes at either end. I then asked a series of questions that increased in complexity and provocation. Some of the more challenging questions relevant to the performance were:

- *Child pornography: Paedophiles castrated or Paedophiles rehabilitated?*
- *Rape: Victims of rape are never to blame or Rape victims may bear some responsibility?*
- *Terrorism: Pro-terrorism or Anti-terrorism e.g. There is a reason to kill for your beliefs or There is never a reason to kill for your beliefs?*

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<sup>121</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Exercises for Rebel Artists, Radical Performance Pedagogy* (Routledge, New York & Oxford, 2011), p.3

<sup>122</sup> Gómez-Peña 2005, pp.107-8

The performers then positioned themselves somewhere on the line and were asked to justify their stance in relation to where they stood. The aim was to provide a space for them to negotiate the binaries of the extremes and to provoke a critical self-examination of their personal beliefs. Through the discomfort they search for ways of asserting themselves amongst their colleagues, as MBJ writes in her feedback:

To be actively encouraged to speak or act without censorship about topics that are loaded or controversial is a rare chance to be able to gauge your opinions and your emotional attachments regarding these opinions in relation to others.<sup>123</sup>

This process allows for a variety of positions and beliefs to co-exist in the room at once and develops trust between participants. As MBJ says: "...‘diversify to unify’ at least temporarily..."<sup>124</sup> It encourages them to expose themselves emotionally in front of each other and can lead to an acceptance and empathy. This is particularly helpful when someone does something in the work that another finds offensive.

### **3.3 The Negotiation of Boundaries**

One of Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s most well known exercises, Poetic Ethnography,<sup>125</sup> is aimed at enabling the performers to negotiate a range of issues from both a personal and an artistic perspective. To summarise:

*One performer plays the role of the Ethnographer (E) and the other of the Specimen (S). (E) examines (S) visually, through smell, listening, touch and the exploration of the physical movement of their body. (S) has the right at any time to stop the exercise, or take a break from it and in this sense it exemplifies the conceptual approach that you could call ‘reverse anthropology’. In that (S) is a willing participant and (E) is*

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<sup>123</sup> Appendix E Performer Evaluations: *MBJ Roundhouse Evaluation*

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Gómez-Peña 2011, pp.61-5

*required to proceed with her examination in the most sensitive and respectful way possible. However (E) can push the boundaries of the exploration of (S) as far as (S) is comfortable with.*

This is a powerful exercise that permits the partners an unusual level of intimate sensory access to one another's bodies and is repeated a number of times during the working process. It develops a negotiation of each other's physical, personal and emotional boundaries and is used to respectfully test one another's limits. This reverses the classical anthropological approach of objectifying the person and instead encourages compassion towards them. The exercises themselves create a professional intimacy and mutual respect to be given to your colleagues as a matter of course.

### **3.4 Tableaux Vivant**

Poetic Ethnography leads into (E) moving the body of (S) to create posed physical images; however the roles are re-framed as the Artist and the Raw Material. The process then follows a fine art approach of utilising the attitude of bricolage<sup>126</sup> and the artful arranging of props and costumes on each other to compose living images. An essential part of this process is to collect, what Gómez-Peña calls, a 'Pop Archeology Bank'<sup>127</sup> that is used to dress the Raw Material. The materials collected by the company and performers were a mix of heavily symbolic items that related to the themes we were exploring. This included items with political, social, personal, religious, ethnic, gender and ideological significance: artefacts with strong cultural or universal meaning such as

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<sup>126</sup> For a contemporary definition see <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/b/bricolage> (accessed 18/09/2016)

<sup>127</sup> Gómez-Peña 2005, pp.112-13

costumes, hats, masks, wigs, fetish items, shoes or accessories, imitation weapons, make-up or body paint.

The first images that the ensemble created using each other as the canvas were around the theme of 'How to Create a God!'. The instruction I gave asked them to project onto their partners a 'glamorous' version of them and exploit their natural physical attributes as if they were celebrities with super powers. The picture of MBJ is one created on her by NE:



Illustration 2. Moss Beynon-Juckles Tableaux Vivant, London, UK, October 2015, Photo: Jonathan Grieve



NE has emphasised MBJ's Englishness and alternative look from the hippy subculture using the union jack, the drums and flowers in the hair. NE contradicts this with red sexy lingerie and the use of a black wig as exaggerated pubic hair. In her arms she has a doll of a black baby that could symbolise extreme 'cultural appropriation', referencing Angelina Jolie and her adoption of 'non-white' children.

### **3.5 Conceptual Exercises in *Selfsploitation***

The tableaux vivant exercises were repeated a number of times to explore different themes. Initially, participants created images on each other; at the next stage, the performers began to create an image on themselves. The ideas for the images were arrived at through a reflective conceptual process and resulted in lists of physical, psychological and social characteristics that could be exploited. The premise was:

*Our political, religious and ideological sympathies emerge from our emotional disposition and the image we have of ourselves. What we identify with in society is based on our personal history and come from how we are treated and seen. We would like to think that our beliefs are rational or a sign of some eternal truth but in fact they are merely an emotional stance.*

#### **Exercise #1: Glamour**

The first exercise explored the more positive side of *selfsploitation*, the 'god' aspect of their personality.

*What are the most socially attractive and acceptable sides of yourself? What are your most obviously appealing characteristics? Like a celebrity, how would you self-glamourise to present the most alluring and charismatic image of yourself to the world? How would you sell yourself to the world?*<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> The following instructions are a summary of each idea and, as part of the rehearsal process, required discussion to clarify them.

## **Exercise #2: Freak**

The second exercise explored the 'demon' and more negative images of themselves.

*What are the most unacceptable sides of your personality? What do you dislike, or what would you never show the world? Ugliness, violence and weirdness sell and are equally, if not sometimes more easily, exploited.*

## **Exercise #3: Beliefs**

Then I asked a very simple question: *What do you believe in?* The asking of this question puts the person on the spot and all of a sudden they do not know what they believe in and *can't see the wood for the trees*. The exercise caused a certain amount of personal agonising over first defining and then committing their personal beliefs to paper. As MBJ says:

I wanted to leave the situation out of personal terror or confusion. When you question things, such as identity, agency, self-exploitation, beliefs and much more...all of one's points of reference are shaken around, and this can be very frightening.<sup>129</sup>

## **Exercise #4: Dogmas**

My final questions were:

*What happens when these beliefs become part of a dogmatic system of belief? How would you turn your list of beliefs into a fanatical dogma and use them to create an ideologically totalitarian society?*

Figure 5. is a selected list of MBJ's answers to the questions. The process then focused on converting the ideas expressed in Fig. 5 into Symbolic Actions utilising self-created tableaux vivant images. At this stage, instead of creating an image on the other person, the partner becomes a mirror providing a commentary on how the symbolism is

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<sup>129</sup> Appendix E Performer Evaluations: *MBJ Roundhouse Evaluation*

being read. The work on the Six Elements, described in Chapter 3, ran parallel to the image-making process, and involved embodying one's personality traits and belief system as physical actions and qualities of movement. The material that was generated was then improvised as a solo within the performance art possession.

Figure 5. MBJ Selfsploitation Exercises

<p><b>GLAMOUR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tits and Ass</li> <li>• White and Rich bitch</li> <li>• Hair: Blonde</li> <li>• Well spoken RP Accent and Language</li> <li>• Ability to please many</li> <li>• Childlike-Innocence-cutey</li> <li>• Sexy</li> <li>• Voice, Dance, Music</li> <li>• Perfectionist</li> <li>• I have a vagina</li> <li>• Tactile</li> </ul>	<p><b>FREAK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebellion</li> <li>• Non conformist</li> <li>• Rude - overt sexually</li> <li>• Guilty for being a woman</li> <li>• Narcissist</li> <li>• Eternally disappointed when things are not perfect, or self hatred</li> <li>• Fascist perfectionism, animist,</li> <li>• Desire to touch</li> <li>• Selfish, egocentric</li> <li>• I have a vagina</li> </ul>
<p><b>BELIEFS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LOVE</li> <li>• Mother Earth- Nature- Natures Principles- Natural Hierarchy</li> <li>• I believe the form of myself is the conscious expression of energy in its primal being</li> <li>• Multiplicity - Multiple Identity</li> </ul>	<p><b>DOGMA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforced Thankfulness. You must give thanks before anything else</li> <li>• Corporal Punishment. Bring out the Rulers</li> <li>• Everyday would be different.</li> <li>• Dictator - There is One Way</li> <li>• Righteousness</li> <li>• Tough Love</li> <li>• Controlled Violence-</li> <li>• Emotionally Uncontrolled Absurdly Happy and Absurdly Tormented</li> </ul>

#### 4. Mamatrix: Goddess and Demoness

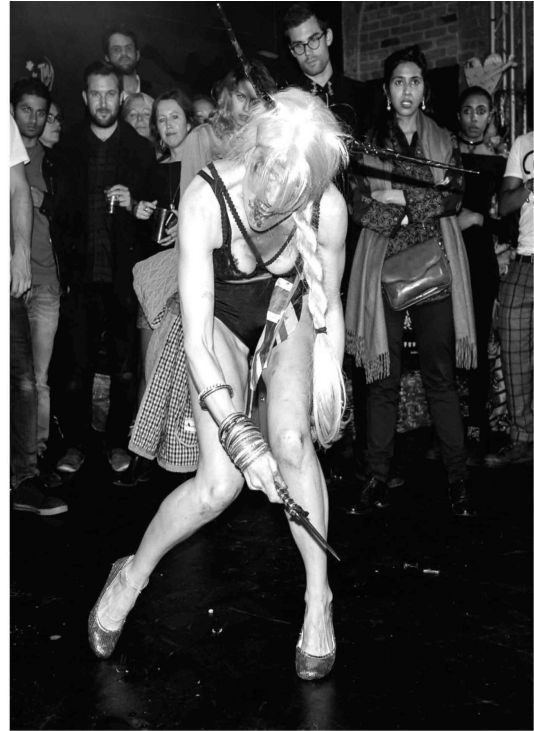
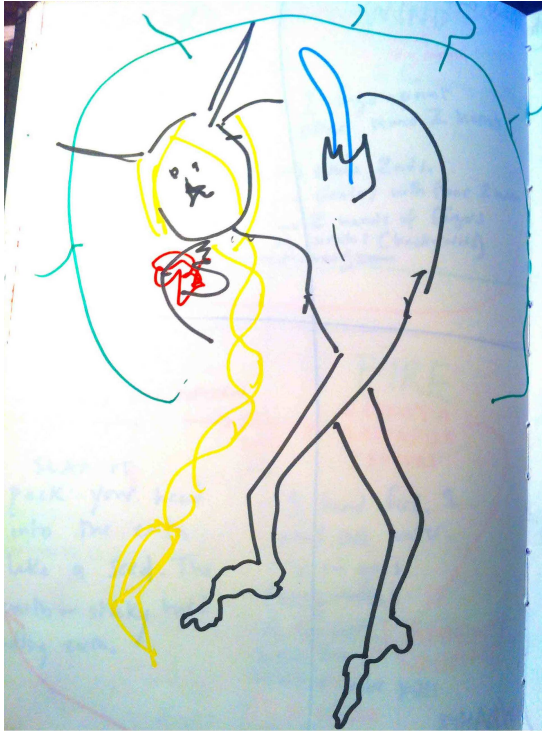


Illustration 3. Mamatrix persona images, London, UK, October 2015, Photos: (clockwise) MBJ, Dimitri Djuric & Jonathan Grieve

#### 4.1 Analysis of the Persona

The photographs above show the work that MBJ did on the persona Mamatrix during R&D Period 2. The work continued during the Production Period when she also created her god persona Baphoma. Visually, Mamatrix is a demon/goddess combination: MBJ exploits her tall, slim, north European 'viking' appearance by adding viciously pointed horns and a blonde wig with pigtails. The image can be read as a demonic femme fatale or an archetypal celebrity blonde. It is an exaggerated stereotypical version of herself that she did not find difficult to do because "Its something that you see all the time everywhere."<sup>130</sup>

However she draws on the dogmatic version of herself in the fascist perfectionist that manifests in a tight but revealing costume that gives the persona a sense of physical and sexual control. She found exploiting this a challenge because "it puts me in a vulnerable position....because of your own self-judgement about...the way you come across to other people".<sup>131</sup> She contradicts the diva image with a Madonnaesque exotic touch using bangles, necklaces and a Hindu bhindi to draw out the 'mother earth' side. The red heels add an element of Wizard of Oz Dorothy-like innocence.

The impact on the audience was varied and aimed at exploiting both their desire and their envy. From my observation as a director I could see that people were sexually attracted to the persona but found it difficult to accept this, and occasionally behaved in denial of their reactions. "The face value of image is so persuasive...you can really

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<sup>130</sup> Appendix C Media: Audio 4. *MBJ Interview Persona*, 00:24 mins

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 00:47 mins

play with the fact.... It's the mirage, its convenient it's the easy way of manipulating people to do things."<sup>132</sup>

There is chaos and aggression in the behaviour of the persona that runs counter to the submissive feminine element. This combination of sexual allure and unpredictable aggression dictates the way that the audience relates to her, and enables her to maintain control during the performance. This contradiction between submissive erotic and aggressive erotic is also very typical of both the exploitation film genre and the media representation of women. However within the context of Exploitation Art "it's liberating...because you're the one who is deciding to do it, no-one else is making you do it for their own gain, it's you doing it...in order to reveal something else"<sup>133</sup>

#### **4.2 Analysis of the Performance Art Possession**

Mamatrix is a kind of European version of Ezili Danto, described in Chapter 3 in the discussion of the Petwo dance. Danto is a mother figure often depicted as the Black Madonna with a child. She is both the protector of children and of women from sexual violence. MBJ is a mother of a 3-year old child and part of the aggression of the persona emerged from her protective side. This came out very early during The Spectrum exercise and the question about paedophilia. Her performance art possession,<sup>134</sup> near the end of *The Passion*, is a revenge act and a sacrifice on behalf of Lady Vendredi. It climaxes with the stabbing of

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 1:18 mins

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 1:50 mins

<sup>134</sup> Appendix C Media Video 3. *Mamatrix Possession*, 1:13:00 mins

Papa Ito, the Christ-like Willing Sacrifice, and priest-rapist-paedophile figure.

