

## SPATIAL ANIMATION: AN ETHOS OF THEATRE DIRECTION

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### **Abstract**

*Modern Nigerian theatre’s advancement is verifiable through rigorous professionalism and a sturdy academy. While directing has evolved into a sophisticated interpretive cornerstone of Nigerian theatre practice, the training of students has remained incongruously yoked to western texts, theories and techniques. Consequently, the spatial animation directorial principle proposes an alternative pedagogical prism that exploits mythology-related creative techniques in modern theatre directing.*

*Conceptually positional in orientation, spatial animation’s impulse is humanity’s creation myth complexus. Adopting the practice-based experiential mode of enquiry, the paper accentuates the methodological import of Creative or Artistic Humanistic Reflection (CAHR) – for research in creativity-inclined disciplines – in concert with comparative mytho-analytical procedures.*

*Majorly stimulated by creation myths’ primal spatial chaotism, spatial animation conceptualises modern theatre’s pre-performance stage-space as dead. The art of theatre directing is anchored in instinctual recreative spatial intercession, its origin, the dead primeval space’s archetypal spatial revivification enactment by the divine directorial impulse. Mytho-logically, then, modern theatre directors are the creator-deity-director’s professional descendants: thus, inheritors of a unique spatial animation gene. Central to this order-form-restoring technique is a tripartite trans-substantiation complex encompassing the ase creative accent; imole intexterior illumination; and atunda deconstructivist-(re)constructivist formula.*

*The spatial animation principle re-theorises theatre directing as an existential space-order restorative act and a stage-spatial aesthetic intercessory art. Sourcing its constitutive properties – constructivist*

*assets and creative codes - from Yoruba meta-philosophy, the artistic compositional counter-ethos advances African theatres' decolonial discourse.*

**Keywords:**

*Theatre directing in Nigeria; Creative/Artistic humanistic reflection; Spatial animation; Ase-Imole-Atunda triadic cardinal principle.*

**(1) Introduction**

Post-creative iterations concerning artistic stimulus, inspiration, ideology, technique and doctrine by theatre directors is a template of the modern theatre. Literatures on theatre directing have proved creativity-based introspections as professional, educational and cultural projection. Such testimonials transmit details about directors' ideas from evolution to transmutation into personal aesthetics and final legitimisation within the academic and professional communities. Outsiders to the creative process are thereby privileged with insight into specific backstage/offstage artistic encounters encompassed by directorial labour. We grapple with such iterations in manuals that originated strictly from a diversified who-is-who of Euro-western theatre directing assembled by Cole and Chinoy (1953). This, coupled with other authoritative Eurocentric texts by renowned practitioners and theorists including Dean and Carra (1974), Grotowski (1968), Brook (1996) and Brecht (1964), have functioned as theatre directing's historical, theoretical and methodological paradigms. These imperial resources have, in modern Afro-Nigerian theatre, remained standard pedagogical scriptures.

The Nigerian theatre academy, since the 1960s, has remained subservient, substantially, to its colonial ancestry through over-dependency on mostly foreign citations. This reality antagonises its rigorous educational and professional proclivity - verifiable through exemplary treatises, performances and experimentations – that are comparable in standard with their global equivalents. Obviously an artistic and pedagogical anxiety bothering theatre directing scholarship, the condition provokes further the urgency of decolonisation of Nigerian theatre.

