

Carnival Performance

Aesthetics:

Trinidad Carnival and Art making in
the Diaspora

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	p.1
Chapter ONE: History of the Trinidad Carnival	p.24
Chapter TWO: Carnival and Performance	p.52
Chapter THREE: Towards a Concept of Mas'	p.98
Chapter FOUR: Mama dat is Mas' art project Review	p.152
Chapter FIVE: Conclusion - Project AfterWords	p.199
Bibliography	p.220
Appendix	p.229

List of Illustrations

1. Trinidad Carnival 1896. Image courtesy whensteeltalks.ning.com (p.31)
2. Jouvay reveler 2003. Image courtesy Wendell Manwarren (p.39)
3. Sailor Mas', Port of Spain Trinidad 2011. Image courtesy Scott Dewis (p.44)
4. Pretty mas' costume. Image courtesy I-sanna Gibbons-Fideler (p.47)
5. cAnfAs in Cardiff Carnival. Image courtesy Wahda Placide (p.102)
6. *Symbiosis*, CAGE Gallery Edna Manley College, Jamaica. Image courtesy the artist Marlon Griffith (p.142)
7. *Cerra del Aripo, Caterpilla*. Image courtesy Davlin Thomas (p.145)
8. *Mama dat is Mas', the Shrine Station*. Image by John Collingswood (p.178)
9. *Mama dat is Mas', performance still 01*. Image by Catriona Abuneke (p.181)
10. *Mama dat is Mas', performance still 02*. Image by Catriona Abuneke (p.182)

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the ways in which identity and ritual converge within the emancipatory performances of the Trinidad Carnival and the Caribbean inspired Carnivals of Notting Hill and Cardiff. The work looks at the ways in which Carnival performances can be interpreted in order to investigate how these interpretations can be practically utilized within art-making or art presentation. The thesis develops an innovative reading of the word mas' (masquerade/mask) offering new perspectives that can serve as a nucleus for ways of engaging with and analyzing Carnival. The consideration of mas' as a performance activity with traits that can be manifested within and outside of the Carnival environment is highly relevant and has been applied in my practical art experiment called *Mama dat is Mas'*. The project also aims to analyze the ways in which re-interpretations of mas' can engage with issues of social anxiety and feelings of displacement.

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INTRODUCTION

A people's art is the genesis of their freedom.¹

The Trinidad Carnival can be seen as both a spectacle² and a personal performance ritual. Mas'³ (as the Carnival performance is described by Trinidadians) fills the street at Carnival time and it is not only manifested in the artistry that explodes on a grand scale on the streets. Weeks before Carnival Monday and Tuesday, the mas' is also visible in the disposition of the people, the way they walk, the way they play the Carnival music in their cars and from their porches, the way they dress and dress-up – the whole island is throbbing with anticipation. Having booked tickets in advance, those that wish to avoid the 'heat' of the season escape to the sister island of Tobago, go on a remote retreat or stay at home. The rest of the islanders count down the days, hours and minutes to start their annual ritual, which begins with the early Monday morning celebration of Jouvay.⁴ This thesis develops an interpretation of the word 'mas' and uses that interpretation to explore the ways in which Carnival performance

¹ C. Jones, 'Caribbean Carnival 1959. Souvenir Program', quoted in C. B. Davies' *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007), p. 167.

² Here, the use of the word spectacle refers to a visually striking image as opposed to the exploration of the Yoruba Spectacle discussed by Henry John Drewal and Margret Thompson Drewal in their book *Gelede* (1990) as "a fleeting, transitory phenomenon", one that is concerned with bringing manifestations of spirit to the physical world, although the Drewal and Drewal research contribute to my later considerations of mas' performance. H. and M. Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Indiana University Press, USA, 1990), p. 1.

³ The word mas' (or mas) comes from the Trinidadian vernacular and as such, there are variations in spelling. In this study I favour the spelling option with the apostrophe as, in my view, it represents a sense of lineage (connection to another word), a sense of loss (apostrophe substituting something that is no longer there) and also shows potential for re-invention. In that regard mas' (with the apostrophe) can be aligned metaphorically as significant to the evolution of notions of Caribbean-ness.

⁴ Jouvay – Jou-vé (jou-vay, jou-vé, jou-vert, j'ou-vert, jour ou-vert) The beginning of the carnival celebrations before dawn on the Monday morning of the week in the Christian observance of Lent will begin; it is set going officially at 5am with street dancing to steel-band music and people playing ole mas individually or in bands. R. Allsopp (ed), *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage: with a French & Spanish Supplement* (UWI Press, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, 2003), p. 317.

can be utilized within art spaces in the diaspora in order to address and empower those who feel some sense of displacement.

Within the general Trinidadian society 'to play mas' usually refers to the activity of wearing and dancing a 'pretty' costume, within a Carnival band on Carnival Monday and Carnival Tuesday. To play mas' although commonly understood in that context, can also have visual and performance-based manifestations within the early morning Jouvay celebrations. The word mas' is also inherently a part of the Trinidadian vernacular so that within and outside of the Carnival season, the word mas' can be used to describe certain scenarios. Mas' can therefore be variously interpreted as a performance within the Carnival Monday and Tuesday, within the Jouvay or outside of the Carnival season as a whole. I wish to emphasize a performative connotation of mas' that suggests 'a type of bacchanal.' Within the Carnival context, mas' performances permit an empowering freedom for the reveller through a re-presentation of self via costume and/or performance or play. It is that empowering aspect of performance that I am interested in accessing when considering how mas' can be interpreted within art spaces to the benefit of those who feel some sense of displacement.

Playwright Tony Hall defines his use of the word mas' in the context of his Carnival Monday presentation 2014 in an interview with the *Trinidad Express* newspaper. Hall states:

I mean playing mas, as opposed to playing Carnival, mas is what we do... Mas is a specific mechanism that has to do with spirit possession and masking to reveal inner energy. It is an ancient apparatus important to

our being. Mas, as defined by [economist, professor, intellectual] Lloyd Best is being whatever you're supposed to be, to do what you have to do.⁵

The above quotation from Hall suggests that mas' is empowering as it allows for the expression of an inner self and allows us to "be whatever [we're] supposed to be." Hall emphasizes a distinction between mas' and Carnival that is viscerally understood by Carnival revellers and spectators. There is a current debate among cultural critics such as playwright Tony Hall and Carnival costume designers Brian MacFarlane and Peter Minshall, among other culturally active participants, that positions mas' in the context of meaningful expression, aligned with male dominated traditional mas', the playing of a character through the transformation via costume and 'Carnival' with the more frivolous contemporary female-dominated 'pretty' mas'. In light of that, I argue that a closer examination of the context of mas' usage allows for a better understanding of how mas' can be positioned within the Carnival as I propose that although mas' and Carnival are distinct in terms of emphasis, they are not as clearly distinguishable as traditional versus contemporary, nor do they fall neatly under male-dominated versus female forms of display. I argue that mas' can be manifested in both traditional and contemporary spaces.

To play 'a(h) mas' involves an 'other' activity different from the norm or regular life. My contextualization of the Trinidad Carnival performance and mas' can be located within a broader field that is connected to ways of interpreting identity, re-presenting self, to notions of playing, finding forms of agency and modes of reacting through performance. In that respect it is linked to current

⁵ *Trinidad Express Newspaper* (2014) Make Way for Miss Miles – Monday Mas, *Trinidad Express Newspaper*. Originally printed at <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Make-way-for-Miss-Miles--Monday-mas-245630771.html>. [Last accessed 14.02.2014]

theories of performance, Carnival and ritual as well as to issues of diaspora and post-colonial discourse. These different theories are important to my research as they help inform the ways in which art practice, Carnival and performance (as social ritual) can access and begin to address potential ways of dealing with feelings of anxiety, fears and potential frustrations within the context of displacement. The notion of displacement is set within the diasporic experience of immigrants and is relevant both to the history of Caribbean (to where people were forcibly moved, where people chose to move and within which Carnival evolved) and the more relatively contemporary situation of living as an immigrant in the UK. To function effectively outside of one's familiar place and having to make/forgo a space to exist within, requires forms of self-transformation that are familiar to masquerade traditions – those of becoming an 'other' for survival.

A consideration of mas' is increasingly relevant as its usage, within the Trinidadian context, holds a poignancy that imbues the word with a meaning that is both inherently understood and at the same time, difficult to clearly define. Mas' is not entirely identical to its translated meaning. That is, mas' can be mask, or masquerade or Carnival, but it is potentially that and more. This thesis engages with the relationships that develop between Carnival, mas', ritual and art. Mas' as a performative expression that resonates with a people suggests that the word holds identifiable traits and as such, stimulates the question: What are these traits and are they transferable to art contexts? As the action of playing mas' instigates empowering, liberating effects I ask, is it possible to access those effects through an interpretation of mas' in art making or art-presentation for

displaced peoples?

Located within a post-colonial discourse, writers such as Gerald Aching⁶, Earl Lovelace⁷ and Richard Schechner⁸, who engage with issues of performance and identity, gravitate towards a critical engagement with Carnival performance to varying degrees. However, these writers have not, to date, approached mas' as an activity distinct in emphasis, from Carnival. One writer who has begun to explore the different emphases between mas' and Carnival is economist, professor and intellectual Lloyd Best. In the final paragraph of his essay 'Making Mas with Possibility: 500 Years Later', Best states that mas' is not Carnival.⁹ He considers Carnival as 'total theatre', one within which mas' performance is incorporated. Best continues:

Carnival is not only total theatre combining mas, pan, calypso and limbo, as metaphor. It is the central and legitimating rite of the culture. We have only to fathom it to make mas with the possible.¹⁰

In the above quotation, Best does more than simply position mas' in relation to Carnival. What is highlighted for me is the way in which the word mas' is used to represent the costumed aspect of Carnival as well as an affirmative mobilizing social action. Earlier in his essay, Best states that:

[M]as emerges as activity absolutely necessary to identification of self, given social family, ethnic community and constantly shifting bases of cultural kinship. In America we 'play ourselves' ritually and in many incarnations, no fewer than those in which we also play the Other. Is the

⁶ G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, Cultural Studies of the Americas, Volume 8, 2002).

⁷ E. Lovelace, 'The Emancipation Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York and London, 2004).

⁸ R. Schechner, 'Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York, London 2004).

⁹ L. Best, 'Making Mas with Possibility: 500 Years Later' in George Lamming (ed.) *Enterprise of the Indies* (Trinidad and Tobago: Institute of the West Indies, 1999), p. 297.

¹⁰ L. Best, 'Making Mas with Possibility: 500 Years Later' in George Lamming (ed.) *Enterprise of the Indies* (Trinidad and Tobago: Institute of the West Indies, 1999), p. 297.

multiple role not the creole process in motion? Is it not what has prepared and is still preparing us to compete and prosper, once we come to see it as core activity, valid, enduring and profitable, in many definitions?¹¹

Best considers mas' to be the way we act and enact, the way we take on roles in order to survive and overcome, in order to advance in society. He states that we play ourselves and play the other. To 'play yuhself' used in the Trinidad colloquial context refers to the obvious 'being yourself' but also suggests crossing a line – it suggests that you have gone beyond the norm or the expectation of your everyday persona. In a significant way, I interpret 'play yourself' as a performance that allows us to go beyond our everyday self and to access an 'other' aspect of ourselves. In light of the above quote from Best, mas' plays with complex multiplicity in the everyday performances for survival within and outside of the Carnival environment. As mentioned previously, I am interested in furthering discussions on mas' by identifying the potential traits of mas' and how these traits can be interpreted within art making.

Lloyd Best and playwright Tony Hall¹² have to date made the most significant contribution towards engaging with mas' as distinct from Carnival. Writers such as Earl Lovelace, Gerald Aching and playwright Rawle Gibbons¹³ have contributed significantly to writings on Carnival that deal with important aspects of how we understand ourselves as Caribbean people and the ways in which mas'/Carnival/cultural performances act as empowering modes of expression. These will be discussed in more detail shortly. My research interest

¹¹ L. Best, 'Making Mas with Possibility: 500 Years Later' in George Lamming (ed.) *Enterprise of the Indies* (Trinidad and Tobago: Institute of the West Indies, 1999), p. 296.

¹² Tony Hall manages a BLOG called *The Jouvay Institute* in which he documents his ideas, projects and workshops that engage with Jouvay as a creative process within theatre.

<http://jouvayinstitute.blogspot.co.uk> [last accessed 20.09.2014].

¹³ R. Gibbons, *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics*, (WVT, Germany 1998).

follows in the footsteps of creative people such as director, musician and academic Geraldine Connor¹⁴ who has contributed to ways of engaging with Carnival forms, rooted in celebratory performances for the theatre stage. Most influential of her works was large-scale stage production *Carnival Messiah*. Based on Handel's¹⁵ oratorio *Messiah*, this work engaged with integrating European and Caribbean forms, playing with notions of transformation, empowerment and re-presentation from a modus operandi that can be considered distinctly Caribbean/diasporic.¹⁶ Carnival forms (costumes) and symbols (character attitudes) were interpreted within this aesthetic rendition, ultimately addressing ideas of equality and self-discovery. Guadeloupian writer-scholar-curator Claire Tancons also has an interest in Carnivals. In her writing, Tancons begins to distinguish nuances in performance activities such as Carnivals, protests and funeral processions, in order to explore the emancipatory street energy in these public presentations. In her essay 'Spring', (a proposal to the Gwangju Biennale) Tancons pays homage to the Gwangju Democratic Movement¹⁷ and identifies distinctions between a Carnival and Spectacle:

If the accumulation of capital is the condition of the Spectacle, the cancellation of capital is the condition of Carnival. If capital excess breeds Spectacle, the lack of capital engenders Carnival. Lack, however, is not absence, but presence denied, the nullification of excess by an excess of excess.¹⁸

¹⁴ G. Connor, *!Hallelulia!: Excursions into a third space: 'Carnival Messiah' as an instrument of postcolonial liberation*. (UK: University of Leeds, 2005).

¹⁵ 'Handel, George Frideric' in Stanley Sadie/John Tyrrell (eds.) *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. (Macmillan, London, 2001).

¹⁶ Connor, *!Hallelulia!* UK: University of Leeds, 2005).

¹⁷In the spring (May 18-27) of 1980, the people of the South Korean city of Gwangju rebelled against dictatorship and took over the city. The South Korean army eventually crushed the popular uprising.

¹⁸C. Tancons, *7th Gwangju Biennale: SPRING*, p. 340. PDF downloaded at <https://independent.academia.edu/ClaireTancons>.

According to Tancons, the Spectacle relates to the physical display of power and capital. Tancons contrasts this with the notion of the Carnavalesque as one of anti-spectacle. Tancons underscores this relationship with the example of South Korea versus North Korea (grand display of spectacle and power) along with words such as “popular manifestations” and “theatrical staging of destruction” to describe the climactic performative attributes of each respectively. According to Tancons, the Carnavalesque resides in the realm of public performances that have the capacity to comment on and address issues arising from the politics of the Spectacle. In her ‘Spring’ proposal, Tancons draws on the Carnavalesque nature of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, also referred to as the Gwangju People's Resistance, to substantiate her vision of using Carnival procession as the main presentation tool of her curatorial art project. Both the Spectacle and the Carnavalesque share certain qualities – those of being public and of being visual/visible. Although Tancons mainly places these two in opposition, when the allegiances of a Carnavalesque presentation shift, it can become a Spectacle. According to Tancons, the main distinguishing factor between Spectacles with their grand displays and Carnival is precisely about power and capital. There is no mention of whether the removal of capital from a Spectacle engenders a Carnival. Tancons’ interest in the concept of Carnival versus that of spectacle is furthered in another essay, ‘Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility.’ Tancons states:

Carnival hardly exists in the United States anymore. It has survived as a Shrovetide festival with Mardi Gras in New Orleans and as a summer celebration for the West Indian community with the Labor Day parade in Brooklyn. However, the carnivalesque – as a medium of emancipation and

a catalyst for civil disobedience – is alive and well, and these contemporary carnivals have retained their rebellious potential.¹⁹

Here, Tancons observes that the carnivalesque is no longer visible in Carnivals but very visible in protests and demonstrations (referred to as ‘contemporary carnivals’). Tancons is interested in mass and the culmination of this mass in spaces with a common purpose (funerals, Carnival, protests). Her work contributes to some of the ways in which Carnival can be interpreted apart from the carnivalesque and how the carnivalesque is manifested in other public performances outside of Carnivals. Although my research focuses on mas’, I acknowledge that the choice of words – mas’ and carnivalesque – can often share certain attributes. However, whereas Tancons concentrates on attributes of the carnivalesque with a rebellious emphasis on disrupting and challenging the status quo, I place emphasis on transformation through performance. My research starts with the individual reveller within Trinidadian society and from their interpretation of mas’ and what the performances mean to them, broader connections are made with scholarship about Carnival, performance and ritual and experimentation within art spaces. Also relevant to my work is Tancons’ projects as a curator which engage with Carnival elements in art space contexts. The curated Carnival art projects of Tancons have often emphasized the visual aesthetic of the festival through the manipulation of materials and the use of mass bodies in mainly outdoor processions.²⁰ I emphasize that my approach to this research accesses the experience of individual revellers, beginning with the personal ritual of Carnival. In that respect, my art experiments that inform this

¹⁹ C. Tancons, *Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility*, p. 4. PDF downloaded at <https://independent.academia.edu/ClaireTancons>.

²⁰ On 23rd August 2014, Claire Tancons curated *Uptown, Downtown: An Indoor Carnival*, at the Tate Modern, Turbine Hall in London. These performances were indoor and aimed to invoke specific viewer experiences within the Notting Hill Carnival history.

work will necessarily aim to engage mainly with the performer immersion experience as it is from that point that notions of displacement and social anxiety can be addressed.

My interest in Carnival developed into a deeper desire to engage critically with the performance aesthetics of the Trinidad Carnival in 2007. Many of the textual materials that I had access to at that time provided more of a historical interpretation than a critical one. I have found it useful to position the history of the beginnings of the Trinidad Carnival performance directly in relation to the critical interpretations as one feeds directly into the other. Writers like Errol Hill,²¹ Professor Hollis Liverpool²² and Maurine Warner-Lewis²³ give sound historical contexts; Clinton Hutton,²⁴ Gerald Aching,²⁵ Rawle Gibbons,²⁶ Milla Riggio²⁷ and Earl Lovelace²⁸ engage with Caribbean performance or Carnival concepts more critically and in the case of Lovelace, also creatively in his novel: *The Dragon Can't Dance*.²⁹ I would also cite three other works of direct interest: the first is Samantha Noel's essay 'De Jamette in We: redefining performance in contemporary' published in the *Small Axe* Journal in 2010. The second is Susan Harewood's *Masquerade as Methodology... or, Why Cultural Studies Should Return*

²¹ E. Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (New Beacon Books, London, 1997).

²² H. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: the Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962*, (Research Associates School Times Publications/Frontline Distribution Int'l Inc., Chicago 2001).

²³ M. Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Sons: The African Dynamic In Trinidad Culture* (The Majority Press, Dover, Massachusetts, 1991).

²⁴ C. Hutton, 'The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Identity and Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom', *Caribbean Quarterly* Volume 53, Nos. 1&2, (March-June 2007).

²⁵ G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, Cultural Studies of the Americas, Volume 8, 2002).

²⁶ R. Gibbons, *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics*, (WVT, Germany 1998).

²⁷ M. C. Riggio (ed.), *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York, London, 2004).

²⁸ E. Lovelace, 'The Emancipation Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York and London, 2004).

²⁹ E. Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance: a Novel* (Persea Books, New York, 1998).

to the Caribbean and the third is Edwidge Danticat's novel *After the Dance*. These writers are all engaged with Caribbean or Caribbean-diaspora issues (with a focus on Carnival/Caribbean culture) from a specifically Caribbean standpoint.³⁰ This has been crucial to my research because as these writers highlight a growing trend of Caribbean thinkers taking an interest in writing, documenting and critically engaging with their own stories, they provide a platform of Caribbean voices that help to decipher the relevance and resonance of performance and forms of re-presentation at home and abroad – contributing to answering questions about why we play ah mas'. While I have also looked at Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, I have not focused in detail on his writing because of the argument that within a Caribbean context, the dynamics at play within the Carnival ritual have subtexts distinct from those that have been theorized by Bakhtin, which in turn affect the performances or play within the environment differently.³¹ Of Bakhtin, writer Susan Harewood stated:

Caribbean writers, in particular have drawn upon masquerade and carnival's endless cascading cast of characters and sensual experiences in order to rework the literary form to move literature beyond the realist western model. In some ways these writers trace a different journey from that of Mikhail Bakhtin. Whereas Bakhtin traces the sublimation of the carnivalesque into the European novel, these postcolonial writers seek to reimagine The Word and reanimate representation by moving 'from literature to carnival.'³²

The issues arising from the postcolonial discourse within the writings of the specific authors mentioned previously, are directly relevant to ideas of identity

³⁰ Milla Riggio is an American, but she has conducted considerable research on the Trinidad Carnival and has immersed herself in the culture. Riggio has a keen interest in performance and organizes an annual exchange program in which students from the US come to Trinidad to study Carnival performance.

³¹ R. Schechner, 'Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York, London 2004), p. 3.

³² S. Harewood, 'Masquerade as Methodology... or Why Cultural Studies Should Return to the Caribbean', in C. McCarthy, A. Durham, L. Engel, A. Filmer, M. Giardina, M. Malagrega (eds.) *Globalizing Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Interventions in Theory, Method, and Policy* (Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2007), p. 69.

and belonging which I engage with in this thesis. I have, however, found Bakhtin's writing useful as a base for interpreting more general Carnival dynamics.

I have also considered ritual to be an important aspect of Caribbean performances and useful as a template for experimenting with performances outside of the Carnival context. Of particular interest with regards to theories of performance and ritual are Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* and Victor Turner's *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. I have found their work integral to interpreting ritual forms specifically in relation to performance and masquerade. While various theories of performance are relevant to considerations of Carnival performances, I have chosen to focus on Schechner and Turner as they deal specifically with ritual aspects of Performance Theory and discuss Carnival within their analysis of masquerade forms. As my focus involves unraveling the ritual of Carnival in relation to interpretations of the word mas', I felt it appropriate to focus on those theories that have already begun to engage on some level with Carnival, ritual and masquerade. Being placed specifically in relation to its cultural context and history offered a greater insight into the impetus of the performer experience, specifically when considering Trinidad as a racially diverse space and some of the ways in which the effects of the experience of colonization are manifested in contemporary performances. In mentioning Carnival within broader analyses of ritual and performance, Schechner and Turner permit a starting point for a deliberate, further analysis of where Carnival fits beyond revellery.

I look at concepts of Identity Theory and Diaspora/ Post-Colonial Theory mainly through the writings of Stuart Hall who has written seminal essays on

these issues in the Caribbean context. The works by each of the afore-mentioned writers, theorists and critical thinkers, contributed to my interpretations of the role and function of performances and aided me in acquiring a deeper understanding of Carnival Performance. That is, by dealing with notions of Carnival, identity, performances and ritual, these writers play a part in my interpretation of what mas' experiences entail as physical, psychological and social experiences.

My focus on mas' implies an approach that relies on analysing deliberate performative manifestations within the Carnival in relation to the everyday and historical context. This mas' focus suggests that I pay privileged attention to the performance of costumed dance, as the word 'mas' is usually associated with this aspect of Carnival. This deliberate focus provides a useful starting point for beginning to decipher a meaning for mas', which is an intrinsic component to the development of ideas that make up this thesis. The thesis teases out the idea that mas' can be manifested both within and outside of the Carnival environment. Within the Carnival environment, mas' occurs alongside music. Mas' can certainly be located in relation to the formal structures of competitions as well as broader cultural nationalist projects. Music has played an important role in the development of Carnivals. In the thesis I move between positioning the Trinidad Carnival, Notting Hill Carnival and Cardiff Carnival within their historical contexts and observing/describing/analysing the performances within these spaces. However I maintain that my priority is with a consideration of the word mas' as associated but distinct from some of the considerations that may be relevant to engaging with Carnivals as events or festivals.

The complexity involved in looking at Carnival in order to decipher a new meaning for the word mas' raises ambiguities that are associated with the assumed synonymous meaning of mas' and Carnival. I have briefly touched on the political project of Carnival, specifically in relation to 'Pretty Mas,' in my first chapter. The development of Carnival can be seen as a nationalist project of nation-building in post-emancipation Trinidad during the 1930s under influence of the scholar and the first prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Eric Williams. In this thesis I engage with performances that may have been excluded from this political project, such as jamette mas'. I consider the need and necessity that participants feel to perform, situated within various personal, social and political contexts. In that sense, my interest, although naturally and inevitably inextricably linked to the movement that financially established Carnival and exported it, is also very much connected to an aesthetic approach to performance that can exist both within and outside of the sanctioned borders.

The personal, social and political preoccupations of performances within the Carnival manifest aspects of transvestism, transgressive grotesque exaggeration and bare body exposure. In many ways these performances are rooted in the experiences of those on the island, and they are inclusive and simultaneously subject-specific. In gaining a broad concept of the mas' experience and manifestations of mas' performances located both within and outside of the Carnival, I have found it sufficient for this particular phase of the research to explore mas performance through the lens of ritual, identity and performance theory. This approach allows me to engage with context/relevance and form, which are necessary for interpretation within art spaces.

Consequently, in an effort to further unravel the concept of mas', I have included extensive references to and quotations from interviews that I have conducted in Carnival Caribbean and diasporic contexts with Carnival practitioners. Carnival is not a static event and it is constantly evolving. That the Carnival is evolving implies that as the art/costumes and performances reflect, recall and respond to everyday society, the experiences and interpretations of these Carnival performances will inevitably shift depending on how the society changes. This thesis is situated within the period of my research and acknowledges that the views and opinions collected are also set within that time frame. The interviews from primary sources include those from academic, professional and personal contacts in Trinidad and within the Carnival sphere in Cardiff and London. I have looked at the Notting Hill Carnival as the most popular of the transplanted Trinidad Carnivals in the UK. The relevance of highlighting Cardiff Carnival emerged from my experience of working within that space and discovering the differences that existed in how the performances were played out and how the public received them. The Cardiff Carnival was even more relevant for my research when it came to considering the context and space within which it was introduced, in light of Carnivals that existed previously in different pockets of Cardiff.³³ The inputs from these different spaces have proven to be vital resources as the different opinions are located and specific to

³³ The Carnivals that existed in the other parts of Cardiff and surrounding cities and valleys seem to stem from the idea of community festival. That is, there is a strong emphasis on community, activities for children, music, food and (sometimes) a parade. Although all those elements are part of the Trinidad Carnival, in the Caribbean the performance on the streets (parade) has a tendency to move beyond spectacle and towards necessary visibility for socio-political purposes. The Carnival happens in the main cities in Trinidad on the same day and moves beyond community identity. It is a national thing. This naturally raises the question of how Carnival is interpreted within different spaces outside of the Caribbean and what are the meaningful interpretations generated, that are relevant to the individual. My research has suggested that these Carnivals are community festivals that place emphasis on building community, sharing and working/having fun together.

their different circumstances. The specificity of different experiences produces a wider range of interpretations for consideration, thereby also facilitating a broader range of ideas that can inform interpretations of a 'prospective' meaning of mas' and Carnival performance. By 'prospective' I mean that I am looking towards a working definition of mas' that has not already been established. This is necessary to my project because in facilitating a range of experiences, impressions and perspectives, the ideas that I draw on in defining mas' can potentially begin to incorporate some of their experiences while simultaneously observing similarities more readily. That is, if impressions of mas' and Carnival performance are based on individual exposures to mas', the likelihood of extracting similarities is increased with the more variety of voices that are heard. I place emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative research, so that the variety represented here was less concerned with the overall numbers of opinions represented and more interested in the diversity of experiences.

Additionally, when considering Carnival experiences, valid understandings can come not only from academics but also from the sentiments, expressions and the memories of all kinds of individuals from diverse backgrounds who are passionate about Carnival and have experienced the event intimately. Some of the quoted passages in the chapters that follow include those that were produced via formal interviews, those gathered through casual conversations on Carnival and those that occurred incidentally. Incidental citations include bits of conversations that I had not deliberately intended to take into account in my research but that have in some way proven to be intrinsic to an understanding of a particular aspect of Carnival tendencies.

This thesis uses interpretations of Carnival performance from players, makers and revellers within the Carnival. Formal interviews were conducted in Trinidad, Cardiff and London. As my time within specific spaces was often limited, I aimed to get a varied number of experiences through a select set of different individuals. The framework used for these interviews varied depending on location. In Trinidad some of the interviews were conducted at Carnival mas' camps and others were more formally conducted in an office. Cardiff interviews were set up on a specific day outside of the Carnival mas' camp and some revellers were interviewed after performances at different locations. In London the interviews were mainly conducted on the streets with revellers and onlookers. However, some key contributors were interviewed less formally via on-line correspondence via email and Facebook. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of my research and how their contribution would potentially be used. Interviewees were asked questions such as: What is your Carnival experience, history, how did you get involved? What is mas' to you? Why do you play mas'/Jouvay/Carnival? (or why do you not)? What do you do in everyday life? How is mas'/Jouvay/Carnival different from going to a party? How do you feel after you have performed in the Carnival? The questions were flexible and often followed the lead offered by the interviewees while covering the main points.

I have found it incredibly beneficial to utilize the material I gathered from primary sources such as, personal interviews and casual conversations in my attempts at gaining an understanding of Trinidad Carnival performance aesthetics. The procedure for gathering interviews ensured that no one felt coerced into giving information. All interviewees consented and informants have

been thanked for their contribution in the acknowledgements. An edited DVD with some of the participants' interviews is included in the appendices to this thesis, since I have found it consistently beneficial to hear and see aspects of the interviewees' contribution juxtaposed with a glimpse of the Carnival spaces to which their experiences are related.

In addition to being a researcher and visual artist, I am part of the movement of Carnival, a player too, in the midst of it. My approach is influenced by the fact that I am Trinidadian and have been living in Wales for over 11 years and write on Carnival as an experience from memory, which in itself carries implications that may involve imbuing the Carnival performance with nostalgic resonances. The Carnival I remember is not the Carnival of today or tomorrow. This project is relevant because, having made the journey from Trinidad to Wales, I have missed the Carnival and more importantly, what the Carnival allowed me to express and experience, beyond the glitter and mud. With this work, I seek to engage with the question of whether it is possible to experience mas' outside of Carnival. In addition to the fact that there is a Cardiff Carnival with which I have been involved in different capacities during my residence in Cardiff, I am interested in being involved in a performance over which I could claim performative ownership, one that has the potential to allow for transformation and empowerment, one in which my inherent language of movement need not be censored to accommodate the criticisms of the onlooker or fellow reveller.

My experience within the diasporic space that is the UK has re-contextualized the category of 'black' and what a black body should and should not do within stereotypes of representation. Within multi-racial Trinidad

society, there is a black/non-white majority. Trinidadians speak openly about differences in complexion and racial mixtures and attribute labels for describing individuals based on visual manifestations such as the slant of their eyes and the length and texture of their hair. However, despite the differences, there is an umbrella sense of Trinidadian-ness that we all have a claim to. It is a sense of identity to which we can react, we can talk about and to which we can talk back, in short we belong. My early art movement experiments during my MA in Wales were met with critical comments around the sexualisation of the black female body. Despite being perturbed, because that was not the intent of the work, I learnt very quickly that being non-white in the diaspora had a long history of meanings that were often negative or exotic. Other comments on my Carnival performance by some revellers within the Cardiff Carnival also made me aware that this black body in movement did not quite 'fit' here. The sense of 'not-belonging' and the sense of wanting to express and empower myself led to the critical exploration that is this thesis. With this work I am interested in exploring the potential of the most empowering elements of Trinidad Carnival when they are transposed to diasporic spaces to empower those who are displaced.

As an artist, a major part of this research involved testing my concept of mas' within a practical artistic experiment. The artistic project that I undertook included a cathartic³⁴ dimension. That is, the notion of experiencing a healing release from performance was relevant, but the performance also aimed to engage with a concurrent experience of agency. In that regard I prefer the use of

³⁴ Catharsis: the notion of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions. From the Greek *katharsis*, from *kathairein* 'cleanse', from *katharos* 'pure'. The notion of 'release' through drama derives from Aristotle's *Poetics*, Online Desktop Dictionary. [Last accessed 13.01.2014]

the term cathartic-restitution as it invokes a sense of reclaiming ownership over a performance for empowerment.

In Chapter One, *History of the Trinidad Carnival*, I look at the ways in which the history of the island is connected to the performances that comprise the Trinidad Carnival. Trinidad's history is looked at mainly through Errol Hill's seminal work, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* and Hollis Liverpool's *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962'* and other relevant literature. This first chapter also looks at specific Carnival performances such as Canboulay, Jouvay, Traditional Mas' and Pretty Mas' and engages with the ways in which these performances are informed by the island's history.

The second chapter, *Carnival and Performance*, looks initially at research in this area, identifying where the discourse is currently and what issues are raised in scholarly texts, as well as the ways in which my work responds to existing literature on the subject. I look specifically at writings by Gerald Aching, Earl Lovelace, Clinton Hutton, Rawle Gibbons, Edwidge Danticat, Samantha Noel, Richard Schechner, Victor Turner and Stuart Hall. This second chapter also briefly engages with the role of music and space in performance and some of the ways in which Carnival music informs movement expressions of empowerment or release. This chapter sets the groundwork for the arguments that follow in the third chapter dealing with considerations of a mas' concept. Here I argue that a mas' experience places emphasis on what the performance *feels* like on the inside rather than on what the performance *looks* like from the outside.

The third chapter, *Towards a Concept of Mas'*, looks firstly at the question of mas' and what that word means, set within the context of Trinidadian

colloquialisms. This search for the meaning of mas' is explored through interviews with revellers in Trinidad, Cardiff and London and informed by Carnival practitioners, Carnival texts and my own experience as a practitioner/reveller. The concept of mas' is also explored through the use of the word within broader phrases such as 'play yuh mas'' and 'make ah mas'', which may have little to actually do with the general context of Carnival. These terms add to the potential construction of a meaning for mas' that is essential for the manipulation of what I have termed *mas' aesthetics* in the chapter that follows. This third chapter also looks at how artists potentially understand, interpret and utilize my construction of mas' aesthetics within their works. I introduce a masked character of my own called cAnfAs and engage in discussion with the works of performer Mary-Anne Roberts, artist Marlon Griffiths, curator Claire Tancons and playwrights Tony Hall and Davlin Thomas. In relation to the artists/performers, I have deliberately identified those who work with mas' elements within their practice, outside of the Carnival context. That is to say, these artists are not Carnival designers but have utilized an embedded code of icons and symbols in a Carnival method of making work, including the use of physical Carnival materials, Carnival ideas or a Carnival methodology within their artistic processes.

The fourth chapter, *Mama dat is Mas'*, reviews my experimental art project concerned with a journey towards realizing a mas' experience outside of the Carnival environment. The project looks at the elements that potentially constitute a mas' experience within my research, at the ways in which mas' can be interpreted and at the visual and performative results of the interpretation. *Mama dat is Mas'* took the research question into a practical arena, testing

elements of Trinidad Carnival that had been identified as intrinsic to a mas' experience and utilizing them within an art space in the hope of attaining some sense of self-empowerment, or cathartic-restitution. In relation to my research question – how are the performances present within the Trinidad Carnival relevant to art making in the diaspora – this practical project not only put the research in a public space experimenting with mas' aesthetics but also permitted public engagement with academic research that continues in forms of online social media correspondences, documentation of project research on the project BLOG <http://mamadatsmas.blogspot.co.uk> and informed my other collaborative art projects that have since developed.

Finally, the fifth chapter, *Project Afterwords*, discusses the findings of the *Mama dat is Mas'* experimental project and argues for the ways in which these findings potentially impact on practice and performance. I approach this research as an artist, as a mas' player, as a mother and as a Trinidadian living in Wales. That is to say that these particular aspects of my make-up have been intrinsically relevant to my interest in the research question and have directly contributed to the events that have led to this study. This research is positioned mainly in relation to Carnival theory, identity, ritual and post-colonial theory. These theories are relevant in contributing to interpretations of the multi-faceted nature of mas' performances and to how these performances are applicable to diasporic experiences of displacement. Rooted within usage of Trinidadian colloquialisms, I have paid particular attention to the masking and performance practices within the Trinidad Carnival. I have not delved into the musical aspects of Calypso, Soca and Steelpan, although I acknowledge that these

genres are intrinsically connected to mas' performance and contribute to the way in which the performances are played out.

Chapter ONE: History of the Trinidad Carnival

Without question carnival had become a symbol of freedom for the broad mass of the population and not merely a season for frivolous enjoyment. It had a ritualistic significance, rooted in the experience of slavery and in celebration of freedom from slavery. In this sense, carnival was no longer a European-inspired nature festival. Adopted by the Trinidad people it became a deeply meaningful anniversary of deliverance from the most hateful form of human bondage. The people would not be intimidated; they would observe carnival in the manner they deemed most appropriate.³⁵

In this chapter I ask two main questions: firstly, can an understanding of the origins of the Trinidad Carnival help in unraveling the nature of the Carnival performance? Secondly, how can an interpretation of this performance throw light upon performances outside of the Trinidad Carnival's specific context? The History of the Trinidad Carnival has been documented in texts such as *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* by Errol Hill (1997) and *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962* by Hollis "Chalkdust" Liverpool (2001).³⁶ The History of the Trinidad Carnival is directly connected to the history of the island. The etymology of the word Carnival comes from the Latin *carne vale* or *carnem levare* or *carnelevarium*, meaning to take away or remove meat/ farewell to the flesh, or from the lesser-cited Roman *carrus navalis* meaning naval wagon or float (later becoming car-nival).³⁷ For the Egyptians, the celebration was concerned with

³⁵ E. Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (New Beacon Books, London, 1997), p. 21.

³⁶ Several published essays can also be cited, some of which have been collated in *The Drama Review: the Journal of Performance Studies – Trinidad and Tobago Carnival*, Volume 42 Number 3, Fall 1998 and *Carnival: Culture in Action – the Trinidad Experience* edited by Milla Cozart Riggio (2004).

³⁷ "The only aspect of carnival that Christianity can legitimately lay claim to, is the term 'Carnival' itself, and even that has been a source of debate. Some etymologists contend that the word is derived from the ship on wheels, 'carrus navalis' central to so many of the antique and medieval rites." A. Orloff, *Carnival: Myth and Cult* (Perlinga, Austria, 1981), p. 37.

the worship of the god Osiris, for the Greeks the worship of Dionysus, for the Romans, the god of wine, Bacchus. When the Roman Catholics adopted the festival, it was inserted into the pre-Lenten calendar. Author Barbara Ehrenreich in her book *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* writes about Carnival celebration as related to human nature and observes its transition from pagan ritual to festivity into everyday life. Ehrenreich says:

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Catholic leaders finally purged the churches of unruly and ecstatic behaviour. They must have known that they could not prohibit such behaviour in the society at large. If the people were so determined to frolic, condemnations and bans would not suffice; some kind of compromise had to be worked out – some kind of balance between obedience and piety on the one hand, and riotous good times on the other. In its battle with the ecstatic strain within Christianity, the Church, no doubt inadvertently, invented carnival.³⁸

The Church's 'invention' of Carnival implies that the Church formulated a word to go with the ecstatic performances that were already present. This point echoes that of Michael Holquist in the prologue of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* as in the following quotation:

Carnival must not be confused with mere holiday or, least of all, with self-serving festivals fostered by governments, secular or theocratic. The sanction for carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by church or state, but from a force that pre-exists priests and kings and to whose power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival.³⁹

Both writers agree that Carnival activity pre-dated the word 'carnival'. In an interview I conducted with Carnival designer/'Mas-man' Peter Minshall on his critical stance on Carnival, he similarly stated that:

The need 'to carnival', is universal and it is simply just every society everywhere has this need to celebrate life, fertility, to seek the blessings

³⁸ B. Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, (Granta Publications, London, 2007), pp. 77-78.

³⁹ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Indiana University Press, USA, 1984), p xviii.

of the universe, be it sun, rain whatever, to encourage the seed that we plant in the ground to grow into crop – no drought, no pestilence.⁴⁰

There is the implication in the above quotations from Ehrenreich, Holquist and Minshall that this type of festive performance, the desire to dance, sing, frolic and release is instinctive human behaviour. This implication informs my thesis position in so far as Carnival activity is a human activity that can find resonance with different people in various places. Each example cited suggests that Carnival activity predated rules, formal religion and governments. In accounts of the evolution of the Trinidad Carnival on the island, many beginnings depend on perspective. As noted by writer Errol Hill, the Carnival was probably introduced to the island with the arrival of the French in the 1780s. Hill states:

Trinidad was discovered by Columbus for the Crown of Spain, a Catholic country, in 1498. It remained a Spanish possession for three hundred years until it was surrendered to the British navy in 1797. Yet it is unlikely that carnival was a popular occurrence in the island before the year 1783, which marked the arrival of French-speaking planter immigrants and their African slaves.⁴¹

The French influence directly impacted on the evolution of the Trinidad Carnival. I have, however, chosen to begin with the earlier Spanish colonization of the island. I start with the Spanish only to give an idea of the island's general history and influences, as the later French occupancy was made possible through the Spanish. This will be discussed in more detail shortly. When the Spanish, as the first colonizers of the island of Trinidad arrived in the 16th Century, they encountered the indigenous Amerindians. In keeping with the history of domination and control, these native peoples were made to work for the production of cotton and tobacco as the Spaniards brought with them, "weapons,

⁴⁰ Interview with Peter Minshall, 2008, Trinidad.

⁴¹ E. Hill, *Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*, (New Beacon Books, England, 1997), p. 6.

farming utensils, seeds, tools and animals”⁴². Due to disease, neglect and overwork, the numbers of these indigenous people eventually diminished, although as argued by Hélène Bellour and Samuel Kinser in their essay ‘Amerindian Masking in Trinidad’s Carnival: The House of Black Elk in San Fernando’ these indigenous people did maintain some presence and left traces of their culture:

Unlike the case in most Caribbean islands, Trinidad’s aboriginal population was not quickly eradicated by war, enslavement and disease after the Spanish arrived. Aborigines maintained their diminishing tribal independence in the southerly areas of Trinidad until the mid eighteenth century. By 1797, when the British conquered the island, Amerindians no longer existed in any significant way as self-sustaining communities. But they had waned slowly, leaving behind groups of mixed Spanish-Amerindian-African descent in several parts of the island.⁴³

This slow waning of the indigenous people also implies that the Amerindians left aspects of their heritage on the imported peoples and some of these aspects were made visible/visual in what was to eventually become the Trinidad Carnival.