Her performance art possession begins with a striptease where she transforms from her male god persona Baphoma into Mamatrix: “The idea of BaphoMA came...with the initial need to create an overarching and protector persona to somehow contain Mamatrix.”<sup>135</sup> Up until this point her gender was disguised and her body covered, and the strip was intended to titillate and exploit the audience: “I play the sexy idiot who can’t put on her shoes to show off her legs.”<sup>136</sup> She ritualistically makes a mess of putting her make-up on, referencing the dictator side of the persona by adding a Hitler moustache. When she enters the audience she has the attitude of a dancer in a gentleman’s club: ‘Mamatrix is a bit of a dominating persona who controls the space through tactility.’<sup>137</sup> She moves through the audience, touching them intimately on the face yet making it clear that they do not have permission to touch her. She runs her hands over them, occasionally stealing their drinks, taking a sip and tossing the rest into the air.

She brings out a knife to stab Pap Ito, wielding it as a phallic symbol in a way that ritually links sex and death. The final Symbolic Action of stabbing him brings her transformation to its climax: here the internal and external aspects of the vertical and the horizontal combine to cause a change for both the performer and audience. To quote MBJ from her performance journal:

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<sup>135</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>136</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 4 *MBJ Roundhouse Evaluation*

<sup>137</sup> Appendix C Media Audio 5. *MBJ Interview Touching* 5.11 mins

“If the symbolic acts on the psyche in a real way [...] I murder with a dagger and I pretend to weep, as I crawl to the dressing room [...] If I am not me I could be her, I can kill, I am a nightmare, I am my worst nightmare, and I have to be this monster every night.”<sup>138</sup>



Illustration 4. Mamatrix Final Persona, Soho Theatre, London, April 2016, UK  
Photo: Dimitri Djuric

The impact on the performer of *Selfsploitation* can be extreme, taking them to emotional excesses through the full embodiment of the

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<sup>138</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 MBJ Soho Evaluation



‘the image made flesh’. However it is important for the performers to contain the work by using the Yanvalou: “It allowed a symbolic door to open and close [...] And more importantly, perhaps, it meant that I could go home as my “normal” self as opposed to my “persona”. A kind of washing, a neutralising, a calming of the nervous system.”<sup>139</sup>

#### **4.3 The Symbolic Transaction: the exploitation of tactility**

Mamatrix controls the space through a tactility that comes directly from MBJ’s *Selfsploitation*. She describes it as the desire for wanting to connect with people and sees it as part of her personal artistic research into what touch is and why we use it.<sup>140</sup> The exploration of touch as a Symbolic Action, on a phenomenological level, connects to a need for trust or family<sup>141</sup> and relates to the concept of Being a Part Of Things. It triggers strong reactions and profound feelings that are difficult for her to discuss. The feelings that emerge through the use of tactility are used to build the energetic state of the performer and contribute to her transformation into the persona.

The action of touching the audience (placing a hand on the face, stealing a drink, stroking their hair or even kissing them) transgresses the audience’s personal boundaries because in the moment of doing it the performer does not have explicit permission. Nevertheless, within the overall dramaturgy of the performance we have already gained the audience’s consent to the overstepping of interpersonal limits, this is discussed further in the following chapter. What we are concerned with

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Appendix C Media Audio 5. *MBJ Interview Touching* 4.20 mins

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 5.11 mins

is how the Symbolic Action causes the autonomous relationship between the performers and the audiences to develop. The efficacy for the performer is clearly the Autonomy she achieves through a sense of intimacy, one performed spontaneously; the act of touching is not planned “It’s a tactile reading of an audience”<sup>142</sup> and is performed in reaction to the cues that she gets from them. The efficacy for the audience is in the authentic, direct and horizontal execution of the contact she has with them; as MBJ says, the action of touching “feels good, it feels like connection is possible.”<sup>143</sup> In spite of this, the reactions from the audience are not always easy to manage, there is a risk and a danger to it and there were times when an audience member panicked or was scared. However this was an exception and MBJ felt that in general people were excited to be acknowledged and made present in the performance, because, in that moment of connection “you can’t be judging...you’re just actually present...you’re not witnessing only but also experiencing, so for a minute you don’t have to think about it.”<sup>144</sup>

MBJ’s Symbolic Action of touching had a cumulative effect on the other performers in the long-term creative process. During R&D Period 2 she was the only performer who consistently made physical contact with the audience. However, by the time we were at Soho Theatre with the finished production each performer had their own tactile relationship with the audience. This was not something that I consciously directed into the

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 5.47 mins

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 7.14 mins

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 8.57 mins

work but instead it emerged spontaneously from the sense of freedom and autonomy that the performers experienced during performance.



Illustration 5. Audience Hug, Soho Theatre, London UK, April 2016, Photo: Carrie Hitchman

On the sixth night there was a spontaneous audience hug at the end of the show. From a directorial point of view this was not something I specifically aimed for because of the risk of it being a forced or inauthentic moment; however some audience members were sufficiently motivated to behave as catalysts for this spontaneous action. The audience behaviour could suggest that the horizontal aim of creating an autonomous relationship between the audience and the performers had

been achieved in this self-aware, spontaneous and intimate moment. As audience member Andrea Foa says “All I wanted to do was to dance, and touch and be touched, and that’s a great thing to achieve for a show.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Appendix D *Audience Feedback*

## **Chapter 5 Symbolic Action and the Audience**

### **1. A Transactional Approach to Immersive Theatre**

While I was directing *The Passion* I had in mind the artistic aim of 'possessing' the audience in the terms set forth as Autonomy and Being a Part of Things. However the artistic structuring was intuitive as much as a conscious patterning of the Symbolic Action; as such this analysis of the transactions is done in retrospect. The transactions build in complexity in order to gain the audience's consent to the transgression of their boundaries, enabling us to give them permission to act freely and feel part of the performance.

The premise for this refers back to Berne's analysis of ritual as the simplest social occasion. Ritual is based on a series of parentally regulated traditional transactions that are formal and relatively easy for the participants to follow. The advantage of this for the participant is that they can join in without being spontaneous, or challenged to reveal anything publicly about themselves. In exchange they receive a sense of being part of the occasion. The controlled nature of ritual provides a safe way of experiencing danger and excitement while reassuring the audience that they are protected. This safety and control is parentally guided and established through the literal naming of leaders or gods in parental terms: God the Father, for example. Lady Vendredi presides over the ritual of *The Passion* as the embodiment of the nurturing mother goddess. She formally structures the ritual to gain the audience's consent and eventually gives permission to the audience for a freer,

more unconstrained and intimate experience. *The Passion* follows the two phases that Berne describes: “(1) a phase in which transactions are carried on under rigid Parental strictures (2) a phase of Parental license, in which the Child is allowed more or less complete transactional freedom, resulting in an orgy.”<sup>146</sup>

Transactional Analysis (TA) is based on a phenomenological approach to the ego and what Eric Berne calls ‘Ego-states’. He provides a structural analysis of the ego dividing it into the Parent, Adult and the Child or PAC. The clinical basis for this is the observation that Ego-states of former age levels are retained by an individual.<sup>147</sup> Ego-states in TA “are not concepts, like Superego, Ego or Id, but phenomenological realities”<sup>148</sup> that represent mental states. On an operational level they are observable through specific behaviours, demeanours, gestures, tones of voice and vocabulary.

The Parent Ego-state<sup>149</sup> is identificatory and can be said to have been activated if the individual literally behaves as their own parents would ‘in response to child-like behaviour’. Berne divides the Parent into two typical examples, the Controlling or Critical Parent,<sup>150</sup> who is concerned with setting boundaries and passing on their prejudices and beliefs to the Child:<sup>151</sup> and the Nurturing Parent concerned with administering love, care, sympathy and meeting the immediate needs of

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<sup>146</sup> Berne 1964, p.34

<sup>147</sup> Berne 1961, p.19. At the time of Berne’s writing it had already been established from clinical research that “...ego-states ‘can be re-cathected directly under special conditions; for instance in hypnosis, in dreams and in psychosis’”

<sup>148</sup> Berne 1961, p.24

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.76

<sup>150</sup> Ian Stewart & Vann Joines, *TA Today, A New Introduction To Transactional Analysis* (Lifespace Publishing, Nottingham England, 1987), p.25

<sup>151</sup> Berne 1961, p.76

the Child. As Berne points out, there are professionals such as priests or nurses who earn a living from publically embodying this Ego-state.

The Adult is concerned with data-processing and daily activities that involve reality-testing and taking decisions according to what is happening in the external environment. Operationally it is observed when someone behaves appropriately to a situation according to age and experience. It is the Adult who experiences autonomous feelings and behaviours that respond to the here and now.

The Child represents regressive states and when activated brings up the relics of one's own childhood in response to someone acting parentally. It is divided into the Adapted Child who re-configures their thinking and behaviour to meet parental demands exhibited as obedience, rebellion or withdrawal: and the Free Child who acts without consideration of parental boundaries and can operate independently. The positive side of the Free Child enables the person to access playful and creative reactions, and the negative side may manifest as reckless or naïve behavior.

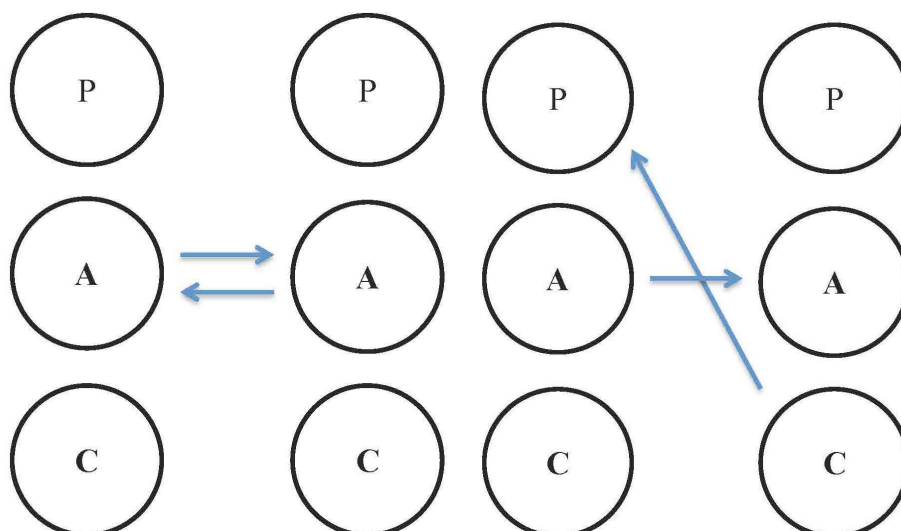
TA proper is the analysis of transactions between Ego-states, and enables one to identify "which Ego-state implemented the transactional stimulus, and which Ego-state executed the transactional response."<sup>152</sup> A simple example of an Adult to Adult transaction is an audience member, who when asked by the usher for their ticket, as a responsible adult has it ready, gives it to them and is allowed into the theatre. It is what Berne describes as complementary transaction: the Adult of the

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<sup>152</sup> Berne 1964, p.28

usher is responded to with the Adult of the audience member. TA is mainly concerned with crossed transactions in which conflict or confusion arises through misaligned Ego-state responses. The audience member enters the confusing immersive space of *The Passion* and a performer greets them, indicating with a practical Adult instruction where to stand. In wanting to comply with the performer's instructions the audience member obeys, but experiences a great deal of awkwardness in taking these few steps across the space, worrying whether they are doing exactly what was expected of them. The audience member reverts to the state of an Adapted Child in wanting to please the misperceived Parent figure of the performer, and instead of assessing the situation as an Adult to Adult transaction, they respond with a crossed transaction to the performer as a Controlling Parent. This is a small example of what is commonly known in classical psychoanalysis as 'transference': the projection by the analysand onto the analyst of feelings towards their actual parents. Berne expresses these transactions diagrammatically:

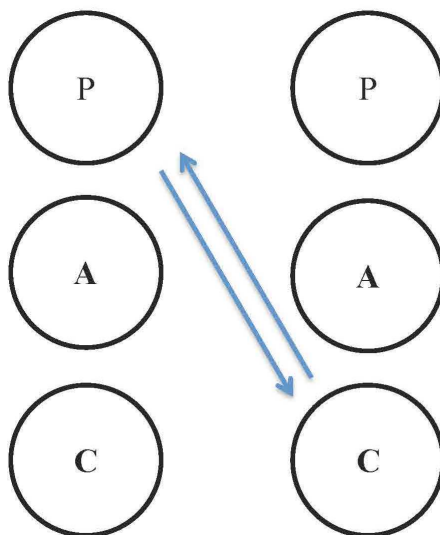
Figure 6. Complementary Transaction Crossed Transaction





The overall transactional aim of *The Passion* is to create a complementary Parent to Child transaction between Lady Vendredi, as the parental goddess figure (with the performers in *loco parentis*), and the audience, as the child-like followers of the cult of the Daughters of Manifestation. The ensemble alternates between Controlling and Nurturing parental figures with the audience initially operating as the Adapted Child. The gaining of the audience's consent in this transaction allows the ensemble to give them permission to act as the Free Child.

Fig 8. Parent to Child Complementary Transaction



Autonomy and Being a Part of Things are the realm of the Adult and result from the awareness of making choices spontaneously from the range that are available to generate a sense of intimacy. However, “It is the proper function of the “healthy” Child to motivate the data-processing and programming of the Adult to obtain the greatest amount of

gratification for itself”;<sup>153</sup> and gaining the audience’s cathexis<sup>154</sup> with the Child activates the sense of Adult Autonomy.

TA as a therapy is focused on transactions between individuals. Berne was not at all concerned with ritual so to apply this method to the theatre is unorthodox. It is made possible because the performance takes place in the here and now using the artistic framing of immersive or interactive theatre. The improvisation on a nightly basis removes pre-meditation and makes programmed responses from the audience less likely. Further to this is an ambivalence regarding the fictional nature of the performance, and as one audience member remarked “I felt I was part of a sisterhood, at once real, simulated and entirely false.”<sup>155</sup> We cast doubt on its inauthenticity through combining: traditional vodou dance/music, artistic experimentation, the ensemble’s cross-cultural ethnic mix and the fact that the percussionists are from authentic ritual traditions. To explore the authentic in relationship to the inauthentic I draw on Gómez-Peña’s cultural analysis that “neotribalism is loosely based (allegedly) on crosscultural performance rituals inspired by “ancient rites,” and spiced with collective drumming, aficionado performance art, and pop “anarchist” politics. The goal is collective “ecstasy.”<sup>156</sup> The aim is not to convince the audience of the authenticity of the performance, but instead to cast doubts on the fiction, its inauthenticity. The doubts over the inauthentic nature of the work implicate the audience in the ‘realness’ of the action, increasing the

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<sup>153</sup> Berne 1961, p.78

<sup>154</sup> Berne 1961, p.32. Berne uses cathexis as the commonly accepted term for describing a psychic shift to an Ego-state.