## **(2) Creative or Artistic Humanistic Reflection in Creativity-Inclined Research**

In the humanities' research horizon, creativity-related arts' elastic production modes have constructively disrupted rigid methodological orthodoxies to accommodate flexible practice-based investigative options. The scholarly culture and research conventions in the arts-humanistic preoccupation consider pragmatic creativity, historicisation, critical interrogation and philosophical contemplation as cohesive and multi-disciplinary knowledge production procedures. Creative or Artistic Humanistic Reflection (CAHR), adopted in this paper, is a data gathering, analysis and discussion technique in creativity-inclined disciplines such as performance and visual arts. It is amenable to mostly practice-based undertakings where actual creativity or experimentation precedes formal conceptual deduction, process description and result presentation. In theory-oriented artistic research, this is vice versa. CAHR, introspectively and retrospectively possible, is the artist's formal explication and documentation of pre-creative abstractionism, creative thinking, strategy and process, and post-creative futurism. It posits a subverted judicial court room where the artist engages in self-interrogation, self-defense, self-deprecation and self-judgement altogether. CAHR, though not so initially christened, served mostly referenced theatre directors as strategy of disseminating practice-based reports. My submission here leverages on CAHR's legitimacy as an artistic discursive method from which theatre directing postulations have greatly benefited. Such experience-based reflective-projective narrativity finds template in prior directorial iterations that have mutated into theoretical prototypes, charting the landscapes of praxis and criticism. In the quest to impact the theatre discipline's knowledge-reserve in humanistic creativity-driven scholarship, CAHR offers a standard methodology.

The exercise is a post-creative retrospective explication consequential upon years of consistent practice as director in academic and professional theatres. The first in a determined series of cogitations on directing-related matters of theatre historiography; doctrinal motivations; artistic taste and style; directorial approaches and conceptualisations, it is mainly positional. While my immediate stage of directorial practice has been chiefly Nigeria, its broad global canvass privileges neo-primitive ethos. In theory and practice, entitled claim of my African Yoruba cultural heritage and studentship

of world mythological complex rightfully embeds me into the universal collective unconscious. Artistically and philosophically, cognisant consultation of mythology's profound repertoire for creative exegesis has, essentially, assisted in defining and charting the course of my directorial attitude. Conceptually then, the essay transcends previous iterations by locating the primitive origins of the art of theatre directing, with its original assets and creative codes, in mythology - especially the Yoruba variant.

### **(3) Creation Myths, Causality and Space as Muse**

Spatial animation, the principle in discourse, historically locates the existential antecedents of the art of theatre directing in the creation chapter of global mythological corpuses. The very first director in any creativity-inclined endeavour, this principle posits, is that archetypal hero of origin myths – the Supreme Being – whose origination varies from culture to culture. This Principal Creation Hero's substantiation entails two blueprints: the non-causal or auto-cause and the causal models. The first denotes creation myths that are reserved on their Supreme Being's causal impulse by reifying an uncaused Super Mind's divine-automatic beingness and awakening. This 'pastless' Superhero simply commenced creation with a programmed exactness as paradigmatised in the Yoruba, Hebrew and versions of Egyptian myths. In the second, the Supreme Being is of traceable origination as a divinely automated emanation. Here, His 'pastness' or source is preserved in a cosmically inert condition – e.g. the boundless sea, cosmic egg and world serpent models - and upon taking form, He commences the job of creation. Variations of this exist in the Egyptian, Chinese, Dogon, Hindu, Sumerian, Babylonian and Australian myths (Wilkinson, 1998). Such myth-making revelations structurally embody their inventors' theologies and cosmogonies.

Creation in origin myths is of dual typology. The primary precursor type's Supreme Being - like the Hebrew Yahweh, Japanese Izanagi-Izanami, Norse Odin, Inca Viracocha, Maori Rangi-Papa, and Greek Zeus - is the sole and direct creation divinity. The secondary precursor type – like the Indian Brahman-Vishnu-Brahma, Aztec's Quetzalcoatl-Xolotl, and Yoruba Olodumare-Obatala – ceded the universe's creation to a subordinate deity. In the minds of these creation-deity-hero-directors, creation hibernated, like pregnancy, incubating in form of creative energy for ages while they

searched and researched habitable spaces for their respective universes. Thus, paradigmatically and methodologically, the deities attest to space as the foremost empirical muse of creativity. Consecutively, human directors, through all epochs, derived their existential space exploratory taste and conventional stage transformational intellect from the spatial super-intelligence of the gods. In theatre directing then, space is creatively existential. The director must be aware that space is the primal and ultimate muse of the creative act. Right from the first existential drama – creation – theatre unveiled the *stage* as *space* perpetually craving mediation and redefinition through the director's creative will, illumination and intercessory instinct. That is the director's mandate and muse of spatial animation. I commence, then, from the phenomenon of primal space.