According to Errol Hill, Charles II of Spain issued the ‘Cédula de Población’ in 1776, which granted Spaniards and Catholic foreigners the right to settle in Spanish colonies. Grenada-based French planter Phillipe-Rose Roume de Saint Laurent visited Trinidad during that time and noticed the agricultural potential of the island. He travelled to the neighbouring islands to encourage other French planters to move there. In 1783 Saint Laurent went to Madrid to petition on the

⁴² H. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: the Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962*, (Research Associates School Times Publications/Frontline Distribution Int’l Inc., Chicago 2001), p. 28.

⁴³ H. Bellour and S. Kinser, ‘Amerindian Masking in Trinidad’s Carnival: The House of Black Elk in San Fernando’, in M. C. Riggio (ed) *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York and London, 2004), p. 129.

issue of colonization of the island. This petition resulted in a new Cédula de Población' which granted land to families. Hill states:

The grants were made to families, with thirty-two acres being offered for each member of either sex of a white family, with an additional six acres for each slave. Coloureds and free Negroes received sixteen acres each, plus eight acres for each slave. There were additional import, trade, and tax benefits. The only conditions imposed were that immigrants should be Roman Catholic and should take the oath of allegiance to the king of Spain.⁴⁴

In 1783 French-speaking white and mixed-race planter immigrants with their enslaved Africans arrived on the island of Trinidad mainly from islands that had become unsafe due to revolutions⁴⁵ and hostilities between Britain and France. The French immigrants settled, introduced a lavish life-style and according to Hill:

In the short space of fourteen years these planters with black slave labour transformed some 85,000 acres of virgin land into a flourishing agricultural industry producing sugar, coffee, cotton and tobacco. ... The new immigrants quickly established a fairly comfortable standard of living, maintained commodious country houses, and entertained themselves in varied divertissements, which were especially concentrated in the carnival season. This season lasted from Christmas to Ash Wednesday.⁴⁶

Hill's research gives detailed examples through newspaper articles (*Trinidad Gazette; Port-of-Spain Gazette*), diary accounts and memoranda of how the early Carnival in Trinidad was attended. Hill observes that it was an activity for the privileged class and that the enslaved were onlookers, only occasionally invited to perform for entertainment. The Carnival involved "masking and costuming,

⁴⁴ E. Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*, (New Beacon Books, London 1997), p. 7.

⁴⁵ Haiti's Revolution started in 1791 and they were a free people in 1803. It is likely that planters and their enslaved Africans would have also come from French Haiti and in a very crucial way Haiti can be identified as contributing to the masking practices within the Trinidad Carnival.

⁴⁶ Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p. 7.

street promenading in carriages, and house-to-house visiting.”⁴⁷ Masked balls at private residences were also noted as well as dancing to African drums and masking forms such as garden slave/black field slave (*negue jadin*) and *mulatress*. Hill quotes an account that mentions a march with torches called *cannes brûlées* (canboulay – canes burning) as noted by an anonymous retired planter in which the elite enacted an imitation of the enslaved putting out cane fires. These observances highlight the main characteristics of the French Carnival on the island. The Trinidad Carnival was to exhibit vastly distinct attributes informed by Africa, the French and other immigrants and experiences of colonisation.

In 1796 Spain declared war on England and by 1797 Spanish Governor Don José Maria Chacon surrendered the island to the British. Hill observes that the British conquest of the island facilitated an increase in the influx of immigrants from diversified groups from the British West Indies, Britain, ‘coloureds’ from Venezuela, more enslaved Africans, and freed-enslaved Africans from slaving vessels (after the slave trade abolition in 1807), freed-enslaved Americans who had served with British forces (1812-1813 Virginia) and the initial Chinese indentured labourers in 1806. The white population included people from England, Scotland, Wales, America, Germany, Switzerland and Italy but the French numbered as the majority. Hill’s discussion also mentions that the whites were hostile to each other and that the ‘coloured’ populations were split into French, English and Spanish-speaking groups. Hill notes that the African base was the most cohesive group.

⁴⁷ Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p. 11.

The early Trinidad society was Spanish in terms of laws, governed by Britain and ruled culturally and socially by the French majority. Under Spanish law the freed-‘coloureds’ enjoyed similar status to the whites. Under British rule, the freed-coloureds were “demoted to second-class citizenship by discriminatory legislation.”⁴⁸ This shift in position for the coloured population would have an impact on the development of the Trinidad Carnival particularly after emancipation as they sought to rectify racial divisions and create a national identity. In British colonies, Christmas was seen to be the leading festival, rather than Easter-time, which was set within the Lenten calendar and more significant for the French Catholics. During Christmas time the enslaved Africans were allowed “some respite to amuse themselves”⁴⁹ but the authorities were present in case of any signs of revolt. The entertainment of the enslaved Africans involved lively shows and performances that included masking and costuming in such characters as stilt-walking Moko Jumbies⁵⁰ and music and dancing that invoked fear as well as comedy. These Christmastime masquerades were the beginnings of the Junkanno festivities celebrated in some Caribbean islands today.

⁴⁸ Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p. 11.

⁵⁰ “The character of the Moko Jumbie was originally a cult figure found throughout West Africa. In the West Indies he appeared regularly as a Christmas or carnival masker whose performance had lost its ritual significance and was purely entertaining.” Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p. 12.



Trinidad Carnival 1896. Image courtesy whensteeltalks.ning.com

Slavery was abolished in 1834 and enforced apprenticeship ended in 1838, creating a new class of freed people, who refused to work on terms and conditions that showed little difference from those of their past. According to social historian Bridget Brereton⁵¹, 10,278 West Indians were brought to Trinidad to work on plantations between the period 1838 and 1849. Other immigrants included Portuguese, Africans from Africa and freed-Africans from America, as well as a second wave of workers from China. Between 1845 to 1917 a total of 143,939 people were brought over from India to work as indentured labourers.. The dynamic created within such a racially and culturally diverse space was one that inevitably had an effect on the way in which these diverse peoples began to define their identity and their right to belong to the island. Emancipation also brought with it a shift in the way in which the Carnival was celebrated. Carnival in this post-Emancipation era was dominated by the

⁵¹ B. Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962* (Heinemann, USA, 1981), pp. 96-103.

black, rebellious elements of the city's working-class called *jamettes*⁵² suggesting a status outside the norms of respectability. Brereton states:

Urban blacks evolved a kind of sub-culture in the slums of Port-of-Spain based on barrack yards, dominated by jamets, the singers, drummers, dancers ... Carnival was the focus of this sub-culture, and in the 1860s and 1870s the jamets took over the festival using it as their chance to let off steam and pay off old grievances in ritualized band conflict.⁵³

The system of injustice, scarcity of labour, ethnic conflicts and oppression on various levels was very much a part of Trinidad society. In consequence emancipation ushered in the public celebration of the black masses on the streets at Carnival time with an agenda. Hollis Liverpool in his book *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad and Tobago 1763-1962* describes the shift in the Carnival performance in the following terms:

Yet, continued oppression by Whites, and suffering on the part of Africans brought on by urbanisation and unemployment further caused the freed as well as most of the newly-arrived Africans to resort to their carnival practices of masquerading. This can be seen in the types of masks ... they portrayed and the manner in which they portrayed them.⁵⁴

Liverpool states: "the battle seemed to be one between Whites and Africans as far as the Carnival was concerned, while Free Coloureds and incoming immigrants watched from the side-lines."⁵⁵ Liverpool continues that after Emancipation the Africans populated the streets at Carnival time because of the Whites' policy of keeping away from the Africans' culture in order to perpetuate their own sense of white superiority. The African jamette Carnival practices involved the celebration of freedom from slavery (Canboulay and stick-fighting)

⁵² "Jamette (French): J'Mette - Employ, enjoy. Diametre - 'other half' or underworld character." J. Mendes, *Cote ci Cote la: Trinidad and Tobago Dictionary* (New Millennium First Edition-2003), p. 225.

⁵³ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, p. 135.

⁵⁴ H. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad & Tobago 1763-1962* (Research Associates School Times, USA, 2001), p. 231.

⁵⁵ Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, p. 214.

and an assimilation of different cultural forms that included diverse African masquerade traditions such as that of the Christmastime masquerade mentioned earlier, along with Carnival manifestations influenced mainly by the French. The Trinidad Carnival not only syncretized these masking forms into a unique spectacle but also cultivated a space that had the capacity to make public, real issues and experiences of injustice and discrimination through performance. The strength of the Trinidad Carnival performance lies in the performative, carnivalesque 'free abandon' coupled with both: 1) the deeper significant African masquerade element evident in secret societies throughout the African Diaspora, as well as 2) the celebration of freedom from slavery.

Canboulay

The anniversary of emancipation, celebrated on August 1st 1838 inaugurated a street masquerade by the black masses. Every year on this day the freed Africans commemorated their freedom by re-enacting 'Canboulay', the ritual of putting out fires in the cane field. This included processions with torches, singing, dancing and stick-fighting, mentioned earlier in Errol Hill's account. Hill establishes that the emancipation celebration was also accompanied by cracking whips, which directly symbolized slavery. The freedom day Canboulay celebrations eventually found their way to the beginning of the pre-Lenten Carnival. Hill states:

Not one report is given of an emancipation-day celebration such as Fraser described, nor is it possible to say definitely when this ceremony was shifted from August 1 to the beginning of the annual pre-Lenten carnival.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p. 24.

Canboulay celebrations were a major part of the Carnival on the island and are regarded by the majority of writers on the festival (Hill, Liverpool, Riggio) as the beginnings of the Trinidad Carnival. In 1841 Carnival was restricted to the Monday and Tuesday preceding Ash Wednesday as the church deemed that the celebration (that had originally included the Sunday) was too noisy and boisterous for a Sabbath. Midnight ushered in the Carnival season with the Canboulay processions with torches, drumming dancing and singing.

Carnival character manifestations noted by English visitor Charles Day ten years later in 1848 include Jab Molassie (molasses devil), Punchinello the clown, Turks, Highlander caricatures, Red Indians, a Death character, white men in black masks and little girls dressed in “negro creole costumes.” Despite the observation that the Trinidad Carnival was attended by all classes of society, the prevalence of the black working classes and the prevalence of what was perceived by the ruling classes as ‘uncouth’ behaviour that accompanied the black presence, led the elite to several attempts at banning Carnival. In 1846 Governor McLeod banned masks from the streets; in 1858 and 1859 Governor Keate unsuccessfully attempted to forcibly stamp out the festival. The fight to preserve the Carnival on the part of the black majority involved riots and killings. For the white elite the black presence equated the deterioration of the Carnival into *jamette* Carnival, but Hill rightly states:

It must be admitted that there were many objectionable features of the nineteenth-century carnival following its takeover by the populace. But the very idea of carnival is the temporary inversion of accepted norms of behaviour, and the notion of a “clean carnival” – still voiced occasionally in certain circles – is palpably absurd.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, p.18.

Out of this struggle to keep the Carnival, the celebration became not just a happy day to dance in the streets. It carried with it a memory of blood. The Carnival now belonged to the people and to reiterate the opening quotation from Hill, “the people would not be intimidated; they would observe Carnival in the manner they deemed most appropriate.” Out of the aggressive, repressive bans and the burning of drums, the musical gem of the steelpan would be born. The steelpan is the only original musical instrument invented in the 20th Century.⁵⁹

While contemporary Carnival bodies are not consciously thinking of a history of celebrating freedom from slavery, they are simultaneously involved in engaging with tradition and reacting to their contemporary situation. These performances engage with a tradition that has allowed for the presentation of hidden rituals, the resolving of rivalry, the fight for re-presentation of self and the active demasking of the visible ‘other’ as defined by Gerald Aching in his book *Masking and Power*, while reacting creatively to personal and socio-political issues of the everyday. Of demasking Aching states:

[D]emasking may be understood as an unexpected and undesirable ideological self recognition ... that is brought on by contact with a masked subject. As opposed to the term “unmasking,” which tends to be laden with the meaning that the mask is removed from someone else, I choose “demasking” in order to lay emphasis on the action of literally or figuratively removing an ideological mask from oneself or someone else in encounters and confrontations between masked subjects and viewing subjects.⁶⁰

Viewing subjects are faced with an image of themselves through interaction with a masquerader. The concept of demasking imbues the masquerader/reveller

⁵⁹ There have been other instruments invented in the 20th century such as the synthesizer (keyboard with built-in controller to get sound through loud speakers), Hammond organ (electronic organ) and the theramin (electrical instrument with an antenna that senses proximity of the thereminist’s hands to control volume and frequency without physical contact), but these were based on a template of other instruments and not considered here to be ‘original.’

⁶⁰ G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2002), p. 6.

with an agency that is relevant for the potential transformation of un-masked subjects – by observing the ‘other’ they see themselves/their position differently. These processes continue to inform and shape the presentation of self through costume and performance, within a vibrant rebellious history of mas’.

I have so far outlined a brief history of the evolution of the Trinidad Carnival based on written accounts from Hill and Liverpool. In the following three sub-sections, I identify three basic performance spaces within the Trinidad Carnival: Jouvay’s Mud Mas’, Pretty Mas’ and Traditional/Ole Mas’. The types of masquerades manifested in these spaces are not as clear-cut as I have proposed as aspects of Jouvay Mud Mas’ can be seen as traditional and some traditional characters are a prominent part of the Pretty Mas portrayals. The temporary demarcation serves only to allow for a brief discussion of the general types of masking spaces within Carnival as well as to observe the types of performances that each allows. The following also contributes to the continuation of an understanding of the evolution of the Trinidad Carnival and is important for my analysis of Carnival in the diaspora in Chapter Three, *Towards a Concept of Mas’* where I develop a working definition for the word mas’.

Jouvay’s Mud Mas’

Musician Machel Montano in his Carnival soca song, *Jab Jab*, describes the Jouvay in the following terms:

The Jouvay is when you take mud and you plaster it on your body and you become some kind of creature of the universe!⁶¹

⁶¹ Machel Montano, feat Tal’prie and Peter Minshall, ‘Jab-Jab’ in *Young to Soca*, (2000).

The transformative nature of the Mud Mas' of Trinidad Carnival's Jouvay is facilitated by the wearing of mud, oil or paint and more recently, chocolate. Jouvay is a pre-dawn festival that ushers in the Carnival Monday celebrations. Jouvay has its roots in Canboulay and emancipation celebrations. As such, the transformative nature of these performances can be considered in the light of several layers of a struggle for freedom. In his essay: *The Emancipation Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan*, Earl Lovelace outlines how the origins of Carnival Jouvay lie within an emancipation tradition. Lovelace states:

We knew that from 1838, 1 August was the official day of the emancipation celebration. What we did not know was that sometime in the mid-1840s the colonial administration had moved the celebration from that day and tacked it onto carnival. From midnight carnival Sunday the emancipation celebrations began. In effect, Jouvay became emancipation.⁶²

That the emancipation tradition became the Jouvay's mud mas' places emphasis on the notion of freedom, being free from the bondage of slavery and oppression. The notion of freedom from bondage is not to be taken lightly. It is about celebrating an entire change in the way in which life was lived. Although the post emancipation period opened up other forms of oppression in colonial Trinidad, the emancipation celebration visible within Jouvay was concerned primarily with liberation.

This liberation within the contemporary Carnival context is about performances that harness a sense of self-agency. Rooted within real experiences of oppression, the Carnival celebration can be seen as a coping mechanism that allows for a re-positioning of the self within the context of society. There is a

⁶² E. Lovelace, 'The Emancipation Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action - The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York and London, 2004), p. 187.

now-ness and present-ness about this notion and this interpretation of emancipation as the core of the performances amplifies the Carnival's resonance as an activity that the people need. This need stems from the desires of anyone whose lived experiences involves different degrees of oppression, racism, sexism and other forms of de-humanization, to address injustice through song, dance and performance. We need this and it matters to us as playwright Rawle Gibbons says:

I think this matters to us and it may have to do with the business about the experience of slavery and colonialism, because it's not just Black people, it's other people involved, too, who experienced colonialism, in the sense of saying that 'I free at this time'. And of course the highest expression of that, the most complete expression of that, is participation in the mas', is taking part in it. Because what this does as against not taking part ... is that the 'me' that is inside of the 'you' can emerge.⁶³

In Jouway, this emancipation manifests itself through performance. This pre-dawn, darkened space facilitates the emergence of the 'me' inside of the 'you'. In other words, the Jouway performance addresses a sense of common shared humanity (manifestations of 'me' inside of 'you'). The Jouway performance also permits the presentation of suppressed selves, the play of who you want to be or who you think you are, or who you need to be at that time. The Jouway environment is potentially volatile and can be dangerous, as with any liminal space occupied by a large gathering of people with blurred, obscured personal identities. It is however, within the Jouway environment that many of my interviewed revellers find the freedom to own performance and to express their 'true' selves. The personal experiences of some of my interviewees will be

⁶³ Interview with Rawle Gibbons, 07.03.2011, Trinidad.

discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three. Please also see the interview DVD included as an appendix.



Jouvay reveler 2003. Image courtesy Wendell Manwarren

Traditional Mas' / Ole Mas'

The Traditional mas' of the Trinidad Carnival often consists of identifiable characters with roles such as the character of a Baby Doll dressed as a dolly and carrying a baby doll in her hands. The character's role involves looking for the father of her child (baby doll) and approaching spectators accusing them of child neglect. These characters play the role of their mask (that can include stilts,

talcum powder and exaggerated physical features) and can often have social and political agendas. Other traditional Carnival characters include the Moko Jumbie, the Midnight Robber, Pierrot Grenade, Dame Lorraine, Jab Jab, Jab Molassie, Bookman, Imps, Dragon, Black Indian, Minstrels, Bat, Cow, Sailor and Burrokeet. (Please see the slides in the Appendix). The Traditional mas', with its play of the mask and link to social concerns, is closely linked to masquerade manifestations in other islands in the Caribbean (such as the Junkanno⁶⁴) and to masked performances of West Africa.

Hollis Liverpool in his book *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* discusses the masking practices of some of the peoples of West Africa and links these practices to the roots of the Trinidad Carnival. West and Central Africa are identified by historians such as Liverpool, Robert Farris Thompson⁶⁵ and Maureen Warner-Lewis⁶⁶ as the base from which many of the Africans arrived in the Americas by way of the transatlantic trade. Liverpool states: "West Africa, the Zaire Basin and equatorial Africa are two areas steeped in masking traditions"⁶⁷. It is likely that the enslaved Africans and in particular the Africans who immigrated to Trinidad after emancipation, were familiar with various forms of masking and masquerade within their own traditions. Liverpool further states that:

Masking in Africa suggests spirit-associated transformations whereby wearers cancel or obliterate their personalities, changing into other human characters and spirits, so that they are no longer themselves. Maskers are usually playful and yet serious. ⁶⁸

⁶⁴ The Junkanno is a Christmas time masquerade celebrated mostly in those Caribbean islands that were once British Colonies.

⁶⁵ R. F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (Vintage Books, USA, 1984), p. xiii-xvii.

⁶⁶ M. Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Sons: The African Dynamic In Trinidad Culture* (The Majority Press, Dover, Massachusetts, 1991), pp. 1-6.

⁶⁷ H. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad & Tobago 1763-1962* (Research Associates School Times, USA, 2001), p. 59.

⁶⁸ Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, pp. 57-58.

Liverpool continues:

By embodying spirits, African maskers bring the mysterious world of nature and the supernatural into the known and more predictable community of humans, so that spirits may commune with the people and cause them to respond in various ways: dancing, drumming, praying, hand-clapping, offering and singing.⁶⁹

The African form of masquerading is connected to a valid social function and is not merely for frivolous enjoyment. I would argue that within the Caribbean, there are traces of that functionality of masquerade within the contemporary Carnival. In the Caribbean nation of Haiti and the island of Cuba there are masquerade elements within ritual and secret societies that hold strong functional significance in the society. These include masquerades such as the Haitian Ra Ra and the Abukua of Cuba. Both spaces also celebrate Kanaval/Carnival and have a high integration of ritual and social elements within their traditional arts, dance and music. The similarity between the masquerade portrayals such as Junkanno in St Kitts, St Vincent, Jamaica, Belize and the Bahamas and that of some of the traditional masquerade characters found in Trinidad is explained through the recognition that these visual manifestations have the same ancestral base. Traditional Carnival characters such as the stilt-walking Moko Jumbie observed in several island masquerades can be directly traced to their West African roots although the role of the characters may have shifted. The contemporary functional role of masquerade is directly based on personal, political or social situations. While Junkanno is a form of masquerade that has retained, in some cases, the direct visual link to the African masking forms via secret societies, contemporary manifestations are usually a result of government organizations attempting to keep a tradition alive.

⁶⁹ Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, p. 58.

I have so far, discussed some of the performance attributes of the Traditional mas' of Trinidad and some of the ways in which these characters are connected to masquerade manifestations in other islands due to their shared African base and the effects of transplanted peoples in these island spaces as well as movements in between these island spaces. I anticipate that the use of words like masquerade, festival, Carnival, mas' and Junkanno within the Caribbean context can become complicated. In many spaces these performances evolve similarly with different names attached to them. In this research I observe that there is a distinction between the words 'masquerade' and 'Carnival' – masquerade carries a ritual sense of masking and the playing of a mask, while Carnival connotes free abandon and community festivity. In the Trinidad context the merging of these distinct forms and what happens as a result, are the beginnings of my interest in mas' performance.

The traditional Carnival characters place emphasis on performance. With regards to Ole mas' the costumes can be homemade or preserved from the previous Carnival. Ole mas' can sometimes lend itself to political protest with the use of placards and visual manifestation of the double-entendre prominent in Carnival music forms such as Calypso. The Traditional and Ole mas' characters usually come out of 'yards' or private residences rather than big mas' camps. They are mostly concerned with individual stories. Novels such as Earl Lovelace's: *The Dragon can't Dance*⁷⁰ and Michael Anthony's: *King of the Masquerade*⁷¹ provide examples of the way in which Traditional characters connect to individual stories. Their performance is concerned with the play of

⁷⁰ E. Lovelace, *The Dragon can't Dance: a Novel* (Persea Books, New York, 1998).

⁷¹ M. Anthony, *King of the Masquerade* (Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, Miami, 2007).

the character and interaction with the audience/viewer-participant is usually a prominent part of the experience. The Traditional and Ole mas' masquerade provide a crucial link to ways of utilizing personal/social/political stories and satire, through the play of a mask. Their role is not isolated to interactive performances and occasionally revelry is a necessary aspect of these portrayals.

There are conscious efforts being made by the Carnival Studies Unit of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad, as well as by traditional mas' practitioners and enthusiasts, to sustain the traditional characters by transferring skills of dance movement, song, costume making and wire-bending to the next generation. The documentation and cataloguing of images and information, public engagement workshops and exhibitions are some of the crucial steps being taken to preserve these characters and to foster appreciation of traditional forms. These steps also begin to show how these traditional forms are relevant to on-going considerations of masquerade and identity and further visual manifestations of Carnival forms. They provide a resource that is relevant to research and to an understanding of national cultural forms and their global impact.



Sailor Mas', Port of Spain Trinidad 2011. Image courtesy Scott Dewis

Pretty Mas'

The version of Carnival that has been exported to the rest of the world is the Pretty mas'. Pretty mas' can be dated as stemming from post-Canboulay with the sanitization of the jamette elements⁷² of Carnival by the upper and middle classes and their incentives to 'upgrade' the mas'. In the early 20th century, popular bands called themselves 'Millionaires' as more emphasis was placed on expensive costumes to create impact and win prizes. The trend would later lead to the era of Historical mas', which involved splendid and expensive portrayals from themes of world history. In the 1950's, the traditional mas' became 'fancy', with more and more ornate elements being added to costumes creating new characters such as the Fancy Indians and Fancy Sailors. (See G. Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society* and H. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*). Carol Martin's *Trinidad Carnival Glossary* says of Pretty Mas':

Today's dominant form of masquerade emphasizing beautiful costumes with elaborate decorations. To some extent, pretty mas developed as middle-class participation in carnival increased, although the Afro-Creole carnival also emphasized "dressing up and looking good," from early on in the nineteenth century. Some feel that [the] growth of pretty mas has led to the decline of traditional characters, the eclipse of *ole mas*, and commercialization of carnival. Many pretty mas costumes are now decorated bikini-style garments.⁷³

Contemporary Pretty Mas' is precariously placed. Most of the players within this masquerade are female. As identified by Martin, many of the costumes are ornate bikinis. However, the Pretty Mas' of Carnival Monday and Tuesday (usually the Monday mas' is a dressed-down version of the Tuesday mas') may contain other

⁷² The 'sanitization' of the jamette mas' from 1900 until independence in 1962 was enforced through competitions that encouraged prizes for costumes that were 'acceptable' to the upper and middle classes stressing European values. Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, pp. 353-365.

⁷³ C. Martin, 'Trinidad Carnival Glossary' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York, London, 2004), p. 292.

forms of masking. The female presence is interesting when considering performance, masking and re-presentation. In an interview that I conducted with reveller Camille Quamina, she describes the play within this space:

I use mas' playing as a way of identifying with this space. People... (say)...it's a cliché to say all Trinidadians play mas', but I grew up with that, I suppose limited notion that all Trinidadians play, we play we mas', we put on, we perform, we constantly perform and in my way, that was my time to perform whatever I want to perform on those two days. ... There's no script, no director, there is me, there's this costume, there's this body, whether people like it or not, there is this woman, there is this music and this is my space. This is my performance space. I created my performance for those two days, based on whatever I feel like.⁷⁴

Camille's account draws reference to the everyday in relation to the Carnival play. There is an interesting dynamic here when considering the female body in performance with a mask in the form of an ornate bikini. The exotic representations in the drawings by Richard Bridgen in the eighteenth hundreds and the portraits of bikini-clad masqueraders in Carnival magazines, highlight that the Caribbean body is used to being shown. In this example described by Quamina, one becomes aware that her play is not *for* anyone but herself. It is not scripted or directed. Quamina, as masquerader, steps onto the public road along with thousands of other masqueraders and performs a play that is about liberating herself. As a public performance, this is one through which she is made visible. I argue that this visibility has less to do with the costume and much more to do with the engagement of the relationship between her body and her play.

⁷⁴ Interview with Camille Quamina, 03.2011, Trinidad.



Pretty mas' costume. Image courtesy I-sanna Gibbons-Fideler

Chapter Two of Gerald Aching's *Masking and Power* is entitled: *The New Visibilities: Middle-Class Cosmopolitanism in the Street*. Here, Aching speaks about pretty mas' as an outcome of the Carnival Improvement Committee, just before independence in 1962. Aching observes that:

The Carnival Improvement Committee began as a task force of civic leaders and businessmen who in order to compete with the relatively new "uptown" carnival of the French Creole elites at the Queen's Park Savannah, decided to stimulate the introduction of "pretty mas'" in the "downtown" festivities.⁷⁵

⁷⁵G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, Cultural Studies of the Americas, Volume 8, 2002), p. 74.

Aching elucidates the irony of this interest in a festival that was almost stamped out “after emancipation in 1838 and until the 1930's when the Creole middle class began to take greater interest in participating in carnival.”⁷⁶ With the interest of the middle classes and an emphasis on marketing a desirable national image for local and foreign consumption, strategies for the ‘new visibilities’ were implemented. These included the perpetuation of visual politics through images of the higher-classes involvement in Carnival. In terms of visibility, those being seen were those in a position of economic power. In order to participate in the ‘pretty-mas’, one must first be able to afford the costume.

Aching observes that “only the Creole middle-class suffers from a discomfort about its ambivalent position.” They are in-between a desire to achieve elite status and holding an inherent sympathy towards the culture of the lower class. The middle class presence in the street at Carnival time is naturally accompanied by their enactment of dancing/winin⁷⁷ in the street. Winin’, a typical Carnival dance, is seen historically as a dance coming out of a ‘jamette’ culture. The implementation of this dance by the middle class is, according to Aching, a form of mimicry of the lower-classes’ performance. Aching draws reference to the *mulatress* and *negue jadin* costumes⁷⁸ of the upper classes to strengthen his argument that “mimicry is not the property of the oppressed.”⁷⁹ That is to say, the newly visible revellers were being seen implementing a version of the performance styles of the invisible lower-class people.

⁷⁶ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 76.

⁷⁷ Winin’ – the rotation/ gyration of the hips and pelvis to music.

⁷⁸ “At the time carnival flourished, the elite of the society was masked or disguised. The favourite costume of the ladies was the graceful and costly ‘mulatress’ of the period, while gentlemen adopted that of the garden Negro, in Creole, *negue jadin*, or black field slave.” *Port of Spain Gazette* (March 19, 1881) E. Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival*, (New Beacon Books Ltd, 1997), p. 11.

⁷⁹ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 95.

As suggested by Aching, the middle classes and upper classes are more visibly present in the pretty mas' due to the expense of having to buy costumes, which aims to keep the lower classes out. Within Trinidad society, however, class lines are often blurred by income. This blurring is exemplified by the colloquialism 'you is what you could afford.' Yet, with regards to middle class performance within Carnival, I am reminded of a game I played with my sisters as a child. It involved a form of mimicry of a dance that began restrained and polite and gradually got larger in gesture until it was raucous and scandalous. The game usually ended in laughter, with our safe return to the world of the discreet. Annually visiting our Grandmother's home in St. Kitts gave us a glimpse of life as part of an island's elite and perhaps enhanced my notion that we were just playing a part in a role that had its value in being seen by others. Although we loved these visits, our day-to-day lifestyle was not that of the elite upper class world to which we were exposed. Our mimicry of them was also a reflection of our own scenario of having to sit at tea parties when perhaps we just wanted to run around and play. There seems to be a sense of needing to break free, which may have many outlets but can certainly be identified via the unsuspecting release through the movement of dance. I would like to suggest that, the observed middle-class winin' bodies may be a reflection of the way in which they find liberation, similar to any other dancing body in the streets at Carnival time. It is worth bearing in mind that winin', chipping and jumping up are all valid parts of Carnival public dances and that they are mainly triggered by the music being played. These Carnival performances allow for the playing out of some of our multiple identities. That is, the Carnival permits performative expressions

that are outside of the day-to-day self-perceptions realised through costumed performances and *play*.

Despite the expense of the majority of costumes on Carnival Monday and Tuesday, the working classes refuse to be excluded. Carnival is for all. The revellers perform with an intensity that insists that this ritual is so much more than simply a parade. Masquerader Camille Quamina says:

[My husband] Marvin has no problems with me spending \$5000(TT)⁸⁰ dollars on a costume because he understands that that's a totally different world of reason. You don't equate it to needs and responsibilities. It exists on its own. So when Camille says she taking \$5000(TT) dollars to play mas', he doesn't say anything, he doesn't rebel against it because he understands that for me, it's a must. I feel it part of my tradition. It has become a tradition for me, mas' playing.⁸¹

The Pretty Mas', dominated by female bodies of varying class positions, remains a space for re-presentation. This re-presentation is a form of transformation concerned with the presentation of an 'other' self as with the Jouvay performance space. The costumes of ornate bikinis are geared towards emphasizing beauty and sensuality but are not necessarily concerned with individual stories, as with many of the Traditional mas' costumes. Recently, the generic beaded bikinis have been produced cheaply in China and for many of the big mas' camps, the costumes are primarily an economic venture. As a result the revellers' medium for self-empowerment, through the presentation of an 'other' self, within this masking-form, is primarily through dance. It is through dance movement that other forms of transformation can take place that allow for moving between conscious and less conscious states, shifting between deliberate and unintentional movements.

⁸⁰ In order to afford a \$5000TT costume, someone on minimum wage of \$12.50/hour will have to work 8-hour shifts, 7 days a week for 2 months.

⁸¹ Interview with Camille Quamina, 03.2011, Trinidad.

I have looked briefly at the three basic performance spaces within the Trinidad Carnival: Jouvay's Mud Mas', Pretty Mas' and Traditional/Ole Mas' highlighting some of the performances that each space allows. Both the Jouvay and the Pretty Mas' place emphasis on dance and the exertion of energy as transformative modes although the use of costume (mud/ paint or ornate bikini) facilitates the transformation and the ability to reveal an 'other' aspect of one's self. The Traditional mas' places emphasis on costume and the play of a character and by being made in personal spaces, often facilitates the disclosure of personal/social/political stories. I am interested in how these performances with personal, social and political resonances both in costume and in play impact on the individual reveller. Why are the performances relevant and what is the key underlying feature that fuels the need for such re-presentations?

Chapter TWO: Carnival and Performance

If the Haitian Revolution best narrates the attainments of Maroon resistance, the most complete transformation of plantation ritual into a dynamic, contemporary site of power takes place in the Trinidad Carnival.⁸²

The Trinidad Carnival has always been more than just a parade.⁸³ It is an activity tied up in the complexities of masking and the role of social visibility (Gerald Aching)⁸⁴, concerned with forms of re-possession (Clinton Hutton)⁸⁵ or restitution and being able to empower and renew, reclaim, protect and project freedom (Rawle Gibbons).⁸⁶ Carnival performance moves beyond the idea of a mere party. In the last chapter, I looked at the history of the Trinidad Carnival and some of the different types of masking spaces within the festival. Some of the questions that arise are: what is the significance of this performance? And what makes it more than just a parade? Set within the context of a post-colonial experience, notions of dispossession and finding forms of agency, I argue that performances of repossession and transformation (from the everyday to an 'other') are relevant to contemporary situations where injustice and forms of disenfranchisement/powerlessness are present. In what follows I look at some of the issues that Trinidad Carnival performance raises for critics and historians in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of what makes this ritual fundamental to my research. The Trinidad Carnival fits within a discourse that is

⁸² R. Gibbons, *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics* (WVT, Germany, 1998), p. 117.

⁸³ "But carnival has never been just a party. Carnival is a time for releasing tensions, for rupturing the boredom of the quotidian labouring life. It's a time for making political commentary, and for keeping history in mind and focus..." R. Fleming 'Kanaval' in L. Gordon, *Kanaval: Vodou, Politics and Revolution on the streets of Haiti* (Soul Jazz Publishing, 2010) p. 15.

⁸⁴ G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, *Cultural Studies of the Americas*, Volume 8, 2002), pp. 1-5.

⁸⁵ C. Hutton, 'The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Identity and Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom', *Caribbean Quarterly Volume 53, Nos. 1&2*, (March-June 2007) pp. 131-135.

⁸⁶ R. Gibbons, 'Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics', (WVT, Germany 1998), pp. 117-118.

not only concerned with Carnival Theory, but also is connected to aspects of Performance Theory and Diaspora/Identity Theories. I will address the work of writers and critical thinkers such as Gerald Aching, Clinton Hutton, Rawle Gibbons, Samantha Noel, Edwidge Danticat and Susan Harewood specifically in relation to Carnival performance and identity. Their works reveal key perspectives on how Carnival performance facilitates identity formation within everyday social reality and permits a sense of agency in relation to taking control of self re-presentation and potentially being able to enact social change. I then look at identity, displacement and issues of diaspora mainly through Stuart Hall's essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*.⁸⁷ As Hall's work concentrates on Caribbean immigrant experiences and black representations in the UK, I have found his work relevant to this research, which aims to connect to those who feel some sense of displacement. Hall's work provides a framework for interpreting some of the ways in which displacement and the need for performances of re-presentation connect. I look at the relevance of ritual to an understanding of Carnival performance drawing on the work of Victor Turner and finally I outline the ways in which my research responds to some of the arguments raised in the texts and essays outlined.

On Carnival

Within the Trinidad context, Carnivals as public transformative performances are connected to the everyday social reality of a people. Aching, Hutton and Gibbons discuss in their writing notions of dispossession (Aching), repossession

⁸⁷ S. Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990).

(Hutton) and restitution (Gibbons). Each of these terms is crucial to an understanding of the relevance of performance in the Caribbean context and contributes to the literary documentation of the relevance of performance to social and personal identity. In the first chapter of his book *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean*, Gerald Aching looks at empowerment, disillusion and the ways in which “social protest is resolved within and outside Carnival.”⁸⁸ Aching is concerned with the ways in which the mask ‘reveals’ aspects of the masker’s social situation and moves beyond the apparent contradiction of a mask as revealing to consider how the play of the mask empowers by providing social visibility. Within his writing, Aching engages with aspects of Earl Lovelace’s book *The Dragon can’t Dance* in order to address the dynamics of three different states: dispossession, nonpossession and self-possession. With specific reference to the characters within the Lovelace text, dispossession is seen by Aching as a state of poverty and degradation that relates to place. He states: “I use the term ‘dispossession’ to refer to the post-independence political abandonment of poor urban constituencies.”⁸⁹ Dispossession is a landscape that has been dissolved of any form of possession. Nonpossession in contrast is seen as a mentality that has its roots in the ideology of the people and their historical practice. Drawing on the example of the residents of the Hill in Lovelace’s novel, Aching describes nonpossession as follows:

Rising out of this landscape is a spirit of rebellion against poverty ... the Hill’s inhabitants transcend material impoverishment by holding to it as they would a prized possession.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 52.

⁸⁹ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 53.

⁹⁰ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 53.

The notion of experiencing a sense of nonpossession is directly connected to the state of dispossession. The inhabitants of the Hill share a common disposition, a situation fostered by where they live and it is through this position that their pride in their possession of nothing can arise.

The state of nonpossession is also what fuels the Carnival dance performance of Lovelace's main character, Aldrick. This Carnival performance of Aldrick's Dragon which entails choreographed and improvised movements of lunging and restraint has one main aim, that of providing social visibility. The Hill's inhabitants are an invisible, forgotten, neglected people. The Dragon mask creates an opportunity to be seen, felt and heard. This visibility is achieved through presenting the mask in terrifying play and, in so doing, allowing it to be seen by the viewer, with all its literal and metaphoric appendages.⁹¹ For example, the performance of the Dragon masquerade is aimed at triggering fear, yet the desire to terrify in itself highlights an aspect of the individual behind the mask who may need on some level to be acknowledged and reacted to, by those members of his society with power. The visibility that this play permits is, for the masker, of utmost importance. The play becomes a moment of self-empowerment, a moment to re-affirm and re-claim identity. Earl Lovelace (in *The Dragon Can't Dance*) writes of Aldrick:

He wanted everybody to see him. When they saw him, they had to be blind not to see. They had to be deaf not to hear that people everywhere want to be people, and that they going to be that anyway, even if they have to rip open the guts of the city.⁹²

⁹¹ Rex Nettleford: "To ordinary people, festival arts are more than minstrelsy; they affirm the use of the mask, literally and metaphorically, in coming to terms or coping with an environment that has yet to work in their interest..." (1988), *Aching, Masking and Power*, p. 59.

⁹² E. Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance: a Novel* (Persea Books, Inc New York, 1998), p. 124.

That Aldrick wanted everyone to see and hear him, suggests that the Carnival provides that space for visibility, (even in mask, or specifically when masked) and for making audible voices that are under-represented. It further suggests that Carnival is available to everyone – “people everywhere want to be people” – and it is within that public Carnival space (that is available for all including, Aldrick and his community) that their needs and desires are performed. Another quotation exemplifies the impact of their Carnival play:

Then he saw Sylvia, dancing still with all her dizzying aliveness, dancing wildly; frantically twisting her body, flinging it around her waist, jumping and moving, refusing to let go of that visibility, that self the Carnival gave her; holding it balanced on her swaying hips, going down and coming up in a tall, undulating rhythm, lifting up her arms and leaping as if she wanted to leap out of her-self into her self, a self in which she could stay for ever, in which she could *be* for ever. He watched her dancing into the insides of the music, into the Carnival’s guts, into its every note, its soul, into every ring of the tall ringing iron; her whole self a shout, a bawl, a cry, a scream, a cyclone of tears rejoicing in a self and praying for a self to live in beyond Carnival and her slave girl costume.⁹³

Sylvia’s intensity within performance, so aptly re-imagined by Lovelace, simultaneously sheds light on both a necessity to perform/re-present self and the direness of the everyday. Lovelace’s poetic, descriptive language facilitates an imagery that can be specifically related to the female body and ownership of performance, similar to the sentiments expressed by Quamina in the previous chapter. The intense transformative potential is rendered here as a need and not just a frivolous exhibition of self. I think this is important as the need/necessity pre-supposes a cause of origin. The novel supports this in earlier chapters where Sylvia’s relationship with Aldrick and a wealthy man are fleshed out and this scenario is very specifically located within their living space/context – The Hill. In this Carnival performance, Sylvia is empowered to be her own narrator. In the

⁹³ Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, p. 127.

novel the Carnival play can be seen to directly reflect on pre-Carnival anxieties and issues within social reality which constitute the characters' 'everyday'.

The third state, self-possession is according to Gerald Aching, a way of re-affirming selfhood, after the breakdown of communal nonpossession. When Aldrick's community is distracted away from their state of nonpossession, he no longer dances his Dragon costume. Aching beautifully states that "the Dragon mask can't dance (but) its choreography is still performable."⁹⁴ Although Aldrick no longer dances his mask, the effect of the Dragon mask dance can still be attained. This is done by Aldrick pursuing an alternate way of gaining visibility, engaging in "undisguised, political resistance."⁹⁵ As can be seen from the example of Aldrick taking up arms, stealing a policeman's jeep and driving wildly through the town with his accomplice Fisheye (another of Lovelace's characters), this form of self-possession entails acts of rebellion and revolt aimed at forging a visible identity. The performance occurs outside of the legal social structures and usually, outside of the Carnival environment. Despite its context, Aldrick and Fisheye describe the performance as a mas', a play of mas'.

Indeed, their efforts at rebellion was just a dragon dance. In jail the first thing Fisheye said with a kinda pride, kinda justifying to himself the seven years' sentence, was: 'I can't say they jail me for nutten; we play ah mas', eh? We really play a mas'. We really had them frighten. We had them wondering if we was going to shoot down the town or what. We really play ah mas', eh Aldrick? You couldn't play a better dragon'.⁹⁶

As can be seen from this example, masking within some Carnival performances can be used as an outlet for playing out the effects of injustice and discrimination through a form of social protest. It may be too simplistic to conclude from Aching's first chapter that the Carnival performance of Aldrick's Dragon dance

⁹⁴ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 68.

⁹⁵ Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 68.

⁹⁶ Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, p. 186.

prevented an earlier militant 'breaking of the law' but in essence, the space is there for that. The Carnival space provides an opportunity for balance so intrinsically linked with everyday social reality, as in the case of Aldrick, that doing away with it can affect the way in which daily frustrations are dealt with. Within that context the Carnival performance when considered as associated with modes of visibility, can be directly linked to forms of social identity.