<sup>155</sup> Appendix D Audience Feedback, *Elizabeth Noble*

<sup>156</sup> Gómez-Peña 2005, p.62

probability that their responses will be spontaneous, in spite of any resistance they may have.

## **2. The Symbolic Transactions**

### **i. The Purification Ritual**

*The Passion* begins with the Purification Ritual 20 minutes before the audience enters it is conceived as a real ritual using the Yanvalou as the main Symbolic Action. The first transaction is a blessing that takes place between NE, as Lady Vendredi, and the ensemble. NE takes the cup of water and, pouring a little into the hands of each the performers and the director, says a prayer. It is a straightforward Parent to Child transaction that establishes her as the mistress of ceremonies. The most important transactional aspect is the symbolic hand over of power from myself, as the director, to NE as the lead performer. From here on in I am now an assistant and a witness and it is Lady Vendredi who leads the performance from the inside.

As previously discussed, The Purification Ritual opens the performance with the symbolic use of the Yanvalou to put the performers into a state of receptivity. When the audience enters into the space the energy is already at a high level of intensity and they walk into something that is already happening. The role of the audience is as a temporary congregation; however they did not know in advance the precise nature of what they were coming to see. The conventional theatre experience of taking a seat to watch a show is reversed, but rather than make it clear to the audience what to do, this section is

designed to increase anxiety and ritually establish the space as ours. Cross transactions are helpful here to begin to de-activate stereotypical 'theatrical' reactions from the audience.

## **ii. The Opening Ceremony**

The Opening Ceremony is a ritual to Papa Legba that combines the appearance of the traditional with the sensibility of pop culture. Having never experienced a vodou ritual the issue of authenticity is important and there was no pretence that what we were creating was genuine. However it is presented in a deadly serious way to give the appearance of authenticity. To assist the audience in their familiarity with the ritual, procedural aspects of the Holy Communion were added.

The inauthenticity is compromised by the image of the cast: NE is a black Nigerian woman, the percussionists Randy Lester and Gerardo De Armas are black Cubans and other members of the cast are of mixed African/European cultural origin or white British. There is no opportunity for the audience to place or stereotype the origin of the performers, leaving the possibility of authenticity open. The Opening Ceremony begins with a traditional vodou song that is sung by MBJ,<sup>157</sup> who is both blonde and English, it is a statement of this confused authenticity. The performers' costuming and persona at this point are an exaggerated performance version of themselves in their 'Sunday best'. Who are attending, in Gómez-Peña's words, "A participatory ritual performance through which we get to experience (or rather to believe we are

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<sup>157</sup> Appendix C Media Video 1. *Traditional Song*, 0:23:09 mins

experiencing) an intensified sense of ourselves and of the many worlds we have lost for good.”<sup>158</sup>

The first transaction in the Opening Ceremony is the blessing and the libation (Water),<sup>159</sup> this starts to establish Lady Vendredi as the parental priestess figure in relation to her acolytes. This is followed by a traditional salutation to the musicians and specifically to the drum as the medium through which we enter the spirit world. The ritual continues with a choreographic drawing of the veve (Air)<sup>160</sup> as a Symbolic Transaction between the performers and the imagined higher power of Papa Legba: “These *vévé* reveal the presence of the god in a tangible form... intended to establish a close link between the object and the divinity. ...Merely by tracing them out a priest puts pressure on the *loa* and compels them to appear.”<sup>161</sup>

The next part of the ceremony (Earth)<sup>162</sup> is the first direct transaction between the performers and the audience. The popcorn is both a common offering to Papa Legba, symbolic of the Eucharist and also a reference to the ‘pop’ communion of its consumption at the cinema. The transaction with the audience is low risk and they can take it or leave it as they wish. In isolation it is a simple action of giving however in the context of the ceremony it is a Parent to Child transaction that involves the audience taking on the status of the uninitiated. It functions as an invitation to be part of the performance, and it is important that the audience has the real option to turn it down.

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<sup>158</sup> Gómez-Peña 2005, p.62

<sup>159</sup> Appendix C Media Video 2. *Water – Libation*, 0:18:53 mins

<sup>160</sup> Appendix C Media Video 2. *Air - Veve*, 0:21:06 mins

<sup>161</sup> Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (Andre Deutsch, London, 1972), p.165

<sup>162</sup> Appendix C Media Video 2. *Air - Earth - Offering of popcorn*, 0:22:26 mins

Nonetheless we need the majority of the audience to accept the offering and risk their refusal while giving the impression that we do not mind.

This is followed by (Fire),<sup>163</sup> the sacrifice of Lady Vendredi as the Black Female Christ; the symbolic striking of her by the ensemble symbolises the piercing of Christ by Longinus with the spear of destiny. This replaces the stereotypical image of the ritual sacrifice of a chicken in vodou ceremonies and avoids any display that would give the appearance of earnest authenticity. This leads to a crescendo and a Yanvalou choreography representing the lamentation and tears of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross. By the end of The Opening Ceremony the transactions have established Lady Vendredi as the mother priestess figure.

### **iii. House Rules**

In order to build the relationship with the audience I make a number of assumptions that contribute to the Parent to Child transaction. The first one is that they want to be entertained and feel part of the show. The mysterious and alienating tone of the Opening Ceremony is reversed in House Rules, as Lady Vendredi performs a solo interactive dance track called *Dirty Chicken* about food, sex and dancing; an indication of parental permission.

To put the audience at ease, Lady Vendredi beckons them forward and, in the tradition of ritual theatre, proceeds to tell them what will happen. Reading from the programme's order of service she

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<sup>163</sup> Appendix C Media Video 2. *Fire – Sacrifice*, 0:23:29 mins

explains content of the ritual. The switch from not knowing what is happening to being told what will happen aims to take the edge off their anxiety or confusion and present the parental figure of Lady Vendredi, as being in control of the performance. The next assumption is that the audience, in role of the Adapted Child, wants to be told what to do. They do not need to know exactly is happening but they do need to know how to behave, and the popular format of the music gig requires no explanation; Dirty Chicken is a clear invitation to dance. It builds to a musical drop<sup>164</sup> derived from the Gospel tradition that is used to take the audience through a sequence of movements. They are directed to move in time with Lady Vendredi to the right, left, backwards, to the floor and finally to run around and change where they are in the theatre. Functioning as an audience warm-up its structural purpose is to teach them to move quickly and create different spatial arrangements for the scenes. However from a transactional perspective the Parent gives the Child permission to be free, with the unspoken suggestion that it is a freedom within parameters.

The overall assumption is that as a unit the audience is susceptible to manipulation. Taken as a whole they will do whatever you ask them to because they want to be included, enjoy themselves and please you. The process of gaining their consent involves a gradual winning over of the majority, some you never win over and will watch from the sides or even leave, but as a director one has to accept this as a necessary risk. However this is not cold manipulation, it is approached

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<sup>164</sup> Appendix C Media Video 1 *Musical drop*, 0:36:24 mins

through Lady Vendredi as the Nurturing Parent who treats them with empathy, praises them and meets their needs by bestowing on them the pleasure of enjoying themselves.

#### **iv. The Womb Mass**

The Womb Mass is structured around a track called Bathed in Love with phrases from Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, set to the Kongo rhythm and dedicated to Ezili Freda, the vodou lwa of love. It explicitly sets up the cult of The Daughters of Manifestation and the revering of the woman as the divine mother. Lady Vendredi stands in as the physical embodiment of the goddess, but here she has only a ceremonial function, instead it is the ensemble, her acolytes, who do the work of allowing the audience to project the female parental role onto her.

It begins with the House of Flow<sup>165</sup> and the introduction of MJB's god persona Baphoma. The image is based on occultist Eliphas Levi's androgynous earth god Baphomet: bearded with outsized hands and the illuminati eye in the pyramid on her head. Baphoma leads Venus in Chains (Jennifer MT White), the confused and innocent seeker of truth, back to the source of life: the vagina of the mother. The scene switches in style to an absurd expressionist comic skit, as Venus, who wears a pink hijab, Mickey Mouse ears and a phallic symbol on her forehead, is sexually groped by the exploitative guru Baphoma, on her way to enlightenment. The stylistic change is designed to throw the audience's expectations off balance and give them some time to stand back and watch.

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<sup>165</sup> Appendix C Media Video 1 *House of Flow*, 0:40:25 mins



Venus reaches up inside her wedding dress and pulls out a set of teeth, symbolising the Vagina Dentata and the demasculinization of the male, and gives them to Lady Vendredi. Inside is symbolic menstrual blood used to bless the audience with. The atmosphere relaxes allowing the audience to talk, and the two acolytes, Baphoma with his big hands, encourage the audience to come to the stage to be blessed by Lady Vendredi, and receive the mark of the menstrual blood on their foreheads. The Symbolic Action of the blessing signifies the acceptance by the audience, including the men, of temporarily joining our fictional cult. This implicitly creates the Nurturing Parent to Adapted Child transaction; obedient if they come, rebellious or withdrawn if they do not.

#### **v. The Veneration of the Woman**

The Womb Mass continues with The Veneration of the Woman<sup>166</sup> and begins with the ceremonial entrances of Paracossada played by Fabiola Santana (FS), and Papa Ito: The Willing Sacrifice. FS, who is the youngest and least experienced actress in the ensemble, leads the audience through a text-based intimate Parent to Child ritual Symbolic Transaction. She is a conservatoire trained ballet and contemporary dancer with very little text training, but succeeded in exploiting several aspects of her personality to embody both the Controlling and the Nurturing Parent. Her empathy towards people in general was crucial for generating a connection with the audience, and a manipulative controlling side was used at times to tell the audience off as if they were naughty children.

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<sup>166</sup> Appendix C Media Video 1 *The Veneration of the Woman*, 0:50:00 mins

She invites the audience closer telling them not to be shy, and, introducing the theme of the worship of the female and the submission of the male, she reveals to them that they will undergo a rebirth through a ritual confession. FS leads an adapted version of crossing yourself for the audience to participate in: in the name of the mother, the daughter and the grandmother, they touch their foreheads, hearts and vaginas. Lady Vendredi and Papa Ito stand at the front of the stage demonstrating the action we want the audience to follow. FS is strict, because at this stage there are no excuses for lack of participation in this low risk transaction.

Up to this point the transactions between the performers and the audience have been building in complexity, and now we switch to a transaction between audience members. Their willing participation is crucial for the autonomous relationship between themselves and the ensemble to develop. FS asks the women to find their man. This is a potentially difficult request in this era of complex gender identity. So FS references the variety available to encourage men and men, and women and women to also pair up, and reinforcing the Nurturing Parent she says: 'we are all children in the eyes of the mother'. They are to told stare into each other's eyes and the woman, in call and response with FS, makes a statement of female independence. The man, staring into the woman's eyes, is asked to put his hand on the belly of the woman and, repeating after FS, says: "I have abused women", this shocking statement symbolically subordinates the role of the male signifying a ritual surrender to the idea of womanhood.

However, FS states, redemption is possible for the man, and placing power into the hands of the woman tells her to lower the man to his knees. The man is then told to confess into the belly of the woman: “What is the worst thing you ever said to your mother?” The audience is finally given a private intimate Symbolic Transaction of their own. There was often laughter from the audience which acknowledged the nature of the ritual as an ‘ice-breaker’, and it was this humorous release of inhibitions that enabled the ritual to work consistently. When they stood they were praised for having confessed and transformed into ‘new men’, and on occasions this would turn into an arms raised, evangelical-style spontaneous release of clapping and cheering of their final initiation into the cult.

This was a potentially excruciatingly embarrassing section of the performance, however the spontaneous reaction suggested that some kind of real transaction had taken place between the audience members. It worked because the simple transaction of saying hello, looking into each other’s eyes and physically touching, was framed within a ritualised confession. The reversal of power and the vulnerable self-deprecation of the male created a Symbolic Transaction that disinhibited the audience and put them on an emotional high. It gave them sense of Being a Part of Things and a ritualized experience of spontaneity and intimacy occurring in the here and now. At this point we had finally gained the consent of the audience enabling us to give them permission to act freely through the cathexis with the Free Child.

*The Passion* proceeds with a series of performance art possessions including NE's Ezili Danto possession (Chapter 3), during which the transactions with the audience become less organised and more personal: direct or spontaneous. They build towards MBJ's Mamatrix possession (Chapter 4) and the sacrifice of Papa Ito, after which the formal nature of the ritual begins to disintegrate. The entrance of the Ghede and NE's Baron Samedi persona in the final act (Chapter 2), intended to create Berne's 'phase of Parental license' and 'transactional freedom'<sup>167</sup> however this was rarely fully achieved at Soho Theatre. In part this was due to having to adhere to a strict time limit and in part to the anxiety, from a health and safety angle, that the unpredictable nature of the audience interaction caused the theatre's Operations Department. The continual changes, live improvisation and occasional rebellious behaviour, placed the company in the roles of the Free and Adapted Child up against the Controlling Parent figure of the theatre itself. I, as the director, was being 'told off' on a daily basis and had to find solutions to maintain the integrity of the production while fulfilling the legal demands of the theatre. The transactional freedom that we had aimed at had become anarchic and to some extent dysfunctional.

By the second week we had the timing of the performance under control and arrived at the solution of ending by including the audience in a Closing Ceremony,<sup>168</sup> based on the Yanvalou closing from our daily

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<sup>167</sup> Berne 1964, p.34

<sup>168</sup> Appendix C Media Video 1 *Closing Ceremony*, 1:30:15 mins

training. This resulted in a calmer resolution to the performance that saw

Lady Vendredi reasserting her Parental role, as one reviewer remarked:

In the true essence of a god, Lady Vendredi brought joy and wrath. Her final costume was that of a priest, not a white christian priest, but a black priestess with a painted white face, hat, two tailed coat and a cane. The kind of priestess who could bring us back together, all of us holding hands in a circle. I left with my belly full, feeling like I had been taken to church, a church for people like me.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Online review Hysteria <http://www.hystericalfeminisms.com/passion-lady-vendredi/>  
(accessed 24/06/2016)

## Conclusions on Being a Part of Things

I had initially thought that the transpersonal or 'spiritual' aspect, defined as Being a Part of Things, would form a larger part of the thesis. As we continued through rehearsals and performances it became apparent that experiences such as trance, perceptual hallucinations and possession were not predictable, and I was not in a position to direct them into the performance. These experiences, though very revealing, were also occasionally disturbing for the performers, and on reflection, often too difficult to write about whilst maintaining their integrity and personal significance to the individuals involved. However I offer here a few small examples, one of which occurred during the blessing at the beginning of the Purification Ritual.