**(4) In the Beginning, there was Space and Space was Dead: Primal Chaos Mediated by Direction**

On my stage, **space** – before mediation by the intercessory art of directing – is **dead**. That is the canon.

In the beginning, the **space** was **dead**. The stage-space is dead. The space – without **action** - will always be dead. Nothing exists. No sight nor sound. The theatrical space is only alive in the art of performance. Act resurrects the stage. Performed action awakens the space from organic deadness. That director is merely an over-hyped theatre genius who lacks wealthy proficiency of mastery of resurrecting the space. Since only he, of all artists in a production, cannot lay claim to a designated portfolio, only a profound space recreative aptitude can authorise his status.

The theatrical stage is existentially phenomenal. Spatial animation conceptualises this, in metaphor and reality, as the pre-creation space. The director's operational ecology – before engaging the stage – compares with pre-creation space's eco-crudity, its deadness resounding in the pervasive chaos of mythology's primal space. I shall illustrate with two major instances in which the dead primal space gained liveness through the act of creation. Act, action and experience are central to being, performance and existence.

Mythologies of multiple ethnocultural origins preserve humanity's psyche in cryptic narratives. First, I draw reference from a known scriptural book of colonial conquest. The Hebrew God – an auto-cause primary precursor variant - is the supervening power in

creation. At the world's genesis, He caused phenomena to be – heaven, earth, the celestial bodies, etc. The pre-creation universe “was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (*Holy Bible*, 1994: 1). Nothing, except a floating miasma – God's spirit – was visible within that space. Uncreated existence before the creation-director's intercession graphically illustrates the phase of nothingness of being and that of sourcing a space for creation. The popular biblical prototype presents the stages of the Hebrew divinity-director's creative act:

And God said, Let there be light...and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night...And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters...And God called the firmament heaven...And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear, and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called the Seas...And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass...and it was so...And God made two great lights; the greater to rule the day, and the lesser to rule the night:...and it was so...And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness:...So God created man in his own image...male and female created them. (Genesis: 1–3).

Scholarship has scribbled Yoruba oral cultural history into formal treatises. Idowu's book (1962/1994) is one of such documentations. Yoruba creation myth combines both the primary and secondary precursor types unfolding the pre-creation universe, earth's becoming and deity-occupation, and the entire creation saga's direction:

What is now our earth was once a watery, marshy waste. Up above was the sky heaven which was the abode of Olodumare and the divinities, with some other beings. The watery waste constituted, in a way, the sporting place of those dwellers above... What moved Olodumare to think of creating the solid earth, no one knows. However, He conceived the idea and at once carried it into effect. He summoned Orisa-nla, the arch-divinity, to

his presence and charged him with the duty: for material, He gave him a leaf packet of loose earth..., and for tools a five-toed hen or pigeon.

When Orisa-nla arrived, he threw the loose earth on a suitable spot on the watery waste. Then he let loose the hen and the pigeon; and these immediately began the work of scattering and spreading the loose earth. This they did until a great portion of the waste was covered. When enough of it had been covered, Orisa-nla went back and reported to Olodumare that the work had been accomplished. Whereupon, Olodumare dispatched the chameleon to go and inspect what had been done...from the second visit, however, it returned with the cheering report that it was both “wide enough” and sufficiently dry. The sacred spot where the work began was named *Ife* – “that which is wide” (19 – 20).

Yoruba mythological text of becoming, like other ethno-narratives, is a multi-chaptered epic. That is the first layer - discovery, retrieval, formation, and restoration of an expedient space from a waste-space. Next: stage set-up and casting.