The connection between the Carnival performance and the everyday social reality cannot be over-emphasized. Jamaican critical thinker and visual artist Clinton Hutton in his essay *The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom and Identity*,⁹⁷ examines the ways in which the enslaved Africans in the Caribbean utilized performance as a means of re-possessing themselves. The physical, tangible self of the enslaved was one that underwent extreme brutalization, torture and mutilation. These were bodies that were owned, the possession of a white plantocracy, bodies without human rights. Several modes of performances are identified by Hutton as ways in which these enslaved peoples sought to re-possess or to possess again their own selves. The following expressions exemplify specific modes of performance:

Got one mind for the boss to see, got another mind for what I know is me
– USA.
Plie fwul fi kech wiz (playing [pretending to be] the fool to catch [trap] the wise) – Jamaica.
Lespri voye sot nan mache, men sot twompe lespri (The smart person sends the fool to the market, not knowing that the fool is more clever) – Haiti.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ C. Hutton, 'The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Identity and Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom', *Caribbean Quarterly Volume 53, Nos. 1&2*, (March-June 2007).

⁹⁸ Hutton, 'The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora', p. 128.

Hutton notes that the enslaved were: “rooted in an aestheticism in which performance became a critically important *modus operandi* for Black agency during and indeed after slavery.”⁹⁹ The fore-mentioned expression: “got one mind for the boss to see, got another mind for what I know is me”, is indicative of performance, playing the fool to catch the wise, and suggests that the everyday, enslaved, brutalized, mutilated, possessed self was not what the Africans perceived to be their ‘true selves’. That expression and the others that follow, further add to the notion of re-possessing self and fostering a sense of agency for self-determination and making choices. As with the stories of Ananci, the spider-god who crossed the Atlantic with enslaved Africans in order to show how cunning and wit can aid self-sustenance and survival, the expressions identified by Hutton provide an example of taking control of self-representation through a creative performance of masking. Within the historical context, these enslaved bodies sought ways of being their own narrator through a kind of mask/play that hid their true ability/knowledge from their enslavers.

This form of agency contributes to the notion of multiple selves, as with Lovelace’s Sylvia and “that self the Carnival gave her.” In the Hutton case, emphasis is concentrated on the ways in which the enslaved, through allowing for the public visibility of an ‘other’ self, sought to protect the private visibility of their perceived ‘true’ self. Performance within these circumstances may be seen as the playing of an ‘other’ self in public and can also be seen as concerned with ritual performances that were enacted and which facilitated the becoming of the ‘true’ self through ancestral possession. These ritual performances usually occurred during the nighttime hours after the harsh working day and are also

⁹⁹ Hutton, ‘The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora’, p. 128.

evident within revelry and entertainment. Hutton argues that the African god Legba was the principal deity for the enslaved, being “characteristically a trickster god and as such, he is master of drama and make-believe.”¹⁰⁰

Hutton further observes that:

The nocturnal assemblies of the enslaved were freedom spaces, communal spaces in the heart of enslavement where they psychologically, mentally and aesthetically ritualized their bodies, their persons to repossess themselves from their enslavers by performing rituals which enabled their ancestors and gods to possess them (to guide them, to communicate with them, to instruct them). Thus these abused, ontologically desecrated and commercialized bodies ritually became gods, kings, queens, sovereigns and free persons cultivating an ethos which enabled them to resist and to cope with slavery.¹⁰¹

Carnival is identified by Hutton as one of several re-possession rituals in which the enslaved performed in order to empower themselves by allowing their bodies to be (re)possessed by their ancient ancestors and gods. This notion of performances of re-possession can be identified in popular culture in the Caribbean. For example it is echoed by Reggae band Third World in their album *96 degrees in the Shade* 1977, song: *Rhythm of Life* -

Your Grandfather cutting sugar cane
Wonder why he survive the pain
When they lick him with the whip
Grandpa feel the rhythm

Both Hutton and Third World suggest that the enslaved survived through the empowerment that occurred through secret performances, hidden under layers of masking. “When they [hit] him with the whip, Grandpa [felt] the rhythm.” By conducting their own communal rituals under the revelry that was permitted, these people not only contributed to the building of what Glissant calls a “creole

¹⁰⁰ Hutton, ‘The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora’, p. 130.

¹⁰¹ Hutton, ‘The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora’, p. 131.

conspiracy”¹⁰² but were also able to transform aspects of pain into self-empowering art and ways of surviving/overcoming. This idea of transformation for wellbeing is also referenced in dancehall music. In excerpts from her essay *Readings of ‘Ritual’ and Community in Dancehall Performance* critical writer Sonjah Stanley Niaah¹⁰³ redefines Victor Turners’ definition of seasonal ritual and argues that Jamaican dancehall serves as a daily transformative ritual of empowerment for the poor of Kingston. Although the poor urban communities are responsible for perpetuating the events, dancehall is inclusive and Jamaicans (and foreigners) from different social backgrounds attend dancehall dances.

Niaah states that:

Where a Bakhtinian analysis simply offers a liberatory potential, the daily persistence of Dancehall is liberation actualised in the sense of daily celebration of the everyday condition. This study of Dancehall acknowledges that even while its habitus is marginal Dancehall is sacred space by virtue of the sense in which souls continue to be sustained.¹⁰⁴

That “souls continue to be sustained” suggests that the daily occurrence of this dancehall ritual and the performances involved in its participation serve to uphold and strengthen its participants and acts as a form of re-possession. As mentioned earlier, performances of re-possession and transformation directly contribute to dealing with situations of injustice and powerlessness.

Both Hutton and Aching place emphasis on performance as a primary means of agency for empowerment and social visibility as does Rawle Gibbons in

¹⁰² E. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1989) – Glissant theorises creole languages as originally a kind of conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open expression.

¹⁰³ S. Niaah, *Readings of ‘Ritual’ and Community in Dancehall Performance* (Institute of Caribbean Studies, UWI Jamaica), p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ S. Niaah, *Readings of ‘Ritual’ and Community in Dancehall Performance* (Institute of Caribbean Studies, UWI Jamaica), p. 73.

his essay *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics*¹⁰⁵. Gibbons looks at theatre performance and the African diasporic experience drawing connections between plantation, maroon and mas' performances. Gibbons asserts that the ways in which performance developed in the African diaspora involves four modes: recall, resistance, re-making and restitution.¹⁰⁶ Recall suggests being able to remember, resistance suggests being able to fight and stand up, re-making suggests being in charge of a re-presentation and in so doing allowing for restitution. Restitution according to Gibbons is concerned with finding a sense of wholeness and connectedness, place and purpose within the universe. Looking specifically at Carnival and the different ways in which performance functions, Gibbons recounts in his essay a song that tells the journey of a woman called Ame. Gibbons writes:

A woman aboard a slaveship in the mid-Atlantic swears one night to fly back home. Next morning, she is gone. One of the countless suicides of the Middle Passage? One of the weaker ones who died on the way? Or one who, through the act of rebellion, freed herself? ... (Ame jumped up/disappeared, Ame gone home).¹⁰⁷

Gibbons describes Ame's journey as one that was full of agency and one that allowed her to be immortalized in song. Ame's actions embody a freedom through transformation, a magic that, like Carnival and theatre performances, contains elements directly concerned with power and transformation. Gibbons says:

If theatre is about anything, it is about power, the power to transform self, to affect others, to change in other words, both being and behaviour. It is a shared power given to the one who acts (divests) by those who testify by their presence (invest). From among the millions who perished at sea,

¹⁰⁵ R. Gibbons. *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics* (WVT, Germany, 1998), p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p.118.

¹⁰⁷ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p. 115.

Ame is given a name, an action of her own making, and, through song, is empowered to enter the continuous present.¹⁰⁸

I emphasize the notion of restitution here since it is of particular relevance to my overall argument about Carnival in the diaspora. As I read it, the Trinidad Carnival is a very serious performance activity, with characteristics directly informed by its history. The notion of restitution through performance, being able to find/forgo a place/belonging, is integral to the Carnival's resonance for a people. Gibbons reminds us that:

The conditions out of which this space is shaped relate to: the values of Carnival among the French Plantocrats and, in particular, their use of rites of reversal (negre jade/ mulatress, Canboulay masquerade) during the time of enslavement; the value of Carnival to the freed Africans and, in particular, their use of rites of reversal (Canboulay) not merely to celebrate their freedom, but, in a situation of continued oppression, to protect and project it.¹⁰⁹

That is, the rites of reversal that contributed to the psychological formation of the way in which some of the Carnival performances emerged, encompass a *right* to perform, act out, react, voice and celebrate even in the face of oppression. As Carnival "shifts what is peripheral to the centre"¹¹⁰ I will argue that, as highlighted by Gibbons' essay, the act of performing allows for taking hold of and being in charge of re-presentations of self and crucially, of bringing this re-presentation into the public domain. With the four modes of recall, resistance, re-making and restitution, the diasporic performer demarcates a Carnival space, claims the streets and re-presents performances for empowerment.

Another important issue raised by Carnival is how this performance within a Carnival space addresses and engages with individual anxieties. In what follows, I look specifically at the ways in which an analysis of contemporary

¹⁰⁸ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁹ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p. 117.

¹¹⁰ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p. 123.

Carnival performance movements can be interpreted as release and how this release can be transformed into empowerment within the Carnival spaces. The various types of Carnival movement inherently affect some of what the performances become. For example in the song *Dollar Wine* by Colin Lucas (1991), Lucas describes teaching a woman how to wine (gyrate). Essentially the lyrics are also commands for the listening public to enact:

With a cent piece in your left pocket,
5 cent in your right,
10 cent in your back pocket, simply out of sight
In front under your vest, stick a dollar
Now count if you want to learn, I explain to her
Cent, five cent, ten cent, dollar

The lyrics go on to say “leave out the small change, give me big money wine – dollar, dollar, dollar...” which results in the repeated forward thrust of the pelvis. This type of Carnival movement is mainly about release. Within the contemporary Carnival space, movements for release include the ‘wine’, ‘jump up’ and ‘chipping’ (shuffling). Some of these movements are manifested in traditional Carnival performances as well, although generally, traditional Carnival character movements are specific and ritualized. This specificity does not necessarily restrict the potential of these traditional performances to embody moments of release or empowerment, as can be seen in the previously mentioned example of Lovelace’s Aldrick and his Dragon costume. On Carnival movement and performance acting as a form of relief from daily pressures

Carnival Rapso¹¹¹ trio *3Canal* chant:

Too much pressure in yuh [your] head,
you can’t sleep at night yuh twisting in bed
Feel like jumbie in yuh pillow,
no matter what you do you doh [don’t] want to go

¹¹¹ Rapso – Rap in Calypso, the rhythm of the word in the power of the word.

Move de pressure from yuh head put it in yuh waist instead
Shake yuh bam-bam round and round,
Feel di pressure coming down, down, down, down, down, down...¹¹²

And they continue:

Whole day is pressure
I cyar [can't] take it no longer
It's time for a release
It's time to wine down to di beat.¹¹³

Here movement and performance are transformative activities, still concerned with release. In the above quotation this is seen in the moving of the pressure from your head to your waist, indicative of the Carnival 'wine', a gyration of the hips and similarly within the lyrics that state: it's "time to wine down to the beat" of the music. Through the example of the above lyrics, as well as the earlier description of Lovelace's Sylvia dressed as a 'slave girl' in the Carnival, I wish to argue that movement, facilitated no doubt by the music, can be a very successful emotionally transformative outlet. The agency of dance movement within the *3Canal* lyrics, aims to transform the individual from one experiencing anxiety, pressure and insomnia to one experiencing the pleasure and effects of their release. The release of pressure through movement, facilitated by music, by a body adorned in mask within a specific communal scenario in turn facilitates an intense transformation with potential effects of self-empowerment.

Empowerment arises from a combination of the transformation that emerges out of performances of release and repetitive movement and the almost contradictory notion of being in control of one's performance. Unlike most ritual activities, this consideration of repetition in movement (and the ensued notion of empowerment) goes alongside the active freedom to choose to enact a jump, or a

¹¹² 3Canal, 'Heat in the Place' in *Heroes of Wha* (Rituals Music, Trinidad, 2001)

¹¹³ 3Canal, 'Heat in the Place' in *Heroes of Wha* (Rituals Music, Trinidad, 2001)

wine, or chipping on the streets, rather than being assigned a specific movement whirling Dervish-style. Even when appropriated and isolated from its ritual/religious context, 'whirling' allows the practitioner feelings of exhilaration and transcendence. The Carnival reveller accesses these states through a combination of dance movements informed by procession, group dynamic and the desire to play one's self. This transformation through movement can take the form of the losing of one self/state in order to facilitate the visibility of another. I would argue that one way of interpreting the notion of 'to lose yourself' within the Carnival context is as a losing of the everyday self. The Carnival play is not one that is out of control, it is one that is beyond the norms that usually control behaviour. For the player, the reveller, this transformation into sometimes wild hysteria is exciting and liberating. It is not frightening. It is potentially flammable in the sense that emotions ride high and intense performances can shift into aggression, but it is not dangerous. It is a freedom that exists within the boundaries of the spaces allocated for the ritual, a liberation that is merely a glimpse, but that is also necessarily so. The temporality of the performance is one that facilitates its sustaining effect. It potentially permits the emergence of an 'other' self through movement.

Mikhail Bakhtin in the introduction to his book *Rabelais and His World* also addresses the role of the body in Carnival performance:

It is not a closed completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the

open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.¹¹⁴

Although manifestations of Carnival movements in Trinidad are informed more by Africa than Europe, the above quotation from Bakhtin serves to highlight that Carnivals share a movement principle concerned with exaggeration and transformation. How these performances translate into empowerment depends on the context of the society and the individual or group within that specific setting. I will limit my use of Bakhtin to that example as mentioned previously, Caribbean discourses on Carnival often avoid Bakhtin as his theories are based specifically on a medieval European paradigm. The arguments are that 1) the type of Carnival that informed the Trinidad Carnival is not the type of Carnival that Bakhtin describes as he theorised a much earlier folk occurrence and 2) the Bakhtin model was not based on a democratic society. In the opening lines of his essay *Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin*, Richard Schechner writes:

Bakhtin's notions of carnival are founded on a settled, stratified society – a non-democratic society. In such a setting, authority can be suspended or set aside temporarily, and “the people” given a chance to act out their desires freely if temporarily. But today's world is not that kind of world.¹¹⁵

Schechner continues:

Bakhtin's model of carnival was developed in terms of medieval European practices as Bakhtin configured them while living in the dangerous, totalitarian world of Stalinism. Bakhtin stressed carnival's rebelliousness as he explained how carni-revellers act out their hatred for official culture. Trinidad Carnival developed under very different historical circumstances. Trinidad Carnival emerged in the nineteenth century from the celebrations of liberated African slaves embodying African ways and values and the carnival traditions of Catholic Europe as carried to the

¹¹⁴ M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Indiana University Press, USA, 1984), p. 26.

¹¹⁵ R. Schechner, 'Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience*, (Routledge, New York, London 2004), p. 3.

Caribbean perhaps by Spanish and certainly by French planter-slave owners.¹¹⁶

Schechner goes on to identify intrinsic differences between medieval Carnivals and the Trinidad Carnival looking at the notion of temporality and freedom. He engages with the complexities of Trinidadian society and the ways in which the Trinidad Carnival as an art form, with the use of competitions and intercultural displays, serves to blur notions of freedom. The idea of 'temporary' is also questioned as Schechner argues that:

Trinidad Carnival dominates the national consciousness and occupies the time, work, and imagination of many people for much of the year. Next year's carnival begins the day after this year's ends.¹¹⁷

I am in agreement with Schechner's arguments on the sustaining effects of Carnival, although the idea of being sustained does not in my view obliterate the idea of temporality. I maintain that the Carnival performances are necessarily temporary and the notion of being sustained emerges as a consequence of those performances being considered here as empowerment. That is, the temporary Carnival performance entails moments of transformation, release and agency resulting in experiences of self-empowerment. It is in the memory of that experience of self-empowerment that the concept of a sustaining effect resonates, as it is those experiential glimpses that the reveller carries forward to post-Carnival day-to-day activities and indeed to the next year's Carnival.

I would like to revisit the point initiated at the beginning of this section concerned with Carnival movement. The identified movements of wining, chipping and jumping are prevalent outside of the Carnival environment as well.

¹¹⁶ R. Schechner, 'Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin', pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁷ R. Schechner, 'Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin', pp. 5-6.

I argue that what makes the Carnival movement unique is tied up in the entire package of masking, public space and the performances that have the potential to allow for the losing of one's rational self. Loss of rational self through movement, I argue, is crucial to the cathartic effects of performance. The performative action of 'letting go' facilitates a freedom that, by being momentarily transgressive, allows for the release of anxiety and the ability to deal with the situations of anxiety through a re-presentation of self. (This point is illustrated at greater length in interviews in the Appendix).

In an example of this process, Edwidge Danticat, in her book *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* writes about her experience as a Haitian-American, revisiting Haiti specifically to take part in the Carnival season, which as a child, she was taught to fear and stay away from. Danticat takes her readers on a visual journey as she describes moments and encounters prior to the Carnival that seek to give an understanding of the context in which the Jacmel Carnival takes place. These encounters include references to superstition in relation to a particular type of flowering plant growing at a grave site, political unrest and environmental deforestation brought on by political and anti-vooodoo activity and natural disasters.

I will look in more detail at two sections from Danticat's text, that add to the understanding and interpretations of what may be entailed within Carnival performance and the role of movement. The first reads as follows:

At last my body is a tiny fragment of a much larger being. I am part of a group possession, a massive stream of joy. I feel like I am twirling around a maypole, and going much too fast, and cannot stop. My head is spinning, but I don't care. There is nothing that seems to matter as much as following the curve of the other bodies pressed against mine. In that brief

space and time, the carnival offers all the paradoxical elements I am craving: anonymity, jubilant community, and belonging.¹¹⁸

This description of being in the midst of the Carnival, as a player, as an active participant is one that is familiar to me. Danticat's body moves as if in a group possession, it follows the curve of the bodies pressed against her. Within this scenario, resistance is not really a feasible option. The movement within the crowd facilitates a kind of transformation permissible in that space, one that is connected to the revealing of an 'other' self.¹¹⁹ In an interview I conducted with South Wales Intercultural Community Arts' Cardiff Mas' Carnival founder Steve Fletcher, he stated that the anonymity of being in the crowd was a key aspect for encouraging masqueraders to take part in Cardiff's Carnival.

So early on, the shyness thing, you hide inside a section so it's like 'go down a street, dressed like that!' and then you actually say well (a) you'll rehearse, (b) you're doing it to this music and (c) there are 30 of you just the same. Now, particularly if you're going down the face-paint road, you could dance past your – and people have done, danced past their mothers – and they still will not recognize you until you go 'ah ha, it's me!' so you have suddenly this total anonymity which is almost absolute freedom.¹²⁰

My research has suggested that in order to make sense of this anonymity it is helpful to look at it both in a way that is directly connected to my own experiences as a reveller, specifically within the Trinidad Carnival Jouvay environment (discussed earlier in Chapter One) and in relation to Danticat's description. In my experience of Jouvay, the notion of anonymity is concentrated on three levels: 1) the level that involves applying the mask, usually mud or paint on the face and body; 2) the level that involves the time of day, which for Jouvay

¹¹⁸ E. Danticat, *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel Haiti* (Vintage, London, 2002), p. 147.

¹¹⁹ The revealing of an 'other' self can be connected to a diasporic sensibility in that when we are placed in new spaces, we find dominant selves to act within. The Carnival performance allows us to tap into other aspects of ourselves that may not be allowed visibility within our adopted roles.

¹²⁰ Interview with Steve Fletcher, 03.12.07, Cardiff.

is the pre-dawn darkened environment and 3) the level that involves being part of a crowd. Danticat describes this with the use of words like “group possession” and “following the curve of the other bodies”, suggesting how the performative intensity of the crowd and of being a part of that mass, plays a major initiating role in the process of mask removal – the process of allowing for the visibility of an ‘other’ self.

It is within the group with blurred, semi-recognizable, liminal identities that one can begin to ‘give-in’ to bodily feelings that accentuate our connection to the natural world, much like the ways in which the actions of eating, of sexual intercourse and of giving birth cannot really be modified and updated to be fully subsumed within a high-tech, post-modern, capitalist template. These are bodily activities that situate human-kind very closely to the animal kingdom. *We are* after-all, animals. The communal performance, I argue, carries with it similar bodily dynamics to that of eating and childbirth. It is not coincidental that the activities of Carnival (farewell to the flesh) are concerned with life and birth, death and excess simultaneously. It is worth mentioning that this communal performance is facilitated by the music being played. The music within the Carnival space directs frenzied group energy that potentially allows for visibility of an ‘other’ self. As a bodily activity, this communal performance, which incorporates music, involves engaging and interacting with bodily stimuli, reacting to sound and touch, laughter and feelings of pleasure. The performative actions at Carnival time though are not simply stimulus and bodily reactions free of cultural connotations. Within the Caribbean context Carnival is very much historically linked to ritual practices.

The second section of Danticat's text that offers a useful insight is the very last paragraph in which she states: "So it did happen after all. I had really been there. Even as others had been putting on their masks, just for one afternoon, I had allowed myself to remove my own."¹²¹ Continuing my argument outlined above, I would suggest that the performance allowed Danticat to remove her own social mask. I would like to suggest that Danticat was able to allow for the visibility of an 'other' of her 'self' within that Jacmel Carnival. On seeing herself as reveller being played-back on a television screen Danticat admitted to not recognizing herself:

Seeing myself ... my head cocked back, my arms draped around people I didn't even know, I had a strange feeling of detachment. Was that really me? So unencumbered, so lively, so free.¹²²

Perhaps seeing herself on screen was a moment of demasking¹²³ for Danticat, a moment that allowed her to be more aware of her everyday self. Here the Carnival performance can be interpreted as acting as both a form of release and a medium for empowerment.

Carnival performances utilize the (often masked) body as the primary tool for transformation. In her essay, *The Jamette in We: Redefining Performance in Contemporary Trinidad Carnival*, Samantha Noel looks at the evolution of the word Jamette within Trinidadian society, in order to engage with the ways in which the Jamette has contributed to performances within the contemporary Carnival. Noel distinguishes between Jamette – interpreted by Noel to mean women of the twentieth century and Jametre – used to refer to a class of people

¹²¹ Danticat, *After the Dance*, p. 158.

¹²² Danticat, *After the Dance*, p. 158.

¹²³ De-masking – 'an unexpected and undesirable ideological self-recognition (the shock of self-recognition) that is brought on by contact with a masked subject'. Gerald Aching, *Masking and Power*, p. 6.

that characterized people of the late-nineteenth century. Noel's essay is relevant to my argument because by looking specifically at the historical evolution of the Trinidad Carnival, Noel begins to engage with the dynamics at play with the use of the body, within the Carnival performance. The shift from the use of voice to the use of the body is considered by Noel as follows:

[T]o "improve" Carnival in the early twentieth century ... it became taboo for women of the *jamette* class to be *chantuelles* [the singers of costumed bands], since this did not reflect respectability. Such prohibition represented an important juncture in the shift from vocal to corporeal expression in women's participation in Carnival and led to a further discovery of the potential for the body alone to be effectively proactive.¹²⁴

Although her emphasis is on "women's participation in Carnival" evident by the use of 'jamette', Noel's writing suggests a collective experience that affected both men and women. In my research I have been interested in the intensity of play/movement within Carnival performance spaces such as the Jouvay and for some revellers in the Pretty Mas'. Noel's discussion continues to contribute to the idea central to the work of writers like Professor Errol Hill that the history of slavery and freedom from slavery informed the *ways* in which the performance space was occupied:

Their participation in Carnival, however, was not pure revelry; the concealment of weapons was a common practice in these bands as early as 1864, and many of these women armed themselves with horsewhips, stones and razors, reflecting the violent culture inherent among the *jameters*. The viciousness of slavery and its quasi continuation in the post-emancipation era of colonial plantation society produced a class of both men and women who could inflict violence with as much vigour as they endured it.¹²⁵

Noel's focus leans towards interpreting the importance and signification of the physicality of the corporeal Black body. Noel states:

¹²⁴ S. Noel, 'The Jamette in We: Redefining Performance in Contemporary Trinidad Carnival', *Small Axe Journal*, 14:1 31 (2010), p. 61.

¹²⁵ Noel, 'The Jamette in We', p. 63.

Most lower-class women recognised that rejecting jametre traits entitled them to upward mobility, and while some attempted to adopt the colonial role, others refused to be sidelined during Carnival. These more rebellious women were aware of how the body could be used as a form of protest. Although these women knew that the voice was the most effective tool for expressing displeasure with social and political circumstances, they cunningly gauged the potential of their exposed bodies as a locus of rebellious and expressive energy through which their discontent with the colonial order could be channeled.¹²⁶

Speaking of the contemporary Carnival, Noel argues that this history of the jamette has influenced the performance within the Carnival space for women of different classes, exemplified by the sexually suggestive gyration of the hips (wine) and the desire to make one's self a spectacle. Noel continues:

This kind of jamette behaviour ... revealed an insistence by these women to become engaged in the creative act of spontaneous movement. Unmistakably, the costumes designed and created in the mas' camps, based on a particular theme, did not afford these women masqueraders the kind of portrayal they wanted to convey. So for them, the body became the costume. It was only through the full utilization of their physique that their creativity could emerge.¹²⁷

For many masqueraders, the notion of claiming space through movement is intrinsic to Carnival activity. Their performances claim, as Gibbons stated: "vertical and horizontal spaces"¹²⁸ with movements that are large, sometimes aggressive and often "intentionally ceremonial so that [their] signature stays in space, remaining to signify and empower each successive set."¹²⁹

Ultimately, the performance within Carnival is about claiming freedom, freedom to perform, freedom to express, to wear or not wear, to dance, protest, observe. As Gibbons states, "through performance, mas and mass (the movement

¹²⁶ Noel, 'The Jamette in We', pp. 66-67.

¹²⁷ Noel, 'The Jamette in We', p. 76.

¹²⁸ R. Gibbons, *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics* (WVT, Germany, 1998), p. 123.

¹²⁹ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, pp. 118-119.

of crowds) claim the streets, asserting the freedom so intrinsic to Carnival.”¹³⁰ In that respect, the very action of performance and movement can be interpreted within Carnival spaces as one that, through a collective exaggerated expression touches on and has meaning for both individual and communal circumstances.

On Identity

As discussed previously, Carnival performance is directly connected to identity (dispossession and social visibility – Aching; self-repossession – Hutton; individual and collective agency and restitution – Gibbons). Displacement is another term that is useful in relation to considerations of identity and the ways in which feelings of displacement affect/effect performance. Displacement is considered by Stuart Hall in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* to be a condition of the Caribbean space in that it involves a space of peoples being removed and peoples being placed:

The Third, ‘New World’ presence, is not so much power, as ground, place territory. It is the juncture-point where the many cultural tributaries meet, the ‘empty’ land ... where strangers from every other part of the globe collided. None of the people who now occupy the islands – black, brown, white, African, European, American, Spanish, French, East Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, Jew, Dutch – originally ‘belonged’ there. It is the space where the creolisations and assimilations and syncretisms were negotiated.... It also has to be understood as the place of many, continuous displacements: of the original pre-Colombian inhabitants, the Arawaks, Caribs and Amerindians, permanently displaced from their homelands and decimated; of other peoples displaced in different ways from Africa, Asia and Europe; the displacements of slavery, colonisation and conquest. It stands for the endless ways in which Caribbean people have been destined to ‘migrate.’¹³¹

¹³⁰ Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p. 123.

¹³¹ Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, p. 234.

In relation to identity, Hall questions whether the notion of identity is something to be uncovered and rediscovered or whether it is to be considered as something that has a history but that has to be continuously re-produced:

Is it only a matter of unearthing that which the colonial experience buried and overlaid, bringing to light the hidden continuities it suppressed? Or is a quite different practice entailed – not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity. Not an identity grounded in archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past?¹³²

Hall continues:

As well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean’s ‘uniqueness’ ... Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation.¹³³

As argued previously in the *History of the Trinidad Carnival*, Trinidad society is marked by difference, made up of a melee of peoples and cultures forging common identities. Difference, in terms of racial difference is often openly acknowledged by Trinidadians. Writer Annie Paul draws reference to this in her essay *Subjects Matter: The Repeating Alternative and the Expat Gaze*:

In a sense the question of race could only have been brought up in the Trinidadian context where the signifier of skin colour is further complicated by the different and competing ethnicities of the Afro-Caribbean and the Indo-Caribbean. In contrast to Jamaica which maintains a stiff postcolonial silence on such matters, race and ethnicity are frequently invoked in discussions of art in Trinidad. Guggenheim’s thesis on Trinidadian art for instance constantly refers to artists as ‘creole or black’, ‘white’, ‘East Indian’ and ‘Chinese.’¹³⁴

¹³² Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 224.

¹³³ Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 225.

¹³⁴ A. Paul, *Subjects Matter: The Repeating AlterNATIVE and the Expat Gaze* (2nd Caribbean International Art Education Symposium, Centre for Creative and Festival Arts, UWI, Trinidad, June 2005), p. 11.

This acknowledgement of ethnicity often occurs in the context of questions and comments about race, such as the public labeling and identifying of individuals as 'chinee', 'whitie', 'reds', 'dougl'a', 'brown-skin', 'darkie', 'beti' – but more specifically through questions of race-mixtures within both the obviously plural-mixed race people and the otherwise non-suspecting not-so-obviously mixed race population. That is to say, throughout my primary and secondary schooling in Trinidad, the question 'what are you mixed with?' was often asked by other school children in the school playgrounds and was addressed to almost all school students. This assumes not only that the reality of the forging of an identity has to do with the merging of peoples, a single space and the places they left behind, but also that the role of the body and particularly what the body looks like is significant in a sort of unspoken brotherhood/sisterhood of Trinidadian identity. Beyond the outward appearance of the Trinidadian of obvious African-descent, the body can often be scrutinized by other Trinidadians to identify traces of other races, so much so that within the household in which I grew up, my sisters and I have had labels publicly attributed to us due to our appearance alone which not only attempted to assert and perhaps enhance our differences from each other as sisters, but also in severing the obvious family resemblance, inserted each of us into the melee of what constitutes the peoples of this space. Due to the slant and size of eyes, one was labelled 'chinese', the other 'indian'/'beti' due to the length and texture of her hair. Our differing shades of skin tone was also a separating factor so that being 'red', 'brown-skin' or 'darkie' within the Trinidadian vernacular, is not necessarily consistent for an entire family. These labels are not often taken as derogatory though and it is important to note that often, the 'wrong' labels may be seen as a compliment, for

example within the complicated context of 'colour caste politics' being called 'chinee' because of one's slanted eyes might signify an open acknowledgement of pride in mixed ancestry – or at times the wrong label may be a way of embracing a foreigner into a space, for example, my white welsh husband being called 'red' by one 'commentator' may be read as a familiarizing term and in assuming his connection through me, to the space, he underwent an instant 'creolizing' within that particular Trinidadian's obsession for identification and inclusion.

In the Trinidad context, national identity is layered and complex. Informed by the work of writer/poet Kamau Brathwaite, writers such as Patricia Mohammed¹³⁶ and Bridget Brereton¹³⁷, (among others)¹³⁸ consider that the word 'creole' can be used to refer to those people born on/native to the island. Therefore historically, the white elite (descendants of the white plantocracy) were known as French creole (although some may have been English Catholics), the black creoles were those born in Trinidad, distinguished from the black immigrants from other Caribbean islands, America and Africa. Creole also referred to 'mixed' or 'coloured' people of mixed ethnicity, including people of Spanish-Amerindian-African descent (peon) and European-African descent (mulatto). On the issue of multi-ethnic Trinidad, the East Indians that arrived on the island were not a homogenous group but were generally isolated from the black creoles: 1) by geography (as they tended to be assigned to estates in rural areas as opposed to the urban spaces populated by black creoles and other

¹³⁶ P. Mohammed, 'The "Creolisation" of Indian Women in Trinidad' in Verene Shepard/Glen Richards (eds.), *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*. (Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston Jamaica, 2002), p. 130.

¹³⁷ B. Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962*. (Heinemann, USA, 1981), pp. 116-135.

¹³⁸ For detailed analyses around creole, creolisation and hybridity see: Verene Sheperd/Glen Richards' (eds.), *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*. (Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston Jamaica, 2002) and Shalini Puri's, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity*. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004).

immigrants), 2) by inherent caste prejudice that they brought with them from India and 3) by self-protection – surrounding themselves with their culture and religions to protect themselves from the real and perceived aggressions of the host inhabitants.¹³⁹ Over time, despite the rhetoric of some conservative representatives of the East Indian community, Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians did inevitably mix. The offspring of this mixture was called ‘dougla’ meaning ‘bastard/illegitimate’ (similar to ‘mulatto’ meaning ‘mule’). In some cases the dougla was considered to be ‘creole’ because of the perceived threat to purity with the taint of black blood. Writer Shalini Puri mentions that the East Indians who were born on the island had their request for repatriation back to India denied by India¹⁴⁰. In terms of identity this denial suggests that being ‘native’ ethnically mixed or not, facilitates an inevitable cultural creolisation in the birth of a Trinidadian/Caribbean identity. That is, the East Indians did not share the history of slavery and emancipation on the island, but did share a colonial oppression and were an obvious growing presence on the road to independence. Their journey from ‘immigrant’ to ‘national’ alludes to a layering of identity perceptions. The remit of the conservative East Indians wanting to remain separate (culturally, religiously, socially) yet equal (politically) is challenged when considered in light of the ‘dougla’ and discourses around ‘dougla poetics.’¹⁴¹ Dougla poetics adds another dimension to notions of creolisation and according to Puri, ‘[articulates] a third alternative to opposing

¹³⁹ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, pp. 108-114.

¹⁴⁰ Puri’s, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity*. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004), p. 220.

¹⁴¹ See: Tejaswini Niranjana’s, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad*. (Duke University Press, USA, 2006) and Shalini Puri’s, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism and Cultural Hybridity*. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004).

stereotypes.’¹⁴² Dougla poetics, as I read it, highlights the potential to rectify conflicts by observing and acknowledging the creative potential of how we borrow, share and make new. Dougla poetics moves beyond the notion of the mixing of two ethnicities. As with considerations of creole, the crucial points to be made are as follows. Firstly the mixture creates a new form with potential alliances to its two (or more) components. As a result of this and because of its unique perspective it secondly has the capacity to create new outlooks, approaches and forms of expressions. These do not merely engage with dual perspectives (black/white, African/Indian) but can also challenge the very ideology of those dual perspectives/identities by imagining an other. As such, these dougla/creole processes are messy, they deal with processes of inclusion and exclusion that accompany the ways in which identity and belonging are experienced and defined. The umbrella notion of ‘Trinidadian-ness’ and Caribbean-ness (and creolisation) is certainly, as Hall observes, a process of continuous movement. Puri states that ‘the dougla has served as a means to re-think cultural hybridity in relation to projects of political equality and critiques of the racialized national-bourgeoisies.’¹⁴³ My reading argues that creole is also an on-going process with many results. It is relevant to the space and as a process, births ‘new’ concerns (dougla poetics), ways of thinking and approaches. That creole is a process, rather than a final result implies not only that this ‘becoming’ is an evolving, moving experience but also that it is not merely about the product of black-white race mixing. As a cultural process, it involves internal conflicts and contradictions within the melee of

¹⁴² Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 216.

¹⁴³ Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, p. 216.

representations. The fact that the creole process embraces all of that complexity, and that mas' performances of identity are birthed as a result, are relevant indicators as to some of the ways in which ethnically diverse, culturally connected Trinidadians make and forge their spaces for visibility.

Writing on identity, Hall, in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* says that: "We should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."¹⁴⁴ Hall identifies two ways in which cultural identity has been thought about from an Afro-Caribbean perspective. The first is the notion of cultural identity as one of a shared culture of black experience. Within the Caribbean context this Afro-centric perspective denotes identification with a culture that is African, an African experience that is ostensibly the same for Africans and those people of African-descent dispersed around the globe. This is similar to the 'all ah we is one' scenario. It is the acknowledgement of identification with a culture that is not, as Hall puts it: "grounded in the archaeology, but the re-telling of the past."¹⁴⁵

This first position is reminiscent of an encounter I had with a reveller during the Trinidad Carnival Jouvay celebration in March 2011. This female reveller of what might be called in the Trinidadian vernacular 'cocoa payol/pañyol'¹⁴⁶ (as a corruption of the Spanish word *Español* for Spanish workers on cocoa and coffee plantations) origin approached me with the question: "Why do you think they are playing mas'?" I answered with the word

¹⁴⁴ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 222.

¹⁴⁵ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 224.

¹⁴⁶ Payol – Person of mixed race (white, Amerindian and black) usually a member of one or other of the scattered, poor, peasant communities in Northern Trinidad that retain remainders of Hispanic culture, such as Parang and varying degrees of dialectal Spanish. Reference: R. Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, (Oxford University Press, 1996).

'liberation' at which point she further added a brief history of the enslaved Africans and freedom from slavery and celebration of freedom. I then posed the question: "And you? Why do you play?" since she did not appear to be of African-descent. Her response was emphatically defensive: "I is ah Trini, that's why I play." This response is relevant. Although it is not about Africans on the continent and those displaced sharing a similar cultural identity, her response plays with similar dynamics to those mentioned by Hall. Here one sees the 'being Trini' as the unifying justification for playing or participating in the Carnival. The history of freedom from slavery on the island, however simply stated, might be seen as the grounding for the intensity of the energy within that space and added to that, the notion of locality is also relevant to the action of playing. The island's history and the evolution of the Carnival are pertinent to all on the island and act as a kind of birthright. For this woman it is about identification with a shared cultural experience. Their history is my history too, she seems to suggest. 'We is Trini'. This is not to say that all Trinidadians play in the Carnival or that the Carnival is open only to Trinidadians, but rather that it is there for the choosing. In that respect there is a similarity with Stuart Hall's observation about understanding a form of cultural identity based on re-telling the past and identification with a shared culture.

The second position Hall identifies recognizes similarity and oneness but places emphasis on difference as defining aspects of who we are. "Cultural identity in this second sense is a matter of becoming as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past"¹⁴⁷ It acknowledges that the past has shaped what we are, what we have to become and what we will be, so that a concept of

¹⁴⁷ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 225.

forging and building identity incrementally emerges. These bits and pieces include memories of an Africa we could not access, as well as the merging and re-creating of identity forms that were specific to the islands, the spaces where we live. I identify this second stage as directly related to the building of Trinidadian identities evident in the performances and displays within the Carnival. For example in the case of a Traditional Carnival character like the Midnight Robber, his play shows vestiges of Africa, Europe and the island politics. What emerges is an amalgam of influences that *becomes* native and is constantly in process, re-inventing and re-inscribing, making new.

Hall further identifies three presences that may be regarded when considering the production of Caribbean cultural identities in this way. He describes them as follows:

To borrow Aimé Césaire's and Leopold Senghor's metaphor: *Présence Africaine*, *Présence Européenne*, and the third, most ambiguous, presence of all – the sliding term, *Présence Americain*.¹⁴⁸

The African Presence is defined as the Africa that was hidden but that became the underpinnings of language, customs, stories, rituals and arts etc.; the way in which the Africa was remembered pieced together and inherently embedded into Caribbean culture. The European Presence is identified as that presence which constantly aimed to dominate and represent the people through the imposition of power. Hall observes that this presence has also been creolised and cannot be found in its pure state. The American Presence refers to place and the negotiation of space within the New World. Hall positions this third presence as a space of “continuous displacements” and as the beginnings of the concept of Diaspora, where the experience is one that is built on recognition of the forging

¹⁴⁸ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', p. 230.

of an identity that has its roots in difference and continuous transformations. Hall concludes that identity may be theorized as constructed within, rather than outside of, modes of representation.

The Caribbean body is familiar with labels and being represented. As with the school yard question of 'what are you mixed with', I would argue that, as identified by Hall, the *Presence Americain* is relevant here in the forging of Trinidadian identities which involve a piecing together. This piecing together informs another transformation, the making of the old into the new so that the inevitable mixture of races is not just about space but also about people. The people mixed and continue to mix with each other until, in some cases, the mixture is no longer identifiable or even an issue. This mixing of peoples refers both to the inter-relational or marital mixtures of different ethnicities as well as to the notion of mixing as working together, collaborating and exchanging.

The New World as a place of "continuous displacements", allows for a space that is ripe with potential performances that are concerned with a right to space and belonging. People want to be people. What has happened on my island is that the different peoples, post-emancipation, post-independence, claimed complex Trinidadian identities, and claimed the right to be free. Through Carnival performances, this claim is re-iterated. Within the African diaspora, these performances re-imagined, are necessarily tilted to create again, moments that have the potential to transform and empower.

On Ritual

Both academic writing and interviewees for my own research see Carnival as an annual ritual due to the fact that it is located as a seasonal occurrence. It is calendrical, and by that very nature it is also necessarily temporary. Trinidad, Carnival fits within the Lenten calendar, preceding Ash Wednesday and the 40 days of 'fasting' before Easter. However, it also shares other elements of ritual as described by anthropologist Victor Turner. I will engage primarily with Turner's *From Ritual to Theatre* to tease out some aspects of ritual theatre that can be relevant to Carnival performance as I understand it.

I start with the notions of rites of passage and liminal phases. The *liminal* was described by Victor Turner in relation to Arnold van Gennep's *Rite of Passage*. Van Gennep, Turner states: "distinguishes three phases in a rite of passage: *separation, transition, and incorporation*."¹⁴⁹ The 'separation' phase involves the novice/candidates being detached from the normal or 'everyday' and includes ritual symbols, rites of inversion and a symbolic interpretation of time. The 'transition' phase where my interest lies is also called the margin or limen (threshold) phase by van Gennep, in which:

...the ritual subjects pass through a period of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states.¹⁵⁰

Of this liminal phase Turner also states:

... in many societies the liminal initiands are often considered to be dark, invisible, like the sun or moon in eclipse or the moon between phases ... They are associated with such general oppositions as life and death, male and female, food and excrement, simultaneously, since they are at once dying from or dead to their former status and life, and being born and

¹⁴⁹ V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (PAJ Publications, New York 1982), p. 24.

¹⁵⁰ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 24.

growing into new ones. Sharp symbolic inversion of social attributes may characterize separation; blurring and merging of distinctions may characterize liminality ... other signs include eating or not eating specific foods, disregard of personal appearance ... in mid-transition the initiands are pushed as far toward uniformity, structural invisibility, and anonymity as possible.¹⁵¹

Turner adds that: "Liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events."¹⁵²

The third and final phase of a rite of passage identified by van Gennep as the 'incorporation' phase: "includes symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in total society."¹⁵³ Before focusing specifically on Carnival in relation to the liminal phase of rite of passage rituals, I will mention that Carnival activity can be interpreted as a rite of passage in which the entire seasonal journey takes the reveller through the three phases of *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*. Considering the Carnival as a rite of passage implies that the reveller comes out of the seasonal activities changed in some way, as rite of passage activities involve physical, emotional or social changes for the participants as well as being seen differently by others in the society. The *separation* phase of "being detached from the normal or 'everyday'" can be seen as the Jouvay, carnival Monday and carnival Tuesday.