NE began the blessing by offering the cup to the performers who would put their fingers into it to take the water and put it on their faces. Halfway through the run, NE was suddenly unable to perform this action and became very upset. Initially she would not tell me what the problem was, but eventually admitted that it was because when the ensemble put their fingers into the cup, she felt like they were putting their fingers into her vagina. As a researcher, this was a very literal example of Being a Part of Things, where the performer had physically identified with the symbolism of the cup at a sensory level. MBJ interpreted this experience as a ritualised "reconciliation with her womanhood."<sup>170</sup> However, as a director, this phenomenological experience was operationally impractical, and the following day we changed it and she poured the water into the

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<sup>170</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

hands of the person receiving the blessing.

Nonetheless, these types of experiences were common amongst the ensemble, as Ignacio Jarquin says: “in Berlin, I had...the experience of a trance which I am still to digest emotionally. Don't know...how this would fit within my artistic practice. I felt...an intense sense of connection, of going beyond myself.”<sup>171</sup> MBJ says “Petwo put me into trance very easily”<sup>172</sup> and goes on to say:

There were...moments where I didn't feel wholly myself. As if I was myself and the other. I remember a couple of moments where I did not know if I was my own persona or that which belonged to somebody else, no longer than about 5-7 seconds...I like to wonder if we can experience for a fraction of a minute the embodied experiences of the other.<sup>173</sup>

In our conversations with audience members, we learnt that they also were experiencing very private internal changes:

I reacted to it with my body more than with my head, which was unsettling... My emotions were all over the place but the strongest sensations were physical...There was a lot of ritual and I found this very soothing. One in particular set off a very private response to some work I'd done in the past, a job I really had hated. I felt like some vital incantation was taking place on my behalf to make sense of it.<sup>174</sup>

The Symbolic Action created private internal experiences that do not always accommodate the extroverted experience of live performance, and have to be left to the individual to process away from the intervention of the director.

TA does not take into account spiritual experience, the emphasis is on awareness, spontaneity and intimacy to provide the satisfaction of

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<sup>171</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, *6 IJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, *2 MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>174</sup> Appendix D Audience Feedback, *Ellis*

unmediated connection with other people. The efficacy of a Symbolic Action is in the sense of the greater connection it gives to the 'worlds out there'; that is to say that its existential function is to make us feel more complete and actively part of the world that we live in. In the final analysis, as an artist I had to be satisfied that the primary message of experiencing a sense of autonomy and freedom was being received:

I felt inspired by the joy *The Passion* gave to everyone: at once freely, but also asking for consent - looking, looking for a space of liberation. Offering the audience the chance to do the same thing.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Appendix D Audience Feedback, *Elizabeth Noble*



# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Biographies

### **Zsuzsa Parrag – Haitian Vodou Dance Teacher and Choreographer**

She has worked as a dance teacher for twenty years in Port-au-Prince (Haiti), Berlin and Hungary. She began studying oriental dance in 1992 with Ruth Nuriya Macia for whom she worked for several years as a teacher until she founded her own dance school " Art Oriental " in 2003 in Berlin. In addition to the oriental dance her great love belongs to the Vodou dances of Haiti which she studied in Port-au-Prince with her teacher Florencia Pierre. Now she teaches not only in Germany but also regularly in Greece and England. She was appointed Associate of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin of 2010.

<http://www.art-oriental.de/>

**See online programme for full cast details:**

<http://www.nitrobeat.co.uk/projects/passion-programme/#>

### **Jonathan Grieve – Director & Deviser**

A director, deviser, writer and musician, Jonathan Grieve first began his artistic journey as a young man playing in several Mod bands in the early 1980's. His ultimate break-through in music was his creation of the experimental band Contrastate in 1987, releasing multiple albums and still touring to the present day. He later came across Artaud, Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook who energized him to pursue an education in theatre. He attended The University of Birmingham to study Drama and Theatre Arts in 1989. He participated in training workshops with actors from the Grotowski's Laboratory, Roy Hart Theatre and The Odin Teatret. Grieve also had a brief flirtation with dance theatre and dramatherapy before forming Para Active Theatre in 1993, where he was Artistic Director for thirteen years. Para Active Theatre created an outlet for a series of innovative productions combining the work of Grotowski, Barba, martial arts, Indian classical dance, music, vocal training, improvisation and interactive performances. He has taught at numerous universities and has been a visiting director at Rose Bruford College since 2004. Grieve has directed over forty five productions including a guest director credit on the five-star, 6 hour long, over night production of Hotel Medea at the Edinburgh Festival in 2011.

### **Nwando Ebizie – Performer & Composer**

Nwando Ebizie is an experimental performance artist, musician, producer, DJ and dancer from Nigeria. She is trained in classical piano, electronic music production, physical theatre and a variety of dance forms ranging from contemporary to aerial arts. She has released three singles and a 4-track EP to date gaining her a cult following. Her sound encompasses traditional Haitian voodoo grooves through to global bass, jazz, hip-hop, African tribal and experimental music. She has worked with a wide range of world-class musicians, artists and producers including LV, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Peaches and Princess Superstar.

### **Moss Beynon-Juckes – Performer & Composer**

Born in Sydney, Australia, Juckes graduated from Roehampton University with a BA in Dance Theatre and Live Art. After graduation, she went on to create and produce her own work with a co-created independent ensemble, Hand to

Mouth, who performed at the Cockpit Theatre and Shoreditch Warehouses, between 2006 and 2007. She has gone on to perform in Documenta 13, The Tate Modern, Sophiensalle, and The Round House, working with Tino Sehgal, Javier Cura, Jule Flierl and many other acclaimed artists.

#### **Fabiola Santana - Performer**

Santana is a highly trained contemporary dancer who has worked on a number of acclaimed performances such as Triptych at The Barbican, London, and Hotel Medea, a five-star immersive performance at The South Bank 2012. Her expertise has allowed her to head and facilitate workshops both locally and internationally while continuing her MA research in Contemporary Dance, specialising in the embodiment of imagery as a catalyst for creativity and artistry.

#### **Jennifer Muteteli Taylor White - Performer**

From Sierra Leone, Muteteli, has successfully showcased her work across the globe. After graduating from The University of Surrey, Roehampton, with a degree in Dance Studies and Philosophy, she ventured to Helsinki to train at The Mime Centre where she gained a Diploma in Physical Theatre and Mime. A few years later, she attended Ecole Philippe Gaulier, Paris. Muteleli, along with a few other graduates founded a company and produced their first professional show at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2005. Since then she has performed solo shows for The Roundhouse & Stratford Circus, and devised work at Southwark Cathedral, Amnesty International and Camden Peoples Theatre. She is also the co-founder and curator of Studio 180, artist studios and events space in London.

#### **Ignacio Jarquin – Performer & Vocal Coach**

Born in Mexico City. He studied classical music at Vienna University, but is also an avid singer, actor and vocal coach, who earned an Orchestra Conductor diploma, with Distinction, from the Vienna Conservatory in 1991.

After his professional début as a répétiteur and conductor at the Stadt Theater in St Pölten he moved to Paris where he founded and directed his own Orchestra and Opera Company. With his worldly training and natural talent, Jarquin was head hunted to design and create corporate events for the French TV Channel TF1. In 2004 he began focusing more on his singing, and in later years found himself in the presence of voice masters Carol Baggott-Forte and Rachel Bersier, organizing Master Classes in advanced singing technique with Bernier in France and Germany. In 2006 he made his début as an actor-singer in the award-winning production of The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster.

#### **Gerardo De Armas Sarria – Lead Percussionist**

Gerardo is from Havana, Cuba and came to the UK in 2010. He grew up in a family and neighbourhood that are deeply involved with Afro Cuban cultural representations (Rumba, Palo, Abakua, Yoruba amongst others). At the age of 20 he began his training in Afro Cuban percussion. He has played with a number of groups including Columbia del Puerto, Danza Cuba and Yoruba Andabo - which is a company made up of seventeen artists, including singers, percussionists and dancers who professionally perform the most important genres of both religious and profane music within the Africans roots of Cuban culture. They are one of the most important Afro Cuban Group worldwide and won the Latin Grammy Award in 2001.

**Randy Lester - Percussion**

Born in Santiago de Cuba. Professional percussionist with more than 20 years experience who plays congas, bongos, cajon, timbal, bata, minor percussion and drum kit.

## Appendix B: Timeline of The Passion of Lady Vendredi

### 2013

June

#### **Award**

£8,600 award from Arts Council Grants for the Arts for R&D 1

*Lady Vendredi: Baadass Blood Quest*

July

#### **Research and Development Period 1**

Public Haitian dance workshop led by Zsuzsa Parrag produced by MAS Productions at Chisenhale Dance Centre, London, UK

Performance with Zsuzsa Parrag and Artful Badger at Wilderness Festival, Oxfordshire, UK

3 Day Secular Ecstatic Art Workshop  
Artist Studios, Tottenham, London, UK

2-week R&D and rehearsal process and one performance of *Lady Vendredi: Baadass Blood Quest* with choreography by Zsuzsa Parrag  
Lime Wharf, Hackney, London, UK

November

#### **Training**

Haitian Dance Workshop with Zsuzsa Parrag Dalston, London, UK

### 2014

February

#### **Training**

Public Haitian dance workshop led by Zsuzsa Parrag produced by MAS Productions at Trip Space, Hackney, London, UK

March

Public Haitian dance workshop led by Zsuzsa Parrag produced by MAS Productions at Artist Studios, Manor House, London, UK

May

#### **Performance**

Duet version of *Lady Vendredi: Baadass Blood Quest*  
at State of Magick conference, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK

July

#### **Performance**

Chorus version of *Lady Vendredi: Baadass Blood Quest*  
at Latitude Festival, Henham Park, Suffolk, UK

### 2015

March

#### **Training**

Haitian Dance Workshop with Zsuzsa Parrag Limehouse, London, UK

- June            **Awards for Lady Vendredi: Battle Cry! R&D 2**  
 £13,800 Arts Council Award  
 £1,500 PRSF Award
- Research and Development Period 2**  
 Secular Ecstatic Art 5-day workshop to performance  
 Apiary Studios, Hackney, London, UK
- July             Solo Performance at Trip Space, Hackney, London, UK
- August          Gig performance at Africa Utopia festival  
 South Bank Centre, London, UK
- October        Full length performance for 2 Nights of *Lady Vendredi: Battle Cry!*  
 Roundhouse, Camden Town, London, UK
- November      **Awards for *The Passion of Lady Vendredi***  
 32,000 Arts Council Award  
 £3,000 PRSF Award
- 2016**            ***The Passion of Lady Vendredi* Production Period**
- January        **Education**  
 Devised a full length show at Forge Initiative, Guildford, UK
- February       **Gig**  
*Lady Vendredi* gig to create band for the *The Passion*  
 Hootenanny, Brixton, London, UK
- Training**  
 One week Haitian Vodou Dance Training with Zsuzsa Parrag  
 Studio Art Oriental, Berlin, Germany
- Training**  
 3 open training sessions  
 Soho Theatre, London, UK
- March           Ensemble training sessions led by MAS productions  
 at Regents University, London, UK
- Rehearsals**  
 3 weeks rehearsal for *The Passion of Lady Vendredi*  
 Low Profile Studios, London UK

April

**Performance**

3 weeks run of *The Passion of Lady Vendredi*  
at Soho Theatre, London, UK

## Appendix C: Media (see attached USB stick)

### Video

Documentation of the performance of *The Passion*

Video 1. Front. April 30 2016

Video 2. Reverse View. April 28 2016

Video 3. Front. April 27 2016

Video 4. Training Methodology Documentation

### Audio

Audio 1. NE Interview Boxer Image

Audio 2. NE Interview Boxer Image

Audio 3. NE Interview Boxer Image

Audio 4. MBJ Interview Persona

Audio 5. MBJ Interview Touching

### Structure and Timecodes for *The Passion* & Training Methodology Documentation

File No.	Act Time Code	Scene Section	Rhythm & Dance Track
	<b>A 1</b>	<b>Prologue</b>	
<b>Video 1.</b> Front. April 30 2016	<b>0:02:08</b>	<b>Sc 1 Purification ritual</b>	<b>Yanvalou</b>
	0:02:08	i) Blessing	
	0:04:06	ii) Yanvalou training	
	0:17:53	iii) Audience enters	
	<b>0:23:09</b>	<b>Sc 2 Opening Ceremony</b>	
	0:23:09	i) Traditional song	<i>Silibi</i>
<b>Video 2.</b> Reverse April 28 2016	0:18:53	ii) Water - Libation	<i>Papa Legba</i>
	0:21:06	iii) Air - Veve	
	0:22:26	iv) Earth - Offering of popcorn	
	0:23:29	v) Fire - Sacrifice	
	0:23:59	vi) Lamentation	
<b>Video 1.</b> Front. April 30 2016	<b>0:31:33</b>	<b>Sc 3 House Rules</b>	<b>Mayi</b>
	0:31:33	i) Order of service	<i>Dirty Chicken</i>
	0:36:24	ii) Musical breakdown	
	<b>A 2</b>	<b>Sc 4 Womb Mass</b>	<b>Kongo</b>
	0:40:25	i) House of Flow	<i>Bathed in Love</i>
	0:44:57	ii) Blessing of the audience	
	0:47:38	iii) Entrance of the Novice & Willing Sacrifice	<i>Stabat Mater</i>
	0:50:00	iv) Veneration of the Woman	
	0:51:26	v) To the mother etc	
	0:52:39	vi) The woman to the man	
	0:53:04	vii) 'I have abused women'	
	0:54:03	viii) Ritual Confession	
	<b>A 3</b>	<b>The Possessions</b>	
	0:55:40	<b>Sc 5</b> Paracossada Possession (FS)	<b>Ibo</b> <i>What Time Is It?</i>
	0:58:48	<b>Sc 6</b> Lady Vendredi Possession NE	
	0:58:55	i) Putting on costume	<i>Mama</i>
	1:00:45 to	ii) Boxer Image	<b>Petwo</b> <i>Petwo Impro 1</i>
	1:01:03		
	1:03:49	<b>Sc 7</b> Venus in Chains Possession	<b>Yanvalou</b>

			(JMTW)		<i>Myrha</i>
	1:08:47	i)	Ghede children		<b>Banda</b>
	1:11:50	ii)	Venus in Chains (Pt2)		<i>I Seduce</i>
	1:13:32	iii)	Transition (IJ)		Myrha/Yanvalou
					Mahler
	<b>A 4</b>		<b>The Sacrifice</b>		
<b>Video 3. Front.</b>	1:13:00	<b>Sc 8</b>	Mamatrix Striptease (MBJ)		<b>Kongo</b>
April 27 2016	1:13:45	i)	Transformation/Make-up		<b>Petwo</b>
					<i>Vital Signs</i>
<b>Video 2. Reverse</b>	1:10:55	ii)	Touching		
April 28 2016	1:12:08	iii)	The Stabbing (IJ)		<i>Petwo Impro 2</i>
<b>Video 1. Front.</b>	1:20:14	iv)	The Sacrifice		<i>Pergolesi</i>
April 30 2016	1:21:05		Papa Ito Possession (IJ)		<b>Banda</b>
					<i>Banda Impro</i>
	<b>A 5</b>		<b>Epilogue</b>		
	1:22:12	<b>Sc 9</b>	The Ghede:		True Believer
			Baron Samedi Possession (NE)		
	1:27:55		Final Ghede Dance		<b>Mayi</b>
	1:30:15		Closing Ceremony		<b>Yanvalou</b>

### Training and video documentation

#### Timecode Section

00:00:14	<b>Opening the Space</b>		
	<b>The Purification Ritual</b>		
00:02:54	The Shower		
00:11:29	<b>Opening Ceremony</b>		
00:11:40	Water		
00:12:34	Salute to the Musicians		
00:13:04	Air		
00:14:00	Earth		
00:14:50	Fire		
00:15:30	Lament		
	<b>The Haitian Vodou Dances</b>		
	<b>&amp; the central movemnet and direction</b>		
00:16:30	Yanvalou	Water	
00:22:06	Mayi	Earth	
00:25:35	Kongo	Air	
00:30:20	Ibo	Metal	
00:34:28	Petwo	Fire	
00:39:16	Banda	Spirit	
00:43:10	<b>The Plastiques</b>		
	<b>The Six Elements Improvisation</b>		
00:52:26	Improvisation with	Yanvalou	Water
00:54:44	Improvisation with	Mayi	Earth
00:56:22	Improvisation with	Kongo	Air
00:58:19	Improvisation with	Ibo	Metal
01:00:14	Improvisation with	Petwo	Fire
01:01:16	Improvisation with	Banda	Spirit



01:01:24	Improvisation with	All the elements
01:05:33	<b>Closing the Space</b>	Yanvalou Water
01:07:55	<b>Ezili Danto Possession</b>	
01:08:35	Boxer Image	
01:11:20	Full Possession	

## Appendix D: Selected Audience Feedback

### Andrea Foa

I felt excited when my boundaries were crossed because the performers were all so playful, sexy and subtle. I loved being picked by them as it made me feel personally welcomed to the show. I remember even getting a bit jealous when they picked others!

It can vary a lot. I've had both wonderful and horrible experiences. When I go to the theatre, I tend to be open to a performer making direct contact with me, I like to be ready and active as a spectator. But it really comes down to the subtlety and charm of the performer.

From the very beginning the performers made me feel in a velvety atmosphere, a dream where I was invited (not forced) to be myself, to cross some boundaries. It was a pleasure to be a part of the ritual, and even to get a bit uncomfortable in it. I wish I was even more involved. I was impressed by how playfully and elegantly the performers engaged with things like nudity and sexuality (which can easily become vulgar), making them a vehicle for intimacy.

I loved the intensity and baroqueness of *The Passion of Lady Vendredi*, and the amazing generosity of the performers. All I wanted to do was to dance, and touch and be touched, and I that's a great thing to achieve for a show.

### Elizabeth Noble

I think the reason why so many journalists are finding it difficult to critique *The Passion of Lady Vendredi* is because to critique it properly, they'll have to talk about themselves. Or if not their 'selves', then their identities. Or if not their identities, then the swirling atomic bridges where selves and identities miss and meet. This is also perhaps the reason why I've held back from writing about the show - because I knew that to do so, would be to lay my internal evolving conflict between my self and my identity bare for all to see. Doing this in a formal 'public' way, means that I've got to look for a new (or much neglected) language and a new (or just unusual) logic for my critique, and that in itself already has to be the first potential revolution (already sometimes) achieved by the show.

So I ask, for the umpteenth time, how to be honest? How to retain my belief in the importance of secrecy?

I wanted to respond more on the night, to say things and to understand.... but whenever I thought I ended up saying, 'I'm just not clever enough' (which in fact, I don't really believe). In the end I was gentle with myself and said: 'I'll give it some time. I'll put it into words, I'll write it down and I'll send it'. I know from experience that the intelligence of my gut needs some time to reach my head, and vice versa. Often that night I felt things in chest - urges to laugh, to sing and to weep. And sometimes panic. I've realised recently that I'm scared of big crowds and people I don't know, unless I somehow allow my self to feel, or am made to feel, part of a community. At the *Passion of Lady Vendredi* I felt I was part of a sisterhood, at once real, simulated and entirely false - making something, scrabbling at something, destroying something, tearing it apart, rebuilding, building again, bright new (sometimes BRAND new), reusing old clay for a new figure, beautiful and bleeding with a knife in her heart, attacking

itself, dancing with the wind in her hair, a phone in her hand, beyond now and extremely ancient - somehow the full stop won't come to me...

In plain words: I felt inspired by the joy *The Passion* gave to everyone: at once freely, but also asking for consent - courageously and impatiently. Laughing at the world, and at ourselves, in a Swiftian sort of a way - not so bitter, just as ridiculous, just as sad.

Looking, looking, looking for a space of liberation. Offering the audience the chance to do the same thing. Revolutionarily uncynical. Needfully bewildering. Not avoiding but escaping definition - and that is very hard to do.

Why didn't I want to put white paint on your face? Because I love Nwando and Nwando is beautiful, and because the white paint felt like violence to me.

p.s. when I say 'violence to me' I mean actually just 'violence'. I do not mean 'violence done to me'. Rather in fact, 'violence done by me'.

### **Neil Luck**

As well as the stylistic flair and great music, I think the thing that stuck most with me about *Passion* was how it forced me to be self-reflective during the show in quite a direct and palpable way. As a young(ish) metropolitan liberal male working in the arts it's dangerously easy to become complacent about one's place in local society and broader global cultures, as well the desires and expectations of music/art/theatre audiences. *The Passion* threw a lot of this up in the air for me, which was refreshing (and not a little brave). Without being didactic at all, to me it felt like the show was great in taking stances on cultural issues, but then self-sabotaged or subverting them in ways that forced me to question my own views and standpoints - it's that confusion of response that's most exciting to me, not being manipulated into conventional emotional responses, but rather being plunged into a sort of space of interpretation. Having an almost physical aversion to the image of Nwando dressed as an old-time minstrel, but simultaneously enjoying the sheer joy of being coaxed into dancing with her is totally disconcerting and gloriously activating. Powerful stuff.

### **Ellis**

I saw *The Passion of Lady Vendredi* at Soho Theatre, on my own. The person who was supposed to come with me cancelled at the last minute, and it was a curious experience to participate in the whole experience alone. I'm not afraid to say that I was afraid. Then I became relieved that I could go through the fear on my own, without a witness to point and laugh at my panic. I went through a range of complex and conflicting emotions. I laughed a lot. I was often very confused. I reacted to it with my body more than with my head, which was unsettling because I had prepared myself for a theatrical time, which is all in the mind, and I get to be in control of my experience. This didn't happen. My emotions were all over the place but the strongest sensations were physical. It felt a lot like going to see a music performance, but so much more. There was a lot of ritual and I found this very soothing. One in particular set off a very private response to some work I'd done in the past, a job I really had hated. I felt like some vital incantation was taking place on my behalf to make sense of it. But that's just me. *Lady Vendredi* seemed to throw expectations and reactions and atmospheres around the room like a juggler. It was all really witchy and weirdly relaxing at the same time as being exhausting. I'm glad there are people out there doing stuff like this, and unsettling and uplifting their audiences in new ways. Thankyou!

## Appendix E: Performers Evaluations

- 1 JMTW Soho Evaluation
- 2 MBJ Soho Evaluation
- 3 MBJ Mamatrix Persona
- 4 MBJ Roundhouse Evaluation
- 5 NE Performer Evaluation

### 1 JMTW Soho Evaluation

*Jennifer Muteteli Taylor White excerpt from Soho Evaluation*

#### WATER

RAIN The stillness before a downpour, the charged air, the anticipation of rain, a gasp before the first drops, the relief of those drops touching skin, the wonder that water falls from the sky, isolating the part of the body that gets wet, the puddles, playfulness.

WATERFALL The ultimate wetness of a cascading waterfall, the complete union with water in one of its most exciting appearances. The image of standing underneath a powerful waterfall and receiving all its force right on the top of your head is very stirring. I found this to be the most accessible image and found that it led me into feeling the water element in a more embodied sense, so this Would lead me into 'being water'

The waterfall image continued to Soho and was further developed as we used it a lot during the Yanvalou training. I think there's something about being able to receive, embrace the element on the vertical plane. It can feel clear and literal that this water is hitting you and entering inside you, in a way that you might think of light.

WAVE the one-drop that expands internally, so feeling waves throughout the body, the stages of a wave. Feeling the whole space as water as ocean, you are in the waves, the constant waves that can take you anywhere - this was most effective for allowing new images to appear each night.

### 2 MBJ Soho Evaluation

*Moss Beynon-Juckes excerpt from Soho Evaluation*

**Mayi:** The lost wings, discovering the muscles that hold the shoulder blades with the spine, opening the heart chest ribs, the Mexican heart with wings with an arrow through it. A heat that I had never experienced before between the shoulder blades. The muscles that pull the rib cage forwards and send heat down the back of the spine as in the sense of earthing from behind. The heart that wishes it could fly away, but is engaged in its gravity. Denied escape. A serious work out of new muscles. In relation to the earth- the under earth terrain, dirt, heavy and textured.

**Kongo:** Light swing, side to side, rocking. Joyful and open to the skies. Connection to innocence to happiness beyond this world. Ephemeral. Something about disappearing into that weightlessness, into that big sky. Trance of denial and of seeing nothing around me on the earth. I see only the sky, immense, calling me as if I were a cloud. To die like this might be bliss.

**Ibo:** Absolute association with metal, metal work, chains and sweat. Hope in the foot patterns. Limited space, limited movement. These limits create an energetic desire to cross lines, or circle forms inherent in the movement. A sense of the weight of inflicted limitation. Traveling across the space to break free

**Petwo:** Arms as proud unforgiving blades, slicing the air for freedoms sake. Connected to fire. Ferocity, anger, tempo always increases. Blood in the eyes. Bloody thoughts. Thoughts about murder. The million ways of murdering the subordinator. Limited space, limited movement. These limits create an energetic desire to cross lines, or circle forms inherent in the movement. A sense of the weight of inflicted limitation.

**Banda:** The Pelvis as the head. Thinking from the pelvis. Direction under the pelvis. A certain type of surrender to the politically incorrect advances of the overt pelvis. Pelvis as predator, as naughty, reckless, fickle, fun, consuming. As anarchist and devils advocate who will prevail over anything. Power without control. Chaos present. A natural chaos, as apposed to an enforced one, a conscious and deliberate chaos- a carnival?

#### **Using the Yanvalou as a daily closing to the work**

**b.** Practically it set a clear frame of entry and exit from the mode of ritual-ceremony- performance. It allowed a symbolic door to open and close. It functioned as a way to contain certain energies/personas/and manifested actions in a safe way, without them spilling out of the context of, in this case SOHO theatre, and say into the cafeteria or onto the streets. And more importantly, perhaps, it meant that I could go home as my “normal” self as opposed to my “persona” most of the time. Then what impact has the “persona” upon the “normal” self etc.? A kind of washing, a neutralising, a calming of the nervous system.

The idea of BaphoMA came with me to London, with the initial need to create an over arching and protector persona to somehow contain Mamatrix. It fully transformed during the rehearsal period and in relation to the others. The real birth of BaphoMA came after much frustration and failure in improvising. I had the hands as a prepared symbolic ritualised fetish, and then the Kongo became the associated dance, with the elements of air and sometimes spirit. The state emerged from playfulness in the Kongo rhythm and the facial expressions and adornments. The ritualistic intension was to create a unity between female and male forces, and provide a bigger perspective. The movement vocal extended out of the Kongo in relation to a Chinese opera character I had seen in Beijing about 10 years ago. BaphoMA became the embodiment of the magic guru master/ the wizard, and I symbolically put the sun and moon together when I walk. During the house of flow- comedy meets melodrama, in a surrealist story about a suffering pilgrim

Searching for a guru, and a god that leads her Marylyn of the Mud back to her “godhood”. The story emerged through trial and errors of communication, through drawings, devising text in parallel and then improvising with that together. The texts emerge from the body of BaphoMA to some degree. It is very wonderful when text emerges from movement and persona and not only from the sitting thinking body.

*On MAMATRIX -“Symbolic act as a real act- what is my act symbolising to me? How does that change when it is placed and directed, or somehow recoded symbolically inside the theatre show as a whole ritual act? If the symbolic acts on the psyche in a real way, I kill the classical ghost of a man, I murder with a dagger and I pretend to weep, as I crawl to the dressing room, I surrender to weep, my voice still being heard as it gets pick up on the wireless head mic. (The things that don’t get said) It was real, it was real. I must trust the multitude, allow the diversity, the schizo elements that reverberate in the space. Where is the anchor? I loose myself in my nightmare. I tried to make the protector persona, but it inverted into itself, and is transformed back into hell. If I am not me I could be her, I can kill, I am a nightmare, I am my worst nightmare, and I have to be this monster every night. Lets make it funny. Because otherwise this IS hell. This is the road to nowhere. DAY 2*

### **Transpersonal experiences:**

Trance states and dances:

- Petwo put me into trance very easily. I felt very familiar with this energetic state. Though I did not particularly like it. I experienced trances in Petwo during rehearsal more than in performance.
- Banda I was more fearful of, because I feared where it would take me and I really liked it. This is connected to being out of control and through this I hope to learn how to be out of control without fear.

c. The symbol of the ceremony of Nwando being revealed only by the end-the meaning of the cup of blood as a reconciliation with her womanhood. Understanding the position of supporting a transformation. A real ritual. And a clear positioning.

There were plenty of moments where I didn't feel wholly myself. As if I was myself and other. I remember a couple of moments where I did not know if I was my own persona or that which belonged to somebody else, no longer than about 5-7 seconds. I think this is both illuminating and painful. I like to wonder if we can experience for a fraction of a minute the embodied experiences of the other.