¹⁵¹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 26.

¹⁵² (*ibid.*: 27)

¹⁵³ (*ibid.*: 24)

Consider the following diagram:

Carnival Experience as Rite of Passage

Carnival environment = separation

Jouvay = transition/liminal phase (part 1)

Carnival Monday = transition/liminal phase (part 2)

Carnival Tuesday = transition/liminal phase (part 3)

Ash Wednesday = incorporation

Each of these performance spaces can then be interpreted as stages of 'transition/liminal' activities that gradually lead the reveller towards the incorporation phase that is concerned with re-integration into society. The nature of the Carnival performance however involves intricacies that are specific to Carnival as much as the rites of passage activities identified by Turner involve aspects that are not so relevant to Carnival performance. For example, the changes that occur in rites of passage are usually permanent/non-reversible ones, while in Carnival the transformations are temporary and seasonal. Rather than attempting to 'fit' Carnival into a rite of passage template, it is useful to my research to consider how the Carnival performance engages with a specific aspect of the ritual rite of passage.

The Carnival activity can be interpreted as situated within one phase of the rite of passage – the liminal/transitional. Turner introduces the term 'liminoid' to describe activities within a post-industrial society that play with liminal attributes or 'resemble' the liminal. He suggests that the term *liminal* belongs almost exclusively to the considerations of rites of passage rituals within

agrarian societies because aspects of play that may be considered 'ludic' are intrinsically connected to ideas of work. The understandings of the relationship between work and play within agrarian societies are tied into a holistic system that is about the efficient running of every aspect of their life. The ways in which the sacred affects the profane and the ways in which the ludic affects serious work are part of a whole system that depends on all its parts in a symbiotic relationship. Agrarian liminal activities are distinguished from liminal activities in post-industrial societies because of the underlying sense of meaning and the direct role that these activities play in relation to broader community well-being.

Of the liminoid, Turner states:

But for most people the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice not obligation. The *liminoid* is more like a commodity – indeed, often *is* a commodity, which one selects and pays for – than the *liminal*, which elicits loyalty and is bound up with one's membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group. One *works* at the liminal, one *plays* with the liminoid.¹⁵⁴

Carnival activities, according to Turner, fit within a liminoid template. This argument is interesting as it directly implies that Carnival performers are involved in an activity that resembles elements of a liminal ritual but that they inherently have freedom in terms of *how* they participate and the ways in which other members of the community choose to participate within the ritual, if at all.

Turner continues:

Again in St Vincent, only *certain types* of personalities are attracted to the carnival as performers ... – for people do not *have to* act invertedly – as in tribal rituals; some people, but not *all* people, *choose* to act invertedly at the carnival. And the carnival is unlike a tribal ritual in that it can be attended *or* avoided, performed or merely watched, at *will*. It is a genre of leisure enjoyment, not an obligatory ritual, it is play-separated-from-work, not play-and-work ludergy as a binary system of man's 'serious'

¹⁵⁴ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 55.

communal endeavour. ... To the contrary, in tribal ritual, even the normally orderly, meek, and “law-abiding” people would be *obliged* to be disorderly in key rituals, regardless of their temperament and character.¹⁵⁵

Turner presents a clear framework of how liminal and liminoid activities are manifested. This framework is useful as it contributes to a further understanding of Carnival performance as ritual, which in my view, remains in a sliding limbo space between the two definitions. Turner highlights that the Carnival in St Vincent attracts certain personalities and within that group of personalities, some choose to act “invertedly.” While I agree with Turner that Carnival attracts certain types of people, I am concerned that Turner’s interpretation of Carnival as a leisure activity misunderstands the wider resonance of the Carnival performance for a people. While not all people are *obliged* to be a part this performance, the option of doing so (or not) remains primary. Playwright Rawle Gibbons considered the dynamic between Carnival and choice during our 2011 interview. Gibbons states:

It is a space for choice ... In other words, it’s not that you *want* to do it every year: you can choose to do it or not to do it. But the point is, whatever you do, you give yourself the space for choice. Nobody could force you to do anything, they can’t force you to play, they can’t force you not to play. Even if you don’t play, it’s still your time. ... it is that if you’re within the mas’ you can choose whether you are or are not playing *your* mas’, for whatever reason, but that doesn’t mean it’s any less your time.

The Carnival is a space that permits room for choice; as Turner mentions, it is “a matter of choice not obligation” and as such, it also permits room for the choice of *how* to play. Gibbons advances my argument that Carnival is a freedom space in which one is free to choose to play or not to play, and free to play how one

¹⁵⁵ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 43.

wants to play by contributing the point that most importantly, whether or not you partake in the Carnival, it belongs to you – the Carnival is *your* space.

An aspect that stands out from the Turner quotation is the comment that “people do not *have to* act invertedly ...” and his insistence that the Carnival “is a genre of leisure enjoyment, not an obligatory ritual, it is play-separated-from-work, not play-and-work ludery as a binary system of man’s ‘serious’ communal endeavour.” I argue that Carnival choices differ from the choice to be involved in a leisure activity or recreational sport. While, often to be involved one has to pay for a costume, Carnival is ‘your time’ and one can choose to ‘play’ even outside of the boundaries of commercial consumer, especially in the Jouvay environment, although the Carnival Monday and Tuesday celebrations also offer room for ‘unofficial’, ‘unregistered’ masquerade manifestations. At the risk of contradiction, I emphasize that for those who forged this practice into something meaningful for them, the Carnival *is* a serious communal endeavour, directly linked to the everyday and the play within it, as said within the Trinidadian vernacular, is “a must”. My interpretation of the acts of inversed behaviour is very much coloured by Barbara Ehrenreich’s introduction to her book *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* in which she quotes some of the descriptions used by European explorers to describe ‘the savage’. Ehrenreich quotes from Captain Cook’s writing in the 1700’s, when he arrived in Tahiti and observed a group of girls dancing – “a very indecent dance, which they call Timoredee, singing the most indecent songs and using the most indecent actions ...”. Ehrenreich also quotes Charles Darwin’s description of the Corroboree rite of the western Aborigine Australians, in which he writes: “... and various other gesticulations, such as extending their arms and wriggling their bodies. It was a

most rude, barbarous scene, and, to our ideas, without any sort of meaning.”

Ehrenreich further quotes an English visitor’s description of Christmas celebrations in 1845 Trinidad:

... Drunkenness bursting forth yells and bacchanalian orgies, was universal amongst the blacks... sleep was out of the question, in the midst of such a disgusting and fiendish saturnalia ... all dancing, screaming and clapping their hands, like so many demons...¹⁵⁶

The prejudiced language of primitivism has often been used to describe the ‘other’ and although this may not have been Turner’s intention, I would insist that performances are not a question of choice, they emerge how they have to. If aggressive and harsh, intricate and beautiful, intense and passionate, they directly reflect the individual immersed within the context of the wider society. I would also insist that visceral movement is initiated in the gut, it starts with the belly and works its way out. Gyration, wriggling, screaming, clapping and acting ‘invertedly’ are performative manifestations of ‘gut reactions’. The use of adverbs like “indecent”, “rude” and “disgusting” by Cook, Darwin and the unnamed English writer highlights a form of blatant ignorance on their part, of the ways in which temporarily letting go of the pretentious man-made rules in society can allow for a deeper awareness of communal self and self-empowerment.

The Carnival environment as a (partly) liminoid activity arena, is a space for choice. The play within this Trinidad Carnival environment, I argue, potentially allows for movement between blurry limbo stages concerned with the liminal versus liminoid, individual versus community, masking and

¹⁵⁶ Ehrenreich goes on to observe that not all visitors described indigenous rites and performance rituals in this way. Her book basically takes the reader on a journey that concludes that today’s Europe is finding again that ‘native energy’ which was originally an integral part of early man. B. Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, (Granta Publications, London, 2007), p. 3.

anonymity versus visibility. Likened to the concept of the liminal/liminoid is the notion of 'communitas'. According to Turner, communitas is concerned with "abrogation, negation, or inversion of the normative structure in which its participants are quotidianly involved."¹⁵⁷ Of communitas Turner states:

Communitas exists in a kind of "figure-ground" relationship with social structure ... just as the liminal phase of an initiation rite is defined by the surrounding social statuses ... Communitas, in the present context of its use, then may be said to exist more in contrast than in active opposition to social structure, as an alternative and more "liberated" way of being socially human, a way both of being detached from social structure – and hence potentially of periodically *elevating* its performance – and also of a "distanced" or "marginal" person's being more attached to *other* disengaged persons – and hence, sometimes of elevating a social structure's historical performance in common with them.¹⁵⁸

Turner identifies three forms of communitas: spontaneous, ideological and normative. Spontaneous communitas manifests itself as a visceral, gut feeling that is in sync with (an)other individual(s), where both feel the need to be open and honest and where "they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved..."¹⁵⁹ Ideological communitas is described as a theoretical language that is employed in order to understand the occurrence of 'spontaneous communitas' and finally, normative communitas is identified by Turner as "a subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous communitas on a more or less permanent basis."¹⁶⁰ The consideration of communitas is very much tied into the marginal and liminal, and in an interpretation of the potential for discovering moments for simultaneously connecting with and discovering/rediscovers self through ritual-like interaction. Within my research, I am interested in operating on some

¹⁵⁷ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁸ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁵⁹ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁰ Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 49.

level with manifestations of ritual elements within Carnival and a consideration of the roles that the interpretations of liminal/liminoid and communitas may play.

Conclusions

Engaging with Carnival performance, its resonance/meaning and some of the elements of ritual that constitute part of its make-up, are relevant to my understanding of Carnival in my research and how it can be utilized outside of the festival context. A major part of my interpretation of Carnival's resonance/meaning has developed from my engagement with personal interviews with revellers and Carnival artists. This will be explored further in the following chapter. What begins to be clear is that the Carnival is an activity that is primarily about an embodied experience. My work is about isolating elements of that experience that can begin to distinguish between how Carnival *feels* from the inside as opposed to what Carnival *looks* like from the outside. As I begin to explore this issue, I use the word **mas'** to signify the notion of the festival from the inside. In my interview with Carnival designer/maker/reveller Amaru Chatawa, he stated that people write about St. Vincent Carnival but Vincentians say "Vincy mas'" and for Amaru, mas' and Carnival are not the same thing. That distinction is crucial to my work in terms of the way I view and perform in Carnivals outside of Trinidad. This leads to the question of what is mas', if it is distinct from Carnival, what are the elements that are intrinsic to its make-up and what are the elements that lend themselves to interpretation outside of the festival? To develop a concept of mas', my research takes as its core elements of masking and aspects of performance that are geared towards self-empowerment

and a re-presentation of self as discussed by Gibbons, Hutton, Lovelace and Aching. My research asks the question: Can art begin to engage with identity issues specifically as they relate to forms of displacement, utilizing ritual elements of Carnival, or more specifically, utilizing mas'? The next logical stage of my research would be to develop a productive definition of mas', as the word mas' is often assumed to be (wrongly in my view) synonymous with Carnival, or used to describe Traditional mas performances, or in some cases, specifically related to the 'pretty mas' on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. My own performance and creative experience within Carnival has suggested that mas' can be theorised as distinct from Carnival, although they are inherently connected.

Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* and his ritual theatre research suggest a useful way in which mas' could be interpreted. In this book, Schechner describes a masking festival by the Elema people of New Guinea called the Hevehe, outlining the relationship between the mask and the player and the dynamic between the mask *as* spirit (as opposed to the representation of spirit) and the masker:

In theatrical terms neither the performed (masks) nor the performers (villagers) is absorbed into each other; one does not "play the role" of the other. They stand whole and yet autonomous. Their relationship is what Grotowski called a "confrontation." It is not that one reality reflects, represents, or distils the other. Both move freely through the same time/space. The realities confront, overlap, interpenetrate each other in a relationship that is extraordinarily dynamic and fluid.¹⁶¹

Both the mask and the masker according to Schechner appear as whole entities relating symbiotically. Within the Trinidad Carnival context the mask is not consciously thought to be a manifestation of a spirit ancestor. However, what

¹⁶¹ R. Schechner, *Performance Theory*, (Routledge Classics, London, New York, 2003), p. 44.

Schechner has identified within the Hevehe, coming from a very specific ritual context is relevant to a consideration of mas' play. The mas' play takes into account the mask/costume and the player/masker/reveller and their potential relationship.

Susan Harewood, in her essay 'Masquerade as Methodology... or, Why Cultural Studies Should Return to the Caribbean' defines masquerade as: "fundamentally a kinetic, sensuous, sensual movement through multiple spaces and identities."¹⁶² Harewood proposes a new way of engaging with research within Cultural Studies in order to maintain a dynamic approach, rather than one that conforms to staid structures and that compromises the impact and intensions of Cultural Studies' initial project to be "both theoretically rich and politically active"¹⁶³. Harewood suggests a "return to the Caribbean" and the use of Carnival as methodology. Her template invites the researcher to consider her/himself in the midst of research that is constantly moving, while the researcher is asked to "to examine his/her own performance, movement in the midst of movement."¹⁶⁴ Harewood challenges the notion of the all-knowing researcher through an interpretation of masquerade analysis:

Our understandings come through the myriad communication encounters that go on (both those we think of as being 'part of the research' and those encounters in our 'real lives' that do not seem to be). Each encounter should be understood as part of a constant cascade of engagements that become woven into our understanding of any given situation.¹⁶⁵

Harewood adds:

¹⁶² S. Harewood, 'Masquerade as Methodology... or Why Cultural Studies Should Return to the Caribbean', in C. McCarthy, A. Durham, L. Engel, A. Filmer, M. Giardina, M. Malagrecia (eds.) *Globalizing Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Interventions in Theory, Method, and Policy* (Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2007), p. 71.

¹⁶³ Harewood, 'Masquerade as Methodology', p. 62.

¹⁶⁴ Harewood, 'Masquerade as Methodology', p. 72.

¹⁶⁵ Harwood, 'Masquerade as Methodology', pp. 72-73.

I seek a way of challenging the polarity of the self and Other without suggesting that this results in quick access to knowing 'self' or 'other' because of their hybrid interrelationship.¹⁶⁶

My interpretation of Susan Harewood's proposal of masquerade analysis and Carnival methodology is that this approach opens up a scenario in which one's position can shift based on vantage points of perception. It also suggests that one's vantage point is based on experiences within the space and experiences in one's own personal life, which are also shifting and moving. I find her definition of masquerade as "a kinetic, sensuous, sensual movement through multiple spaces and identities" eloquently poetic and very useful in evoking the illusive nature of a definitive meaning of that kind of performance. However, I am slightly concerned that the metaphor implied by Carnival as methodology appears to be linked to participation as spectator. It implies that in order to see, one has to step outside of the festival. While I understand the logic of this position, my research is based on interpreting this ritual immersed as a both performer and spectator, where the process of immersion offers perhaps a third view of an experience in motion. What stands out for me in a productive concept of Carnival or masquerade is that it is of a temporary nature. Thus an approach that uses Carnival as methodology, both as a set of tools and as a set of actions in gathering research, can also imply a kind of impermanence related to the 'incompleteness' mentioned by Harewood, that results in moving between formal and less formal structures of gathering/documenting research. This shifting between approaches does not have to be problematic.

While Susan Harewood addresses a way in which Carnival and masquerade can be interpreted to allow for an interesting approach to gathering

¹⁶⁶ Harwood, 'Masquerade as Methodology', p75.

research, my specific research is interested in utilizing Carnival performance aesthetics. It acknowledges Carnival as a template that works effectively in relation to engendering a positive sense of self-empowerment. It asks the question: 1) can identifiable mas' elements can be transferred to a context outside of the Carnival; and 2) can the *effects* of a mas' performance be transferred in order to begin to address some of the anxieties of displacement within mainly immigrant scenarios. In order to engage with the above questions I need to begin with a more detailed consideration of mas'.

Chapter THREE: Towards a Concept of Mas'

"I am mas', mas' is me. Mas' is dance and fight."¹⁶⁷

The Trinidad Carnival performance has the ability to transform in a range of different ways. These transformations are most evident in the donning of costumes but in addition to this, within the Carnival environment revellers may undergo transformation in different ways. Both *where* the reveller is 'playing' and the emotional or physical connection s/he may have with the space in which the play is taking place are important to different forms of transformation. My research suggests that transformations that occur within the Carnival environment are often intensely passionate, facilitated by high communal street energy and music. Pauper to king, wealthy land-owner to molasses covered dancer, these transformations through play are about a type of visibility that allows for being seen, not merely as reveller but as a player in a ritual that has a fundamental role in the ways in which the self is perceived within and outside of the event. The notion of transformation as discussed here is temporary. It is not a metamorphosis that facilitates a permanent change. When I look at the temporary nature of this transformation, I ask if the residues of this temporary change can be as vital as the actual play itself in helping to empower the individual re-entering the non-Carnival social environment that constitutes most of his/her existence. I wish to argue on the basis of my research that what the individual reveller becomes, through transformation in Carnival play, may be less connected to the fantasy of the costume with which the reveller is adorned and be more likened to the becoming of an emergent self that in some way has

¹⁶⁷ Narrie Approo – quote from interview with Mary-Anne Roberts, 09.10.2012

been suppressed under everyday circumstances. It is however important to recognize that for many participants, it is the adornment via the costume including items such as a feathered headdress, a beaded bikini, a mask or the wearing of mud or paint, as well as the other elements of Carnival performance, that facilitate re-manifestation of this suppressed self. Performance allows for metaphorical and literal playings that, within the Carnival context, tap into the subconscious and remedy social anxieties and other forms of invisibility.

The two previous chapters looked at the history of the Trinidad Carnival and at the different manifestations of Carnival performance informed by specific critical and historical texts focusing on identity and ritual. In this chapter I will delve firstly, into the intricacies of different experiences of Carnival play in order to arrive at a definition of mas' that lends itself to the particularities of the nature of the performance within (and sometimes outside of) the Carnival environment, with which I wish to engage. This chapter will look specifically at interviews that I conducted with Carnival revellers and artists in Trinidad, Notting Hill and Cardiff. Secondly, I look at the ways in which Carnival has been interpreted within art-making or performance. The intention of the second part of this chapter is to facilitate the use of (what I will term) 'mas' aesthetics' within art-making in the diaspora. The proposed mas' definition will also be informed by readings from the previous chapter and my own experiences within Carnivals.

Generally, the word mas' in Trinidad is used to describe the play/performance during Carnival Monday and Tuesday and the play of traditional Carnival characters. In this chapter, I include accounts from the experience of Jouvay, as I will argue that this environment also facilitates a performance or play that is worth considering in the context of developing a

definition of mas'. Thus, my use of the word mas' in this thesis includes both Jouvay performances and those of the Carnival Monday and Tuesday. They are all mas' – "we dream dat"¹⁶⁸ – and I will argue that these Carnival masquerade manifestations come from experiences of owning performance for empowerment. The journey to arrive at a mas' definition will take into account a type of performance/activity that moves beyond being a spectacle.

A look at cAnfAs

Before exploring mas' concepts further, I will give some background to a performance art character that I constructed called cAnfAs. cAnfAs is relevant to this discussion because of the following incident. While walking through the streets of Port of Spain dressed in the costume of cAnfAs during the Trinidad Carnival Tuesday celebrations in 2008, elderly men, sitting by the pavement watching the Carnival bands go past, made a comment to me: "that is mas'!" The mas' character of cAnfAs came out of my questioning the reasons behind my approach to producing paintings during my MA in Cardiff. I had entered my MA in Fine Art with the question of how I could combine and utilize my painting and movement/dance work. I was soon to realize that the integrated art form of 'Carnival' was an obvious answer. As I whitened out some of my paintings, I began a journey of starting over. I went back to my first area of interest, my drawing. I drew a female figure with black pencil on a white surface. Visiting the museum for inspiration (and as part of the MA course), I found it difficult to identify with many of the museum's collections. I was however drawn to Degas' oil painting of *The Parisian Girl* (1874) and the similarity of her dress to some of

¹⁶⁸ From interview with Mary-Anne Roberts, 09.10.2012, Cardiff.

the traditional folk dresses of Trinidad. I became increasingly convinced that I not only wanted to be my own subject matter in order to create images that were directly relevant to me, but also that I wanted to engage with the ways in which we re-present ourselves, for ourselves. I embarked on a process that involved what I have recently named a 'mas' aesthetic'. In the context of cAnfAs, this mas' aesthetic was about making visual and tangible the concept and story of being a painting. Initially concerned with the literal making of a costume that was 'drawn' using paint, canvas, tights and a vest, the mask gradually became laden with other issues concerned with race (black becoming white) and issues of female representation in the art world. Beyond what the mask looked like, was the experience of playing the mask. The play that cAnfAs permitted as a performance art character within a performance art space was one that allowed me to be childlike and playful, something approaching my alter-ego. When placed within the Trinidad Carnival space, cAnfAs almost instantly became a bold statement against perhaps the commercialization of the Carnival, a symbol of individual protest and in her/my isolation, she appeared to have resonance as a political mas', commenting on the nudity in Carnival, the need to go back to basics, to start again and so on. While I performed 'becoming a painting', different people, located within different spaces and contexts read the play as relevant to their own scenarios. Admittedly my play within the different spaces must have also changed, since an art performance in a university bar in Cardiff is likely to be altered when re-located to the steaming streets of Port of Spain on Carnival Tuesday, although I would argue, specific masks lend themselves to specific kinds of play. Writer Keith Johnstone, in his book *Impro*,¹⁶⁹ has stated

¹⁶⁹ K. Johnstone, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (Methuen Drama, London, 2007)

that every mask has a character behind it and that it is the actors' responsibility to release the character, to become less self-conscious and through improvisation, allow the mask to be made manifest. Johnstone noted identifiable mask-personalities even when worn by different actors.¹⁷⁰ cAnfAs prompted the elderly men's comment "that is mas'!" and that comment led to my initial desire to find out what makes something mas'. Why was an art piece in the middle of glittery, bikini-clad, dancing bodies considered by those gentlemen to be mas'?



cAnfAs in Cardiff Carnival. Image courtesy Wahda Placide

¹⁷⁰ Johnstone, *Impro*, p. 10.

Mama, look ah mas'

Data from the interviews that I conducted with revellers in Trinidad suggests that Carnival's resonance and meaning can be about different aspects of performance and play. The following examples point to where the emphasis of meaning lies within a Carnival play or mas' for different participants. Mas' performance can be seen as a re-birth, forging a new identity (Risha Gibbons 04.03.2011) or being free to express individuality within the dynamic of a group (Marcus Waldron 04.03.2011). Mas' can be an opportunity for liberation, being free to create a space for a performance that is about validating sensuality and owning performance (Camille Quamina 05.03.2011). It can be about being involved in a free, pre-dawn communal activity (Marvin George 05.03.2011), or about engaging with the audience and the relevance of connecting the mas' play to current issues in society (Brendon LaCaille 07.03.2011). It can be seen as a social ritual in which everyone contributes in different ways (Michael Philips 07.03.2011), and mas' can be connected to notions of home, freedom of choice or of *how* to play, a notion that can be deeply rooted in ancestral links (Rawle Gibbons 07.03.2011). For many of the above-mentioned participants, the Carnival space provides an opportunity to be the narrator of one's own story through performance. It is a freedom space and a space for choice. In an interview that I conducted with Trinidad Carnival costume designer Brian Mac Farlane after his presentation *Carnival: the Meaning of Mas'* at Coventry in April 2011, he stated that: "Costume, street theatre, putting on a costume, becoming the part, telling a story; that is mas'."

The Trinidadian colloquialism to play (ah) mas' or to make (ah) mas' carries with it certain connotations that differ from the widely understood

notion of masquerade.¹⁷¹ There are at least three types of usages of the word mask that I have identified within the context of Trinidadian Carnival and society. 1) The mask signifies the imposed social status, which provides social invisibility, 2) the mask layers and conceals 'truth' (double entendre) and 3) the mask serves to create agency to instigate a play/scenario for being seen. (For more on this see the discussion of Aldrick's Dragon mask in Chapter Two *Carnival and Performance* pp. 55-58). Carol Martin's Trinidad Carnival Glossary defines mas' and the play of mas' as follows:

"Mas, mas': Mas is the Trinidadian word for masquerade. Some people prefer 'mas' to carnival. Mas is part of the triumvirate: *calypso, pan and mas*."¹⁷²

And

Play mas, play mas', masquerade, play mask: To put on a costume and participate in a mas band or jump up in the streets. This is the key action of carnival from which everything else comes. The expression "to play mas" is part of Trinidadian vernacular, connected to the idea "to play yourself" or "do your thing."¹⁷³

Martin's definition of mas' gives a sense of the word masquerade but it does not invoke the complexities of mas' itself. I would argue that mas' is very much distinct from the word 'carnival' within the Trinidadian vernacular in terms of the potency, which it signifies. It is not just an alternate thesaurus substitute. The definition Martin provides for 'play mas' is preferable and begins to suggest: 1) that the playing of one's self is a playing of a self that is perhaps distinguishable (within the Carnival context) from the everyday self, i.e. a self, defined by one's self and not by external forces and 2) that the concept of a mas' is very much embedded within the Trinidadian vernacular and therefore not necessarily

¹⁷¹ The word mas' may be seen as the shortened form of the word masquerade or mask, although in the Trinidadian context there is that added notion of performance i.e., the play of the mask.

¹⁷² C. Martin, 'Trinidad Carnival Glossary', in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Carnival: Culture in Action- The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York and London 2004), p. 289.

¹⁷³ Martin, 'Trinidad Carnival Glossary', p. 292.

directly addressed to Carnival in all its usage. When referring to a mas' this concept involves the play of the mask but also carries with it a sense of knowing intent and even rebellion. Within that context I propose that mas' is not mask or masquerade. I propose that the abbreviated word, marked by the apostrophe, facilitates an inherently new meaning. Mas' is mas'. Although visibly connected to its textual lineage of mask and masquerade, it is not a shortened form of anything.

The role assumed by the participant in playing mas' within the Carnival environment is of central importance. It is a practice that, as identified by writers like Gerald Aching¹⁷⁴, can be directly linked to everyday social reality and has the capacity to help participants deal better with aspects of the everyday. In an interview I conducted with reveller Marcus Waldron, (04/03/2011) Waldron stated:

In everyday life ... I have to wear many hats for many different people and that's just the way my life is structured. Jouvay is a time when I can get at least one day out of the year to express who I really am, my creativity, me just being me.

The mas' that Waldron plays is one concerned with the re-presentation of self. The environment, in this case Jouvay, constitutes a space rich in agency that allows for such self-re-presentations. The potency of that desire for expressing "me, just being me", that mas' play, draws on the everyday social reality. The masking performance can become a play against it, acting as a subversion of perceived ideas of self, usually attributed to the reveller by others, or a play that re-affirms selfhood and complements social status. Mas' is for all. Thus there is a direct correlation between the everyday and the play of mas'. University student

¹⁷⁴ G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, Cultural Studies of the Americas, Volume 8, 2002), pp. 51-52.

Risha Gibbons' experience continues the notion of 'being yourself' that was introduced by Waldron. In relation to playing within Jouvay, Gibbons states:

For me it felt as though I was stripping of myself because when I go to school I am somebody's friend or somebody's enemy or somebody's daughter, but when I was on the road, I was who I wanted to be. I wasn't wearing any mask whatsoever. I wasn't pretending to be happy, I wasn't pretending to be joyful, I wasn't pretending to be level. I was just on a high, going with the flow, going with the music. You get that too with ... [the play of] traditional Carnival characters and that is a different kind of mask ... So people would think, ok so she's wearing a different mask, but it was actually me, coming through. For me, that is what Carnival is about – expressing your true self, being free.¹⁷⁵

Risha Gibbons identifies both the Jouvay play and the play of traditional Carnival characters as mediums that allow her to "be free". She speaks about being able to have the opportunity to express her "true self" without being defined in relation to friends, enemies and parents. The idea of "being free" is concerned with ownership of self-definition, ownership of performance and ways of re-presenting self. It is directly opposed to the bondages of pretentious etiquettes that are often imposed by society such as those that dictate and enforce the use of 'proper' English over dialect and silence over voicing disagreement with the government, for example. Carnival provides a space for that kind of freedom, which can be clearly seen in Calypso commentary. As mentioned previously, Carnival can be seen as a freedom space that allows. In Trinidad, the Carnival space is one that is divided into sub-spaces. Thus the afore mentioned Jouvay that happens during the pre-dawn hours of Carnival Monday facilitates a different kind of play to the Carnival Monday and Carnival Tuesday (Pretty Mas') performances. As such, revellers' concepts of what mas' means to them are tied up in the specific performance spaces and the specificities of what each allows.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Risha Gibbons, 04.03.2011, Trinidad.

The personal mas' experience can be further influenced and informed by childhood experiences within the Carnival environment. The Trinidad Carnival is constantly evolving. Actor and Community Creative Arts director Marvin George talked to me about his reasons for preferring the Jouvay environment to that of Carnival Monday and Tuesday. George's reasons are directly based on his childhood experiences:

When I was younger, I had a problem with mas' as a bourge[ois] thing ... I think what I mean is, my community [Mt D'or] never played mas' except Jouvay. We didn't know what it was to go and buy a costume and dress it up and twist this, we never did that. When my father brought me and my brother to play mas' it was Jouvay he carried us to play. ... In those days it had no pay no money to play Jouvay. ... They used to ... fill up somebody's van and go down the road. When you got in town, if Maracas had a band, the big men in Mt D'or, who were usually rougher or louder or tougher, used to cuss everybody and take their mud. We never paid any 'band fee'. It was ... just take your mud and everybody enjoy themselves. ... I really don't know what it is to play ah mas' like a pretty mas' on Monday and Tuesday. I don't know what that is. I never had that experience as a young boy.¹⁷⁶

Marvin George's experience facilitated the choice he made to be an observer in the Carnival Monday and Tuesday activities and to be an active participant in the Jouvay. Yet, even the notion of observer in the Trinidad Carnival context facilitates participation. Playwright Rawle Gibbons in his essay 'Room to Pass' interestingly considers the role of participant and observer. Gibbons states:

If performance (mas) is understood as simultaneously intimate/personal and universally public, then the only obscenity possible is spectatorship, the onlooker/voyeur ... the impulse is inclusiveness – cast by mas ... compelled by rhythm, trying to 'keep the crowd out' is a hopeless un-Carnival-like activity.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, of Medieval Carnivals Bakhtin states:

In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Marvin George, 03.2011, Trinidad.

¹⁷⁷ Gibbons, 'Room to Pass', p. 118.

would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people.¹⁷⁸

Bakhtin describes an all-encompassing, inclusive, almost utopian experience.

Within the evolution of the Trinidad Carnival, the observer/reveller relationship, as with many performances in theatre, dance, music and ritual, is a relationship in which the reveller's performance is not necessarily dependent on the observer but is certainly enhanced by being observed. As in the case of Lovelace's Aldrick who wanted everyone to see him, the notion of being seen equates to a form of acknowledgment of one's presence/existence and affords the opportunity to say/comment/make visible aspects of one's social/political/personal reality.¹⁷⁹

Observers in the Trinidad Carnival environment are not always mere observers. They sing, they dance, they are pulled into the Carnival band and danced with, and are generally free to sit or stand where they like, as well as to come and go as they please. When considering the more traditional mas' characters, the role of the observer becomes even more interactive and vital to the reveller in the play of their character. Actor and musician Brendon La Caille spoke to me about his concept of mas' and the importance of interaction and character engagement with the observers:

I think the main word is 'engagement', it is about that ... I only started recently looking back on creating mas' for me and it was a mix between old, traditional Ole mas' and a traditional form like the 'Pisani' and the Dame Lorraine type mas' with the Gros Coco.¹⁸⁰ What I've learnt is I enjoy

¹⁷⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁹ In relation to art making, the idea of incorporating a public aspect at some stage of the process will be vital to mas' art works.

¹⁸⁰ "Dame Lorraine is said to mean 'fashionable lady.' By tradition, the performance began in the tent at midnight on Dimanche Gras and continued until dawn on carnival Monday, when the masked performers along with the audience would spill out into the streets to begin the masquerade.... They were all masked, and inversion of the sexes was a common practice. Each pupil had a prominent physical protuberance, which accounted for his name in the play. Names such as M'sieur Gros Coco, M'sieur Gros Boudin, Mme Gros Tete, Mlle Jolle Rouge were regularly

it most and it has the most meaning when you engage, when you interact. So the interaction may be as simple as me playing a police man, with a gros coco/ a big, big penis that was under his cottage skirt. I will go and just stand up very prim and proper and then when somebody turn their back, pull out the coco and jam it on their bottom and start to wine [gyrate] and then run away and then revert back. And it is about their reaction to it.

... So therefore, when somebody sees mas' and says 'well dat is mas', it's the level of engagement and what they're saying and how connected the mas' is to what is happening in society.¹⁸¹

The mas' play and its connection to current or historical issues in society can be an intrinsic component of the Carnival performance. This is especially so when considering mas' performances that lend themselves to a form of protest or those that can be seen as a political or social statement, as with some of the portrayals photographed by Leah Gordon which can be seen in her book *Kanaval: Vodou, Politics and Revolution on the Streets of Haiti*. These portrayals include a Kanaval character called Papa Sida (Father AIDS). Haitian reveller Lendor James, interviewed by Gordon had this to say of his mas':

I created the Papa Sida Mardi Gras because I see many young people die of AIDS and I want to get a message to the youngsters of this town that before having sex they must put on a condom. Some people seem to think that AIDS is made up by politicians; so I do this Mardi Gras performance to help people understand that it's a reality. Papa Sida going out on the streets helps people to see that AIDS is not a lie invented by politicians, but the truth.¹⁸²

Manifestations of Kanaval costumes such as the one mentioned above, as well as some portrayals in the Trinidad Carnival, make visual ideas, stories, dreams and visions and they often have social impact. Costumes such as these utilize text/placards and simple masking materials to symbolize ideas that are relevant personally, socially and/or politically. Often within a Carnival context the same

used." E. Hill. *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (New Beacon Books, London 1997), p. 40.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Brendon LaCaille, 03.2011, Trinidad.

¹⁸² 'Papa Sida (Father AIDS): Lendor James' in Leah Gordon's *Kanaval: Vodou, Politics and Revolution on the streets of Haiti* (Soul Jazz Publishing, London, 2010), p. 86.

process of re-presenting ideas occurs in the various Carnival music and through the play/performances of the costume. Such interventions are often successful insofar as they affect participants and viewers on an easily readable visual and culturally visceral level.

Ancestral connections and the way in which the choice of what to play is arrived at, can be seen in another extract from Leah Gordon's interviews. Haitian reveller André Ferner comments on his mas' called Madame Lasiren (Madame Mermaid):

I create Lasiren for Mardi Gras because my grandmother, father and mother all served the spirits, I love her and honour her ... Each year I change the disguise and fashion a new baby. In order to get inspiration, I go to the place where the big beasts live, and they instruct me how to do Mardi Gras¹⁸³.

The choice of character for André Ferner is directly connected to his family, his religion and to instruction from the "big beasts". The story of Carnival manifestations and Rara in Haiti is intriguing because of the visual impact of the portrayals and the direct links to religion, society, politics, nature and culture. Haiti is a culturally rich space. Art is visible everywhere – on public transport, in the towns, inside homes, on public walls, streets and lined-up on sandy beaches. The idea of translating intangible (ideas/dreams) into something visual is evident within many aspects of Haitian art. The two examples on masking in Haiti's Jacmel Kanaval emphasize this point and provide examples of constructive ways of wearing a story or becoming an 'other' that are directly relevant and translatable to my interest in Carnival and the art space. I will limit

¹⁸³ 'Madame Lasiren: Andre Ferner' in Leah Gordon's *Kanaval: Vodou, Politics and Revolution on the streets of Haiti* (Soul Jazz Publishing, London, 2010), p. 60.

myself to those two examples as further discussion on masking practices in Haiti would lead to a very different, although equally exciting thesis.

In an interview I conducted with playwright Rawle Gibbons, the mas' experience for him was very clearly linked to the play of a specific Carnival character (Sailor mas'), his ancestral connections and space or location. Gibbons says:

When I was interviewing my mother, she died 6 years ago and in that period when I was really trying to document her story, she told me that my great-grandfather, her grandfather used to play Sailor mas'. He was a Sailor-man. I knew he was a dancer because he taught them all to dance. And when I started playing mas', I chose Sailor. I've always played Sailor mas', I've never played any other mas' from the outset without knowing that my great-grandfather was a Sailor-man. When I came back from Jamaica, I did my undergraduate years in Jamaica, when I came back, it was also important for me that, not only Sailor but connecting with Belmont. And the three things have come together; Belmont, which is the place that I come from, where I was born and grew up, the district. So, mas' means that. Mas' for me means identifying with Belmont. Mas' means Sailor, for me. Not that I can't play anything else but that is what I like to play, that is what I choose to play; and mas' also means therefore my own ancestral connections, which I didn't start with, but which revealed themselves through the years.

Mas' as an experience that is connected to space, inclusive of family history and tradition, is pertinent especially when considering the concept of home and belonging and how ideas of belonging influence the Carnival play. This idea of identifying with space is also relevant to the consideration of mas' performances in the diasporic space, spaces in which one may not feel full 'belonging'. In the light of those varied examples of mas' interpretations, I propose, for the purposes of this thesis to define mas' as: **a performance activity that (instigated by the player) allows for a change in the everyday in order to draw attention to a specific aspect of the everyday.** The *specific aspect* within this proposed definition could be of personal or public related politics.

Ultimately though, the play of this activity, this mas' simultaneously diverts and draws attention to aspects of the everyday. Thus the colloquialism 'to make (ah) mas' can be understood literally as the making of an activity that allows for change in the everyday in order to draw attention to it. This definition is suited to both the making of a mask/costume within the Carnival environment and the making of ah mas' which locally implies the causing of some kind of disruption (change of the everyday) usually to gain positive or negative attention/visibility (drawing attention to an aspect of the everyday).

According to this definition I would argue that within the Carnival environment, it may be possible to be taking part in the dance of a Carnival and not necessarily playing ah mas'. This distinction is both important and relevant because of the nature of my research. It is necessary to establish a distinction between dancing in a fete/party or dancing with headphones in one's bedroom and the positive effects those activities may have on self-esteem and the experience of playing ah mas' in order to begin to fathom the constitutive elements that are essential aspects of its make-up. These elements that can be identified as specific to a mas' interpretation may be relevant to social experiences that are outside of this specific Carnival context and in need of the familiar empowering effects of the mas'. For example: masking, movement and community may be specific to a proposed mas' concept. In theory, these elements entail some ingredients that are specific to masquerade and Carnival but can also be utilized and reinterpreted within a different context such as an art-space in order to generate liberating 'Carnival feelings.'

Within the Carnival environment there are several modes of performance that I will identify. Performance is here defined as the actions of constructive

doing. These include but are not limited to the following: performance of making within the Carnival (costumes), performance of dancing within the Carnival (revellers), performance of music-making within the Carnival (steel pan players/bands, Calypso, Extempo, Soca, Rapso artistes) as well as the various performances of the organizers and producers. The performance of dancing within the Carnival can be further identified as having the two modes mentioned above – that of dancing in a costume and that of playing ah mas'. Inherently facilitated by the Carnival music, the dance in a costume can in different ways, become a play of mas'. The Carnival is inclusive of transformations and the body in performance can very quickly become involved in an activity that allows for a change in the everyday in order to draw attention to a specific aspect of it. An example of the way in which a body in the Carnival can give way to a kind of transformation is evident in Edwidge Danticat's text *After the Dance* in which she writes:

I can no longer resist the contagious revelry. I am one of those women now, loving and fearing the sensation of red-hot nails pricking me all over, and all I can do is dance and dance for relief from their sting.¹⁸⁴

I now move on to consider whether Carnival performance changes within the diaspora and if so, do these changes in performance require a re-definition of a useful concept of mas'?

¹⁸⁴ E. Danticat *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (Vintage, London 2004), p. 147.

The Notting Hill Carnival and Cardiff Mas' Carnival performance

I propose that identifying a concept of mas' is important in distinguishing forms of performance. This section aims to pay particular attention to performance aesthetics based on observation and oral sources from both the Notting Hill Carnival and the Cardiff mas' Carnival. I will at this juncture adopt the approach of Carnival as methodology proposed by Susan Harewood (mentioned in the previous chapter) and state that as the researcher, I am aware that my observations are very much 'situated', based on my various vantage points. These include the fact that I am a Trinidadian and a woman and may have an affinity to certain types of Carnival manifestations. Revellers often perform differently when being filmed/photographed depending on who is holding the camera. More obvious restrictions are based on where I am in relation to the Carnival procession, my height and the fact that I am positioned as an 'observer' and not a member of the press so access to certain spaces are denied. My vantage points have also affected the meanings that I drew from certain performances.

The Notting Hill Carnival and the Cardiff Mas' Carnival (renamed Cardiff Carnival 2012) are two very distinct Carnival activities that play with distinct elements. Both these Carnivals were derived mainly from the Trinidad Carnival and they both have resonance for specific groups and individuals. It is not often that I become the onlooker in a Carnival, but as this research developed I found myself occupying such a role more and more. Carnivals are truly spectacular events to behold. The players/revellers are often contagiously happy. The Notting Hill Carnival is one of several Caribbean-style Carnivals in England. Other cities include Leeds, Manchester, Leicester, Luton, Reading, Birmingham, Acton and so on. Leeds' Carnival is reported by columnist Dotun Adebayo to

have retained more traditional Trinidadian masquerade elements than Notting Hill. Adebayo states:

Leeds, on the other hand, has taken its lead from Trinidad and prided and billed itself as the traditional West Indian carnival. Despite attracting large crowds, sound systems are not allowed to take over the carnival with high decibels, not whilst there is a large community in the city from St Kitts and Trinidad to prevent it and ensure that the Carnival stays 'traditional'. And even though sound systems line the streets on route, only traditional instruments are allowed on the three hour procession.¹⁸⁵

Trinidad Carnival embraces and is informed by an amalgam of people from different creeds and ethnic groups¹⁸⁶. London accommodates people of different cultures. The Carnival in this space aims to be inclusive and to facilitate a positive, creative awareness of mainly a Caribbean immigrant presence for the onlooker. I would argue that there is a clear boundary between the role of the player and that of the onlooker in the Notting Hill Carnival. The space offers an opportunity to express one's self, re-claim identity, black identity, specific Caribbean identity and belonging. The Carnival connects to the nostalgia of 'home' for many revellers and helps to address feelings of displacement through a performance of transformation that is precisely about engaging with the complexities of culture, identity, belonging and re-presentation.