### **3 MBJ Mamatrix Persona**

**Air wind**= Dropping into a plié in 1st and turning up to standing. Four corners. Clear directions in space marked by angles and straight arms cutting through the space, pointing the hand and spinning. One hand has the sign of the horns marking separation and the other the sign of the unicorn, marking unity. One movement is like a chopper with both signs cutting into space. The sign of unity draws circles on the ground the sign of divisions cuts everything in two or more.

**Earth**= Floor suck, packing the earth onto my head with my hands

**Fire- Animal**= Lion walk, all fours, hyper sexualised into jaws and tongue. The fire in one hand, the heart in the other. “Possession” of the body into ecstatic trance through fast breathing.

## **Sequence of Performance-ritual at the Roundhouse**

Red Shoes- transportation. An invitation to the world of Eros of the Mother, men and women are the same. I play the sexy idiot who can't put on her shoes to show off her legs.

Paint the heart and the womb with two red circles. 1st Heart, 2nd the Womb. What really lies down there in my pants?

Paint the face with a new one. The self is now disappearing.

- 1st day Balinese/Tibetan God/Demon blood mouth and tears
- 2nd day performance 1 black glasses and a Hitler moustache blood mouth
- 3rd day performance 2 yellow sun god with a blood mouth

Send the luminous eye to the audience, an invitation to play my game and to help me go all the way with wisdom pants? sexy idiot who dy into what the game precisely?  
tbc t

The blood in the mouth is the concrete transition towards the fanaticised demon-god self. An invitation towards the unpredictable and chaotic forces.

Fire in the Left Hand- candle / Light in the Right Hand- knife. This was a way for me to balance myself afterwards

## **4 MBJ Roundhouse Evaluation**

Moss Beynon-Jukes excerpt from Roundhouse Evaluation

To be actively encouraged to speak or act without censorship about topics that are loaded or controversial is a rare chance to be able to gauge your opinions and your emotional attachments regarding these opinions in relation to others. This allowance is something that could reverse the saying "divide and conquer" at least temporarily. In some ways it reveals that through great differences, or micro details, there is fundamentally a shared interest and profound curiosity attached to this investigation. Because beliefs matter to people, most people's emotionality and their beliefs are directly connected. When you tap into a belief you tap into an emotion. This reminds me of something James Small said concerning principles in Voudou "We are not the bodies we are in, we are what we believe". This is questionable, however, sharing difference in this way has the means of connecting understanding with feelings. In this sense we could instead say "diversify to unify" at least temporarily. It is in my interest to both feel unity and yet be able to value and sense how diverse things are.

### **Liberated working environment.**

Yes it was achieved for me. I think I had some expectation of this, so I had come prepared to reveal and to be autonomous. I only felt resistance in certain moments where I was personally confronted with surprises either about myself or the others. There was enough space and motivation to go into new territories both physically and mentally and therefore the resistance revealed itself to me when I wanted to leave the situation out of personal terror or confusion. When you question things, such as identity, agency, self exploitation, beliefs and much more, there is plenty of room for the moment where all one's point of reference are shaken around, and this can be

very frightening. I think there was enough of a practical framework in terms of concepts, training and intention to allow this freedom and to contain the space.

## **5 NE Soho Evaluation**

Nwando Ebizie excerpt from Soho Evaluation

### **Yanvalou**

Working with Yanvalou is like taking a dip in the water. I feel like the suggestion implicit in the imagining and performing of the action is so strong that now when I do it on my own in the garden, I literally feel like I've been cast in a beautiful pool of water. At the moment I feel like I'm just starting to access the water, the universal wave of the Yanvalou. It feels like I could do it forever and keep on accessing new ideas, new parts, new stimuli within it. It's like a really complex, really simple movement.

There is a contradiction at the heart of the Yanvalou. It is complex and simple. It is circle but it is also vertical. From my progress over the last few years and seeing other people do it I can see a tendency to focus on the undulation as a large circle and to focus on a large drop at the end. For me, at this moment it seems like what is important is to capture this feeling of verticality - that something begins from the floor, through the feet and flows up through the whole spine. And a second action begins simultaneously through the centre - catching the wave of movement, which (in physical terms) begins not as a circle towards the back of the body, but as a compression up through the centre - this is important. You need the flow of tension through the core as an upwards motion to rise up and then crest the wave at the front - then there is a RELEASE at the front and not a 'drop'. This is also important as this is what keeps the movement going. If there is an insistence on 'dropping' then you have dropped. If you release, something brings you back round to begin the circle again. It is important to find the paths of least resistance in this circularity.

A third action begins at the same time as the movement upwards from the floor and that is a movement backwards from the floor, through the back of the heels that ends at the front of the foot. So it is like there is a circularity at the level of the feet. A fourth action connects with the second - which is a pressing downwards. So whilst there is a push up from the floor, through the feet, through the spine, there is a simultaneous press downwards - onto the surface of the water (e.g. through the arms).

Having said all this, I fully expect that at the next time I work with Zsuzsa I will find a different way of thinking about it, or a more right way, or the next way along the journey. I feel like the Yanvalou is a constant teacher. It constantly corrects me - I find corrections to my body by returning to it again and again. It shifts and ebbs and flows - there is not a 'right' way of doing it exactly - it's more like I find where my body is within it each time I return. And so it defies my tendency of feeling like 'I'm right - so do this more'. That builds tension. One has to flow within it.

### **Kongo**

This felt the most different and the most foreign when I began this with Zsuzsa in February. It is also the one that I feel has kept on growing on quite an every day level. For example, whilst I was deejaying a few weeks ago, I felt it kept my body feeling strong - something about the way it connects the feet to the hips I feel has changed my natural alignment and made my body feel strong whilst feeling light (the



combination of being rooted to the ground with the upper half of the body being free in the air).

The centre of the movement is so beautifully simple. I think it lies between the shoulder blades. It is not the shoulders, it is not the shoulder blades and it is not the chest. The specificity of this is what gives me the feeling of the move. It reminds me of how my grandma Selina dances and my Uncle Joe. Doing the pure core of the movement immediately makes me feel I am doing my Grandma Selina. I can feel my hands and face mimic her. There is something very cool and subtle about this that carries me through to doing the bigger more overt movements within the Kongo.

After Rich Mix I was feeling some strange effects around my shoulder blades and arms. At first I thought this linked to a feeling of disassociation (which I had been struggling with) where I felt my body feel exceedingly light. But now I think it is connected to the Kongo and Mayi. In the middle of an anxiety attack I was on the phone to Jon and I felt something like wings of light spilling from between my shoulder blades. It made my back feel light and warm and it was a very pleasant sensation but it made me feel panicky - probably because I was already panicking. I managed to calm down but still felt that feeling. As I accepted it, it carried on. The next two days I was deejaying at SGP and felt it, this time I was feeling so joyful it was so pleasant and the images around it presented themselves clearly. It made my chest and back feel open and my arms feel light and strong. I can only describe them as wings.

A few days later I felt a change in my shoulders and chest and felt a more physical openness, compared to the slouch I think I've cultivated there over the last few years. This wasn't a physical change - I don't think there was an increased flexibility, rather something around the idea of that area shifted in my body/mind. The information started being relayed differently and I felt able to adjust my body in a way. I think I've felt inhibited by my breasts for a while and this has led to a kind of slouch, which has in turn overdeveloped the top of my shoulders a bit. So basically, I feel an awareness of this shifting which leads to a consciousness about returning to a more natural position for my chest.

## **Ibo**

Ibo is the most energetically challenging. The important thing here is that the engine of the movement is banging back and forth of something deep within the cage of the torso that goes back and forth and never stops. It drives you from here. IT drives you, not you pushing it. That would be a different move. And it does not come from the shoulders. The other interesting things are the legs. The Ibo legs are another facet that have had an effect in everyday life. I gave the example of gardening.

I decided I needed to garden more - to have a soul garden that I would tend. This connected with my practice of the vodou dances. I found that whilst chopping back brambles, the easiest way to do this was to dance (and hear) the Ibo rhythm. This felt instinctive. But dissecting it, I think it is because:

1. The way of lifting the legs up (which for me feels like it comes from the centre) and stomping them back down isn't like running or walking or stamping. It enabled me to stomp down the sharp thorns and so get them out of the way of my body, whilst giving me energy for my next movement.
2. The way of using the arms as machetes obviously helped me wield the actual machete I was using.
3. There seemed to be a heightened awareness, a lack of fear when I fell into the movement that stopped me from getting scratched by the thorns and helped me move through the thorns more fluidly. I think this might be to do with the rhythm.

Obviously people have used rhythm and song to do manual labour - it gives you time to judge your next movement, but to judge it instinctively with the rhythm of your body (e.g. the swing of your machete). It makes time and energy somehow different.

## **Petwo**

By the time we got to Petwo I felt a whole body excitement. I felt a connection to family members - like I was channeling them. I crossed the space, moving into the future. And I knew spirit was coming - it was coming along with Jon saying the words 'spirit' and the anger, the fire, just transformed in me, through me and I was compelled to move. I felt a freeness as my body shook, turning me over, kicking my legs out, letting my head go. I felt I should put myself in the corner in case I hurt anybody as I was kicking somebody. I felt like I wanted to let go, whilst wanting to keep within the bounds of the exercise. I felt like it lasted for a long time, but watching the video, it was over as soon as it started. I steadied myself on all fours, feeling the strength of pure movement coursing through me, feeling waves move through me.

## **Further notes on The Boxer Action**

Thinking further on this action - I suppose I cannot remember how I felt, but only what the impulse led me to do. After the Okey action (or the boxer) I just felt driven. I was driven to suddenly feel my grandmas - I don't feel close to my maternal grandma (she is dead) but I do associate her with Okey. And being demanding. And I felt the demandingness, and something move from Okey to her. And then Jon said 'spirit' and I just felt something take over me and turn me over. Over and over. And I felt free, so free. And its like the words for emotions aren't exactly right. I think that is because I have my memory of that day and the memory feels very corrupted - because the action was performed over and over again. So actually maybe I did feel angry and pain. But that's not what I remember - because I feel good that I experienced whatever I experienced - which I can't really remember.

I just know that I felt essential movements. And it was a bit scary. But I wanted to go with it - because in Berlin I felt that I had stopped myself from going with the feeling of going out of myself - and that had resulted in a kind of trauma. Afterwards I felt gutted, and just so full of emotion energy. I am not Nwando but a whole host of things. And I put myself on all fours and felt the Yanvalou and a moaning. What is interesting about the sequence was that it typifies what the elements came to be for me. The movement suggesting the image - in this case of Okey - rather than a logical leap - a visceral, psychophysical spectre entering one.

## **NE Notes on Performance Art Possession**

Improvisation Images (that formed my new Dantor transformation)

This improvisation occurred after the first time we did the Elements training with Gerardo drumming. This felt like a real turning point and a very ecstatic moment. In general I feel like all the images and the ideas come out of the vodou elements, but have been crossed with a freeing of my imagination through the vodou elements sequence - building up complex stories and ideas. This series of images is all in a flow and a sequence:

- Crouching, pulling a cord towards my centre - I need to transform this pain into beauty
- Compartmentalising - This is the phrase I wrote down - it is the idea of pushing all the badness and mess into different sections. The image is

- shutting lots of boxes and drawers all around me.
- Daffodils - all around, flowering through my body
- Hands cuffed behind me - like Magda at the Apiary - link to Ibo
- I turn into a budding, a flowering
- Vines twist out of my body
- Shoulder blades - hands, centre, chest, back - always legs and feet shuffling (petwo?)
- Till it flowers out like the sun
- Dragon on the ground - pulling scales off body, breathing fire
- Looping and connecting with all the threads and beams in the ceiling and the people in the sky and the space (I'm throwing off loops of fine thread from myself to all these things)
- Sewing (again between myself and the space)

The second time - a refining and extending of the sequence:

- Birthing the baby - drawing a baby out of a mother with loving care.

AIR

- Air - blowing in air, trying to reach forwards, walking on the air
- The image of Jen's mum's coat woman, Posh, flighty, drug addled. Max Mara - mother coat
- Kongo air - blowing off
- If close eyes - can go off on one
- But also connecting to people
- Ignacio in the mirror - wanting to break through the mirror

WATER

- The wetsuit - trying to get it off - the pond is before me
- Richie touching me - don't touch me!
- Trying to get away from Richie
- Mirror Jen and Crocodile Tanya - trying to get away from my 3 year old dream crocodile

Mayi - Earth

- Centre of movement - Mayi shoulder - sand dropping sand, grains of sand
- Wings
- Images of fields
- Orpheus - movement relating to Ignacio trying to break through the mirror and get to him, pull it out. Ignacio - songs of the dead infants

Ibo - Metal - in chains - trying to break free of chains. Image of enslaved person, trying to break free - connection between wrists and ankles - long chains. Casting them off to whip people. Fighter. Hero.

Komodo dragon - poisonous bite

### **Improvisation in Six Elements - Wednesday**

#### **This was when Jon asked me to make an etude**

(Notes after the impro) My comments in Italics

- I did my transformation (*the original Danto transformation that we've been working on since 2013*) and felt more fluid - imagination very awoken - something flowing through me.

- I drowned - I faded with the setting sun then I fell into the pond, fell and it was beautiful so beautiful and then it entered me and I went through the transformation (*the original Danto one*) because I felt the flow the Yanvalou? The fluidness. The channels to flow through
- Felt a lot more raw open connecting so much to people and the space
- Creating the Score (from the improvisations)

### **My notes on organising the score**

1. Lady V Celebrant
  - Air Max Mara Coat Ecstasy Eyes Glamour
2. Compartmentalisation (a battle preparation)
  - Take these fragments, bathed in Love
3. Falling into the pond (a siren)
4. Held in chains and open out into flowering
5. Looping with body - looping threads out of body, up into the rafters, far out through the space
6. Pull of scales (the dragon) - scratching the scales from my neck and body
7. Dry heave - Spirit
8. Pulling the wetsuit off, getting away from Richie, from the crocodile
9. Danto Transformation - Jen in the mirror - trying to get through to Ignacio
10. Shackled chained
11. Drawing the baby out of its mother
12. Rocking baby, blessing baby
13. Walking into the air

### **Thursday impro**

So angry so frustrated so trapped - compartmentalising - blocks

- Searching for balls, cleaning bloody floor
- Toys
- Compartmentalising - string up body - ibo - as push one way - body is pulled the opposite way - like the Romeo and Juliet puppet from Olivia Dunham

### **The Story**

Transforming Pain into Beauty

There is a hand shaped hole in my heart where it was crushed my chest crushed my heart ripped out

Now hanging here with my heart in my hands

Strung up by those unseen I will transform

My beautiful daffodil wings will fly again and I will sing

They came for me and raped me

They cut off my hands so I could not write of it

They cut out my tongue so I could not speak

And I? I ripped out my heart so I could not feel

I was left tangled in a web of my own making

And I will be free

The sun wakes me and relights

And I fade into land in the sea

A water flower once more

I shed my skin so I could breathe

And inside I was love in a handful of dust

For I have become the Sybil

And what the Sybil knew would fill you with horror

## Story 2

Now I sit here with my heart in my hands - I pull towards the light  
They came for me and I compartmentalised  
As they blew me around  
I tied myself in knots  
I was strung up  
They cut off my hand  
Tongue  
Ibo chest  
Petwo feet  
Shoulders of Mayi  
I reflower - I see self in wind, self in mirror  
Then peel off my skin  
Scales, wetsuit away from crocodile  
And am wretched sick of it all  
And am reborn of myself

## Friday Impro

Jon told me that I was in Doctor Who sci fi world  
I felt it very strongly! Felt totally playful and free. So this is improvisation where I can  
both see that I am in a doctor who world and that I am in reality.

Doctor who - coming down to alien planet - army to attack  
Friend killed  
(NOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!)  
Falling down the labyrinth - with compartmentalisation / puppeting  
Falling down hole with air max mara  
Left alone in the hole  
Falling down the hole with hands grabbing from labyrinth  
Colours going swirling  
Pulling out sword  
Alien infection - pulling off skin  
Running from alien crocodile  
Chained to save self cause crazy - see colours happening  
Flash Gordon fight on the rocking table of death  
'For tonight we dine in hell!!!!!!!!!!!!'  
General - leading the team to their glorious deaths

## The Story 3

And it ends with me birthing myself and crying - because I am reborn

I hold my heart in my hand  
And here I stand, with my heart in my hand / (An Okey an Okey)  
There is a hole in my chest and where it once was / (A Petwo, a Grandma Broken  
fragments of broken dreams, broken ancestors towards the spirit  
The Spirit! The Spirit!)  
My chest crushed, my heart ripped out / (The water pours over me - oh!)

I was on an alien planet and was infected by a contagion then....  
Then.... ( )  
Oh shit it's got a hold of me. It turns me around and around.  
They came for me in the very dead of night)

I compartmentalised the feelings  
(or did I fall through an endless alien labyrinth)

(or was I hung up - with each pull I tied myself more and more in knots - so therapy goes) so it goes

Yes! I was tied and strung up in giant loops through the beams and the rafters  
Until I was neither living nor dead

(Or was I hung here for my own good? Yes  
YEs because I became  
I because I was a flowering moon root - April is the cruellest month - breeding seeds  
out of dead earth -  
Yes I was dead - but I will flower)

(or was that just the madness of the alien contagion?  
Wasn't I fighting Flash Gordon on the table of death)

/ Oh look I'm still flowering)

Even though they cut off my hands so I couldn't write of it.  
Even though they cut out my tongue so I couldn't speak of it  
Even though I ripped out my own heart so I wouldn't feel it.  
Even though - I'm regrowing, rebirthing - reflowering  
If I could just turn to the sun.....  
/If I could just awake from this nightmare  
If I could just - breathe  
I would live anew  
And here I am free  
I am new  
The sun awakens me  
Then I lay myself down into the pool.  
Oh Ophelia in the water  
I sparkle  
No. This is not the end  
I must get up  
And tear of this skin  
And get away from the crocodile  
I shed my skin so I can breathe  
And inside I was love in a handful of dust  
(And finally the sickness is over - I throw it all up)  
And I am reborn of myself  
And my heart grows back  
And my hands grow back  
And my tongue grows back

### **Reflections now**

Now I can see that this transformation was a death drive - laying myself down into the peace of the pool - it was around the time of making this story that I was having suicidal yearnings - ideas that would come. And it was all around laying down in the bath and never getting out. It seems pretty obvious now reading it - but at the time of creating it just all felt very instinctual.

## **6 IJ Soho Evaluation**

Ignacio Jarquin excerpt from Soho Evaluation

During the training in Berlin, I had for the first time the experience of a trance which I am still to digest emotionally as I don't necessarily want to intellectualise, it unleashed positive emotions and would like to explore further. Don't know though how this would fit within my artistic practice. I felt at many occasions during rehearsal and performances an intense sense of connection, of going beyond myself but never lost a clear sense of my reality in the current moment. I felt like I could observe myself without judgement go beyond my usual boundaries but without losing control

## Appendix F: Training Exercises

References to 3.4 Training Exercises: the Elements & to 4.4 Training Exercises: the Six Elements

### 3.4 Training Exercises: the Elements

#### **The Plastiques of Water**

##### The Exercise and the Image

*Beginning with the Plastique wave in the hand, imagine that the hand is water. It is made of water, or there is water inside the hand. Bring the quality of a flowing stream to the movement it is soft at first with no tension or staccato impulses. Take the flow up through the forearm to the elbow Plastique, up the arm to the shoulder Plastique and then across the shoulders and back down the arm to the other hand. Bring the movement to the chest for a full wave that spreads down into the pelvis and the knees. Allow the undulation from the Yanvalou to spread into the whole body, let go of the traditional form and allow it to influence all of your movement.*

After this point the exercise becomes a flow of association with the quality of water. At first I would suggest that the image is outside of the performer in a realistic way. One of Jennifer White's was of a waterfall:

"WATERFALL/ [...] The image of standing underneath a powerful waterfall and receiving all its force right on the top of your head is very stirring. I found this to be the most accessible image and found that it led me into feeling the water element in a more embodied sense, so this would lead me into 'being water'."<sup>176</sup>

And then I would suggest that the image is inside of you as a poetic embodiment:

"WAVE/The one drop that expands internally, so feeling waves throughout the body, the stages of a wave. Feeling the whole space as water as ocean, you are in the waves, the constant waves that can take you anywhere - this was most effective for allowing new images to appear each night."<sup>177</sup>

##### The Action

This led into creating poetic actions of a blessing and allowing the performers to access whatever they associated with a blessing, a prayer or a consecration. The actions they created lay somewhere between the abstract quality of water and a realistic blessing.

#### **The Plastiques of Air**

##### The Exercise and the Image

*Bring the feet together in a narrow stance, staying soft in the knees and the body. Allow the hips to be loose and gently swinging bringing you on and off balance. Bring the arms up as if they are wings. Use the arm positions from the Yanvalou, shoulders pressed down, elbows turned slightly upwards, gently undulating. Use the loss of balance to initiate the movement and follow the flow of the kinetic energy to allow you to travel through the space, avoid bumping into things or becoming stiff or rigid.*

And again I encourage a similar process of free association for the performers.

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<sup>176</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 1 *JMTW Soho Evaluation*

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.



*Imagine being blown by a gentle breeze that builds into a hurricane and you are riding it but you are out of control, and then instead of being blown you ride the wind and you put more intention behind it.*

### The Symbolic Action

The images the performers created formed the Symbolic Action of the individual choreographed veve they emerged from visualising themselves cutting the space around them as if it were a sheet in many directions that hid a parallel dimension. From this they gradually developed specific choreographic veve's as in Moss's description of her structure:

**“Air wind=** Dropping into a plié in 1st and turning up to standing. Four corners. Clear directions in space marked by angles and straight arms cutting through the space, pointing the hand and spinning. One hand has the sign of the horns marking separation and the other the sign of the unicorn, marking unity. One movement is like a chopper with both signs cutting into space. The sign of unity draws circles on the ground the sign of divisions cuts everything in two or more.”<sup>178</sup>

### **Plastiques of Earth**

#### The Exercise and the Image

*Allow the body to get heavier, pushing down and pushing up, feel the weight of your body as if you are a rock, a solid moving mountain, the density of your body is packed together. Or your body is trapped inside the earth, in very compact mud and the only part of the body that can help us to get free is the head, as if you are buried alive and the stronger the impulse that you make the sooner you will get out. The movement is more direct. Imagine you are a corpse and the plants, roots, foliage, worms and the insects growing inside your body and animating you, like Swamp Thing*<sup>179</sup>.

The images here should contrast between the obvious heaviness of earth and the lightness of a worm slowly moving underneath the soil.

**“Earth=** Floor suck, packing the earth onto my head with my hands”<sup>180</sup>

#### *The Action*

The action was to do with imagining your body as an offering, a giving of yourself or a surrender. This action was converted into the Transaction of offering popcorn to the audience.

### **Plastiques of Fire**

#### The Exercise and the Image

*Imagine a flame in the palm of the hand, spreading through the whole body imagine your body is damp, and the hand is starting to spark and the fire gradually dries the body out and it grows into a raging forest fire consuming the whole body, a voraciousness, consuming everything around it, eating up the world with the flames.*

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<sup>178</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 3 MBJ Mamatrix Persona

<sup>179</sup> A comic book by Alan Moore

<sup>180</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 3 MBJ Mamatrix Persona

“**Fire- Animal**= Lion walk, all fours, hyper sexualised into jaws and tongue. The fire in one hand, the heart in the other. “Possession” of the body into ecstatic trance through fast breathing.”<sup>181</sup>

#### *The Action*

The quality of fire would move into the action of killing, a wild slashing, and a drawing of blood. This action was used at the end of The Opening Ceremony to symbolize the ritual killing of Lady Vendredi as the sacrificial lamb, the stabbing of Christ with the Spear of Destiny.

#### **4.4 Training Exercises: the Six Elements**

In this section I will describe the specific central movement quality, the related element and the Lwa that is associated with the dance.

#### **Yanvalou: Water, Vertical Undulation/Circle, Papa Legba**

I have already discussed the symbolic and ritual function of the Yanvalou in some detail in the Chapter ‘Defining Symbolic Action’. Here I will focus on the movement:

Yanvalou is associated with Dhamballah, the benign snake, and the motion of water. It employs serpentine undulations of the spine, shoulder girdle, arms and hands. Dhamballah is said to "rule the spine." The supple, small pulsations that flow through the spine represent either the movements of a snake's body or waves of the ocean, or both, simultaneously Schmiderer 1990: 2; Hall-Smith interviews, 1994<sup>182</sup>

The Yanvalou is performed at the beginning of all the vodou ceremonies. It relates to a number of different lwa. However our association was with Papa Legba:

Legba – life – is the link between the visible, mortal world and the invisible, immortal realms. He is the means and the avenue of communication between them, the vertical axis of the universe which stretches between the sun and the tree root. Since he is the God of the poles of the axis, of the axis itself, he is the God of the crossroads<sup>183</sup>

Depicted in the Rada rites in Haitian vodou as an old man with a limp and a walking stick, Papa Legba is the first spirit to be called on because it is only through him that the other lwas can be communicated with.

The distinguishing aspect of the Yanvalou is the undulation of the spine beginning in the coccyx and held rather closely and moving upwards vertically and then descending. The undulation is maintained at all times through the dance. The Yanvalou is related to the element of water so we used it as a ritual purification, a symbolic cleansing of the body. For Nwando Ebizie (Lady Vendredi):

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Lynn Martin (1996) *Six Haitian Vodou dances*, Visual Anthropology, 8: 2-4, 219-249.

<sup>183</sup> Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods*, (Thames and Hudson, London 1970), p.97

Working with Yanvalou is like taking a dip in the water. I feel like the suggestion implicit in the imagining and performing of the action is so strong that now when I do it on my own in the garden, I literally feel like I've been cast in a beautiful pool of water.<sup>184</sup>

Nwando Ebizie's process of learning and understanding the Yanvalou has been gradual and her analysis of how she has begun to embody both the technical aspects of the dance and the element of water is significant because it demonstrates how both sides work together. First of all with regards to the direction of the undulation she says:

"It is a circle but it is also vertical. From my progress over the last few years and seeing other people do it I can see a tendency to focus on the undulation as a large circle and to focus on a large drop at the end. For me, at this moment it seems like what is important is to capture is this feeling of verticality - that something begins from the floor, through the feet and flows up through the whole spine."<sup>185</sup>

The vertical movement is supported by a second movement that begins simultaneously in the pelvic floor that captures the wave and:

...begins not as a circle towards the back of the body, but as a compression up through the centre - this is important. You need the flow of tension through the core as an upwards motion to rise up and then crest the wave at the front - then there is a RELEASE at the front and not a 'drop'. This is also important as this is what keeps the movement going. If there is an insistence on 'dropping' then you have dropped. If you release, something brings you back round to begin the circle again."<sup>186</sup>

The she speaks about how the feet are engaged in a parallel process:

A third action begins at the same time as the movement upwards from the floor and that is a movement backwards from the floor, through the back of the heels that ends at the front of the foot. So it is like there is a circularity at the level of the feet. A fourth action connects with the second - which is a pressing downwards. So whilst there is a push up from the floor, through the feet, through the spine, there is a simultaneous press downwards - onto the surface of the water (e.g. through the arms).<sup>187</sup>

From the point of view Symbolic Action Nwando's description demonstrates how the image of water and a wave is translated into performance through the application of tiny technical details.

## **Mayi The Dance**

The Mayi dance is from the Mahi nation in Benin and is a more upright dance that Fleurant describes as a break from the low movements of the Yanvalou Doba<sup>188</sup>. The spinal movement is a gentle forward rocking of the pelvis partly initiated through the

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<sup>184</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, *5 NE Performer Evaluation*

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Fleurant 1996, p.28

shoulders the lwa associated with the Mayi is Kouzen Azaka, the lwa of agriculture. Katherine Dunham describes how the dancers will:

...bend low in the movements of planting and hoeing. Sometimes they will embrace the ground. Their movements are always awkward and crude to typify mountain people working in the fields .... They are immediately dressed in the garb of the mountain peasant-hat, smock and knapsack-and their behavior requires that they be treated as Cousin [Kouzen Azaka]<sup>189</sup>

We naturally associated this dance with the element of earth. However I made an error and identified the shoulder movements as being the prime characteristic of the dance when in fact, as Fleurant notes it is considered to be a dance of the feet<sup>190</sup>. Nonetheless we took the shoulder movement which is known as zépòl.