Within the diasporic space, the Carnival can take on new meanings. Philip W. Scher in his book, *Carnival and the Formation of a Caribbean Transnation*, looks at the Trinidad Carnival and the effects of its transference to Brooklyn, New York. He describes 'transnation' as a group within the diaspora that has an

¹⁸⁵ D. Adebayo 'Serious Business' in P. Nindi (ed.) *On Route: The Art of Carnival* (Arts Council of Wales, 2003), p. 10.

¹⁸⁶ Part of the creation of a Trinidadian identity is about forging commonality in the midst of diversity within various races and creeds and the complexity of the mixtures of races and creeds based on historical contexts and the unfolding of a creole culture.

on-going relationship with its 'home' country, one that serves to define and re-define both conceptions of home and of the new space. Scher states:

It is within the context of the massive migration from Trinidad and the West Indies in general that cultural and social forms begin to take on a special sort of meaning. Their presence within the lives of migrants helps constitute what I will be calling the transnation. ... Such forms are transformed in their reterritorialization but still rely on their rootedness at "home."¹⁸⁷

Scher says "West Indians find each other in the crowd while simultaneously presenting themselves to the crowd,"¹⁸⁸ and continues:

Carnival not only took over a space but took a place and created another place out of it. The parade carried a kind of memory of place with it as it approximated Trinidad Carnival in Brooklyn; ... And for a few days every year Brooklyn could not help but notice this presence.¹⁸⁹

Although Scher's discussion pertains to the specificities of New York and Trinidad, I think that similar notions are present within the Notting Hill Carnival in that Notting Hill appropriates and re-creates a performance space that allows for simultaneous presentations (or re-presentations) and recognitions of other black/Caribbean people who share a similar everyday social experience. Another aspect mentioned by some of my interviewees in London is that of the comradeship felt with apparent strangers (Victor Turner's 'communitas') as well as the feeling of deviance, performing a powerful statement about black presence/ visibility. On the occasions that I have witnessed the Notting Hill Carnival (including August 2010 and August 2011), the ways in which the performances were played, seemed to emphasize group identity/ visibility, focusing on a mass of first, second and third generation peoples from islands

¹⁸⁷ P. W. Scher *Carnival and the formation of a Caribbean Transnation* (University Press, Florida, 2003), p. 65.

¹⁸⁸ Scher, *Carnival and the formation of a Caribbean Transnation*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Scher, *Carnival and the formation of a Caribbean Transnation*, p. 3.

who, for whatever reasons have chosen to make their home in Britain. Yet, the Carnival is also very much concerned with the individual and poignant instances of this can easily be identified.

During the Notting Hill 2010 Sunday masquerade (Jouvay and kiddies mas'), three pieces stood out for me:

1) A young boy was dancing intensely aware of the cameras on him but not looking directly into the lenses. He carried with his performance a sense of knowingness through the deliberate playing of the costume. The deliberate intensity of his play seemed to afford him a kind of power and control as he appeared to know that his costumed play would draw attention to him. At the same time he appeared innocent in his performance and although I remember little of the actual costume, except that there were a couple vertical extensions to it, the masquerader definitely obtained visibility (Aching) and the full attention of onlookers.

2) There was an Ole mas' character wearing a plastic bag mask and costume with a cardboard sign saying 'doh kill di carnival'. This statement was poignant in a climate in which there were generous amounts of cuts being made in the arts sector. I approached the masquerader and was not surprised to discover that he was a Trinidadian living in London. His character looked alone and out-of-place similar to my own cAnfAs character in the midst of the Trinidad Carnival Tuesday jam, yet, what other space could be more suited to it? The Carnival streets allow for personal visual expressions and self-re-presentations.

3) The third person was a lone traditional fancy Sailor. "Born in Castries, grow-up in Trinidad" he said. He had designed his headpiece and had someone construct it. As another isolated character, (perhaps a little lost in translation but

immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the traditional mas' characters of Trinidad), he was making another powerful statement about visibility, identity and belonging. Being the only one of his kind in this space allowed him to stand-out, but the choice of character, from such a culturally rich context, positioned the player in a place of power and knowing, simply because of the fact that the majority of onlookers might have been ignorant of his character's origins. His play as a result was very confident.

I would argue that these masqueraders are individual examples of how the Notting Hill Carnival space can provide an opportunity for a performance concerned with ideas of visibility and self-empowerment. The way in which that Carnival space provides opportunity can also be seen in my interview with choreographer and dancer June Campbell-Davies who was born in London of Caribbean parentage. In conversation she recounts her experience in the Notting Hill Carnival as a black Londoner:

It was like someone taking the lid off a pressure cooker because in a way at that time you can't really express yourself as a Black person, or anything. You have to fit into a particular lifestyle and it's different when you go home, you could be yourself and when you go to school, you conform to a particular life style. So if you're feeling a bit down or you have to cope with other pressures, there isn't anywhere to release that and you don't really know what that is, you're just coping. Then you go to Carnival and suddenly it's like you don't care if you're making noise. Anybody calls you names or anything, it doesn't matter because somehow there's a whole lot of you and everyone can just... it's a really peculiar thing, but once you've done that first one, it's like magic. ... And you're not afraid of anything. You've got a voice. ... Anything goes and it's just incredible. And it's like mass, all mass, everyone is with you and we're all into the same thing and it's really powerful.¹⁹⁰

June Campbell-Davies' account places emphasis on empowerment through mass – being part of a group. The opportunity to forge a group identity gave her

¹⁹⁰ Interview with June Campbell-Davies, 28.07.2011, Cardiff.

personal confidence through performance. The mass performance silently highlights a common ground of oppressive experience and reacts against it while simultaneously opening itself up to inclusiveness that moves beyond race and Caribbean heritage, although race issues and visibility remain a prominent component of this Carnival.

On the noisy streets of the Notting Hill Carnival 2011, June Campbell-Davies' daughter, Ffion Campbell-Davies a dancer/musician/artist and Carnival reveller said of her Carnival performance:

I think it comes from quite far back in terms of where you come from and what your culture was, whether you still have it now or not, and it comes with you, whether you realize it or not, it's there. Generally, in the UK particularly but generally now in this modern world people are very set in a certain way of living and certain rules and the way you do things is very organized and sometimes you have to just be native and just go and dance and paint your body ... you just have to do it. I think for me anyway, I don't really know particularly why but I think it's just genetically and naturally there anyway so you have to do it.¹⁹¹

I would endorse the validity of Ffion's description of the attraction of the Carnival performance as one that cannot really be explained rationally. It is there and you just have to do it. Essentially she is expressing the opportunity that the Carnival environment gives to 'break away' from the norm and to re-connect with self. The Notting Hill Carnival play is very much about emancipation and being free from forms of bondage. As with the Trinidad Carnival, the history of the event is relevant to the way in which it has evolved and the ways in which the performances within the Carnival space have meaning for the people who play. London-based Trinidadian artist, Curtis Jalim, talked to me about his experiences in London. He said that in London he is often mistaken for being Somali due to his racial mixture of Indo-Trinidad father (East Indian) and Afro-

¹⁹¹ Interview with Ffion Campbell-Davies, 08.2011, London.

Trinidad mother. Jalim acknowledges that the Notting Hill Carnival space acts as a place within which he can re-assert his Trinidadian identity through movement and performance. In terms of his Carnival performance, Jalim stated that he would wine (gyrate) and speak dialect and associate with as many typical Trinidadian traits as possible. He continues:

Because at the end of the day I am from the Caribbean, I'm Trinidadian and ... it makes you feel at home. It sort of takes away from it being London and it being a foreign country and it gives you a chance to show people that this is me, this is who I am, this is where I'm from. And because you're so proud of it, you want people to know that and see that, hence the reason why I've played mas', Notting Hill Carnival. ... It's really about who you are and your identity and kind of staying in touch with where you come from.

Jalim is often draped in the Trinidad flag during the Notting Hill Carnival celebrations as an additional way of re-asserting visually his Trinidadian identity. There is a direct relationship to being able to express yourself, scripting your own narrative and being on show, making people see "this is me, this is who I am" – this show is not frivolous and I will interpret it as a form of *identity performance*. Jalim has participated in Trinidad Carnival in his hometown of Manzanilla, Trinidad and as such is in an ideal position to identify the immediate feelings and insights into how performances from the Trinidad Carnival change within this diasporic space. Jalim states:

Even though Notting Hill Carnival is different from Trinidad Carnival, because it has sort of evolved and modified and changed because in London you have so many different cultures impacting on it. What probably started as a Trinidadian thing ... has kind of grown and ballooned into the Bajans, the Jamaicans, Brazilians, everyone kind of taking part and it has grown and evolved. And now you have not just Soca, Calypso and steelpan, but you have all the grime and all the Underground music and all that music impacting on Notting Hill Carnival, which for me as a Trinidadian, I feel a bit sad. I feel a bit as though it's lost some of its roots. I can understand why, because it's in a different country. And if you go to Trinidad Carnival, it is always Trinidad Carnival ... Trinidad is Trinidad, it's more isolated. Because everyone in Trinidad is a Trinidadian

and you have foreigners coming in just to be a part of it, but in London you have so many different cultures, you expect it to evolve. I hope that Notting Hill Carnival never loses or people never forget about where it came from in terms of its history.¹⁹²

As I watched the different bands go past on the Notting Hill Carnival morning, I was able to identify 3 main groups, apart from the obvious Brazilian Samba bands: those that originated from Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica. There were representatives from other islands as well such as St Vincent, St Kitts, St Lucia and so on, but those previously mentioned were the dominant ones. The flag displayed on the music trucks as well as the type of music being aired was telling. Thus, whether the music that accompanied the band was Dancehall, Dub and Reggae from Jamaica, Soca and Calypso from Trinidad or Soca from Barbados, it told to which island each bandleader was affiliated. There was a subtle differentiation in the emphasis of the accent of the masqueraders' different movement languages. Each group moved ever so slightly differently from their neighbouring island members, perhaps due to where the emphasis of their native music beats was placed, thereby affecting/influencing the way the body responded to the sounds. Interestingly, the sections with the Dancehall, Dub and Reggae music attracted the majority of young white Britons, I suspect due to the prevalence of that kind of music in night clubs. I argue that people would generally tend to release to music and rhythms that they can identify with or that holds some kind of relevance to them, be it culturally, historically or socially. Jamaicans generally controlled the different stationary sound systems.

The Jamaica/Carnival relationship is worth closer consideration. Carnival, in the different Caribbean islands, did not evolve in like manner. The Caribbean

¹⁹² Interview with Curtis Jalim, 29.08.2011, London.

is a very complex space made up of languages including English, Spanish, Dutch, French, various patois and indigenous languages such as that of the Garifuna peoples. The English-speaking islands alone are quite diverse and do not have a homogeneous culture, due to their different imperial colonial circumstances. The ways in which Jamaica historically asserted its independence and identity is very powerful specifically in light of its history of maroon societies of resistance. In relation to public performances that involve forms of masking, some of the Caribbean islands, including Jamaica, St Kitts and the Bahamas celebrate a Christmas-time masquerade called Junkanoo.

The Junkanoo masquerade celebration of the Garifuna people is called Wanaragua and is celebrated in places like Honduras, Guatemala and Belize. The Junkanoo is important to my argument because it is a masquerade that contains and retains some very strong masquerade elements similar to those manifested within the Trinidad Jouvay. Indeed some of the Junkanoo characters and character performances are indistinguishable from some Traditional mas' characters from Trinidad such as the Dame Lorraine with her exaggerated *derrière* (behind). The Trinidad Jab Molassie is similar in many ways to the Monkey mas', the Baby Doll character is present in both and the Pitchi Patchi costume is similar to that of the Pierrot Grenade. The Junkanoo is not considered to be a Carnival but rather a masquerade form.

Trinidad was in the business of exporting the Carnival even before the idea of globalization became popular and many islands have adopted a Trinidad-style Carnival. In Jamaica, musician Byron Lee is generally seen as being instrumental in bringing the Trinidad-style Carnival to Jamaica in 1990. This is relatively late in the history of the society that had already asserted and

established itself locally and internationally through music. Byron Lee on the leaflet enclosed with his album *Soca Fire inna Jamdown Stylee*¹⁹⁴ is quoted as saying:

What I saw in Trinidad was something that was fantastic, people mixing together... regardless of colour, class, creed or profession ... In Jamaica we did not have that. In Jamaica was more prejudice, layers of class; so I said to myself 'If only we could bring to Jamaica what I see in Trinidad.'¹⁹⁵

The 'new' Jamaican Carnival tended to appeal more to what is locally known as the 'uptown' crowd (of middle class income) rather than the general population, although the Carnival takes place in Halfway Tree in Kingston where uptown meets downtown in an attempt to reconcile these distinct factions. The result, according to the leaflet writer was that in 2004 the Jamaican Carnival attracted three hundred thousand participants. Within a society that already had Junkanno, Rastafarianism, Dance Hall, Revival, a distinct and successful musical identity and a strong image of itself, the Trinidad-style Carnival does fulfill an expressive need for a specific section of the population, but the Carnival performance, I would argue, is not the most primary visceral means of expression for the general Jamaican population. The role of London-based Jamaicans in the Notting Hill Carnival is considered in the BBC Radio 4 programme *Stories from Notting Hill*.¹⁹⁶ According to information obtained from Kwame Kwei-Armah's BBC Radio 4 program, the Carnival mandate of dressing up in costume and dancing to Soca did not appeal to the majority of Jamaicans in London. Thus, in the Notting Hill Carnival, Jamaicans mostly controlled the

¹⁹⁴Byron Lee and the Dragonaires, *Soca Fire inna Jamdown Stylee*, (Dynamic Sounds Recording Co. Ltd, 1999).

¹⁹⁵ Written by Gem7n7 Man, Feb 1999 *Soca Fire inna Jamdown Stylee*, (Dynamic Sounds Recording Co. Ltd, 1999).

¹⁹⁶ K. Kwei-Armah, *Stories from NottingHill* (BBC Radio 4, July 2012).

stationary sound systems. These sound systems have also become arguably the most popular feature for the season for the majority of the white population.

Without question, within the Notting Hill Carnival space, different people/groups have inherently manipulated the event to be a meaningful opportunity for them to express themselves or to highlight some aspect of their life/circumstance/culture. The general atmosphere within the Notting Hill Carnival 2010/11 was the beautiful familiar one of 'this is my time, this is my space, watch me.' Within the Notting Hill Carnival context, mas' manifestations as performances/activities that are outside of the everyday and that simultaneously draw attention to an aspect of the everyday were observable. These mas' activities were evident in the examples provided by Jalim of what the Carnival performance means to him, where his 'everyday' mis-representation informs his Carnival re-presentation, June Campbell-Davies' descriptions of her experiences also endorse this point, as do my individual observations already mentioned. Mas' is made meaningful by the people who play it and perhaps even more importantly, by the people who *need* it.

Cardiff Carnival

In an interview conducted by Pax Nindi of the Arts Council of England with costume design specialist Carlton Garcia, Garcia stated:

I think England is going in the right angle in terms of education. People don't really know about carnival, they feel the vibe but they don't know what it is really – like its art and if you like art in any kind of way and you're making something out of nothing, there's an interest and people want to learn more and more.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ P. Nindi with C. Garcia, 'Designing for Carnival: Interview' in Pax Nindi (ed.) *On Route: The Art of Carnival* (Arts Council of Wales, 2003), p. 48.

Cardiff Carnival had a very different beginning to that of Notting Hill. While the Notting Hill Carnival is said to have had many beginnings, perhaps the most commonly accepted version is that Civil Rights Activist Claudia Jones initiated it after the race riots of 1958 supported by the slogan “We are here to stay”.¹⁹⁸ Carnival provided an opportunity for black visibility and Caribbean identity formation within a mainly white environment. The Cardiff Carnival, as it is manifested today, is an all-inclusive event. It does not have a specifically ‘black agenda.’ The notion implied by the general “England” mentioned by Carlton Garcia is that Carnival activity is an art form that people are interested in and want to learn more about. It has been introduced into a space and the adults and children enjoy it and make things and dance and have a good time but as Garcia also stated “people don’t really know about carnival.” This statement is relevant to a conversation I had in Cardiff, Wales with masqueraders on 28th July 2011 who take part annually in the Cardiff Carnival. Of the Carnival performance they stated: “I think ... everybody feels the same, the vibe going through it is happy, celebrating something, I don’t know what.” They feel and acknowledge the communal idea as well as the notion of celebration within the Cardiff Carnival, but are not sure what the celebration is about. What are we celebrating? I think this point is crucial and that it may be connected to how the Carnival was introduced to Cardiff.

In an interview I conducted with Cardiff Carnival founder Steve Fletcher about the origins of the event, he stated:

¹⁹⁸ In the recently published book, *Carnival: A Photographic and Testimonial History of the Notting Hill Carnival* (RiceNPeas, 2014), Claudia Jones’ contribution to the Carnival in Notting Hill is seen in the capacity of initiating a concept, whereas Rhaune Laslett is seen as the individual who got the celebration on the streets, thereby ‘starting’ the Notting Hill Carnival template.

I always used to describe it as a personal decision ... it's the only explanation as to how it started because I actually founded the organization so without us getting into my life history or career in the arts, ... it was the experience immediately before setting up SWICA [South Wales Intercultural Community Arts]. Now SWICA started formally as an arts organization in its own right in April 1990 and it had one paid worker, it was me and I founded it and brought together a voluntary board of management, a group of people who would support this vision as it were.¹⁹⁹

While SWICA gave the Cardiff Carnival an institutional structure, it drew on existing traditions and was in that sense much more than a result of “a personal decision”. Cardiff had Carnivals in different areas, most notably in the docks area in the Butetown community prior to SWICA's Carnival. Butetown is/was a multicultural sea port, with residents hailing from distinct places such as the Wales, England, Ireland, the Caribbean, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Arabia and so on. It is likely that the early Butetown Carnival was brought to the space via the early immigrants and sailors from the Caribbean who eventually settled there, where it was transformed within the multicultural space to become a symbol and celebration of their identity. Retired Head teacher Betty Campbell MBE spoke to me of a Carnival-like Boxing Day occurrence in Butetown after World War 2 (late 1940's). Campbell stated that a group of Caribbean immigrants would dress in costume, play music and go house-to-house visiting:

One will be playing the comb, one will have the bottles, one will be playing a flute or something or other and they used to walk around the streets dressed up. It wasn't like carnival, carnival, but it was like a carnival event. They would walk down the streets, 9 or 10 of them and kids used to follow them. Then sometimes they will go into people's houses and the music will be going into the night.²⁰⁰

Campbell recounted that these Boxing Day masqueraders hailed from islands such as Jamaica and St Lucia where they would have been accustomed to a

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Steve Fletcher 03.12.2007, Cardiff.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Betty Campbell 15.02.2014, Cardiff.

Christmastime Junkanno masquerade. This Boxing Day masquerade in Butetown waned as the handful of immigrant masqueraders died out.

Later, Butetown would see the beginnings of another Carnival introduced indirectly by Mr. and Mrs. Capener. Mr. and Mrs. Capener ran the *Save the Children* club and according to Campbell:

Mr. and Mrs. Capener were raising funds for the Dan y Bryn Cheshire Homes and they started having things going on in August. You had your 'Baby Show' you had music and various things, not on a very large scale, but it did go for a few years and it was based around the flats that hadn't long been built. I think that was the beginning and then it came under the auspices of the Butetown Community Centre.

According to Campbell, the fundraising events were handed over to the Butetown Community Centre to organize. In the hands of the community, the event got bigger and bigger and what started out as a 'fun day' became known as Tiger Bay Carnival. Steve Fletcher described the Butetown Carnival as a community-based black music festival.²⁰¹

SWICA collaborated with the Butetown Carnival for one year. Fletcher describes the reasons for the collaboration as follows:

In 1989, Butetown Carnival did not happen. And July 1990, so this is 3 months after I started SWICA, I was called to a meeting. I could remember it really well and there were 11 people sitting around a table and they were really the elders of the Butetown community and people you'd expect to be there, the people who ran the Butetown Community Centre, the schools, the local policemen, the youth centre, so the right people. ... And they explained that at its simplest the thing in 1988 had been a big success, brought thirty thousand people to the area and they were saying, what's this identity, it's not for us, why are we doing this, all these other people come, they make a noise, they make a mess. I could remember there was a scare about when they had to do voluntary clean-up, there

²⁰¹ The Butetown Carnival had a 16-year break and was revived in August 2014, spearheaded by local musician Keith Murrell and photographer Simon Campbell. The word 'Carnival' is problematic as the event is a community celebration. In line with Fletcher's statement, events like these highlight the question of what makes something a Carnival. In my experience, the Butetown Carnival has a strong community spirit and is perhaps informed by a British model of Carnival while the SWICA Carnival is unapologetically Caribbean influenced.

were some small needles found on the park and it suddenly seemed like people were saying is it worth it? What are we getting out of it? What are our children getting out of it? What is the point of this? It didn't happen last year, did anybody miss it? It's a mess, it's a mess, it's a mess, it's an inconvenience. So it was all negativity. ... And so I said in my innocence and naivety, I hear what everyone's saying, but it sounds terribly negative to me and all I could say is that you may or may not know that by the end of August we'd have 200 costumes half of whom were made and populated by people actually from Butetown, the other half could be used free of charge. ... And I said there, that's my challenge ... 1991 was the year in which the Cardiff Mas' Carnival, a city-wide SWICA organized event and the Butetown Carnival came together, for one year only. And the reason for that was that SWICA was invited by the Butetown Carnival Committee to produce this joint event.

SWICA continued to lobby for the Butetown Carnival but realized that they did not share the same remit as Butetown. The SWICA Carnival was not intended to cater for a specific community but for all of Cardiff.

And the result of that was a small group of local people who were younger than the existing carnival committee in Butetown decided right, thank you very much, you got it all going and now we'll take it over ... I suppose in a way it defined itself. Butetown then moved on in attitude to define itself about Butetown and the mas' said right, we're about everybody. We moved to a new mas' camp, we make it quite plain we're city-wide and the two went their separate paths.

The Butetown Carnival continued for another three or four years and then eventually stopped.²⁰² The demise of the Butetown Carnival according to Fletcher was not only about funding but was also contributed to by external factors that were out of the community's control – the re-generation of Cardiff Bay:

But on one level, if you look at these things, it's the horror of actually the re-generation by [the city in the 1960s and 70s and by] Cardiff Bay Development Corporation [in the 1990s]. What was a community of ... four, five, six thousand souls is now less than one thousand of the original community. So the vision that it was trying to sell and even what it would draw upon in a way, I mean people were moved from Butetown to Ely,

²⁰² August 2014 saw the resurgence of the Butetown Carnival after a 16-year break. The event was spear-headed by local musician Keith Murrell and photographer Simon Campbell.

you could not really describe Butetown as the Black heart of Cardiff, because there were more people of colour living beyond its borders.

At one level most of the Caribbean-style Carnivals in the UK and US were introduced by an individual someone seeing the need and the positive effects the Carnival could potentially create in the society. For example, the Capeners in Butetown in Cardiff created a window that allowed a Carnival to emerge; SWICA instigated the Cardiff Carnival; in the Notting Hill individuals such as Claudia Jones in 1958 started Carnival in a town hall; Rhaune Laslett-O'Brien later initiated a weeklong Community Festival in 1965 to foster a community unity; and then musicians/pan-men Russ Henderson and Sterling Betancourt, contributed a most crucial development to the Notting Hill Carnival by processing the steelpan music on the streets. On another level, these Carnivals eventually needed to become a people 'thing'. Trinidadian music producer Michael Philips argues:

Simply by going to Adelaide in Australia and assembling two-dozen people, you don't have a Carnival, you have a show, you might have a party, but you don't have a Carnival. A Carnival is for a people. So it's the Welsh people, if they become involved in it and become part of whatever constitutes a Carnival, it'll be their Carnival.²⁰³

In the 11 plus years that I have been resident in Cardiff I have witnessed the evolution of the Cardiff Carnival event. A comparison between this development and the history of the Trinidadian Carnival offers useful insights. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the French introduced the pre-emancipation Carnival to the island of Trinidad. What evolved into the Trinidad Carnival was far removed from France in its makeup, a deeply meaningful, mainly African inspired ritual of resistance and transformation for the previously enslaved and indentured

²⁰³ Interview with Michael Philips, 07.03.2011, Trinidad.

Trinidadian people. This ritual was not forged without struggle. The Carnival as a national symbol of Trinidadian creativity and identity was also a deliberate project undertaken by the black middle-classes after independence and served to promote a positive indigenous national identity out of the disparate mixtures that constituted the people of the society. The Cardiff Carnival has not been 'given' to the people to run. Although some in the Butetown community may argue that the Carnival has been taken away from the people, I will steer away from that argument and engage instead with the Cardiff Carnival, as it stands today, distinct from what was the Butetown/Tiger Bay Carnival. It is not a ritual that has been forged out of struggle to express a national identity.

The Welsh society has its own means of expressing itself outside of Carnivals. These include a long history of passionately supporting and attending sports events such as rugby and social events such as nights out at a pub and through art and poetry and song. Rugby is perhaps to Wales what cricket used to be for West Indians, a cultural perspective highlighted in the cricket film *Fire in Babylon*. The Cardiff Carnival will probably not survive if left to 'the people' because in Cardiff there are so many diverse peoples that claiming a single umbrella event requires careful orchestration. As an art form the Carnival requires funding and getting funding requires evidence of vigilant money management and commitment. The way in which Cardiff Carnival functions, is similar in some ways to the function of a single mas' camp in Trinidad. Each mas' camp is responsible for getting a team together to make the costumes of the designer/s which are then sold to the public. In Cardiff, the masqueraders make their costumes, similar to the mas' camps of Traditional Carnival characters in Trinidad and the costumes are not for sale. Another prominent feature in the

contemporary Trinidad Carnival that is absent from Cardiff is that competing bands. Cardiff Carnival has no competition. The lack of competition is not necessarily a bad thing as the idea of competition can take away from the enjoyment of making/playing mas' as witnessed by the frustrations felt by prominent mas' designers such as Peter Minshall and Brian MacFarlane who have deliberately stepped out of the competitive arena. Cardiff Carnival remains however, in the hands of a single organizer.

Yet the Cardiff Carnival is evolving. It started with a team that involved two Trinidadians, following a residency by Trinidadian mas'man Peter Minshall in London. The Cardiff Carnival's team through the years involved wire benders, 'makers' and musicians from places such as St Vincent, Trinidad, St Lucia, China and Wales. The team is now almost exclusively Welsh/British. UK-based Samba bands and Jazz bands feature as a prominent aspect of their music and the revellers are diverse groups from all areas of the city. The costumes have become more relevant to the weather and the history of the space and more recently the costumes and dance have been inspired by Brazilian folk traditions, although still very much connected to Trinidad as most of the materials are imported from Carnival suppliers in Trinidad. SWICA has also embraced Welsh folklore for inspiration with themes including those that feature in the Welsh literary heritage of the *Mabinogion* and symbols such as the Welsh dragon. SWICA has also started to use Carnival to create shows outside of the Carnival event with a group called the *Carnival Crew*. This group comprised mostly of community members and a hand full of professionals, caters for performances for various events such as the St David's Day parade, the Blysh Festival and the Welsh Tafwyl and aims to produce annual productions. These are very deliberate

attempts by SWICA to utilize Carnival within a specific social system and these attempts can also be connected to funding priorities, since the Cardiff Carnival as an art form is dependent on grant funding for its survival. Cardiff Carnival is not Trinidad Carnival. Cardiff Carnival aims to excite a sense of celebration and festivity in the Welsh public using a Trinidad-influenced Carnival. However, despite these deliberate attempts by SWICA and the performances of the faithful revellers, some Welsh observers still consider it an infiltration of an alien form of expression. In order to engage with the Cardiff Carnival on a deeper level, I turn now to examine how within Cardiff Carnival performance, the concept of mas' can be interpreted.

In 2011 I interviewed eight revellers in the Cardiff Carnival. Often some of their responses seemed like pure rhetoric, like something heard and repeated rather than the articulation of visceral responses. These types of responses are not specific to the Cardiff interviews because, as Carnival becomes a commodity, slogans form false memory and become reflex/reflux responses. Despite that, some Cardiff responses have proven to be thought-provoking in relation to my proposed concept of mas' as an activity that is outside of the everyday, while drawing attention to an aspect of the everyday, using forms of masking and performance. The relationship between the pre-Carnival body and the performance, as well as the *need* for performance, takes on a slightly different dynamic to that mentioned previously in relation to Notting Hill Carnival performances. For example, I conducted an interview with dancer and musician Sallie MacLennan. MacLennan works as the director and coordinator of a samba dance and music group called *Samba Galéz* and works within schools. She is

accustomed to performing and teaching. MacLennan described the experience of playing within the Cardiff Carnival as follows:

I think it was a great big showing-off fest! I think that was really good fun. And I think I enjoy it more in my hometown, rather than going to do Carnival anywhere else. ... And it was a fantastic feeling of performing, just for people to see. For enjoyment as well, to be able to create that kind of 'wow that was really cool', seeing people go by and you have the work that you've put into it be appreciated and to entertain. I think a lot of people have that rush of knowing what it's like when you're dancing and you're performing. You do it for yourself in Carnival but you also do it for people to be wowed. So you do it to entertain as well. For me, it's about entertaining as well as just my own personal release.²⁰⁴

In attempting to unravel the notion of hometown and the significance of that in relation to why the performance changes in a different space, MacLennan eventually stated:

I've done a lot of festivals and Carnival parades, just performing in them, not working in them, just performing in them, in lots of other towns in the UK. And a lot of them have been great and greatly received, but I think when you don't have that link with a place and a place is not familiar, it becomes quite faceless and you get lots of people clapping and applauding and it's lovely and you feel like you're doing your job and you're giving what you turned up to do, to entertain actually more than to express your own thing. I think I find it is easier to express, you get something a lot more out of being in your own hometown, than somewhere that you don't really know very well ... There is definitely something about familiarity with people and a place that you kind of dig a bit deeper and you're able to get more out of it. So I suppose in a way it's quite a selfish thing. It's not just about entertaining a crowd it's quite an inward, personal thing.

MacLennan's discussion highlights a difference in performance as well as a potential reason for the change in its personal quality or personal resonance. Performing outside of her hometown became quite "faceless". She was not able to dig deep enough to begin to express herself because the space was not familiar. I can relate to this point with my own experiences within the Cardiff Carnival as opposed to the Trinidad Carnival – although great fun, the

²⁰⁴ Interview with Sallie MacLennan 28.07.2011, Cardiff.

performances in Cardiff tended to become more of a show. There are however, several other factors that may have contributed to that experience beyond the lack of familiarity of being in an unfamiliar space such as the actuality that the Cardiff Carnival happens whether the general public are aware of it or not. Often the parade is a surprise to shoppers and motorists on the High Street and inevitably you as reveller *become* a show. As someone who was born and raised in Cardiff, MacLennan undoubtedly uses the Cardiff Carnival space as an arena to dance and enjoy herself. She describes involvement in the Cardiff Carnival as being part of a family and the performance within this space becomes an opportunity to display, to express herself, as well as to perform.

British Sign Language interpreter Cathryn McShane drew a link in our interview between involvement in Cardiff Carnival activities and the way in which this involvement has helped increase her self-confidence and allowed her to recognize anxiety behaviour. McShane stated:

But what I'd say in terms of carnival, because obviously I've been doing it a long, long time now and the first year I turned up, what I made was rubbish and I didn't even think I could make anything. And my boyfriend at the time sort of very quickly whipped-up this kind of papier maché mask. I was like 'how on earth did you do that?' but through doing carnival, I now make amazing things and I'm really confident making things I'd have never even tried before ... In terms of anxiety things, because even in work a lot of the time I can be centre of attention in work, it's just the visual nature of my job, I could suffer kind of anxiety and doing stuff like this has helped me identify some of my behaviours in terms of what I do. ... It's like being more self-aware I suppose, than what I used to be. And I think carnival is a big part of that.

How do you think it's acted that way?

I suppose it's kind of breaking through that because it doesn't matter. It's not going to be the end of the world. You can do stuff and it doesn't matter, you're kind of quite free to do that. There's no one judging you.

You're performing but without that kind of pressure for it to be perfect because it's not meant to be perfect it's meant to be a celebration.²⁰⁵

Carnival creates the opportunity to be free to perform and to be transformed.

For McShane, remnants of the Carnival process contribute to a fuller and better understanding of herself outside of the event. Again, the idea of celebration is mentioned and here this sits alongside another idea, that of "no one is judging you." Writing about the development of Carnival in Trinidad, Philip Scher raises an interesting argument about social class in relation to forms of performance within Carnival. He divides desires of the performance between the needs of the working-class and the middle-class. Scher states:

The working-class masquerade is very different from the middle-class masquerade in that the working-class masquerade is marked by a desire for freedom to act with authority, with a sense of power, while the middle-class masquerade is marked by disguise or freedom from constraints of their own moral codes or by a desire to forget the responsibilities that result from having power.²⁰⁶

What is suggested in this quotation from Scher is that performance changes according to the specific anxieties of a specific person/group. The performances are still interpreted as a form of reaction in that they are actions based on reactions to the everyday (consciously or subconsciously). The above quotation also opens up the notion that masquerade fills a need. I think there are overlaps between middle-class and working-class performances and that it is not necessarily as clear-cut as suggested. 'Power' can be interpreted as expanding beyond social power, into the domestic sphere, for example and freedom from the responsibility of being a father or mother is equally relevant to the working and middle classes. But perhaps I am making the argument unnecessarily

²⁰⁵ Interview with Cathryn McShane 07.08.2011, Cardiff.

²⁰⁶ P. W. Scher, *Carnival and the formation of a Caribbean Transnation*, (University Press Florida, 2003), p. 58.

complicated. In an interview with engineer Catherine Leggett, she described to me what the Cardiff Carnival performance means for her as a form of escape, transformation and release:

I think it's that one day a year where you go through the mundane, humdrum, droll of life and then for that one day a year, you put all this hard work in for 3 weeks and you gradually feel it building and building. You start to change and transform before the day. And you build up excitement and a little bit sort of anxiety as well and then on the day it's like an explosion of all those pent-up feelings you've had. A complete escape from real life, from bills, from work, from catching buses, from kids and as soon as you put that costume on your transformation then, completely finishes. So, you put the costume on, your face paint, actual layers, you just completely turn into whatever character you're playing; whether it's a demon or whether it's an angel, whether it's a giant puppet, whatever that character is, by the time you're actually ready to go, you are that character. And the way that people react to you in the crowd as well that can completely change your performance. So it's half of what you feel you want to do and then half of what you're getting back from the people who are watching. So, it really depends on the crowd as well.²⁰⁷

According to the responses from the above revellers' interviews, Cardiff Carnival shares with other Carnivals the opportunity it provides to escape from the norm. It allows revellers to be transformed into a character and to release stress. It can also, because of its public nature, contribute to building self-esteem and confidence. Some of the performances within it are very linked to the middle-class performances identified by Scher, but there are working class participants, and group participants with varying levels of disability are also encouraged. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, costumes in Cardiff Carnival are not bought (or for sale) and there is a lot of emphasis placed on the making of the costume as that idea of sharing within the mas' camp helps to forge a happy, inclusive, creative environment. I think Cardiff Carnival's strength is in the ritual of the Carnival mas' camp and what that space permits for those who feel as though

²⁰⁷ Interview with Catherine Leggett, 07.08.2011, Cardiff.

they are not a part of the dominant mainstream social groupings or for those with low self-esteem. The Carnival mas' camp space has a tendency to attract those on the fringes. My observations of the Cardiff Carnival performance from the perspective of *mas'* on the streets seemed to suggest that there was a dislocation between the general revellers' performances when measured against my proposed definition of *mas'*. Manifestations of *mas'*, I will argue occur within (and outside of) the crevices of the Carnival performance, momentarily, incidentally, unconsciously. However, Cardiff-based choreographer and dancer June Campbell-Davies (mentioned earlier in relation to the Notting Hill Carnival) described to me an experience within the Cardiff Carnival that can certainly fit within the *mas'* template:

Carnival in the past to me was you wear whatever you want to and you dance ... but since I have been working on the carnival in Cardiff, something else has come out of it. Although people say that *mas'* is about masquerading as something else, it never occurred to me until one year when I [was] working with a lot of other dance leaders and I was getting a bit frustrated ... and a character evolved. And instead of me dancing my moves for the carnival, I ended up keeping this character all the way through the carnival. ... I had an old costume that I had from my dancing days when I was in London when we did a *Belair* black and emerald green ... So I thought, okay, I'm going to be a Victorian old lady, I'm going to be prim and proper... I took on this character and I started to think about the old West Indian women and that they would be with their handbag and they're looking at scorn at these young girls winin' up [gyrating] and these 'duttu' [dirty] men and I thought, I think that's what I'm going to go as. And also because in the crowd we have onlookers: We always get people who are happy for the carnival and we also get people who don't like the carnival but they're there looking anyway. ... So I am Victorian and I've got myself in this character and I would target the people that were standing there looking disapprovingly, I thought, I'm going to make that person smile. I stood up next to them and I am looking at them, looking at their feet as if to say, "disgraceful, yes" and then I'd put down one wine [gyration] and their face, they couldn't help but laugh because they were not expecting that. ... And then I thought this is playing *mas'* because suddenly you become somebody else. It's not about the costume that you spent 3 weeks making and it's not about doing your favourite moves... because sometimes carnival is about showing-off. It can be about showing-off, which is that you're having fun and the people

outside are watching the display, so it can be like that for young people. But with this character, I was a character and I was portraying something that people ... could relate to.²⁰⁸

Campbell-Davies' experience, outlined in the above excerpt, is a very specific example of how different Carnival spaces can be used directly for personal expression despite the general emphasis of the other performances within the space. This account highlights the mas' idea that it is a performance instigated by the player. The mas' is influenced by the mask/costume but it is concerned with a story or incident connected with the 'everyday'. Campbell-Davies' frustration although not evident in her final portrayal, fuelled the birth of the character she portrayed. Even the actions of scorn and mocking enacted by her masquerade can be connected to her mas' camp frustration that arose from her not feeling confident to voice her opinion on the sections she wanted to work with.

It would be foolhardy and presumptuous to conclude that manifestations of a mas' experience are generally not a part of the Cardiff Carnival especially in light of the feedback from my Cardiff-based interviewees. Instead, I wish to suggest that the Carnival in this space has many elements that may facilitate mas' manifestations. The Cardiff Carnival is young and it is in the process of finding its direction, both in terms of where it wants to go and to whom it wants to be resonant. It is up to the people of Cardiff to claim the celebration and to utilize it as a space that is meaningful to them.

²⁰⁸ Interview with June Campbell-Davies <https://soundcloud.com/mama-dat-is-mas/june-campbell-davies-speaks> (Last accessed 04.01.2014)

Mas' Aesthetics

...for me with Carnival I think over the last 30 years and more so now, it's the process or the methodology of mas' that is more important than the actual reenactment of mas' itself. Think of the materials and methods of Wendy Nanan – derived from Red Indian paper construction or Marlon Griffith's performance and installation work or my video Blue Soap etc... Even Minshall applied methodologies of the Carnavalesque to drive his idea of street theatre. The Carnival itself is not interested in these matters. It is more interested in popular expression and social visibility by competing groups than artist ideas.²⁰⁹

Mas' aesthetics is a term that I will argue involves utilizing aspects of masquerade and Carnival traditions, making, performance and/or masking, within art. Mas' aesthetics is a deliberately broad term, the scope of which aims to include such intangible aspects of masquerade, Carnival and performance such as feelings, as well as the more obvious aspects involved in the actual making of art work utilizing masquerade and Carnival ideas and materials. The above quotation from Trinidadian artist, critic and curator Chris Cozier highlights a move towards mas' aesthetics that my research is interested in – the functionality of the methodologies and processes of mas'. Carnival and interpretations of mas' have been used by artists such as Wendy Nanan and Marlon Griffith, mentioned by Cozier, as well as by playwright and director Tony Hall (Trinidad) with his conception of the *Jouvay Process*, playwright Davlin Thomas, Guadeloupian curator Claire Tancons, who is interested in Carnivals, processions and protests and by performer Mary-Anne Roberts. These artists among others engage with Carnival and masquerade forms in capacities outside of the Carnival event itself.

Outside of the boundaries of the art world, mas' forms have also been used as protest. After the race riots in Notting Hill in 1958 residents were asked

²⁰⁹ In conversation with Trinidadian artist Chris Cozier 26.11.2012

to wear Carnival costumes to protest against racism and injustice. I am aware of mas' being used outside of the South African Embassy in London by *People's War Carnival Band*, to protest against apartheid in 1989 (Please see Appendix). The *People's War Carnival Band* (1982-1998) was formed by designer and bandleader Michael La Rose and Keith La Rose. Michael and Keith are the sons of political and cultural activist, writer and publisher John La Rose. John La Rose, founder of *New Beacon Books*, the first specialist Caribbean publishers, and the *George Padmore Institute*, was interested in the revolutionary possibilities inherent in cultural forms such as literature and the arts. Similarly, the *Peoples War Carnival Band* had an active agenda that was geared towards engaging with political, historical and cultural issues via masquerade forms of protest. This type of masquerade has the transformative and revolutionary potential to enact change.

In November 2013 Trinidad-based *Jouvay Ayiti* used mas' forms to protest against the unfair treatment of Haitians born in the Dominican Republic and the threat of these people losing citizenship. Mas' characters have been used in schools and within communities through the Trinidad-based *Arts in Action* initiative at the University of the West Indies and by other individuals such as artist and social activist Stephanie Leitch and spoken word artist Ivory Hayes to address topics such as gender inequalities, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, gay rights and environmental protection – recycling and conservation. The point is that mas' characters/costumes are already active in spaces outside of the Carnival and provide a language that is easily translatable across generations within the Trinidadian/Caribbean/diasporic context. What

my research seeks to do is to push these boundaries and to engage with mas' as a performance for empowerment, especially in relation to feelings of displacement.

I have defined mas' as an activity that can occur within and outside of the Carnival environment. I have argued that mas' is usually facilitated by modes of performance and/or masking and involves concepts of reacting and re-presenting. Reaction means that the performance is based on actions that are directly connected to the pre-Carnival body. The Carnival-play, the intensity of the play, the hard wine, the jump-up and the desire to release stress are performative manifestations of a bodily response to pressures, responsibilities and anxieties of the everyday. Re-presentation involves the presentation of an 'other' self. The Carnival environment allows for the visibility of an 'other' self through different forms and layers of self-transformation. Within the Trinidad Jouvay, for example, there is the mask of mud, oil or paint, the mask or anonymity of the crowd/or mass, the music and the mask of the pre-dawn darkness, each of which potentially allows for transformation and each of which directly informs performance. The re-presentation also carries with it a sense of owning performance and being in control of one's own narrative and can be enacted through masking and/or performance. Thus, brought forward are: mas' as a mode of re-presenting self and mas' as a performance of reaction.