“Zépòl, meaning “shoulders” (that is, “work the shoulders” from the French, les epaules,)”<sup>191</sup>

### **The Central Movement and Direction**

The zépòl is a fast forward and backward motion of the shoulders. We begin with a gentle bouncing in the knees, not a bobbing up and down of the upper body but a forward and back movement in the knees and the pelvis. Then we add the zépòl movement of the shoulders Yvonne Daniel in her book *Dancing Wisdom* describes it as a constantly repetitive rapid thrusting pattern<sup>192</sup>. This initiates a small forward and backward tilting in the pelvis. The shoulder movement by itself is difficult to sustain and so we continue with a basic foot pattern stepping forward and back. This activates the pelvis and enables the shoulder movement to gain a natural momentum requiring less effort. Finally we add the arms with the elbows out laterally in line with the shoulders, forearms bent at a right angle with the fingers facing front. This simple sequence would be the basis for isolating the shoulders as the central movement of the Six Elements.

### **The Element**

The stance is higher in the Mayi than in the Yanvalou and the feet are narrow and we gradually found our way to using the image of a tree, with the feet as roots in the earth and the sap rising up through the body to the sky. This dance had a particularly strong impact on Moss.

Mayi: The lost wings, discovering the muscles that hold the shoulder blades with the spine, opening the heart chest ribs, the Mexican heart with wings with an arrow through it. A heat that I had never experienced before between the shoulder blades. The muscles that pull the rib cage forwards and send heat down the back of the spine as in the sense of earthing from behind.<sup>193</sup>

### **Kongo The Dance**

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<sup>189</sup> Dunham 1983, p.52

<sup>190</sup> Fleurant 1996, p.151

<sup>191</sup> Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, (University of Illinois Press, USA, 2005) p.112

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

Kongo dance is connected to the Congo nation<sup>194</sup> and is associated with the lwa Ezili Freda, the goddess of love. She is one of the main lwa for the Passion of Lady Vendredi the entirety of Act 2: The Womb Mass is composed using the Kongo Rhythm. For Maya Deren Ezili Freda is:

“...woman as the divinity of the dream, the Goddess of Love, the muse of beauty Erzulie moves in an atmosphere of infinite luxury, a perfume of refinement, which, from the first moment of her arrival, pervades the very air of the peristyle, and becomes a general expansiveness in which all anxieties, all urgencies vanish.”<sup>195</sup>

The Kongo gives an impression of a combined African and European style<sup>196</sup>. The upper body is upright as if a crown is placed on the head, the movement of the pelvis follows the shape of the sign of infinity, a figure of 8 on its side in a feminine movement of the hips, it is a lighter dance, as such I associated it with the element of Air.

### **The Central Movement and Direction**

We begin standing with the feet in parallel position and swing the hips side to side, rocking on the vertical axis, reaching upwards to the left and right with the hipbones. Again there is no bobbing up and down, the movement in the hips is created by bending the knees and pushing up through the floor. We pull the sitting bones together and push the pelvis forward and bring the pelvic walls together. There is a gentle drop as the hips move from side to side. The upper body is held straight, imagining a crown on your head and the arms are held out to the side with the palms facing upwards, hands out delicately. Then we follow a figure of eight movement on its side, like the sign for infinity, with the flow of movement going under and over the pelvis. To emphasise this we use one the first basic steps and form a T position with the feet where the weight is on the front foot flat on the floor and the back foot is on its toes. This creates a flowing rocking back and forward between the two feet.

### **The Element**

This basic form of the central movement is the quality is lightness and flow without any accent, the pulling up of the spine brings an airiness to it with the hands and arms floating to the side as if being held by a gentle breeze.

The association with the element of Air was partly arbitrary, Ezili is traditionally associated with water, and one would normally imagine a fountain sprouting up through the centre of the body. However it fitted the scheme of the elements to convert the associations in the dance to Air. Moss describes the images that she was working with

“Kongo: Light swing, side to side, rocking. Joyful and open to the skies. Connection to innocence to happiness beyond this world. Ephemeral. Something about disappearing into that weightlessness, into that big sky. Trance of denial and of seeing nothing around me on the earth. I see only the sky, immense, calling me as if I were a cloud. To die like this might be bliss.”<sup>197</sup>

### **Ibo**

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<sup>194</sup> Daniel 2005, p.113

<sup>195</sup> Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods*, (Thames and Hudson, London 1970) P.134-5

<sup>196</sup> Lynn Martin 1996, p.245

<sup>197</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

## **The Dance**

Ibo dance is from Iboland in Nigeria. We partly brought this dance into the work because Nwando Ebizie is of Igbo origin. The images and associations within some of the traditional movements are connected to the Ibo nations rebellion against the French in Haiti<sup>198</sup>. We associated it with the elements of metal: the arms are used as symbolic machetes<sup>199</sup>, and the wrists and the ankles are bound together with symbolic chains. The actions express the rebellion of the Ibo people who would rather commit suicide than be enslaved by the French<sup>200</sup>. The main movement that we used initiates in the chest in a pumping action and according to Daniel symbolise bullets bouncing off them<sup>201</sup>. I did not find a description of particular Iwa Ibo connected to the dance. However Nwando Ebizie associated very strongly with the 'defiant and courageous'<sup>202</sup> feeling of the dance through her Nigerian cultural heritage.

## **The Central Movement and Direction**

We start in on our hands and feet in a plank position, with the pelvis slightly raised and one at time bring the knees to the chest to engage the leg movement with the core of the body. We repeat this standing with the upper body leaning forward but with an erect spine. The feet strike flat on the earth pushing through from the core. Then we work on the chest. We start on the floor on our hands and knees and push the chest forwards and backwards as if it is bouncing up and down. In standing we do the same imagining a bullet ricocheting back and forth inside the chest. Nwando Ebizie points out that the:

"the engine of the movement is banging back and forth, something deep within the cage of the torso that never stops. It drives you from here. IT drives you, not you pushing it. That would be a different move. And it does not come from the shoulders."<sup>203</sup>

We add in the arms elbows out laterally, in a position similar to the Mayi with the forearms bent at 90 degrees and fingers facing forward. However the chest leads the movement rather than the shoulders. We add in a basic step: standing in parallel, step out to the right and come back to parallel, step out to the left and back in. We open out from the hips engaging the core so that the stomach muscles move the legs and the weight is put fully on the stepping out leg. The dip in the bent legged is used to push back to parallel. There is a kind of ricocheting in the movement and an explosion free energy.

## **The Element**

The association with metal connects to the movement of the arms with the palms flat symbolising the blades of the machete. In some of the other traditional movements the feet shuffle and the hands are held in fists together representing the chains that develops into movements symbolic of breaking free from chains. Moss Beynon-Jukes notes the images that she worked with:

"Ibo: Absolute association with metal, metal work, chains and sweat. Hope in the foot

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<sup>198</sup> Martin 1996, p.244

<sup>199</sup> Zsuzsa Parrag: Personal Communication 2014

<sup>200</sup> Martin 1996, p.243

<sup>201</sup> Daniel 2005, p.113

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, *5 NE Performer Evaluation*

patterns.

Limited space, limited movement. These limits create an energetic desire to cross lines, or circle forms inherent in the movement. A sense of the weight of inflicted limitation. Traveling across the space to break free<sup>204</sup>

## **Petwo**

### **The Dance**

The Petwo dance relates to specific Petwo rites and the Iwa Ezili Danto, the sister of Ezili Freda. She is the goddess of revenge and the defender of women against sexual violence, sometimes depicted as the Black Madonna. She is strongly associated with the liberation of Haiti from the French from a ceremony in 1791 devoted to her in that has gone down in history and myth as beginning the Haitian Revolution<sup>205</sup>. She is still very relevant in Haiti today as a political symbol<sup>206</sup>. There is a troubling side to her and Dunham characterises the rites as dark and violent:

“The atmosphere of a true Petro ceremony is hostile and negative. The possessions are apt to resemble frenzy rather than ecstasy.”<sup>207</sup>

However Alfred Métraux emphasises the underworld chthonian aspect of the Petwo Iwa.

“The word petro inescapably conjures up visions of implacable force, of roughness even ferocity...”<sup>208</sup>

Zsuzsa Parrag, I must point out, was always at pains to dispel these negative associations and characterise Ezili Danto as hot or fiery compared to her sister who is cool and watery<sup>209</sup>. The dance itself seems to generate heat and an ecstatic feeling Zsuzsa Parrag describe it is a healing dance with the elemental association of fire, a fire which comes up from the earth. However at the same time it seems to be associated with war and aggression<sup>210</sup>. It was this combination of healing through violence that we used in the performance.

### **The Central Movement and Direction**

We isolated the basic movement of the Petwo as a forward and backwards thrust of the pelvis that involves the whole spine and the chest, but begins in the centre of the body. We begin on our hands and knees and loosen the pelvis, bringing it forward towards head and then up towards the ceiling. Coming to standing the feet are planted wide, just beyond the shoulders, knees bent with the weight pushing down into the floor. Using the same forward and backward movement we allow the spine and the chest to become naturally involved. There is resistance to the movement that is very different from the lbo ricochet. We add the arms and hands, which press as a solid block to the front with the pelvic thrust. The movement is bound creating friction, there is definite stop in the arm movements. We add a basic step, a backward movement in the feet as the pelvis moves forward that presses against the floor in a

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<sup>204</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>205</sup> Robert Debs and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood: the story of the Haitian people 1492-1995*, (London : University Press of America, c1996) p. 39-40

<sup>206</sup> Ezili Danto: 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph [http://www.margueritelaurent.com/ezilidanto\\_bio.html](http://www.margueritelaurent.com/ezilidanto_bio.html)

<sup>207</sup> Dunham 1983, p.60

<sup>208</sup> 4. Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (Schocken Books, New York, 1972), p.88

<sup>209</sup> Szusza Parrag *Personal Communication* 2013

<sup>210</sup> Daniel 2005, p.114

symbolic gesture of grinding herbs. The aspect of the feet going backwards and sliding on the floor causes friction. This held resistance in the body creates the heat, there is a certain frustration that emerges, Zsuzsa would always say, the dance makes her angry.

### **The Element**

The traditional elemental association is with fire Moss Beynon-Juckles says:

“The Ibo and The Petwo melt into each other- metal work and fire. Heat, melting, sweltering anger, and basic pride and dignity denied. Petwo: Arms as proud unforgiving blades, slicing the air for freedoms sake. Connected to fire. Ferocity, anger, tempo always increases. Blood in the eyes. Bloody thoughts. Thoughts about murder.”<sup>211</sup>

Nwando Ebizie’s main Transformation Ritual was structured around a Petwo Ezili Danto possession and Moss Beynon-Juckles Mamatrix Possession which leads to the scene of the Willing Sacrifice were based on the Petwo rhythm and dance.

### **Banda**

#### **The Dance**

The Banda is slightly different it is the one dance where the personality of the Iwa becomes prominent. It is a danced in honour of the Ghede or the Iwas of the dead. When we were first taught it, the technical side to the dance was moved through quite quickly and the improvisational aspects of it were emphasised. According Dunham its origins are in Haitian funeral rites treading the line between a ritual and a social dance.<sup>212</sup> There are many types of Ghede but the most well known is Baron Samedi. The Baron makes frequent appearances in international popular culture<sup>213</sup> my preferred incarnation is in the James Bond film *Live and Let Die* where he is played by Geoffrey Holder<sup>214</sup>.

The Baron wears a top hat, tailcoat and dark glasses with one lens punched out. He has specific gestures: he smokes a cigar, drinks hot pepper rum and snorts cocaine. He is anarchic, sexually suggestive and tells filthy jokes<sup>215</sup>. Deren describes him as the:

“The lord of eroticism which, being inevitable, is therefore beyond good and evil and is beyond the elations and despairs of love. Of this he is neither proud nor ashamed...”<sup>216</sup>

His face is painted half white and half black to symbolise that he has one foot in death and one foot in life. As he is dead, his appetite can never be satisfied and his eroticism is impotent. He has a clownish side and will shamelessly mock the pains and passions of love picking up on people’s weaknesses: confronting the pious with obscenities, embarrass the shy and humiliate the arrogant.

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<sup>211</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>212</sup> Dunham 1983, p.10

<sup>213</sup> The website horrorpedia brings together many these appearances

<https://horrorpedia.com/2013/10/15/baron-samedi-and-haitian-loa-folklore-religion/> (accessed 14/09/16)

<sup>214</sup> For his character biography see <http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0026661/bio> (accessed 14/09/16)

<sup>215</sup> Dunham 1983, p.114

<sup>216</sup> Deren 1970, p.102



“...he introduces men to their own devil, for whoever would consider sex as a sin creates and confronts, in Ghede, his own guilt.”<sup>217</sup>

### **The Central Movement and Direction**

The basic movement for the Banda is a circling in the hips that is held tightly to the spine. The erotic aspect to the movement rather than being held back is unashamedly celebrated.

We begin this with a stepping forward movement accentuating the thrust of the hips and emphasising the impulses in the pelvis. The main aim is to release the pelvis in a way that feels free. It is very different from the lightness and flow of the Kongo and the powerful resistance of the Petwo.

We follow this by walking up the wall until we are standing on hands with the knees bent, feet against the wall. In an articulated shake we move the pelvis rapidly forwards and backwards. With Banda the movement develops quite spontaneously into interaction between the performers and as Moss Beynon-Juckles points out everything leads from this pelvic movement:

“Banda: The Pelvis as the head. Thinking from the pelvis. Direction under the pelvis. A certain type of surrender to the politically incorrect advances of the overt pelvis. Pelvis as predator, as naughty, reckless, fickle, fun, consuming.”<sup>218</sup>

### **The Element**

We naturally associated the Banda and Ghede as the gods of the dead with the element of Spirit:

“In magic the pentagram represents the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth—plus one other. [...] with the addition of the fifth element of spirit. The elements of spirit binds together and governs the other four.”<sup>219</sup>

MBJ observed during the creation of the training that she felt that “Banda was all the elements making up the spirit element.” This led me to use it as the clear point of departure for beginning improvisation in order to create material.

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Appendix E: Performer Evaluations, 2 *MBJ Soho Evaluation*

<sup>219</sup> Israel Regardie, *The Middle Pillar The Balance Between Mind and Magic*, 1998, Llewellyn Publications, Woodberry, USA p.185

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## **Online Resources Related to *The Passion of Lady Vendredi***

The Biting Point Live Review: Lady Vendredi's Urban Rites: Battle Cry! @ The Apiary  
<https://thebitingpoint.wordpress.com/2015/09/22/live-review-lady-vendredis-urban-rites-battle-cry/>

Hysteria, The Passion Of Lady Vendredi, A Review By Rudy Loewe  
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The Passion of Lady Vendredi online programme  
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