Interpretations of Carnival and mas' in art and performances can take many different forms. The following will briefly cite some examples of the ways in which different creative people have interpreted carnival/masquerade/mas' within their work in order to engage with the scope of mas' aesthetics. Looking at examples of the work of other creative artists and their use of

Carnival/masquerade/mas' will also assist in positioning my own work as relevant, contributing to a slightly different approach within an active contemporary Carnival art practice.

Japan-based Trinidadian artist Marlon Griffith is world-renowned. Griffith trained under artist/curator Chris Cozier and was apprenticed under Carnival 'masman' Peter Minshall and the late mas'-artist Michael Sheriff. His installation: *Symbiosis*, at the Edna Manley College in Jamaica 2007 was specifically made for a gallery space.



Symbiosis, CAGE Gallery Edna Manley College, Jamaica. Image courtesy the artist Marlon Griffith

According to curator Claire Tancons in her essay *Curating Carnival*, Griffith, in this and other works, attempts to “recreate phenomenologically the feeling of being immersed in a masband.”²¹⁰ Griffith, Tancons continues:

²¹⁰ C. Tancons, *Curating Carnival*, p. 54. PDF downloaded at https://www.academia.edu/1591494/Curating_Carnival_Performance_in_Contemporary_Caribbean_Art. Last accessed 20.04.2014

create[s] organic environments in the cut-out technique that has become his hallmark. Using light to reflect shifting motives and, in so doing allow[ing] shadows to fragment the image even as they also become an embodiment of the work and a reminder of the transient and ephemeral quality of mas'.²¹¹

Griffith's installation is aesthetically beautiful, technically intricate and deeply informed by a walk through Jamaica as part of his residency. His work played with symbols of humming bird forms and the awe of being immersed in forest-like spectacle. Each artifact in the installation was wearable and viewers were encouraged to contribute to the work by wearing an item and walking around in the space. Light refraction also created movement (light and shadow), which added another dimension to this work. I wish to highlight that with *Symbiosis*, the emphasis is on the gallery patron becoming an active participant in an experience. The participant's role is simultaneously as observer and participant. This installation successfully appropriates space, re-interprets an aspect of Carnival and invokes feelings of immersion. Although I am particularly interested in mas' as performance, Griffith's work encourages a look at the role of space in creating an environment that invokes the intent of the work. Griffith has also worked within art spaces curated by Claire Tancons, such as *SPRING* in Gwangju, South Korea Biennale in 2008 and *A Walk into the Night* in Cape Town, South Africa in 2009. The context of these will be discussed in more detail shortly.

While the gallery space provides installation opportunities to engage with Carnival forms, the theatre becomes the most feasible space to engage with Carnival performance. Tony Hall writes for stage, street and television. His *Jouvay Process* is concerned with the ways in which people can be involved in a

²¹¹ Tancons, *Curating Carnival*, p. 54.

ritual of renewal and transformation (through the application of mud which is a prominent masking material used in Jouvay) in order to awaken a spirit of emancipation to empower their everyday selves. He takes this process further to utilize a *Jouvay Process* in theatre – *Jouvay Popular Theatre Process* – as a way of engaging with the dynamics of the *Jouvay Process* within the mechanics of producing performance work. Hall has done considerable work in this area and his ideas are relevant for consideration because of the ways in which they engage with Carnival, attempting to connect to the attributes of empowerment that accompany these performances.²¹²

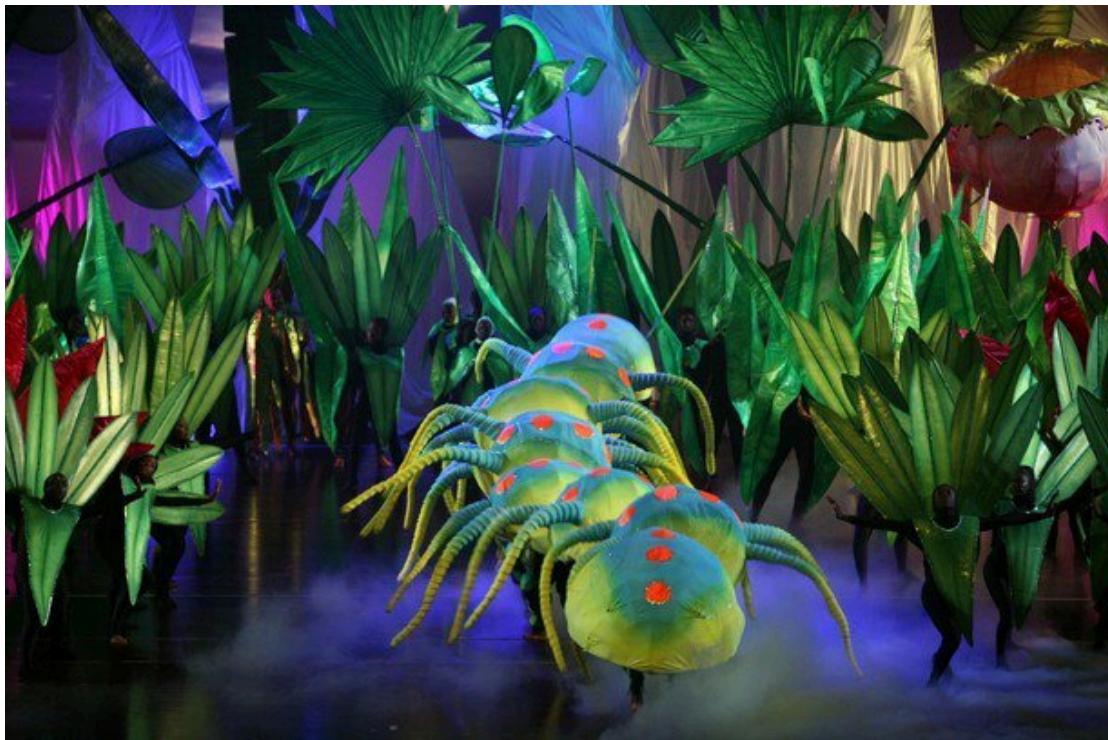
Another playwright, Davlin Thomas, works in-between realms of the creative and the corporate. Within the creative realm Thomas works both within and outside of the Carnival season. His productions aim to combine the dynamics of Carnival and theatre. Thomas says that he uses theatre to transform Carnival into something other than itself. With the use of the Carnival costumes and technology Thomas aims to create an ‘epic’ theatre and to seek the possibilities of ways of occupying a large space. By ‘epic’ Davlin implies ‘on a grand scale’, rather than the Brechtian epic theatre model. Epic theatre was introduced by Bertolt Brecht to describe a move away from the Aristotelian dramatic form of theatre. His epic theatre was different not in terms of being completely opposite but in terms of where he placed the emphasis, both to induce empathy and to force the audience to break with the process of identification, to induce critical understanding of the socio-economic forces in play, shaping and producing behaviors and subjectivities.²¹³ Brecht does however marginally influence

²¹² Please see the BLOG – <http://jouvayinstitute.blogspot.co.uk>.

²¹³ Ronald Gray, *Brecht* (Oliver and Boyd Ltd, Edinburgh 1969), pp. 62-63.

Davlin's work in the sense that all of the action happens on-stage, including costume changes. According to Thomas, his presentations aim to be not just a visual manifestation of Carnival symbols but to be a manifestation of the energy of a Carnival feeling. A detailed example of this can be seen in his work *Cerra del Aripo*. Within this work, the actors' manipulations of the costumes and their use of the performance space contribute to that 'feeling'. In an interview I conducted with Thomas, he stated that within this production *Cerra del Aripo*, he aimed to play with:

The transcendent spirit in the mas' so the mas' was possessed by the spirit of the flora and the fauna. Normally people take it the other way around and you're masking the person...[But] the mas' itself is now a thing that exists, it is to some extent defined as it is what it is... we recognize it when we see it, based on the crowds, costuming and so on.²¹⁴



Cerra del Aripo, Caterpillar. Image courtesy Davlin Thomas

²¹⁴ Excerpt from Skype interview with Davlin Thomas conducted by Adeola Dewis 25.09.2012

Within *Cerro del Aripo*, Thomas used Carnival costumes and technology on a grand scale but re-interpreted the common carnivalesque narrative of 'display' to engage with the notion of communicating. The work was meant to directly communicate a meaningful story to Trinidadian and non-Trinidadian audiences. He describes his process in the following excerpt:

The process begins at the design element, different from play writing, no longer writing and creating a narrative picture. Designing the scene, where the highs go and where the lows go and what keeps you interested at the low points – the mechanics of the caterpillar is exciting enough to keep you interested... Nothing is offstage. Costumes and people are there all along. It is a carnival thing – put together in the bush – those were costumes but it's the spirits in the mas'. It is the usurpation of the carnival space and costume to become a manifestation of an idea beyond the idea of the costume.

Experimenting more recently with the use individual Carnival characters in his production entitled *Drinking with the Bookman*, Thomas says that he attempted to get to the heart of each character, finding the archetypal qualities of each and asking what is the source/essence of their portrayal? By taking a route that moves inward, focusing on the characters' traits, Thomas inflates the character out of proportion, making it larger, something other than its traditional self.

Davlin Thomas asserts that his work engages with questions of what Carnival feels like, what it smells like and how it sounds. He looks at the ways in which theatre can possess Carnival and searches for the multi-layered elements of Carnival that make it instantly recognizable. Thomas' work and his ideas are relevant to my research because while they engage with Carnival forms (costumes) and what might be termed 'carnival senses' (similar to the installation work of Marlon Griffith mentioned earlier), they are also involved in a process that challenges common narratives of Carnival's functionality. While I do not anticipate working on an epic scale, I identify that the use of mas' to tell a

story (personal, political, social) through performance or masking as an integral part of a mas' process.

The notion of working on a 'large scale' within the Carnival context is applicable to both the construction of large mobile costumes, as well as to the mass of bodies that occupy the Carnival streets. The relevance of mass bodies within Carnival is most evident in the visual impact of tens of thousands of costumed bodies as well as the psychological impact for the individual masquerader immersed within the mass. US-based Guadeloupean curator Claire Tancons works with Carnival, processions and protests and is concerned with linking processional forms to contemporary art. Tancons has organized and curated two major projects that challenge the role of performance art and integrate the processional elements of Carnival with curatorship commonly associated with gallery spaces: *SPRING* in Gwangju, South Korea Biennale, 2008 and *A Walk into the Night*, Cape Town, South Africa, 2009. Tancons has also curated another major work entitled *Uphill Downhill: An Indoor Carnival* at the Tate Modern museum in London, August 2014. These curatorial works were an effort to associate processional forms with contemporary art practice rather than the realm of folklore. Tancons' projects are of interest to me because she opens the boundaries of performance art by engaging with alternative ways of imagining exhibition spaces allowing the body to be central to the display in an exhibition of motion. As a cultural project, Carnival is the central motif on which Tancons draws in an attempt to address her on-going considerations of processions and their relationship to the art world. The closing paragraph of Tancons' proposal for her *SPRING* project states:

SPRING's premise and success relies on the artistic contract between a

handful of artists and a multitude of people. Each artist will be at the head of a rhizomatic experiment in artistic collaboration within his or her own workshop, during which skills will be shared, knowledge disseminated, human bonds sealed. At the core of this rhizomatic dissemination of knowledge will soon be not one but several leaders, as each workshop participant takes over control of the production process from the artist. The artist is to diffuse artistic authority and authorial power as the people gain ownership of the artistic process in a joint enterprise of collective self-definition.²¹⁵

According to the above proposal, the artists were asked to handover control to the groups who in turn would interpret the artists' ideas to produce their "collective self-definition" of work/costume/mas' for the procession. This point is crucial. The notion of individual/group agency and being able to script one's own narrative is intrinsic to a mas' concept – to re-iterate Gibbons' earlier sentiment: the freedom of choice of what to play and how to play. This idea of agency, of self defining self for one's self, echoes the intentions of Hall's *Jouvay Process*, even as he utilizes mud to empower. In *SPRING* Tancons aims to allow for the visibility of the peoples' voice/expression. There is an ambiguous line drawn between Carnival and art performance here and Tancons herself has raised the question of whether Carnival needs to be curated at all. It is clear to me that the issue is about recognition and acceptance of Carnival within the elite world of art, but I suspect that this issue is of concern to the curator and not to the reveller. The matter is not about curating Carnival but rather about curating works that engage with modes of mass-empowerment via the use of procession, masking and public spaces. I would argue that Carnival can be seen as culturally specific and any artwork that utilizes many of Carnival's forms in its presentation does not necessarily become a Carnival, nor should that be its aim. I

²¹⁵ Tancons, *7th Gwangju Biennale: SPRING*, p. 350. PDF downloaded at <https://independent.academia.edu/ClaireTancons>.

do not consider Carnival (even if viewed as folk art or popular art) as in need of being rescued or accredited.

The use of Carnival forms can also involve a less tangible approach. Carnival has played an instrumental role in Cardiff-based Trinidadian vocalist, artist, performer Mary-Ann Roberts' perspective on the different performances that she has been involved in. As part of a duo called *Bragod*, Roberts works with Welsh musician Robert Evans. Evans experiments with playing the cwrth (flute) and is interested in ancient Welsh poetry and musical manuscripts. Roberts associates two aspects of her work with *Bragod* with her extensive experiences with Trinidad Carnival: 1) The idea of working from the source and 2) the idea of transcendence – moving from something very physical/human to something cosmic. For Roberts, Carnival has been and continues to be an experience that is directly connected to understanding self. The idea of working from the source is tied to the notion that Carnival performances in Roberts' view provide a link with the past and allow for the exploration of the question: where do I fit? Roberts' Carnival experiences involved learning performance techniques and stories from as close to the original source as possible. Roberts sees learning and engaging with ancient 'links to the past' as a process that involves taking on something very precious, one that is inevitably concerned with exploring identity. A similar connection to the past is felt with Roberts' *Bragod* work as she and Evans perform music from as early as the 6th century.

In relation to the second point about moving beyond the physical/human, Roberts describes the Carnival performance as transcendence, one in which you dance until you can't dance anymore and your spirit continues dancing. Working with the cwrth, Roberts likens that music to the Carnival dance performance as

in her experience it takes you from the very physical space to the spiritual realm.

Roberts states:

If my voice is in tune and the instrument stays in tune, it creates phenomena. You could hear the harmonics starting to pile up and depending on the vowels that you sing, the whole thing just opens up. ... Then when it all opens up, everything opens up and that opening just goes right up into the universe because the music is giving you that. It's based on patterns of 1s and 0s, the language of computers. ... Now the 1s represent eternity and the 0s represent the temporal. And that juxtaposition of the playing of those two things, we're not in eternity but we could play with eternity and when we get all these things right with the music, you can go there, you can be with the gods. It's the same in Carnival ... we're playing with eternity and impermanence.

The importance of Carnival in Roberts' approach is linked to identity exploration, a performance and accessing a place where your body wants to be. Roberts' *Bragod* work is related to her interpretation of Carnival as it allows her to re-place herself within a broad and ancient context and to engage with notions of transcending realms through performance. Roberts continues:

I don't want to be powerful, I don't need high status or anything because I know, I know I could wear it, I could make it. I could wear it and then I could take it off and put it down and just be normal me. I don't need to carry around that big heavy burden all my life.

The notions of impermanence and transcendence identified by Roberts are directly relevant to the approach I am interested in exploring. As Carnival is seasonal and the performances within it temporary, it seems logical to highlight the temporality of this ritual, which draws attention to the notion of the performances being, as proposed, 'outside of the everyday.' The notion of transcendence is relevant to some mas' performances and can be interpreted as both the transformation beyond the physical level as mentioned by Roberts and as the transformation from the everyday to an 'other' self. Again the idea of impermanence persists.

These works (Griffith, Hall, Thomas, Tancons, Roberts) inform and continue to contribute to the ideas of mas' aesthetics by providing examples of how specific aspects of Carnival/masquerade can be interpreted in art spaces or outside of the usual Carnival environment. I would argue that the above projects rejuvenate the creative capacity of Carnival and its limitless possibilities both within and outside of Carnival itself. Carnival works. It is successful and meaningful on so many levels that it opens itself up to being the life string, the heart of artistic experiments that aim to stand apart from the norm, particularly when considering the Trinidad Carnival and the ways in which, as a ritual festival, it has been forged to be a unique manifestation of a people. The above analysis highlights that the ways in which different artists draw upon this Carnival form of mas' varies at times significantly and at others, subtly. What becomes apparent in these works is that the appropriation of mas'/Carnival/masquerade in this context, contributes to an on-going exploration of the ways in which cultural forms challenge debates around 'high' art (as exclusive) and 'low' art/folklore (as inclusive). These explorations also open up the question of *how* these Carnival-works can begin to impact on the artists, performers, participants and viewers who experience them. The following experimental art project utilizes mas' aesthetics within a practical project to explore the manifestations of my re-definition of mas' in an art space.

Chapter FOUR: Mama dat is Mas' Art Project Review

Mas' is a way in which we image and realize ourselves. It is a worldview and it moves beyond the event, the performance. Mas' embodies the whole idea of multiple identities, ... moving from identity to identity. It is an ontology. Mas' also gives distance. Watching your 'self' in a role, it is a conscious reflex. You could laugh at yourself and laugh at other people laughing at you. Mas' perception equals self-perception. It is also shared as it cuts across a field that could be called national.²¹⁶

In the previous chapter, I developed a working definition for the word mas' as a performance activity that (instigated by the player) allows for a change in the everyday in order to draw attention to a specific aspect of the everyday. This definition was informed by writings on Carnival performance, identity and ritual, discussed in Chapter Two and further developed by the personal Carnival and mas' experiences of my interviewees in Trinidad in Chapter Three. This mas' definition was used to explore potential mas' manifestations in the Notting Hill and Cardiff Carnivals. The previous chapter also looked at mas' aesthetics and some of the ways in which artists utilize a concept of mas' within their artistic working processes. My research in this chapter is concerned with mas' aesthetics and the question of how mas' performances present within the Trinidad Carnival are relevant to practical art-making in the Diaspora. This exploration is crucial to my research as it begins to find ways of accessing mas' experiences through art, outside of the Carnival environment. As notions of self-empowerment and agency are immanent within mas' performances, this exploration of interpreting mas' elements, through experimentation, forms a template that enables access to mas' moments. While this chapter takes a mostly descriptive form, the concluding chapter that follows is analytical, discussing the impact and relevance

²¹⁶ In conversation with Rawle Gibbons 02.01.2012

of the *Mama dat is Mas'* project. The project *Mama dat is Mas'* relocates my research questions in the context of performance art. I look specifically at the following questions: In what ways can work produced within an art space relate to an experience of Carnival mas' performance? How can art-making or art-presentation utilize elements of a Carnival ritual of re-possession mas' in order to engage with the experience of displacement and a broader community of displaced peoples? In what follows I look at the stages of this experimental art project and aim to demonstrate ways in which elements of Trinidad Carnival mas' performance can be utilized within an art space as a way of engaging on some level with a notion of displacement.

Mama dat is Mas' was a collaborative experimental art project based on elements of masking and self-re-presentation found in the Trinidad Carnival. The project used the template of what I [the writer] have termed 're-possession mas' or ritual art and mas'.²¹⁷ Artists June Campbell-Davies, Phil Babot, Amaru Chatawa and I undertook a six-month period of collaboration in which we aimed to tackle and explore ways of re-interpreting and re-presenting aspects of this mas' within Wales. As the name suggests, the re-possession mas' is connected to ways of empowering the self through masking and performance, by allowing the opportunity to use mas' elements to narrate one's own story. This art of mas' performance, abstracted from the Carnival environment for the intention of this project, was designed to produce an experience of cathartic-restitution. As outlined in Chapter One, Jamaican critical thinker Clinton Hutton has discussed the ways in which the enslaved in the Caribbean claimed agencies of

²¹⁷ Informed by Clinton Hutton's rituals of re-possession, *The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Identity and Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom* (Caribbean Quarterly Volume 53, Nos. 1&2, March-June 2007)

empowerment through ritual performances of re-possession. Informed by Hutton's writing, I wished to explore the hypothesis that within contemporary British society, finding momentary performance agency for self-empowerment could address some of the anxieties of displacement. The main objective of *Mama dat is Mas'* was therefore to allow access to a form of art presentation or way of working that could in a small, temporary way allow for re-affirmation of selfhood by those who might feel some sense of displacement or to those who might be experiencing forms of social anxiety.

Displacement is considered by Stuart Hall in his essay 'Cultural Identity and the Diaspora' to be a feature of the Caribbean space in that it was shaped historically by peoples being removed and peoples being re-placed.²¹⁸ This feature identified by Hall is useful because it emphasizes location and a notion of being 'out of place.' Displacement, as I use it here, is further concerned with a specific form of anxiety that relates to questions of belonging and notions of home and can be directly connected to immigrant situations. It is in that sense an effect of diasporic identity. The concept of displacement as I am using it, does not signify anything absolute. It does not necessarily affect everyone residing outside of the country of his or her birth or choosing to live in a host country. I propose that *feelings* of displacement are also not necessarily a permanent conscious state so that even though one's 'placement' in terms of physical living space may potentially allow for feelings of displacement, displacement feelings can also be induced by scenarios that allow one to become conscious of one's self. In addition, this becoming conscious of self within a broader social context and the eventual feeling of displacement may not always result in negative effects.

²¹⁸ Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 234.

Displacement happens and can operate on two levels 1) where one is physically displaced, placed within a different physical context in which self-awareness is brought to the fore due to the circumstances of one's new location and 2) where one may be psychologically displaced due to external situations that challenge the self and rupture staid concepts of an individual's normal, day-to-day existence. Despite the implication that the feelings of displacement are not a permanent conscious state, I will suggest that these feelings are more than mere temporary moments of self-consciousness. They are a result of a condition that may be perceived as permanent, a way of life that may be considered a new norm rather than something fleeting. At the heart of feelings of displacement are problematic considerations of identity. According to Hall, within post-colonial societies the rediscovery of identity is at the core of several forms of visual representations. Taking the example of the work of photographer Armet Francis, Hall states:

No one who looks at these textual images now, in the light of the history of transportation, slavery and migration, can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the 'loss of identity', which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place ... They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representations of the West.²¹⁹

Hall asks whether the notion of identity is something to be uncovered and rediscovered or whether it is to be considered as something that has a history but must be continuously re-produced.²²⁰ In the light of Hall's discussion, transformations and re-telling or re-presenting (as in *presenting again*) play a critical role in interpreting identity. Considerations of an identity, cultural and

²¹⁹ Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, pp. 224-225.

²²⁰ Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p. 224.

personal, I will argue, are at the crux of the beginnings of any engagement with notions of displacement. The idea of an identity that is constantly in flux, constantly evolving and changing due to present and past experiences is very relevant. One important question is 'who do you think you are, now?' Questions of where you come from and what you want to be, or how you want to be seen, are also relevant. As regards displacement the key issue is about identity in relation to location or space. Feelings of displacement happen due to a further displacement of space or mind. Hall writes:

The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'. But this kind of knowledge is internal, not external. It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm. ... Nevertheless, this idea of otherness as an inner compulsion changes our conception of 'cultural identity'.²²¹

The experience of being an 'other' contributes to feelings of displacement.

Playwright Rawle Gibbons in his essay *Room to Pass* deals with a similar idea of identity, 'otherness' in terms of multiple selves or 'an-other' self and a concept of displacement:

For the subject in this paradigm whose ancestral heritage is suppressed ends up trapped between denial and aspiration, not being and never-can-be; black skins, white masks. Performance constitutes his [or her] only means of integrating disparate realities/selves or, rather, his every attempt to be, to define 'himselves'; his often absurd, disparate reality

²²¹ Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, pp. 225-226.

becomes 'performance' because it is propelled by a need for external ratification. Am I good enough? Is this how it is done?²²²

Through performance, the post-colonial subject is involved in discovering ways of scripting his/her own re-presentation through both (or either) challenging and going-along with the legacy of previously instigated systems. Writer and playwright Professor Errol Hill, in his book *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*, looks into the masking practices of some individuals in the Trinidad Carnival. Hill uses the writing of English visitor Charles Day whose book was published in 1852 and includes comments on the 1848 Trinidad Carnival to investigate some of the early masquerades. Hill acknowledges Day's prejudice in saying "Day, judged by the preface of his book, was a negrophobe. For him the Negro was a savage..."²²³ but Hill asserts that the writing gives a thorough example of how Carnival was prior to the end of the 19th century. The following example from Hill, describes how Carnival costuming either perpetuated the stereotypes of the ruling class or potentially challenged them:

The black varnish applied to already dark skins might suggest a direct imitation of the make-up of white planters masquerading as the *negue jading*. On the other hand, a similar masquerade, called the "molasses negro," was seen by Lafcadio Hearn in Martinique in 1888. ... Blackening the face is, of course, an ancient practice related to underworld (devil) figures in West African and Indo-European cultures ... In the West Indian carnival, blackening the face and body with soot and molasses could have different connotations. Molasses, a product of the sugar cane, whose cultivation might well have been hateful to the plantation slaves, could be yet another freedom symbols used in masquerade. ... But to return to Day's report: the chains and bastinadoing [beating with whips] were clearly related to slavery, and they coincide with Frasier's description of the treatment of estate gangs en route to a cane fire.²²⁴

²²² Gibbons, *Room to Pass*, p. 116.

²²³ Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival*, p. 18.

²²⁴ Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival*, pp. 24-25.

The “blackening of already black skin” can be seen as a masquerade that imitated the ruling planter class’s *negue jadin* (garden negro) masquerade – imitation of an imitation – or as one that acted as a freedom symbol through actively appropriating that icon and re-inscribing its meaning.

Participating in Carnival or a mas’ activity can be an opportunity for visibility, to (re)present an ‘other’ and is most certainly an opportunity to script your own narrative. The Caribbean Carnival is already a most potent means of dealing with displacement through a kind of re-placement. It has its roots in displacement and provides the opportunity of being able to claim such spaces as the streets. This appropriation of space happens through mass procession and improvised, spontaneous choreography. The Carnival revellers jump, stomp, wine (gyrate), run in zigzag and roll on the streets. Stuart Hall’s discourse of identity and re-presentation is taken further collectively through an interpretation of mas’. Carnival and mas’ experiences have been about negotiating or negating forms of displacement through re-possession and reclaiming a collective and individual sense of self through recall, through reinserting accents, making the invisible visible through forms of masking and costume, and through voice, song, calypso and verbal challenges in prose and other forms of artistic rhetoric. In relation to the *Mama dat is Mas’* project, we intended to initiate a creative platform for artwork-interaction events and to show that this form of experience conventionally available only to Carnival performers and revellers can take on new form and meaning in artistic and diasporic contexts. The value of this is: (1) that events as aesthetic forms are generated which promote new ways of re-possessing the self, and (2) that the scope of art available to peoples within the diaspora is enlarged. Hall’s anxiety

around shifting/unstable notions of identity and displacement, intersects with Hutton's notion of re-possession, being able to re-possess ones self and claim an identity, providing a clear perspective on how Caribbean performances birthed within the experiences of displacement, oppression and colonization can inform more contemporary experiences in the broader diasporic context in the UK.

In the case of *Mama dat is Mas'*, the artists involved came with a range of different experiences including Carnival art and design, dance, choreography, installation art, video, performance art and painting. As an art project, *Mama dat is Mas'* posed two main questions: 1) Can the work being produced within an art space relate to an experience of Carnival mas' performance? 2) How can art-making or art-presentation utilize elements of a Carnival ritual of re-possession mas' in order to engage with a broader community of displaced peoples? One of the main challenges was that this work aimed to engage with something 'new', a new way of working or of presenting that was based directly on a template of Trinidad's mas' performance. The media/ tools at our disposal were not new: video, performance art, drawing, voice, drumming, photography and dance.

As a concept, I would like to reiterate that mas' for the purpose of this work is defined as an activity that (instigated by the player) allows for a change in the everyday in order to draw attention to a specific aspect of the everyday. Based specifically on the interviews I conducted with Carnival revellers in Trinidad, I would like to further add to that somewhat abstract statement, the notion that the concept of mas' that I am engaging with involves on some level one or both of the following: an expression of individual stories and a re-presentation of self. It is almost always concerned with the concept of self-empowerment, through one or two of those performance modes. Thus I will put

forward (again) the term 're-possession mas' as an inclusive term, borrowing directly from Clinton Hutton's notion of re-possession as the process of being able to possess again, re-claim, re-own. The 're-possession mas' is concerned with the empowerment imminent within performances of re-possession. On speaking of mas' performances, playwright Rawle Gibbons says, "It is not escapism but affirmation of self."²²⁵ Historically, within the Trinidadian and perhaps the broader Caribbean context, Carnival has been about creating the spaces for being visible as in the case of Lovelace's Aldrick (see Chapter One), it involves being audible, as in having a voice, something which is also part of visibility and being able to be yourself, 'play yuhself'. The notion of 'play yuhself' is also very much tied to Huttons' 're-possession' ritual concept. The act of masquerading and the use of the word mas' in the Trinidadian vernacular begins to isolate and separate one of the ways in which Caribbean people, West Indians, have reinterpreted and perhaps 'reconstituted'²²⁶ the legacy of Carnival that has been passed on. Carnival language is very much part of our everyday. In that respect, the *Mama dat is Mas'* project may be seen to look at ways in which this reinterpretation/reconstitution of Carnival situates Caribbean people in the diaspora.

Mama dat is Mas' began with interviews, conducted by me, with each of the artist collaborators over a period of 5 days each. Each interview session was broadly broken down into sections, which included the following areas:

1) questions about self, such as: Who are you? Where do you come from? Tell me a bit about your family/ parents/siblings? What was school like? How did you

²²⁵ In conversation with Rawle Gibbons 10.06.2012

²²⁶ Term used by Rawle Gibbons in conversation 10.06.2012

come to live here? What have your experiences been like? Are you married/do you have children? Tell me a bit about your current life? What do you do for a living?

2) Questions about Carnival: What is your Carnival experience? What is your earliest memory of Carnival? Do you think that there is a distinction between mas' and Carnival? If so, what is it? What are your thoughts on this project? Do you think it is possible to begin to suggest a new way of working or showing art? What is Carnival's relevance to you? What are the main aspects of the event that stand out for you? Why?

3) Questions about personal anxieties, fears and potential frustrations.

I felt that in order to tackle the notion of what mas' may potentially 'be' and then to see how it can be interpreted within art-making/art-presentation, it was necessary to begin with the individual. I was aware from my research for the preceding chapters that mas' experiences vary from person to person depending on location, way of life, past and present experiences and so on. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the basic template I chose to work with regarding the concept of mas' involved individual stories and the re-presentation of self. Part of the interview's purpose then was to allow for the mirror-like presentation of a self to the artist-collaborator in order that an empowering re-presentation of an aspect of that self might be tackled. For detailed examples of this, please see the DVD in appendix and interview samples on the BLOG

mamadatsmas.blogspot.com.

Initial Thoughts (Identification)

The project *Mama dat is Mas'* is essentially a question of Carnival performance. I understand Carnival performance to be a serious activity, in that it has meaning, function and purpose. Carnival performance and by extension my proposed concept of **mas'** is, however, also very much about play, being able to release, jump-up, wine, dance, 'doh care' and 'play yuhself'. I wish to suggest that in order to get to those specific physical stages, the player, the reveller, requires time. This 'time' is required in order to over-come the initial anxiety and self-consciousness, which will potentially lead to the ability to 'play him/herself'. This being able to 'play him/herself', I propose, may then lead to notions of self-empowerment and feelings of re-possession. In order to feel comfortable within the time allowed in which to 'play yuhself' other factors need to be taken into consideration; for example, that of space. The space is one that I shall define as a 'space of freedom', a free space that permits. That is to say that the context within which the performance is placed is of high relevance. Within the Carnival context, this free space is accompanied by music, so that there is the environment that permits and the music that facilitates the movements. These movements, through time become expressive of 'playing yuhself'. For the experimental project *Mama dat is Mas'*, I envisioned the creation of imagined 'freedom spaces' within which the re-presentation of stories may be playfully performed/presented. The *Mama dat is Mas'* performances, which directly address the subjectivity of the performers, can, I will argue, have a wider impact. They can be made public through video/projection or photography/billboards. This reflects the importance of the public nature of the Carnival and **mas'** performance in producing empowering effects on the individual reveller.

Valeria Sterzi in her book *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival: A Cross*

Cultural Investigation of a Social Ritual says of mas' in the street context:

Carnival becomes more than a display of parading floats and maskers; it is, in fact, the imaginative medium, the body of codes and conventions, of signs and signals, by which Trinidadians affirm their individuality within the society.²²⁷

This poignant perception highlights the notion that both the costume and the play of the costume (mas') work together, to contribute to the individual's sense of self within the public space. In the *Mama dat is Mas'* project, I placed emphasis on the notion of play which related directly to a staging of elements of Trinidadian mas'. As Sterzi puts it:

In Trinidad >>play mas<< are two elements intrinsically interwoven. The act of playing has much more in common with the Yoruba performances, rather than with the European use of the word.²²⁸

Perhaps the most obvious symbolical representation of Carnival that potentially lends itself to easy transference outside of the festival's context into the art space is its visual aesthetic, the ability to become larger than life or to be transformed into a character, a bat, a devil, a goddess. I faced the question of how the process of the performance, which includes playing a character as well as the continuous repetitive motion of chipping²²⁹ or jumping-up on the streets, could be transferred. The main difficulty is perhaps that the play within the mas' performance in Trinidad is often a result of the music, a result of participant's expectation of Carnival time as the time to 'break away', 'free-up' and so on, and also as a result of personal, individual circumstances. How one was brought up,

²²⁷ V. Sterzi, *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival: A Cross Cultural Investigation of a Social Ritual* (Translation Publishers, New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK) 2010), p. 19.

²²⁸ Sterzi. *Deconstructing Gender in Carnival*, p. 150.

²²⁹ Chip – A peculiar dance/walk shuffle, associated with JOUVAY. To step in time with music, with the weight mostly on toes. J. Mendes, *Cote ci Cote la: Trinidad and Tobago Dictionary* (New Millennium, 2003), p. 41.

one's personal experiences both recent and historically entrenched, even if subtly subconsciously so, have an impact on the intensity of the play and the choices made about how to play and who to play with. This point about individual circumstances is highlighted in an extract from an interview I conducted with Masman Peter Minshall in February 2008. Minshall describes a personal experience in the Jouvay from the late 1950's when he was a boy:

And it reminds me of when I was a little boy, a long time ago, this is the late 50's. I was 14. The Jouvay started at 5 o'clock I had the day before sewn a mask (for) which I had taken a white t-shirt and sewn it to fit over my head, much like what you have done, with just two holes here for the eyes and for the nose and the mouth so I could breathe or suck a sweet-drink through a straw. And then I took a hairnet, full of coconut fibre and put all this red fibrous hair around me and then, the last thing I put on top of the cotton jersey mask, was a wire-mesh mask. These used to be made in Germany, painted a sort of incredible kind of Caucasian pink, with little red sweetheart lips and little sort of vacant blue eyes imprinted on the wire. So I had a mask over a mask. And then on to my hands I put ..., opaque stockings Then I took a pillow and tied it on and gave myself a big boomsee, ... and then I took my sister's Debutant gown, ... and I remember it was midnight blue organdie over pink taffeta. It was pretty, pretty, pretty, my mother had made it. And then I slipped into my mother's bedroom slippers and I put on a big blue hat over on top and oh yes, a little hand bag, a little plastic, nasty hand bag and a coal-pot fan. ... And I walked into town in Jouvay. Crowds of people. I did this, I don't know why. I don't know what fun I was supposed to have, but it is only many years later that I think I am able to verbalise what in fact was happening. In that Jouvay, this little spirit of a creature was totally, I could cry when I say this, was totally liberated of race, he was no colour, totally liberated of gender, although he was dress-up as a lady nobody knew what was underneath and totally liberated of age. He could have been six or sixty-six. It was a liberation of the spirit, out of which comes the expression alive since then hardly used now "mas', mas', I know yuh!" nobody, nobody knew me.

And this little spirit, at the corner of Park and Frederick Street saw on the sidewalk Mr Gopaul and his wife and his girl children lining up to watch the Monday morning Jouvay in the city of Port of Spain. Well, Mr Gopaul was the little boy's Mathematics master. And who tell Mr Gopaul three weeks before to give the little boy bad marks. Sweetheart, the little Dame Lorraine went up to Mr Gopaul and berate him "who is this lady, he on di street here dis early Jouvay morning when he was by me all last night" kindda talk, kindda talk, kindda talk. Well I was worse, when it come to virago, I was worse than a whole band of JabMolassie. Mr Gopaul slip into the crowd like a letter does slip into an envelope. Mr Gopaul disappear. In

front of he wife and he girl chile I make Mr Gopaul feel so. Perhaps over the years, in my mind, I exaggerate my little victory that morning, but in truth and in fact that common place little Dame Lorraine perhaps imprinted on me something that I have tried to share in my work as an artist in the Mas' for the rest of my life: empowerment and transformation.²³⁰

Minshall's highly engaging remembering of this childhood experience within the Jouvay highlights three interesting points: 1) Making his own costume. This type of masquerade was concerned with homemade rather than bought materials.

The 'homemade' feature is not restricted to Minshall's account, but rather a very prominent component of the early Jouvay celebrations. Minshall stated that his costume "...didn't cost ... anything except the effort."

2) The second interesting feature is way in which wearing the costume 'liberated' him from race, gender and age. This was due to the form of masking that he undertook. I would like to suggest that the feelings of 'liberation' within the context of the Carnival costume/mask, can be directly linked to the ways in which the costume facilitates a specific kind of play. Minshall continues:

Nobody told me, I did this all. Nobody was there saying 'well why don't you do this.' I knew what I had to do. I had to completely cover me. I was disappearing the little boy who went to QRC for the rest of the year. The little boy, there was no mummy anymore, there was no daddy, I was going out there into this adventure on my own. And in that encounter with Mr Gopaul, my audience were all the people on the street around us. And in the midst of it, god, talk about empowerment!

3) As an extension of the second point, the third interesting feature is the way in which, through that mask, he was allowed to deal with a personal circumstance. That is, Minshall's play of berating his Mathematics master (within the guise of the homemade masked character) aided a reversal of power and being able to "make Mr Gopaul feel so". Although the meeting with Mr Gopaul occurred by

²³⁰ Interview with Peter Minshal 02.2008, Trinidad.

chance, this mask play is reminiscent of early Carnival encounters where stickfighters would use the space to settle old scores. Bringing these insights to the *Mama dat is Mas'* project, I would argue that in extracting performance attributes in an attempt to utilize them within art-making or art presentation, the first practical step involved the making of a mask that would potentially facilitate a Carnival play. As the project developed it became more apparent that mas', rather than being distinct from Carnival, may be considered as an activity that can result in Carnival. That is to say, Carnival is a mas' activity, a manifestation of mas'.

Mama dat is Mas' posed two questions. The first was: Can recognizable mas' performance elements be utilized within art making/presentation within the diaspora? This question was initially explored via the information provided by my research in the previous chapter on artists working with mas'/Carnival concepts. The process and experiments suggest that identifiable mas' elements can certainly be utilized within art space contexts. Within the *Mama dat is Mas'* project this was evident from the use of various forms of masking and the re-interpretations of various Carnival movements. The second question was whether mas' elements within an art space context can produce similar empowering, re-possession effects as those found within mas'. My findings here were more complicated. In order to explore this question I need to return to the issues raised by street Carnival in the diasporic context discussed in Chapter Three, "Towards a Concept of Mas'". According to the responses from revellers involved in the Notting Hill Carnival, the empowering effects of a mas' experience are directly transferrable. This transference of the effects can be connected to the ways in which the Carnival was introduced to the space, coming

out of a desire to motivate and empower Caribbean immigrants after the 1958 Race Riots in Notting Hill. The Cardiff Carnival was introduced to the community differently.

As shown in the previous chapter, some of the revellers within the Cardiff Carnival engage with Carnival as a celebration of 'something', not necessarily knowing what the roots of the event are and see it as an opportunity to 'show-off'. As a holistic event, including the 3 weeks of making costumes, the Cardiff Carnival reaches individuals in different ways and fosters an environment that is about joy and sharing. In my own experience as a performer within that space, I found that the emphasis of my play remained much more of a show, a performance *for* an audience rather than shifting between inward and outward moments. This may have to do with the context of the Cardiff Carnival's birth as well as the fact that the parade route is a relatively short one in comparison to that of the Notting Hill Carnival and the Trinidad Carnival. The transposed Trinidad Carnival inherently undergoes transformation. For the art project, the idea was not about transferring a Carnival, but transferring and utilizing a *mas' concept*. The question of whether *mas'* elements within an art space context can produce similar empowering, re-possession effects as those found within *mas'* needed to consider what concept of *mas'* we were utilizing.

In the process of working with the other artists on the *Mama dat is Mas'* project, I had difficulty drawing connections between two concepts of *mas'*. The first is the kind of *mas'* experience that is about character-*mas'*, ole time masquerade with an individual story, home-made as in Lovelace's *Dragon Can't Dance*, my cAnfAs character and the traditional Jouvay characters in the experiences of people like Minshall. The second issue that arose was how to

draw on the kind of mas' experience that is still, if only subconsciously, concerned with an individual story, but where the emphasis is on play as in the exertion of energy, the repetitive jumping up and down, the chippin', the winin' that eventually (potentially) leads to an altered state of consciousness. In the Caribbean context the link between those two types of mas' play is connected to the located notion of creativity, that is what the individual brings to the tradition and the ways in which the individual responds within the context. This raises a number of issues when transposed to the diasporic performance context. These include what happens to the moment of transition and potent self-empowerment within a diasporic public space. Does the relationship in a mas' experience between costume and play shift?

A mas' experience outside of the direct Carnival context exists in scenarios such as those that warrant such statements as 's/he make ah mas' in de place!' On 22nd May 2013, political editor Ria Taitt wrote an article in the *Trinidad Express* newspaper which began as follows:

The Prime Minister made mas as she wound up the debate on the no-confidence motion yesterday, with the expected outcome of a resounding defeat of Opposition Leader Dr Keith Rowley's motion of no confidence in her Government. The vote was 26 against, none in favour.²³¹

This 'making mas' sentiment is usually (but not exclusively) expressed by an onlooker, observing an activity by another, who may be perceived as being engaged in some kind of situation/behaviour/action that is outside of the everyday/normal/usual in some shape or form. Within such scenarios it seems that the mas' is identifiable by those who are placed as onlookers (and raises issues of the role of the spectator in facilitating and validating the spectacle of

²³¹ R. Taitt, 'Email Crash', in *Trinidad Express Newspaper National News of Trinidad and Tobago*, 22.05.2013 Originally printed at <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/E-mail-Crash-208596391.html>.

performance, which are also part of Carnival in the Caribbean). The fact that mas' scenarios can be identified outside of the Carnival strengthens the notion that: 1) Carnival is imbedded in the Trinidadian vernacular and has become part of the everyday, and that: 2) In support of my research questions, mas' as it can be recognized outside of Carnival, contains elements that can be reproduced within other, non-Carnival spaces. As again Lovelace's Aldrick and Fisheye recall:

I can't say they jail me for nутten; we play ah mas', eh? We really play a mas'. We really had them frighten. We had them wondering if we was going to shoot down the town or what. We really play ah mas', eh Aldrick? You couldn't play a better dragon.²³²

On reflection, Fisheye saw their actions of revolt and protest as "ah mas'", an activity that was outside of the everyday, one that drew attention to themselves by forging visibility. Fisheye's statement also connotes the presence of the viewer/spectator as he says: "we had *them* wondering" (my emphasis). Aldrick and Fisheye's mas' can be considered as playing with similar dynamics to that of mas' play within the Carnival environment. In some respects costume/mask and play go hand in hand, since the mask (in whatever form from a 10 foot costume, to horns and a tail, to a bejewelled bikini and in the case of Aldrick and Fisheye: guns and a stolen jeep) enables the play. Aldrick and Fisheye's mas' action not only drew attention to their 'making mas' in di place' activity but also drew attention to the broader context of their state of existence that drove them to perform such a manifestation of mas'. My research suggests that the intensity of the type of play that is made manifest is in part, affected by the pre-Carnival body, the state of the individual before entering the Carnival space. The masking and the boundaries of the event itself are the permission tags, the means through

²³² E. Lovelace. *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Persea Books Inc, New York 1979), p. 186.

which the participants' play can be made visible. I propose that, as suggested earlier, a mas' performance that considers the impact of the pre-Carnival body, can be considered as a performance of *re-action*. That is, the mas' performance can be a play that works with pre-Carnival anxieties/ issues as in the following examples: young Minshall as the Dame Lorraine who berates his Mathematics master, actor Camille Quamina and her performance that requires no director or script and Marcus Waldron who finds the opportunity in Jouvay to be what he wants to be, as he states: "in everyday life, I have to wear many different hats for many different people."

Within an art context, mas' is something artists (particularly Caribbean diasporic artists) already engage with, but this engagement takes different forms. The mas' elements that my collaborators and I identified through our collaboration are potentially transferable to different artists working with mas'-like manifestations. However, since there is no specific formula for working with mas' in art, it is likely that like Carnival – where the mas' experience means different things for different people – mas' in art will also be different for different people. Our *Mama dat is Mas'* template was about attempting to represent a moment for the players and hopefully to some extent for the audience, that can engender an experience of cathartic-restitution using some identifiable mas' elements within the framework of the art space. Such work has to be honest and although it took the form of a presentation, we were wary of it becoming a 'show'. We agreed on an approach through ritual combined with an element of fun, the manifestation of an activity that is concerned with costume in play.

The phrase 'mama dat is mas'!' said within the Carnival context is often an affirmative statement. It is a play that is recognizable to the onlooker. In an interview that I conducted with producer Michael Philips he stated that:

When somebody says 'dat is mas' sometimes, it's a figure of speech so that it might not be that they identify the presentation as what mas' should be. It might not be that, it is a figure of speech 'that is mas'!' It's an affirmation. So in other words, it's like applause²³³.

Philips' statement suggests an understanding of mas' as a process producing an affirmative condition or state of being. This affirmative mas' condition is connected to the mask/costume and the convincing or visceral play of it. The player is involved in a complex set of dynamics concerned with masking and the play of the mask. Masking in this context is not necessarily preoccupied with a facemask in the traditional sense, as identified earlier, but certainly with some form of costume or adornment. Although I suggested previously that the significance of the costume was less important and that the mas' was essentially about the weightier 'play', I think that the costume still has an integral role to play in the visual conception of 'ah mas'. I would emphasize that the costume's resonance is not necessarily in extravagance in terms of size or expense. It can be charcoal and hot pepper, as in Amaru Chatawa's recollection of Monkey Mas' (see interview samples on BLOG mamadatsmas.blogspot.com), it may take the form of a traditional Sailor Mas' with talcum powder, it may be mud or be made manifest in the form of my cAnfAs. What perhaps is the essential feature is that the costume or mask acts as a vehicle that enables a potential play of mas'. I am cautious to add that the potential mas' play is not always concerned with the playing-out of the character of the costume – as in the convenient example of a

²³³ Interview with Michael Philips 02.2010, Trinidad.

butterfly costume with the reveller pretending to be a butterfly. The potential mas' play acts on a different level, a sort of sub-space, so that even if the reveller is involved in the play of pretending to be a butterfly, what ensues, in the process of the play is a series of actions or rather reactions related to the player, the reveller and the pre-Carnival body and emotions.

Some caution is needed here. Although I think that mas' situations can often be observed from the outside, I would also acknowledge that within performance in the Carnival, a mas' situation can be a deeply personal, inward activity not visible to the audience, as in my own experience with Jouvay. I am also reminded of Danticat's text *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* in which she states:

At last my body is a tiny fragment of a much larger being. I am part of a group possession, a massive stream of joy. I feel like I am twirling around a maypole, and going much too fast, and cannot stop. My head is spinning, but I don't care. There is nothing that seems to matter as much as following the curve of the other bodies pressed against mine. In that brief space and time, the carnival offers all the paradoxical elements I am craving: anonymity, jubilant community, and belonging.²³⁴

Mas' moments are precisely moments. They are not permanent states. They do not just happen as soon as the costume or mask is donned and although there may be conscious and deliberate actions that help to move the reveller towards an altered state of consciousness or an ecstatic state, the mas' moments are not under the performer's control. This is where notions of giving-in, freeing-up and letting-go come in to play.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, mas' can be used to describe a type of behaviour outside of the Carnival context. In such scenarios the mas' behaviour

²³⁴ E. Danticat, *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (Vintage, Great Britain, 2004), p. 147.

is usually identifiable by the onlooker. The main differences between the mas' scenario outside of Carnival and that within the Carnival environment are perhaps the following: 1) As suggested by Amaru Chatawa during the project's conversations, the mas' player, the person doing the play/action outside of the Carnival context is not necessarily aware that his/her actions or reactions are mas'-like. As a result of this, there is a dislocation between perceived intentions and observable actions. 2) The mas' player therefore, may not be inclined to maximize the eventual feelings of empowerment that often accompany mas' play during or after the event. This second notion can be disputed. It may be argued by someone proficient in theories related to 'commesse'²³⁵ and bacchanal that the actions of making a mas' outside of Carnival actually do contain similar empowering effects to those experienced within the Carnival environment. The main issue here is that Carnival is very much a part of Trinidadian's everyday language. Drawing on the mas' performance within the Trinidad Carnival, a look at the ways in which the word **mas'** can be used outside of that context serves to facilitate the identification of intrinsic elements of a mas' play make up that can contribute to the re-presentation of mas' within in art space.

Origins of the Project

In conversation, my youngest sister (21.08.2012) asked in relation to the *Mama dat is Mas'* project whether I was intending to develop a new character that could be unveiled at a Carnival, one that was concerned with both Trinidad and Wales. This idea excited me, although I felt that the project was more concerned with

²³⁵ Commesse – Confusion associated with arguments, Wheeling and dealing. Gossip and slander. J. Mendes, *Cote ci Cote la: Trinidad and Tobago Dictionary* (New Millennium, 2003), p. 46.

process and that its focus was on mas' outside of the Carnival context.

Nevertheless, my sister's timing was impeccable and between the hours of 1am-4am that night, I began imagining the visual process for what this *Mama dat is Mas'* was to be about. One of the things that I was having difficulty honing was the notion of the mas' of dressing, the 'ole' time mas' as opposed to the notion of the exertion of energy. All three of the collaborators, when it came to a concept of mas' seemed excited by the dressing option; Phil Babot as an Eastern European lady, Amaru Chatawa and the 'bom-bom-bare' and June Campbell-Davies with her Victorian Old Lady. Prompted by my sister's questioning, I became convinced that the project needed development in 2 main areas: 1) The setting up of a space, the parameters for the event and 2) the finding of our characters based on our own personal stories. June spoke about feelings of invisibility and wanting to blend-in during her growing up years in London and early days in Wales. The following extract is from our conversations during the *Mama dat is Mas'*

individual sessions:

When I ended up living here, ... I seemed to go right back to how I was when I was in London... I just became very quiet. So then I suddenly felt very displaced. ... In fact it was like you are invisible and it was really quite strange. I suddenly thought "I think they don't see me" ... You just kind of blend in but blend in and you become invisible again. So that was quite shocking really because it was even more different from London where even though you are black and you can blend in or you can challenge or somebody looks at you as if to say 'what are you doing here?' you can stand up and be boldfaced and stare them back, as if the 'staring back' would be to say "what are you staring at?" And then they would move their gaze away and then you can carry on. Whereas coming to Wales it was a case of, people *don't* stare at you, so you're not there ... In order to fit in I had two things to do, one was to blend in with how I spoke ... I just noticed that I stood out more the way that I spoke or people felt intimidated by how I spoke because they felt maybe they didn't speak properly. And the other thing was that you're invisible. They're not really interested. They're interested but not interested. Or you start explaining and you've lost their attention so you became invisible. So that was a bit

of a strange one. And the only time things will come to life is if I was performing or if I was dancing.

June's account of her feelings of displacement and invisibility seemed fertile ground for the building of a mas' character, the play of which would depend on June's own personal initiative. The making of a mas' was essentially to be about the finding of a form of individual agency. The act of playing a character versus the act of ecstatic exertion of energy, both inexplicably engage with similar empowering results, as the act of 'losing oneself' through mask or dance potentially allows for a new kind of necessary visibility.

10 Intense Days: the Making of a Ritual (Interpretation)

Only theatre (music, dance) is art in the strict sense. Individuals engaged in ritual, games, or sports must conform to the rules which separate these activities from "real life." ... I think these activities are the social counterparts to individual fantasy. Thus their social function is to stand apart from ordinary life, both idealizing it (in these activities people play by the rules) and criticizing it (why can't *all* life be a game?).²³⁶

The *Mama dat is Mas'* experiment demanded both the making of a space that permits and the making of a personal mask character. These were deliberate choices based on the interviews and conversations that took place prior to our ten intense days of collaborative work. (Please see BLOG mamadatsmas@blogspot.com). We were using Carnival or more specifically **mas'** as a language, and as this mas' can be identified in different visual forms and can mean different things for different people, we made specific choices which are not in any way the only options within the vastness of the Carnival language.

²³⁶ R. Schechner. *Performance Theory*, (Routledge Classics London, New York, 2003), p. 14

The notion of liminal spaces seemed to play a vital part in our musings that contributed to the making of a mas' ritual. As suggested by the citation from Richard Schechner at the beginning of this section, the making of our mas' ritual involved very deliberate stations or demarcated areas, and stimulants, which in turn had specific rules. We utilized elements of Carnival such as masking, repetitive music, movement, characterization and symbolized the repeated cyclical nature of Carnival as a seasonal ritual. We decided to make a ritual space based directly on specific elements of Trinidad Carnival and on moments of memory described by some of the collaborators. The main stations included: 1) Washing Station, 2) Shrine, 3) Transformation, 4) Drumming, 5) Gayelle, 6) Threshold and 7) Observation.

The Washing Station was based on the idea of ritual cleansing before entering the space, directly connected to Amaru Chatawa's recollection of *Nine Mornings* celebrated in St Vincent nine days before Christmas and the Jonkannu masquerade in which members of the community go to the beach to wash themselves as an action of cleansing in preparation for the big event. The Shrine Station was a space for the sharing of communal drink and food (red rum, rum-punch, red wine, red grapes, strawberries), a gathering space. Crucially, the Shrine was also our main source of light. The colours we chose were red, black and white. They were specifically relevant to one of the collaborators Phil Babot, for whom his understanding of black and white in Zen aesthetics was the biggest visual influence on his art-work. They represented light and dark, day and night while the red symbolized lifeblood. These colours are also connected to the Trinidad flag and ideas of Eshu the trickster in Orisha mythology, who is agent of transformation and guardian of the liminal spaces, the crossroads, all of which

can be linked to ideas of Carnival symbolism. We were also very interested in the natural elements and included water (in the washing bowl at the Washing Station) and fire (with lit candles and flambeaux) throughout the space.

Continuing with the notion of liminality, we chose to perform at sunset, the change from light to dark. On the wall behind the Shrine Station was a chalk drawing. The image was replicated from a petroglyph on a rock in Indian Bay, St Vincent. The petroglyph chipped out on stone is thousands of years old and probably done by the indigenous Amerindians. Amaru Chatawa had this to say about the image:

And the drawing on this rock is mas', totally mas'. Because ... it's somebody carrying a big standard with the sun on it and it's a woman in a big skirt. It's just mas' ... The man who sat down and drew that, he just saw the march of time, the sun, like the sun goddess going through the sky carrying the sun. It's just like mas'.

This was the main reason for us including it in the project as a central motif. The Transformation Station seemed the most obvious of spaces for inclusion as the space where the masks are placed or removed, the space that initiates the first visual change from the everyday to an 'other'. The Drumming Station was the space for the music, the rhythm as the constant underbelly of the ritual that stimulates and potentially aids the movement between conscious spaces. The Gayelle was the space created out of talcum powder, another significant material within the Trinidad Carnival for characters such as the traditional and Fancy Sailor mas' and within the expression 'yuh cyar play mas' and 'fraid powder' (you cannot partake in the masquerade and be afraid of the consequences). The Gayelle was created as a ritual space for the recognition of current state and the active movement into another through performance, through repetition of movement. The Threshold was the space between the spaces, the step that leads

down into the Observation area, acting as a space for display and finally, the Observation Station as a space for viewing.



Mama dat is Mas', the Shrine Station. Image by John Collingswood

Each of these stations/spaces was intended to create the parameters of the world within which our characters existed. The rules of our ritual meant that nothing was placed within the space frivolously. Objects had purpose, held symbolism and our character journeys had intent. Within the confines of that context, the experimental journey was about trying to unravel the strands of Carnival ritual, personal narrative and cultural space as they converge into a mas' performance, providing a space for cathartic-restitution and creative realization (re-possession).

I would like to explain the idea of 'displacement' with regards to engagement in the above spaces. Feelings of displacement are part of our/my current condition. The idea of displacement is inherent within the ways in which I choose to perform and is manifested in my reactions to stimulus. This might be

expressed as follows: I am unsettled, I want to dance, leave me alone, this is my time now. So that, when considering concepts like Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* and the liminal stage that eventually leads to a permanent or temporary change for the novice before his/her re-integration into society,²³⁷ the *feelings* of displacement are what can be temporarily addressed through the mas' ritual performance as a liminal/liminoid space. The displacement is a subtext that fuels the action and is dealt with not by a permanent change in the situation within which that subtext was birthed but rather through being able to deal with its effects through a performance/play that is scripted by ones' self and informed by one's own narrative. The stations create the parameters for the event but the performing body is the corporal medium addressing anxieties through the opportunity created for performance play.

The Characters

Phil Babot – The Lady (Trickster/ Eshu). Phil Babot chose to develop a character that was based on a carnivalesque idea of reversal, transgression and existing on the threshold of not being one thing or the other. His character was a woman, he spoke gibberish, walked backwards and played with string as a symbolic material that demarcated and drew lines in space. Phil's choice of character emerged from his shamanic research and personal experiences with performances from indigenous cultures.

Amaru Chatawa – The Maker (salesman of masks and dreams). Amaru Chatawa worked with creating the masks. His character came out of wanting to

²³⁷ V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (PAJ Publications, New York 1982), p. 26.

hold on to that aspect of himself as 'maker', combined with a Carnival play that was connected to characters within Ole Mas' (discussed in chapter One, *History of the Trinidad Carnival* pp. 28-32.). His character journey began in full costume and gradually stripped layers away, revealing rather than concealing the player. Amaru's character blew the Conch Shell, used voice in rhyme, drank rum punch and 'sold' masks from a briefcase. His movements were 'everyday' rather than 'stylized' and connected with a play based on interaction and engagement with the audience.

June Campbell-Davies – The Oshun (reflection/visible/invisible). June Campbell-Davies is a dancer and choreographer. June looked specifically at the Orisha deity Oshun, the goddess of the river, at the concept of reflection and connected these to her own experiences of visibility and invisibility. She also played with the idea of beauty and youth versus agedness. June's character was movement-based. She rolled on the floor, danced to the drums, hid in corners, interacted with the audience and found moments to bring all the characters together.

Adeola Dewis – Child of Damballa (artist connected to rope/umbilical cord/long things). My character came out of ideas surrounding being a mother and an artist. Damballa is the snake deity in Vodou mythology linked to the concept of connecting worlds, the umbilical cord and protector of children. My character used chalk on the floor to draw simple glyphs that continued the idea of lines and womb. My character movements included squatting, walking and the Carnival movements of chipping, winin' and jumping.



Mama dat is Mas', performance still 01. Image by Catriona Abuneke

Each character, with its unique traits and tasks, would be transformed within the space. A major part of the intention of the *Mama dat is Mas'* performance was that the play had to be related to whatever was happening at the present, the performer in the present influenced by the audience, the music, the space and the time of day. The reactions could not be scripted and what made the performance experimental and distinct from our previous work was specifically that challenge of being able to connect with both the individual self and the masked character and to create or rather to *allow* a performance that was a reaction to the present. The Gayelle as the space created out of talcum powder was a facilitative space within which the characters could allow themselves to be transformed through repetitive jumping movement. It was created as a sacred space, as suggested earlier, and it held ropes that were bound together, hanging from the ceiling resting on the floor. The characters within that space together

encouraged collective energy sharing, rejuvenation and further transformation.



Mama dat is Mas', performance still 02. Image by Catriona Abuneke

Reflections: My Mas' Ritual Experience

He did not see himself as playing the clown. He felt he *was* the clown. And the scene was not a play. It was life. And the imaginary characters were flesh and blood. It was only now, with the show finished, and the heat of performance cooled down, that the full reality of the day came to him again.²³⁸

Mama dat is Mas' was an attempt to recapture a liberating aspect of Carnival performance, outside of the specific Carnival season and context. Within ritual contexts, that liberating aspect might be accredited to an altered state of consciousness. With specific reference to Carnival, I have been calling these potential altered states **mas' moments**. They involve moments in which the reveller temporarily loses a sense of the crowd, other revellers and becomes immersed in his/her own activity. Phil Babot describes his terms for such

²³⁸ M. Anthony, *King of the Masquerade* (Ian Randle Publishers, Jamaica, 2007), p. 80.

processes: the Outer-performance Consciousness and the Inner-performance Consciousness.

In my research I have actually coined two original bits of research. I believe there is something, what I call Outer-performance Consciousness and Inner-performance Consciousness ... Outer-performance Consciousness is when you're involved in a performance, when you are performing in front of an audience, you're aware that you are performing and that you're aware that you're in front of an audience. And then Inner-performance Consciousness is where you are performing and you're in front of an audience and then all of a sudden and it might only be very brief, a split second even ... you're no longer aware that you are creating a performance. Actors of course will experience this, dancers have experienced it and sometimes it can be more protracted and audiences become aware of it.

Babot observes that these (mas') moments can be triggered by exhaustion, repetition of movement, repetition of sound or constant music and are common to performances in general, including ritual, performance arts and Carnival environments, albeit recognized by differing names. The consequence of this potential altered state if triggered by exertion of energy, is cathartic/ healing through the uninhibited release of energy and the release of 'happy hormones' called endorphins. In relation to feelings of displacement, mas' moments and their potential resulting cathartic effect can have a momentary positive self-empowering result. Mas' moments involve the consideration of the liminal, moving between the limbo of conscious and unconscious states of self-awareness.

During the collaboration days we identified numerous types of mas' scenarios with an equal amount of potential, resulting in empowering effects involving mainly questions surrounding the mask and the play of the mask as reaction. The *reaction concept* is connected both to the state of the individual masquerader on entering the performance space, bearing the weight of the

anxieties of previous events leading up to this time, and to the external stimulus at specific moments during the Carnival play, including interactions with the spectators and interactions with other revellers. My mas' character for this project opted for the forging of an altered state of consciousness, thrusting myself into movement, forcing a situation in which I could lose sense of my surroundings, momentarily and through those actions of repetitive movement, inhabit a 'freedom space', coming out of it through the actions of release, with feelings of liberation. I utilized three specific Trinidad Carnival movements within my mas' play: 1) the wine, 2) the jump and 3) the chip. My character/mask tasks included enacting those movements and tracing journeys through mark-making with chalk during the performance time. I was essentially interested in the dynamic of play between set character tasks and the effect of the reactive performance based on the pre-Carnival anxieties of the 'me' beneath the mask.

Richard Schechner has looked at the concept of performance time in relation to the performative genres of play, games, sports, theatre and ritual and considers three variations: 1) Event time, when the performance has a certain amount of sequences to be completed regardless of how long the enactment of these sequences take; 2) Set time, based on activities that are given a specific time on the clock within which to be enacted and 3) Symbolic time, as seen in make-believe play or where time is "considered differently, as in Christian notions of "the end of time," the Aborigine "Dreamtime," or Zen's goal of the "ever present."²³⁹ Our performance was choreographed cyclically with rotations that could repeat themselves. Essentially it was one that could have been

²³⁹ Schechner. *Performance Theory*, p. 8.

durational and exist within what Schechner has called the *Event* time. This refers to the constant sound we were dependent on of the rhythm of the drums, to keep us going. The drummers, too, were enacting a ritual as they were directed to play until they were exhausted. In that sense the drummers acted as the 'time on the clock' and made the performance play one that engaged with *Set* time. The performance lasted for about 45 minutes. I underwent a process that was aimed at achieving a *mas'* moment. I was aware that the time was limited and that if I wanted to achieve such moments I had to increase my experience of intensity within moments of repetition. Often within those moments, I found that I had my eyes closed. I experienced two deep *mas'* moments within the Gayelle and two shorter ones at the Washing Station and at the corner of the Threshold Station respectively. These were directly related to repetitive movements and the vibrancy of the drumbeats. The drummers stopped drumming during my second intense *mas'* moment. I was not ready for the experience to end and was somewhat jolted out of my *mas'* moment. I walked out of the performance space and isolated myself for a short while. Removing my mask I underwent deep emotional anxiety and began crying, initially being unable to deal with what I was experiencing. After collecting myself, with a hug from my three year old and warm words from my husband, I returned to the performance space. The drummers had started back playing an inclusive groove. The performance was over. With such a deeply personal journey, I had no concept of how the experimental performance was received and having completed the initial aspect of my experiment, I became very aware of the audience, the people looking on, the viewer, the participant. Our audience was thrown into a ritual *mas'* performance, stuffed full of symbolism and microcosms of an experience they

may not have known anything about. And for those that did know, what were their impressions?

The Audience

Unless the performer is prepared to be transformed himself, unless the performer is transformed, there is no hope of any audience member becoming transformed by the performance. It is a completely two way symbiotic process.²⁴⁰

I had experienced mas' moments during my performance. According to the verbal feedback I received, some audience members were aware of the honesty of those moments. There were about 3 main types of basic responses to the *Mama dat is Mas'* experimental performance and these were always distinct, some included a combination of two or three of the following reactions:

- 1) Those that were excited by the experience
- 2) Those that were uncertain and slightly at unease by certain aspects
- 3) Those that experienced loss of interest

I consider the first two responses to be positive reactions, in terms of the intention of the work. "This is my dream!" said one audience member of Polish Eastern European decent. He held on to a mask and excitedly absorbed the performance as Amaru Chatawa's character chanted, "Express yourself!" The third reaction is regrettable but may be directly linked to the ambiguous position in which the audience is often placed where they are not sure what they are allowed to do, whether they have permission to leave or a duty to stay, permission to become involved or a duty to observe. In my own experience quite recently as an audience member, when confronted by that uncertainty of 'how to

²⁴⁰ Phil Babot on speaking with performance artist Alistair McLennan about transformation in performance and evoking catharsis.

be', I instantly put myself in a position of the critic. I often experience a conflict between wanting to open myself to the work, or production for what it is and feeling the need to be critical towards it. Every audience member enters the space with baggage, we are not clean slates and often we come with expectations. These expectations are often perpetuated by the specific forms of advertising implored to publicize the work as well as a desire to experience something amazing on some level. The varying forms of digital media have greatly impacted on the ways in which individuals react to stimuli and are able to achieve immense responses through the portrayal of incredible scenarios, painful realities and wondrous fantasy. Within the art world, the audience can be enthusiastic and ready to go on a journey with the artwork, but essentially, even this audience is made up of individuals and it is the individuality of experiences that often informs their varied responses. Perhaps the most important feature when considering the audience as a performer/artist is linked to the notion of being true to your intent and as Phil Babot iterated, allowing yourself to be transformed. Another factor when considering the question of the response of the audience to this particular project is connected to the way in which our experimental performance evolved into two distinct phases. The first stage was highly ritualized and clear, full of outward actions that were geared towards preparing the space. The second stage was more improvisational, geared towards the development of the individual characters, concentrating on the mask and the masker. In the light of those 2 phases, the audience's role would have been likely to be more clear-cut at the first stage and ambiguous at the second.

One of the challenges faced by performance artists seems to be the question of how much you cater for the expectations of the audience and how much you do what you inherently want to do. I wanted no literature or explanations, I wanted activity that only those around that specific character could experience, enticed by the notion of disconcertedness and people needing to 'find their place within the space'. I did not want it to be a comfortable, spoon-fed event. Honest to those desires, we achieved that, perhaps at the expense of sustaining the enthusiasm of some of the audience members.

One of the most useful critical bits of information given in response to the experimental performance of *Mama dat is Mas'* came from Trinidadian vocalist, artist, performer Mary-Anne Roberts. Some of the concerns Roberts raised were directly linked to aspects of the performance ritual that I had initially intended to include but that got lost in the process of the making of the work, such as introducing the audience to the space within which there was an environment that was reminiscent of a fete/party rather than an exhibition environment. I wanted to maximize the idea of there being no clear boundary between audience and performer and intended to steer away from the notion of presenting a 'show'. Nevertheless, the way in which the audience members were allocated no designated viewing space and the way in which they had the activity moving between and around them succeeded in taking away from the formal notion of traditional, comfortable viewing. This format also had a positive effect on the performers. Collaborator Phil Babot mentions during our feedback session the following statement:

I must admit, I'm sure you must have all felt it as I did, that having the audience in such close proximity, really raised my energy level as a performer and really made me feel a connection there. Vital I think.

Roberts was very excited by the work but felt that from the viewer's perspective, we successfully extracted elements of the Carnival and did nothing with the ingredients. Below I have listed a few of Roberts' other main points to be discussed in relation to my research question (How the performances present within the Trinidad Carnival [mas'] are relevant to art-making in the diasporic art space?):

- 1) Facilitate their participation, not just do your performance. ... Believe in the material.
- 2) What journeys are you taking the characters on individually and collectively and do you want to take the audience with you?
- 3) Carnival is about balancing between everything so you get your life and death, light and darkness, stillness and quiet, don't forget the quiet. It's human music into cosmic music. To me the thing about Carnival is that you do this very, very physical thing and you do it to the degree that you can't do it no more and your spirit carries on doing it. So it's from the physical into the cosmic.
- 4) I think you need to bring the processional element. Move the audience using procession. Each character has their band.
- 5) Creating that balance of what you want to say and how much the audience is going to participate ... Audience needed to be given permission to dance.

Roberts' first comment addresses a question of audience participation. She felt that we needed to be confident in the material in order to be confident enough to allow the audience to join in the performance. As an initial experiment we made some choices. These choices envisioned audience participation but had not anticipated to what degree or extent they would want to be involved. I considered the work of participatory viewing, of observation to be the 'role' of the audience and for some that was enough. For others we perhaps needed to take them on a journey with us. The main aim of my performance was a selfish one. I was interested in connecting to a performance feeling, a mas' moment in order to see the effects of that in dealing with my own anxieties and current

displacements within this environment. Living in Cardiff as a Caribbean woman, artist, wife and mother of three, I undergo several forms of anxieties based on notions of conflicts between duty and desire, what I want to do and what I feel that I have to do. Of Carnival, revellers speak about being who they want to be²⁴¹ and being in charge of their own narrative.²⁴² The Carnival play can be about agency and it can also be about momentary release of anxiety through movement. The selfish approach I undertook was for me, a necessary starting point for this particular phase of the experiment.

Roberts' second comment is a question of our character journey and a consideration of whether we want the audience to go on the journey with us. I think that clarity in terms of our journey is important and that if there is that clarity, the audience will inevitably be a part of it. This clarity may be enhanced through text and forms of supporting literature. As an individual character, it would have been beneficial to have the specific attention of a specialized group during my journey. I think that, as suggested by Roberts, clarity in terms of the audience role/participation/journey is essential and finding ways of manifesting such clarity will be given more prominent consideration within future experimental projects.

The description of Carnival as being between and betwixt is the crux of Roberts' third comment. She points to the music and refers to transformation through exhaustion, the physical into the cosmic. I am in full agreement with this statement and will reiterate that this *Mama dat is Mas'* performance will potentially benefit from being a durational performance. With time, clarity of

²⁴¹ Interview with Marcus Waldron, 03.2011, Trinidad.

²⁴² Interview with Camille Quamina, 03.2011, Trinidad.

rotations and repetitions can be established and the journey to exhaustion can be more impactful.

Roberts' fourth point was: "Move the audience using procession." I am excited by the prospect of an aspect of processional encounters within the artwork but I do not think that it is an essential element when considering the space as a ritual space. A look at the origins of the Notting Hill Carnival elucidates Roberts' point that the processional element is significant in the consideration of what constitutes a Carnival. In the BBC Radio 4 program *Stories from Notting Hill*²⁴³ presented by Kwame Kwei-Armah there was a discussion about the beginnings of the first Caribbean influenced Carnival in London. The earliest visual manifestation of an activity that involved Carnival elements was in the 1950's. Lecturer and Carnival archivist Ruth Tompsett stated:

Carnival has many beginnings, so if we look at the 1950 when the West Indies won against the English team at cricket, wow, what follows is that you have calypsonians leading a parade round the grounds, steelband is playing, they come out of the grounds, they just go into the streets. We had something which we could see there is a street event with a lot of the elements of Carnival.

After the 1958 race riots in Notting Hill, Civil Rights Activist Claudia Jones (founder and editor of the *West Indian Gazette*) began an anti-racism campaign in the area. Ruth Tompsett in conversation with Kwame Kwei-Armah continues:

This remarkable woman who had been an activist in America, who had been charged with being a communist and because of her ill health had been released and was actually deported to Britain, Claudia Jones, seeing what those riots did, organized with others the original Carnival Dance in a town hall in London, with calypso, with costume, with dancing. In many ways that is a beginning of Carnival. It is affirmation. It is how people said 'we are here'.

So where is the controversy then if in your mind '59 marks the official beginning of Carnival?

²⁴³ Kwame Kwei-Armah, *Stories from Notting Hill* (BBC Radio 4.07.2012)

I think because it was indoors. It wasn't on the street and to be fair, we all know that Carnival is about street.

The concept of a Carnival that took place within a town hall removed some of that credibility of the Carnival Dance being considered a beginning of the Notting Hill Carnival for Leslie Palmer, creator of modern Notting Hill Carnival. In reference to Claudia Jones, Palmer states:

In my life with the carnival somebody should have mentioned this, or could have mentioned this or would have mentioned this. How come I never heard about this woman? And only because she was doing it in a different way, she was doing her thing in ... the town halls and so on. But I've never heard a Carnival happening (if I am going to take it literally) I've never heard a carnival happening in a town hall. I don't want to be rude. A Carnival is a thing that happens out on the street in a massive way.

Both Tompsett and Palmer speak about Carnival and the street. Procession, the moving/motion of people on the street, is a central motif in understandings of Carnival. Excerpts from *Stories from Notting Hill*²⁴⁴ continue that: "A Caribbean-style Carnival arrived on the streets of Notting Hill in 1965. The catalyst for this event was another defiant woman Rhaune Laslett-O'Brien." Rhaune's husband Jim O'Brien stated:

The procession was one day on the bank holiday and then at night in the church hall there would be old time music all one night. There was 'happenings' another night, a different thing every night for a week.

The origins of the Notting Hill Carnival have also been attributed to pan men including Russ Henderson and Sterling Betancourt, both professional musicians with a performing history that stretched back to the Festival of Britain and the first indoor Carnival. Ruth Tompsett recalls:

²⁴⁴ Kwame Kwei-Armah, *Stories from Notting Hill* (BBC Radio 04.07.2012)

The way Russ [Henderson] tells it is that standing there playing was not very exciting and was not how he and the guys [including Sterling Betancourt] were used to doing things in Trinidad and he said 'come on guys let's go down the road'. And other people have talked to me about this, how they heard the sound of pan and they simply picked up the baby or left the meal or whatever and ran out. So you had this situation where they made it all the way down to Holland Park with people coming out of their houses following and when it came back up into the Notting Hill area, it was a huge procession of people dancing, singing along, sharing this and for many people, that is a moment they feel Notting Hill Carnival was born.

For Leslie Palmer, this marks the beginning of a Caribbean-style Carnival in Notting Hill. Carnival was for Palmer about community and these processions became "a community-strengthening celebration."

As can be seen from this discussion, Carnival elements are most visible as the joyous movement of people (masked or unmasked) on the streets with music. Within the art space, procession can be interpreted in different ways and can be implemented artistically and stylistically through varying strategies. For those who engage with Carnival, there is something particularly resonant with the concept of the street, the road, the 'stomping ground'²⁴⁵. This can be seen, for example, in the work of Carnival Soca artistes Patrice Roberts and Bunji Garlin who sing about the island of Trinidad as a stomping ground and invoke the repetitive action of jumping by chanting: "stamp your name now". They sing about the activity of jumping-up on the street as a way of leaving your signature, your mark on the space. The street connotes visibility and the mas' activity on the streets reverberates with the notion of being present. The processional element suggested by Mary-Anne Roberts' fourth point, when considered in relation to the notion of the street, takes the experimental work outside of the

²⁴⁵ Patrice Roberts and Bunji Garlin *The Islands*, (2005)

four walls of the gallery but not necessarily outside of an art context as with the example of works of art like graffiti and installations and performances that respond to outdoor spaces.

The idea of utilizing Carnival elements in order to achieve mas' moments within the art space does not curtail a reflection of a processional aspect or even the idea of including the street. It raises the question of *what is an art space*. The street can be transformed into an art-space, hosting both performance art and Carnival band manifestations. Ultimately the processional aspects of mas' directly connect the audience by transforming them from viewers to active participants.

The final comment that I have included from Roberts is "Creating that balance ..." which is concerned with what I mentioned earlier in the section on 'Audience', the question of: how much a mas'-based performance should cater for the expectations of the audience rather than doing what one inherently wants to do? This is a question of the relationship between audience participation and saying/achieving what one has set out to do as an artist. Although I have already touched on this point, it is worth adding that this issue can be addressed through remounting and re-experimenting. The *Mama dat is Mas'* project was about realizing the individual expression and release through mas' moments, but could be developed further through considerations of a potential unpredictable audience input. Ideally the work ought not to be dependent on the audience to achieve mas' moments but ought to allow for the enriching of the experience through their participation.

Audience participation may be a potent aspect in addressing the second half of the research question, which is concerned with the diaspora and

displaced peoples. As a performer, I can find ways of re-possessing myself through performance and the adaptations of Carnival forms. Audience members can perhaps be introduced to a process of re-possession and liberating forms of self-expression through an invitation to participate. This participation could take the forms of writing, dancing, vocalizing and masking, but it would need to involve careful staging as not everyone is excited by the notion of being on display and perhaps importantly, those who desire or require ways of re-possessing themselves may be less inclined to do so within such a public environment, especially if they had not attended the event with that intention in mind.

While Roberts' observations have been very useful in reflecting on the project, the questions they raise can only be taken further experientially. With regards to *Mama dat is Mas'*, I think it is important to re-stage this work. might take the process of engaging with displacement and social anxiety issues through an interpretation of mas' further and begin to realize new ways of addressing self-empowerment.

Reflection: Voice of the Collaborators

Mama dat is Mas' experimental art project intended to utilize aspects of Trinidad Carnival mas' performance within an art-space to produce an aesthetic and cathartic-restitution experience. The project was the initial stage in a creative concept aimed at developing the positive effects of a mas' performance or play that might eventually contribute to addressing some of the anxiety issues that are tied up with immigrant situations and the continuous re-discoverings and

imaginings of identities within the diaspora. The initial feedback from collaborator Amaru Chatawa is transcribed as follows:

I would like to do some work on this project. I think this project seems to have something more to it. Over the years I have been to see people who use Carnival [to] try to make Carnival Theatre and some of them for me were total disasters ... I think what happened here is probably nearer to the roots of the evolution of what we come to know as Carnival or mas' ... And we seem to have a balance here tonight without taking the ritual for granted ... What we do I think is nearer to how mas' probably evolved where it didn't start with 10,000 people on the street. It started with small groups of people ... Years ago when they banned mas' in St Vincent ... they said you can't play Carnival at all and after a few years, on the Carnival morning you look up the road and you saw two people standing up there and then you go up the road and see another three people up there, you see one man here and before you know it all these people just started to trickle into the space and that becomes the mas'. So in a sense that's what I'm seeing, that it's small groups of people that create this massive thing. ... 'this year we playing, we don't care what anybody think'. That is part of the ritual of it, part of you that says regardless of what happens here, we need to do this thing. That's mas' for me...²⁴⁶

Chatawa continued that the reason these other performances that attempted to utilize Carnival elements within the theatre or art space 'failed' in his view was due to the fact that they all seemed to attempt to fit a Caribbean understanding of mas' into a Eurocentric perception or template. This relates the core of the experimental performance to the 'almost loss' concept of Earl Lovelace's essay *The Emancipation Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan* that will be discussed further in the following chapter. That is to say, if I may be permitted to generalize, Caribbean people in the diaspora or perhaps more accurately, *mas' people* (as I suspect not all immigrants of Caribbean origin desire Carnival), are aware of a kind of gap or emptiness that the leaving behind of this Carnival has produced. This awareness is connected to knowing the event viscerally and knowing viscerally what it is not. The relevance of performance then is

²⁴⁶ Interview with Amaru Chatawa 10.11.2012, Cardiff.

concerned with claiming, owning and creating/constructing visibility, activating self, mobilizing and empowering and inspiring.

June Campbell-Davies' and Phil Babot's responses to the project were also very positive. Their excitement stemmed from the unpredictability of the performance. It was not about pretending to be a character, but rather about allowing yourself to be, to play, within mask, so that the 'you' is no less relevant than the mask, but that collaboratively both can work to create an aesthetic play or performance that is in some way relevant or necessary to the initial 'you'.

Babot states:

One thing that I felt happened ... which I wasn't planning on happening at all happened to me during the performance, is that my persona really developed. I actually started to feel part of this character ... all of a sudden I was taken over by this persona and I felt it growing in layers with the different things I added to my body, the lipstick, the wig, the mask, the coat, I could feel it growing bit by bit, taking me over more and more. I got carried away, which is great!

June added:

With an audience, as a performer you're talking about it and exploring bits, and in rehearsals you're not quite there yet. As soon as you've got people there it's like you *have* to be the character otherwise you're exposed, you're fake.

The performance did not feel fake or pretentious. It felt as if everyone was honestly doing what they were doing. The project, with its three main phases: 1) the initial interview conversation phase, 2) performance phase and 3) artist talk with exhibition of documentation, created an opportunity for verbal expression, physical play and then creative reflection and sharing. The project blog has become a useful resource for future work and as a form of documentation can potentially have impact beyond the project itself for artists and creative people interested in areas such as Carnival, performance and ritual. The further

development of conversations and links to Carnival and mas' understanding continue through the online social media Facebook page. The artist collaborators and I anticipate conducting and playing with another *re-possession mas'* or *ritual art and mas'* experiment in order to begin to address some of the questions that emerged from this first step.

There is tension between the cathartic-restitution and the aesthetic aspects of this work – the initial question posed regarding re-possession and empowerment, is preoccupied with catharsis, while some of the issues that came out of the performance, revolve around the aesthetics of what the audience can engage with. Ultimately the projects to follow will aim at an approach that works for both the participants and audience members in order to foster and maximize on somewhat of a collective mas' experience by making a ritual art and mas' form accessible outside of Carnival and by constructing a vibrant form of communication that moves beyond simply the performer immersion.

Chapter FIVE: Conclusion - Project AfterWords

One's body belongs only to oneself, despite the laws governing chattel slavery in the English-speaking Caribbean, which, until 1834, allowed a person to be the 'property' of another.²⁴⁷

The latter part of Chapter Four discussed some of the practical ways in which the *Mama dat is Mas'* experimental project engaged with mas' as a template to re-present an aspect of Carnival performance within an art space. As mas' art works aim to engender similar experiences to those of Carnival revellers, it is useful to begin to conceptualize some of the ways in which liberating experiences can be accessed in mas' art works outside of the Carnival environment. In order to engage with this, I look specifically at the *how* and *why* we perform in relation to Lovelace's Emancipation-Jouvay tradition. This concluding chapter also considers the implications of the project experience of *Mama dat is Mas'* for Carnival performance. I look at some of the ways in which these findings (which include the re-interpretation of the word mas'), can potentially impact on literary discourse and on practice and performance.

In chapter Three, *Towards a Concept of Mas'*, I proposed that mas' is a performance activity that is outside of the everyday but connected to the everyday in some shape or form. This connection between the everyday and the mas' performance signals the reactive aspect of mas'. The *reaction* involves intensity in performance, the desire for release, as performative reactions to the stresses and anxieties of the everyday. The other most poignant aspect of mas' is that of re-presentation. Mas' allows for a re-presentation of self. This re-presentation can be attributed to the use of costume/mask but in essence it

²⁴⁷ R. Nettleford, *Inward Stretch Outward Reach: A Voice From The Caribbean* (The Macmillan Press Ltd, London 1993), p. 98.

follows a linear path from the *reaction* in that the presentation of an 'other' self can be a visual re-presentation, a performative one or a combination of both, where the performative re-presentation is instigated and facilitated by a visual re-presentation via a mask/costume. The art works as mas' ask: how does this journey contribute to a reaction and or re/presentation for the participant and ultimately, how has this mas' action (of reaction/re-presentation) affected the participant? From my own personal experience and from feedback collected in the *Mama dat is Mas'* project, the notion of re-presentation is often a very tangible aspect with the use of obvious masking attributes, but can also take on a more subtler manifestation through the *way* we perform. The notion of reaction lends itself to considering the question introduced at the beginning of this chapter of *how* and *why* we perform. Whereas the everyday can be symbolically represented in costume, the *reactive* mas' performance is often revealed in reflecting on how and why the re-presentations evolved and how and why they were portrayed in the manner and form they eventually took.

The *Mama dat is Mas'* project utilized both re-presentation and reaction aspects of mas' and by extension engaged with notions of public visibility, choice, displacement and empowerment through performance. *Mama dat is Mas'* was a crucial step in my practice-based research towards utilizing Caribbean folk art, ritual and popular culture within a contemporary art context. In this and the art projects that have followed from it,²⁴⁸ aspects of Carnival/masquerade/mas' have been isolated and interpreted within art making, resulting in varying processes of artistic production and outcomes. These processes have included

²⁴⁸ My mas' influenced art projects that have been conceived after the *Mama dat is Mas'* project include: *Mama-Mas': Conversations for Transformation* <http://masmama.blogspot.co.uk> and *Play Yuhself* <http://playyuhselfexp.blogspot.co.uk>.

some of those discussed in the previous chapter, such as the making of a ritual space to experience mas' moments and facilitating a public aspect to the representations. The capacity of mas' in art making to empower individuals resides in its potential for agency, an agency that allows for choice and control over self-representations. In that way, mas' in art gives voice and visibility to those who may go unheard and unseen. The control over representation or the performative ability to re-present an aspect of one's self allows the participant to address more subdued emotions and expressions and moreover, allows the participant to bring her/his own meaning to the process and outcome. In other words, both the process and the final product have their own outcomes, (although inextricably linked) and the work becomes resonant to those participants who allow themselves to be honest to the process. While the template may be provided, it is up to the participant to experience the journey on her/his own terms in order to invoke the transformative potential of the work. Inherently these works aim to engender visually enticing encounters that are also accessible, meaningful activities beneficial to the participants.

An example of the type of experience with which the mas' works attempt to connect can be seen in Lovelace's novel about Carnival *The Dragon Can't Dance*. A conversation between two of the novel's characters Sylvia and Aldrick reads as follows:

'You see, it ain't no big expensive costume. You feel I should play a princess or a slave girl.'
He smiled. 'You is a princess already,' he said. 'Play a slave girl.'²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ E. Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Persea Books, New York, 1998), p. 34.

Aldrick's response to Silvia's question highlights the way in which Aldrick viewed the role of the costume. The purpose was about becoming something else, something other than yourself. The notion of transformation into fantasy is a viable means of escape from the norm. It is the possibilities of what can happen in the world of fantasy/dress-up/masks that are of interest to me and the ways in which the artwork can begin to engage with performances of transformation, that benefit the everyday self. Aldrick spent months diligently fashioning a Dragon costume to wear and play for Carnival. His was an individual mas'. When Carnival was over, he threw his costume away and began making another Dragon costume for the next year. His costumed play was intended to invoke fear and within that play, Aldrick was addressing his experience of everyday invisibility. Silvia, in the novel, wears a 'slave girl' costume, one of many within a larger costumed band. Aldrick observes Silvia's Carnival play and is struck by the honest immediacy of her performance. Hers was an innate expression through which Aldrick was capable of recognizing his own story and their shared circumstance:

And in the face of this scream for life, this cyclone of affirming and appealing tears, it suddenly struck him that his dragon with its threatening claws and fire was small before this girl's scream.²⁵⁰

Both characters, Dragon and 'slave girl', participated in emancipatory performances. Both characters engaged with performances of reaction and representation through the medium of the social bodily expression. Similarly, with the mas' art works, each may engage with Carnival/masquerade/mas' in differing ways but ultimately they aim to reconnect with the participants and to positively impact on their journey.

²⁵⁰ Lovelace, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, p. 127.

Another example of the kind of experience the mas' art works aim to connect with, can be seen in a performance I observed two years ago, on the streets of the Notting Hill Carnival. A woman was dancing as part of a costumed band and was brought to my attention because she danced with an intensity that reminded me of Lovelace's Sylvia. The dancing reveller in Notting Hill Carnival was not smiling and she was not intentionally 'putting on a show' for anyone. Her body moved energetically and her eyes were almost always closed. Her dance took her down to the ground where she lay for a moment on the road. Another reveller offered her a hand to get up which was vehemently refused. This dancing woman scripted her own narrative. She got up when she was ready and continued dancing as the procession moved on. Similarly, in *Mama dat is Mas'*, emphasis was not only placed on individual stories but on allowing project participants the opportunity to tell their story in their own voice (through costume and/or movement), to take control, to act and enact in the ways that they needed to.

The dancing woman in the Notting Hill Carnival embodied a manifestation of mas' performance that appeared to me, to have elements of reaction and representation. Her deliberate play moved beyond the Carnival streets. Her costume was minimal and not 'character-based' yet the effect of her mas' performance appeared healing and empowering. As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, *Carnival and Performance*, Clinton Hutton identified Carnival as one of several re-possession rituals. Essentially, Carnival and by extension mas' play have ritual beginnings. The most notable ritual manifested in Carnival is that of the Canboulay-Emancipation celebration. Again, this individual

masquerader in the Notting Hill Carnival can be seen as participating in an emancipatory performance that was directly connected to her personal journey.

On the question of *how* and *why* we perform, Earl Lovelace, in his essay *The Emancipation Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan*, makes a direct connection between emancipation celebrations and Trinidad Carnival. As described previously in Chapter One, Lovelace stated:

We knew that from 1838, 1 August was the official day of the emancipation celebration. What we did not know was that sometime in the mid-1840s the colonial administration had moved the celebration from that day and tacked it onto carnival. From midnight carnival Sunday the emancipation celebrations began. In effect, jouvay became emancipation.²⁵¹

The above citation from Lovelace's essay suggests two points for consideration that are relevant to some of my critical reflections on mas' works such as the *Mama dat is Mas'* project, as well as on the project of interpreting mas' in diasporic spaces: 1) that of resonance in performance and 2) the relevance of performance. These questions of the *how* and *why* we perform might both appear to be questions along the same line of meaning but the subtle differences are relevant. In light of the first point, that of resonance in performance, Trinidad Carnival performance (the aesthetics of which are the crux of this research) comes out of an emancipation tradition. The performances coming out of such a tradition engage with freedom of choice, freedom of expression and inform the ways in which the events are approached. There is a sense of ownership in this approach that ought not to be overlooked, the notion of privilege and birthright. The masquerader/reveller enters the Carnival knowing that the event is his/hers. That confident starting-point informs the resonance in performance.

²⁵¹ E. Lovelace, 'The Emancipation Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan' in M. C. Riggio (ed.) *Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience* (Routledge, New York and London, 2004), p. 187.

On a more global level, I would argue that mas' in public performances are observable (as evidenced by Tancons in the Introduction of this thesis, in relation to the carnivalesque in protests) and in these contexts, resonance stems from situations of disempowerment, injustice and in finding/forging spaces for visibility and vocal expression. That is, although mas' can certainly be culturally rooted within the notion of Lovelace's emancipation tradition and in the celebration of freedom (and by extension release from the injustice of indentureship and the journeys to self-discovery and national identity), resonance can also be connected to other oppressive shared experiences and the performances of re-presentation that emerge as a result. With the mas' art works that starting point needs to be forged and fostered, that is, emphasis needs to be placed on the context of the work in order to engender that sense of ownership for the participants who are a vital part of the entire process.

The desire that fuelled the questions that were addressed within the *Mama dat is Mas'* experimental project was one that was located very specifically within this writers' context and experiences. I think this point is important. The 'me' that had emerged in the experience of several Carnivals desired visibility with an intensity of play that was about freedom and temporary transformation. In relation to the *Mama dat is Mas'* experimental project, I was essentially involved in a process of identifying mas' elements within an interpretation of aspects of Trinidad Carnival performance and utilizing these within a performance art context in order to question whether the effects of certain transferable performance elements within this seasonal ritual can also be transferred. The impact of the resonance or the *how* I perform is connected to

the experiences of where I come from and where I am now. The project was birthed through a memory and informed by current experiences.

The resonance of *how* we perform can be observed in a social context within the contemporary Trinidad Carnival performances. Prompted by the quote that opens this chapter from Rex Nettleford – one’s body belongs only to oneself – I would argue that there is a paradox between public bodily performances and ownership. This paradox is at the crux of the Carnival-
emancipatory process. The statement that one’s body belongs to oneself is tantalizingly liberating as it suggests that these bodies have no ownership but self and can therefore perform in such a manner. Yet the uninhibited public performances by these bodies are not so free and this observation is very much a contemporary concern. In her article ‘Those Stubborn Jamettes’ for the *Trinidad Express*, March 2014, columnist Sheila Rampersad expressed a point of view about the performances within the Trinidad Carnival that held great significance for me:

Then, as now, it was the explicitly sexual displays that most offended middle and upper class respectability. And this was, then and now, the intention; in the belly of Trinidad Carnival are challenges to moral and political authority, turning respectability on its head, rearranging the common order of things, wining in the face of religious morality, subversion of moral codes and relief from the authority imposed by a democracy that is not really democratic. Gyal, you could get charge[d] for wining like that! Gyal, you could make a jail!²⁵²

The article drew attention to a type of social Carnival behaviour while simultaneously placing emphasis on the context within which this type of performance evolved. Rampersad’s words re-iterated another poignant point of view held by another writer Corey Gilkes who expressed a similar perspective on

²⁵² S. Rampersad, ‘Those Stubborn Jamettes’, *Trinidad Express Newspaper*, 14.03.2014.

the social media pages of Facebook in a group called *WOMANTRA*.²⁵³ Both articles highlight that the sentiments articulated by the ruling classes against the *how* of the Carnival performances after emancipation are indistinguishable from the ‘concerns’ currently being aired by politicians, religious leaders and members of the public in relation to today’s Carnival performances. The implication of this historical comparison is important. Aligning these sentiments not only positions these two comparable sets of arguments as strikingly similar, but also connects a colonial mentality to the perceived ideals of today’s neo-colonial ruling classes. That is to say, the faces in power may have changed but the damage of self-hatred has been planted and as a result, the ideas perpetuated by the plantocracy remain inherent in the perspective of today’s politicians and religious leaders.

Mama dat is Mas’ engendered considerations of the body in performance and a process of claiming control over self-re-presentation. Seen in relation to Rampersad’s article, I argue that the project also begins to challenge the implications of what a performance should look like. Rampersad’s article mentions that for a certain group of people, the excessive bodily performances were too lewd to be enjoyed as spectacle. Rampersad writes the comments of some spectators:

[R]espectable inhabitants are scandalised and outraged by exhibitions that are not only neither amusing nor entertaining, but are decidedly unchaste in character and demoralising in tendency.²⁵⁴

I argue that a misunderstanding lies in the illusion enforced by the government, that of the Trinidad Carnival being ‘the greatest *show* on earth’. That is, the

²⁵³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/womantra/>. More from Gilkes’ here: <http://www.trinicenter.com/Gilkes/>. Last accessed 02.05.2014.

²⁵⁴ S. Rampersad, ‘Those Stubborn Jamettes’, *Trinidad Express Newspaper*, 14.03.2014.

performances highlighted are not a show. They are not for anyone's stamp of approval. Although the Trinidad Carnival is also a commercial industry, the essence of the performances is esoteric in nature. If anything the performances dare, as in previous centuries to challenge and shock and in so doing allow for the de-masking of the observer.²⁵⁵ Informed by the emancipation tradition, these performances engage with freedom of choice and freedom of expression. These performances react against oppressive forces that seek to define and script representations of self. Aimé Césaire reminds us of the kind of oppression that leads to self-hatred and the crushing of individual agency, in the following excerpt:

He was a good nigger indeed.
Poverty had wounded his chest and back and they had stuffed into his poor brain that a fatality impossible to trap weighed on him; that he had no control over his own fate; that an evil Lord had for all eternity inscribed Thou Shall Not in his pelvic constitution; that he must be a good nigger; must sincerely believe in his worthlessness, without any perverse curiosity to check out the fatidic hieroglyphs.²⁵⁶

Carnival performances allow the "good nigger" to take control over his own fate and to free "his pelvic constitution", to come to the realization that, what is essentially a black movement language is not wrong or evil. This point is relevant to my research as in *Mama dat is Mas'* the performances were essentially about agency, taking control of re-presenting aspects of yourself and allowing the performance to be a reaction to the everyday. Furthermore in the light of Rampersad's article, it is evident that the "explicitly sexual displays" within the Trinidad Carnival are necessary performances. That these performances of

²⁵⁵ G. Aching, *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean* (University of Minnesota Press, Cultural Studies of the Americas, Volume 8, 2002), pp. 6.

²⁵⁶ A. Césaire, 'Notebook of a Return to the Native Land', *The Collected Poetry* (University of California Press, USA, 1983) p. 79.

'jamette' movements are visible in the writhing bodies within the contemporary Pretty Mas' suggests that there is an urgent need to re-evaluate the ways in which we perceive our cultural bodily expressions. Corey Gilkes' article on the Trinidad Carnival suggests that these Carnival performances reflect the state of society. Gilkes writes:

In other words, if you find the winin' too stink and nasty in the road, if you find people's costumes too revealing, check the same moral values you think are declining. It is that imposed ignorance enforced by bogus ideas of guilt, sin and irrational beliefs that a sexually open society will automatically descend into chaos and destruction (the supposedly natural, 'feminine' state), that is the real reason behind the almost frenzied displays of sexual release on the streets of Trinbago every Carnival season. Many of those 'moral' values came from a cultural mind-set that dresses up fear and contempt for sex, sensuality, women and nature in a cloak of nice sounding words like 'respect,' 'piety,' 'purity' and 'high' morals. It is ironic that we have people insisting that 'sex is sacred and should be private' – that stemmed from implicit and explicit views in ancient times that a woman's body is shameful and corrupting. Those ideas associated sex with shame, impurity, filth, chaos (hence oft-expressed sentiments that if let out of control, society will descend into chaos). So check the culture of repression, often exercised through sexual shaming ... before you want to say some ... nonsense about evangelising.²⁵⁷

Gilkes' passionate view of the way in which the Trinidad Carnival performances are a response to the everyday is in line with my proposal of a *reaction* concept of mas'. Both concepts iterate that the Carnival performance stems from an everyday action or circumstance. It is worth mentioning that the performances described and quoted above are by no means the only observable bodily performances in the Trinidad Carnival. I emphasize these specific performance observances because they contribute to an understanding of the resonance of Carnival performance as bodily expressions that claim control over self-representation. The traditional characters within Carnival such as the Bat, the

²⁵⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/womantra/> 2014.

Sailor, the Black Indian, the Midnight Robber and the Pierrot all have a series of 'established' movements and/or text assigned that allow these characters to be recognizable and 'authentic'. Yet even within the portrayals of traditional, there is scope for revealing aspects of the individual behind the mask as mentioned previously, the Carnival is inclusive of transformations. While Jouvay remains a potent space for mas' moments, the performances discussed by Rampersad and Gilkes are most observable in the Pretty Mas'. Here, the relationship between the reveller and the mask is more obscure. The body is primary and is used expressively and sometimes offensively to express the reveller's story.

The emergence of Carnival bands like *Vulgar Fraction*²⁵⁸ and *Miss Miles*²⁵⁹ challenge the common narrative on the streets on Carnival Monday and Tuesday, not merely with respect to costuming by providing an alternative to bikinis, beads and feathers,²⁶⁰ but also in terms of the ethos that they perpetuate. These bands have a different agenda and both bands aim to capture a mas' aesthetic in the experience of playing. In the context of *Mama dat is Mas'*, and the other art experiments that have followed, the mas' performance is aimed at granting the individual participant a moment of empowerment. In relation to issues of displacement and social anxiety this empowerment takes the form of an opportunity for the performer to have a voice, to be in control of self representation and to say/do what s/he needs to for that space and time allocated.

²⁵⁸ Designer of the *Cloth* fashion label, Robert Young, conceived *Vulgar Fraction*. The band allows individuals to make their own costume by using left over materials. Unlike most other bands on the street at Carnival time *Vulgar Fraction* is not an all-inclusive event. They make their own percussion music and visit food stalls on the road.

²⁵⁹ Playwright Tony Hall and Cecilia Salazar conceived *Miss Miles Monday Mas'* band. Mas' designer Peter Minshall designed the mask image of Miss Gene Miles. The aim of the band was to highlight corruption in government using Halls' stage play of the same name, on the carnival street. Each reveller wore a Miss Miles mask and held a placard in 'ole mas' fashion.

²⁶⁰ Carnival band *Y2K* founded by twin sisters Kathy and Karen Norman also provides beautiful, creative alternatives as the designers engage with highly artistic designs of mas' as storytelling and high fashion. <http://k2k-carnival.com/about-us/>. Last accessed 01.05.2014.

The mas' projects extract a ritual out of the spectacle of Carnival and concentrate on the individual, even en masse. Agency is manifested in the power to act as yourself and, as stated by Tony Hall's quote from Lloyd Best in my introductory chapter, as "being whatever you're *supposed* to be". The notion of "supposed to be" (my emphasis) implies meant to be, intended, required or obliged, but these are all in relation to self and not in relation to a prescription by an 'other'. That is, the need to be what you need to be at that time, rather than the obligation to perform for someone else and in relation to someone else's expectation. In the context of an art project, this is undoubtedly a challenge as the invited participants become involved in a ritual that essentially involves discovering themselves. Within the Carnival, these performances of re-presentation remain outside of the everyday but are certainly informed by the everyday circumstance.

The second point for discussion is concerned with the relevance of the performance, the *why* we perform. I consider the relevance of performance to be as a means of agency, the ability to act and influence change. The performances provide an opportunity for recall, resistance, re-making and restitution (Gibbons).²⁶¹ The performances help us to remember, they allow us to react against oppressive forces/circumstances and permit liberation. The changes that these performances produce are often (but not exclusively) temporary transformations and can be effective on a personal and/or social level. Within the diasporic setting, the creation of spaces to recall experiences in new contexts is widespread. This can be seen in any memorial celebration, religious celebrations such as Divali and Hoosay and evidently, in Carnival. Clinton Hutton

²⁶¹ R. Gibbons, *Room to Pass: Carnival and Caribbean Aesthetics* (WVT, Germany, 1998), p. 118.

opens his essay *The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom and Identity*, with a quote from Kamau

Brathwaite. The quotation states:

[E]ach time we beat drum, mask ourselves for carnival, enter houmfort²⁶², we, even if we don't know it – participate ... in this magical inheritance of alternative, of alter/native worlds.²⁶³

The “magical inheritance” of “alter/native” worlds belongs to peoples of the diaspora, whether we are aware of it or not. Similarly, the teachings of the Yoruba religions (that among others have given birth to a plethora of religions in the diaspora), state that: “all human beings possess what is known as *Àyànmô* (destiny, fate) and are expected to eventually become one in spirit with *Olódùmarè*.”²⁶⁴ Both the Yoruba mythology and the Brathwaite statement, contribute to an interpretation of the link human beings share with spirit ancestry. The notion of alternative worlds, within which ancestral forces or other layers of consciousness can be accessed, is in sync with some of the mas' ideas this thesis has teased out. If masking for Carnival, as suggested by Brathwaite, allows the masquerader to participate in an alternative space, then it is precisely such an opportunity from which the mas' works are interested in benefitting. That the alternative space is connected to inheritance, suggests that it is a space for empowerment, one concerned again, with forms of agency. The Brathwaite quotation is a perfect taster for what follows in Hutton's essay.

In Chapter Two, *Carnival and Performance*, I discussed Hutton's rituals of re-possession and positioned his ideas as central to the mas' notion of providing the visibility of an 'other' self through performance. This visibility is one that is

²⁶² Houmforts – Haitian Vodou temples.

²⁶³ Hutton, 'The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora', p. 127.

²⁶⁴ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba_religion Date accessed 03.02.2014

ultimately concerned with self-empowerment. Performance is relevant as it offers a means of survival, being able to cope and to temporarily transcend forms of oppression. Public performance also provides an opportunity for visibility and to have a voice within a larger social context. Writing of performances Richard Schechner, in his book *Performance Theory*, argues:

Taking a cue from Erving Goffman's 1959 breakthrough book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, I sensed that performances in the broad sense of that word were coexistent with the human condition. Goffman did not propose that "all the world's a stage", a notion which implies a kind of falseness or put on. What Goffman meant was that people were always involved in role-playing, in constructing and staging their multiple identities. By means of roles people enacted their personal and social realities on a day-to-day basis.²⁶⁵

The Goffman notion of playing a role in everyday life can be about finding ways of manipulating, "constructing and staging [our own] multiple identities." Performances are in that sense necessary journeys. They act as a holistic part of the way in which humans position themselves within various spaces. The performances can be constantly re-invented. For those experiencing forms of displacement, (and in the continued reflection on *why* we perform) performances become a tool to re-affirm or voice the contradictions of notions of self, identity and belonging.

Stuart Hall in his *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* essay speaks about the concept of displacement for black Caribbean people and the complexity of a journey to self-discovery:

These symbolic journeys are necessary for all – and necessarily circular. This is the Africa we must return to – but 'by another route': what Africa has *become* in the New World, what we have made of 'Africa': 'Africa' – as we re-tell it through politics, memory and desire.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Schechner. *Performance Theory*, p. ix-x.

²⁶⁶ Stuart Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, p 232

The above draws attention to the complexities of perceptions of identity. Performances embrace creative processes and engage with different approaches to re-presenting self. Where performances of representation and of the symbolic carry a sense of recreating an unattainable, nostalgic memory, performances of re-presentation and reaction, I argue, carry a sense of active agency and the carnivalesque notion of rebirth and renewal within which manifold possibilities can be realized.

Impact on Practice and Performance

The following will briefly discuss three relevant points related to the implications of this research for practice and performance: 1) the impact on Carnival performance, 2) the impact on art practice and 3) the impact on literary discourse. Views expressed by some of the speakers at The National Citizen's town hall meeting on *The State of the Carnival*, Sunday 23rd March 2014, hosted by cultural activist and writer Rubadiri Victor indicate a growing concern for the survival of the Trinidad Carnival. Concerns include the fact that the festival's designs are no longer in the hands of craftspeople from the island and are being sent to China to be made cheaply and the rising concern that the infrastructure surrounding Carnival as both a mass industry and object for exportation are engulfing creative pockets with irrational rules, fees and competition regulations. These concerns directly relate to the anxieties of the ritual side of Carnival, traditional mas' and the masquerader's experience as the changes and developments threaten some of the meaningful traditions in an absurd effort to make the festival easier for foreign consumption. Within the diasporic context this notion of preservation becomes even more relevant when considering the

need to re-connect with tangible manifestations of a home culture. The Carnival's tendency is however, one that is destined to find a way to survive, a point made by Rampersad in her article where she states:

But as Carnival survived colonial impositions, so too it will survive this ambush by politicians, police and priests ... Jamettes ... are a stubborn, renewable natural resource and as the controls tighten and Carnival is increasingly removed from Carnival, I have no doubt that in time those wishing to truly play themselves will retire from the organised structure and take independent control of what is theirs.²⁶⁷

The mas' art works provide an example of taking independent control of an aspect of Carnival. The experiences of displacement versus empowerment that *Mama dat is Mas'* engages with are inextricably connected to the experiences currently being expressed by mas' players within the Carnival. The notion of displacement is taken even further than initially outlined as Trinidadian Carnivalists begin (again) to feel that they are not allowed to play their mas' and to be what they need to be. Mas' art works impact positively on the journey for the Carnival performer by providing a reminder of ways of reclaiming a sense of individual agency through performance.

By further utilizing an interpretation of mas' at its core, these works also create a template for ways of preserving Caribbean folk art, ritual and popular culture albeit within a contemporary art context. For artists working within the field of folk/ritual/popular culture, such as those mentioned in Chapter Three, *Towards a Concept of Mas'* works such as *Mama dat is Mas'* highlight the significance of using indigenous culture in new ways not only in an effort to re-connect with a notion of home but also to explore identity issues and ritual modes of self empowerment within a social context. On viewing footage of the

²⁶⁷ Rampersad, 'Those Stubborn Jamettes', *Trinidad Express Newspaper*, 14.03.2014.

Mama dat is Mas' project presented at Edna Manley College in Jamaica, drama professor Eugene Williams said that the experiments and questions helped bring an understanding of "the concept of umbilical connectivity to identity and deep self, through the ritualized invocation of the mas' in exile."²⁶⁸ I will add that the role of "mas' in exile" perpetuates a process of simultaneously preserving and re-creating. The process is also dependent on a relationship with the 'original' evolving Carnival form as it seeks to be a viscerally relevant experience. For arts practice, the mas' model established by this research becomes a form that can be used to build performances through improvisation and actor training, therapy and education. The mas' model embraces ideas of re-presentation and reaction within a ritual context that allows the participant/actor/artist to be (temporarily) emotionally and physically transformed based on processes instigated and fuelled by the participants' needs. Forms of masking are directly relevant to this mas' template as they act as 'permission tags' that amplify the possibilities of accessing that need.

I have argued that mas' can be a deeply personal inward activity and that mas' means different things to different people depending on their individual circumstances, their upbringing and where through performance, they place the most transformative relevance. This research opens up the scope of engagement with Carnival and moves beyond pitting mas' as primarily and exclusively a traditional 'serious' (male-dominated) activity by incorporating a performative attribute that can be relevant to the more contemporary 'frivolous' (female-dominated) performances.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ In conversation with E. Williams, 08.11.2013

²⁶⁹ As mentioned in my introductory chapter, cultural scholars such as Tony Hall often align 'mas' exclusively with traditional mas'.

The dialectic between manifestations of mas' is considered in a universalizing anthropological frame in Richard Schechner's analysis of theatre. Schechner's work in theatre is informed by years of study immersed in different western and non-western cultural spaces such as Australia, Africa, Asia and the Americas. In his book *Performance Theory*, Schechner critiques the Cambridge thesis that situates theatre as an evolved more refined form of ritual. Schechner says of theatre, ritual, games, sports and dance:

These activities are primeval, there is no reason to hunt for "origins" or "derivations." There are only variations in form, the intermixing among genres, and these show no long-term evolution from "primitive" to "sophisticated" or "modern." Sometimes rituals, games, sports, and the aesthetic genres (theatre, dance, music) are merged so that it is impossible to call the activity by one limiting name. That English usage urges us to do so anyway is an ethnocentric bias, not an argument.²⁷⁰

Schechner emphasizes that these performances are inherent human performances and further considers a celebratory carnival-like occurrence among chimpanzees documented by V. and F. Reynolds in Uganda 1965. Schechner reasserts that these are prototypes of "celebratory, theatrical events"²⁷¹ as they highlight group gathering, sharing food, music and movement and a designated/special space. Schechner continues:

The entertainment aspects of gatherings are of special importance. Western thinkers have too often split ritual from entertainment privileging ritual over entertainment. It has been accepted wisdom to assert that ritual comes first (historically, conceptually), with entertainment arising later as a derivation or even deterioration of ritual. Ritual is "serious" while entertainment is "frivolous." These are prejudiced culture-bound conclusions... entertainment and ritual are braided together, neither one being the "original" of the other.

And he adds:

²⁷⁰ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 7.

²⁷¹ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 172.

At celebratory gatherings people are free to engage in behaviour that would otherwise be forbidden (frequently promiscuous) behaviour is not only permitted, but encouraged, prepared for, and rehearsed. Behaviour during carnival combines or alternates with prescribed spontaneity with large-scale public performances.²⁷²

Schechner's theories of performance re-stimulate the idea that performances are a natural aspect of group behaviour and that entertainment is a significant characteristic in ritual performances. While I would not want to accept uncritically the idea that performances are natural – they are precisely cultural – they do feature in different ways across different historical moments and cultures. As such, it is useful to look at the types of ritual performance on which Trinidadian and diasporic Carnival performances have drawn, including the entertainment dimension of performance. The Egungun masquerade of the Yoruba people in Nigeria for example, consists of both a sacred performance and one specifically concerned with entertaining the spectators. Similarly, the proposed mas' definition challenges the scope of what is and is not mas', as the process used for attaining this definition, was created by considering different performance experiences within the Carnival event.

Schechner argues that manifestations of both the sacred (ritual) and the profane (entertainment) performances can find a place within Carnival. I would modify this to suggest that performances influenced by rituals can take on different embodiments and new meanings in the Carnival context. The main issues raised by the *Mama dat is Mas'* performance in relation to form and its impact on theories of performance, can be thought in terms of a sliding connection between ritual, art and identity. The significance of this research is that it highlights the fluidity of interpretation as well the potential benefits of

²⁷² Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 173.

performative experiences that utilize visceral indigenous culture. The work is less about shape and form. The emphasis leans towards lived experiences and being able to connect on a tangible level with issues of displacement and anxiety through an interpretation of mas', ritual and art. The thesis that I have proposed here thus offers a new perspective that can serve as a nucleus for new ways of engaging with and analyzing Carnival. This research advances the body of writings on mas' and argues for mas' as an entity, a variation of Carnival performance. The genesis of this form of performance is derived from a specific set of colonial circumstances and is manifested within a combination of Carnival and masquerade apparitions inside (and outside of) the Trinidad Carnival. Through my research and definition of mas', I have developed a perspective that suggests that it is also plausible to envisage performances that can be labeled mas' activities outside of the cultural Caribbean context of mas'.

Experimentation with Carnival's performance reminds us that rooted experiences continue to impact upon and shape cultural values outside of common narratives within 'first world' societies. Carnival has the capacity to allow the mas' player to address feelings of displacement; it is a resource that can be further utilized to engage with notions of self-empowerment and visibility both within public spaces and within the art world. The possibilities that arise from experimentation with Carnival mas' forms offer new contributions to ongoing discussions of the interpretation and consideration of art, performance and identity.

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Appendix

DVD Carnival Interview samples

DVD *Mama dat is Mas'* Experimental Art Project

SLIDES 1 – 2: The People's War Carnival band: *Victory in Cuito Cuanavale; Free South Africa*. Used with permission of Peoples War Carnival Band and designer Michael La Rose.

SLIDE 3: Midnight Robber and Pierrot Grenade (Traditional Carnival Characters)

SLIDE 4: Dame Lorraine, Moko Jumbie, Jab Molassie/Blue Devil (Traditional Carnival Characters)

SLIDE 5: Jab-Jab, Black Indian (Traditional Carnival Characters)

SLIDE 6: BookMan, Imp, Dragon (Traditional Carnival Characters)

SLIDE 7: Minstrels, Bat, Sailor (Traditional Carnival Characters)

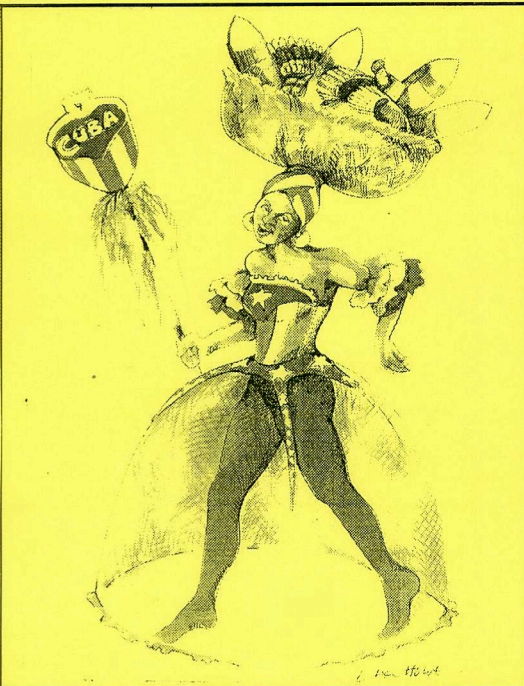
SLIDE 8: Burrokeet, Cow Mas' (Traditional Carnival Characters)

SLIDE 1

Carnival Costume Launch and Dance

J
U
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P



WITH **PEOPLES WAR CARNIVAL BAND**
 The Theme For 1989
"VICTORY IN CUITO CUANAVAL; FREE SOUTH AFRICA!!"

Come and see the colour designs and live costume display at our
Carnival Costume Launch and Dance
 on **Sunday 16th July 1989**
 At Stroud Green Community Centre, Station House
 Stapleton Hall Road, Finsbury Park London N4.
 From: 5p.m to 11p.m.

DRUMMING FROM SOUTH AFRICA (AZANIA) BY MOLEFE PHEHO

Music by **PEOPLES WAR HI-FI**

ADMISSION FREE Costumes displayed at 6.30pm.
 Bring the kids. Carnival is we culture!! Miss this and regret it.
FREE UP SOUTH AFRICA!!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
 PEOPLES WAR CARNIVAL BAND.
 c/o 76 Stroud Green Rd, Finsbury Park, N4
 3EN. TEL:272 4889 , 348 3591

SLIDE 2

J
U
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P

HOW DO I JOIN?
 Choose your costume from the designs here then ring 272 4889 (day) or 348 3591 (eve) with your size. Do it now! In the case of children we need age and size as quickly as possible.

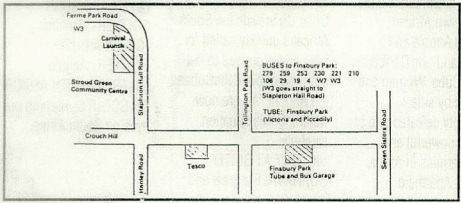
HOW MUCH IS IT?
 Costumes are £18 for adults, £8 for children (under 14). There is a reduction for more than one child. Our policy is to keep the costume prices as low as possible. Compare our prices with other bands!

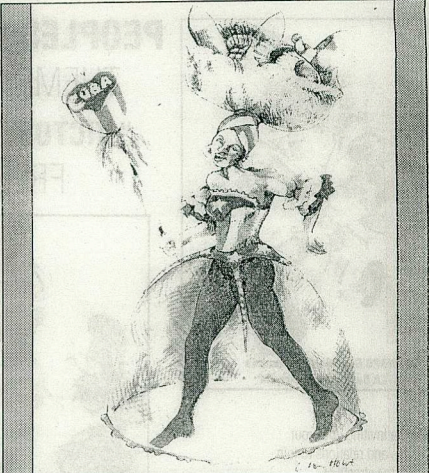
WHAT DO I GET?
 *Free transportation from north London to Ladbroke Grove and back. *Free food and drink on carnival day. *Music and a good crowd to play mas with.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
 PEOPLES WAR CARNIVAL BAND.
 c/o 76 Stroud Green Rd, Finsbury Park, N4
 3EN. TEL:272 4889 , 348 3591

(E) Scouts-keeping our eyes on South Africa

DON'T FORGET Carnival costume launch on Sunday 16th July 1989 at Stroud Green Community Centre, Stapleton Hall Rd, Finsbury Park, London N4.
ADMISSION FREE Costumes displayed at 6.30pm.
 Bring the kids. Carnival is we culture!! Miss this and regret it.
FREE UP SOUTH AFRICA!!



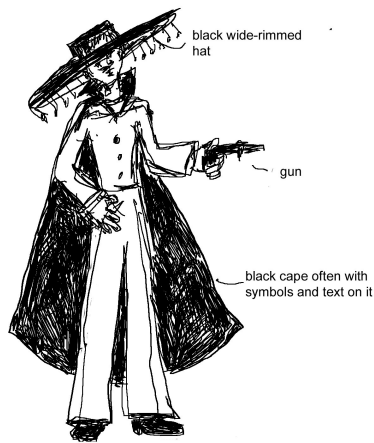


AT NOTTINGHILL CARNIVAL
 WITH **PEOPLES WAR CARNIVAL BAND**
 The Theme For 1989
"VICTORY AT CUITO CUANAVAL; FREE SOUTH AFRICA!!"

Come and see the colour designs and live costume display at our
Carnival Costume Launch and Dance
 on **Sunday 16th July 1989**
 At Stroud Green Community Centre, Station House
 Stapleton Hall Road, Finsbury Park London N4.
 From: 5p.m to 11p.m.
 Music by **PEOPLES WAR HI-FI** **ADMISSION FREE**

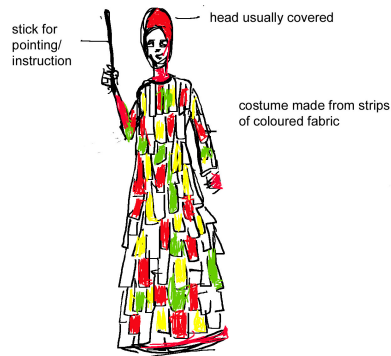
SLIDE SHOW*RAFFLE*REFRESHMENTS*T-SHIRTS

SLIDE 3



Midnight Robber

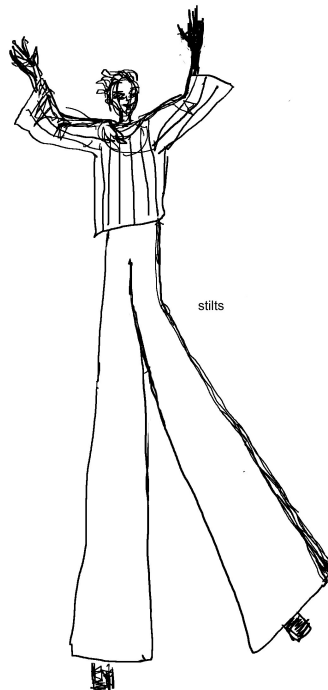
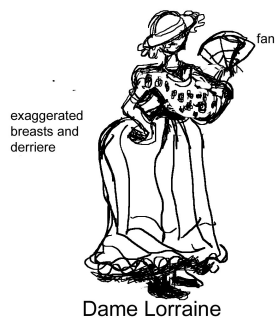
Usually has a monologue boasting about his feats (bravado)



Pierrot Grenade

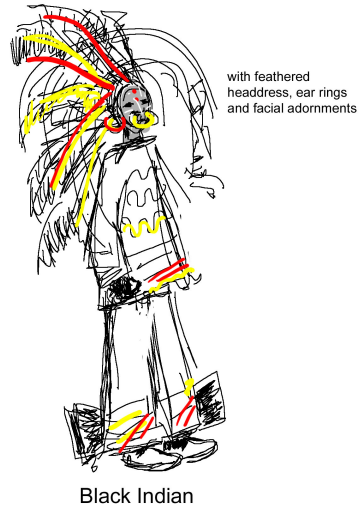
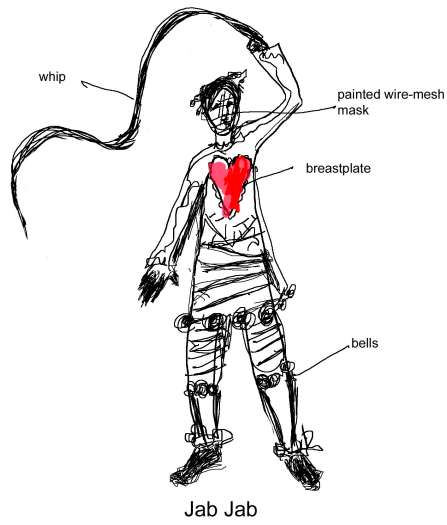
Pierrot's speech is often made up of a complex play of words constructed to 'spell' another word

SLIDE 4

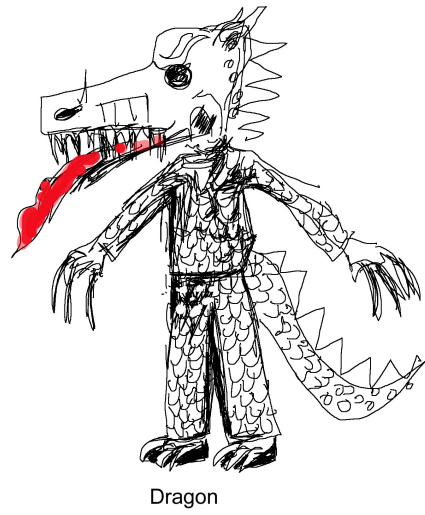
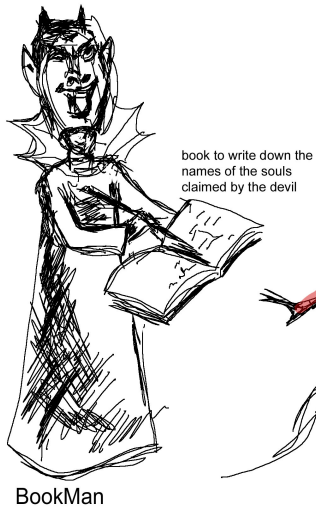


Accompanied by rhythm made by iron on an old biscuit tin

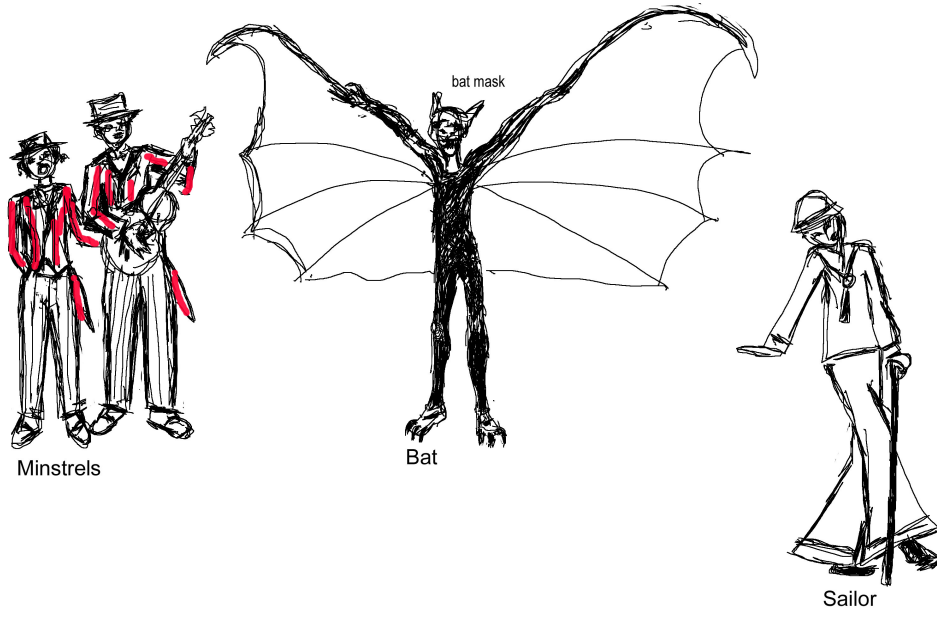
SLIDE 5



SLIDE 6



SLIDE 7



SLIDE 8