**(5) Theatre Director: Being-Caster; Fate-Determiner**

The second layer is the act of humanity’s invention within the newly created cosmic space (stage). Olodumare willed to stimulate the space from its hitherto comatose status into a living universe. Just as in the first layer where he was a chosen protagonist, Orisa-nla or Obatala (interchangeable names of one and same deity), the arch-divinity and the protagonist of the first chapter, was, again, central to the sculpting of human figures:

Orisa-nla was assigned another special job. He was made the “creator” of human physical features ... his allotted duty was thenceforth to mould man’s physical form from the dust of the earth. He thus became the sculptor-divinity (21).

He was not lonely in this onerous task. Olodumare gave him an assistant, Ajala whose knowledge and acquaintance with the earth’s resources earned the panegyric: *Ajala alamo ti n’mo ori* (Ajala, the adept refiner of clay with which the head is moulded). By privilege

of assistantship to Obatala, Ajala emerged as not a mere participant in creation's process but equally as witness-to-fate because *ori* – head – in Yoruba metaphysics, is regarded as the deity of destiny. Ajala's role in creation as witness-to-fate would, in modern theatre, correspond to the stage manager's role (more on that elsewhere). Obatala's primary occupational raw material was clay. Preference for and selection of superior quality raw material determines the excellence of value of the human form to be sculpted, just as theatre's casting procedure and the standard of human materials cast define the worth of performers' productivity. Defective casting merely pre-endorses defective character evolution and performance. The existential awareness of this fate-related logic is evocatively expressed among the Yoruba in folk-supplicatory lyrics rendered unto the duo of Obatala and Ajala:

Nibo l'Eda ti n'mori wa? Nibo l'Eda ti m'ori yan?  
Obatala m'ori m'ori nikan ló le ba'wa se  
Tori, ayanmo l'Eda. Eda l'ayanmo o  
Ajala, alamo ire o. Ajala alamo ire o.  
O ba tete m'ori mi sire. M'ori m'ori, m'ori mi sire.

Where does the created being choose head? Where does humankind select head?  
None except Obatala, moulder of head, can offer guidance  
For fate is man's substance. Man, substance of his fate.  
Oh, Ajala of flawless clay. Ajala, miner of premium clay.  
Head moulder. Do sculpt my head in perfect destiny.

The song lyricises the Yoruba philosophy of creation and fatalism by acknowledging Ajala's status as proxy-sculptor of human destiny, symbolically apprehended in the image of the outer head (*ori ita* or *ori ode*) and an abstractive inner head (*ori inu*). It equally venerates Ajala's ingenuity in sourcing the optimum clay for the task of human creation. The mined clay is then processed into a fine mortar-like paste in readiness for Obatala who engages it, as inspired, in casting various human images. Invoking the elemental essence of the fire-god, Jakuta, later Sango, in the human substantiation procedure, it was Ajala's turn again to bake the sculptures in the divine forge. The sweltered figures were later preserved at the designated chamber of

*ase* for the ultimate mystery by which Olodumare exhales the breath of life into the lifeless forms through their nostrils or mouths. Following their transubstantiation into living beings with flesh, blood, spirit and soul, Ogun - deity of creativity and metallurgy – materialises, exerting his *ase*, his unique creative energy that embodies the beings with orthopaedical and engraved finesse through “lineage marks on the face and tattoos on the body, performing circumcision and such other surgery necessary to keep an individual in good health and to make him or her socially acceptable” (Lawal, 1996: xvi).

The creation of humans is one of the most sublime acts in the entire creation saga. In this act, each persona is distinctly fortified with a private *ase* – unique genetic creative component of the breath from Olodumare - which makes him/her exclusively indispensable to its activation. At this phase, the individualistic creative urge gave way to the communalistic due to its meta-symbolic magnitude. Divinity yields its paradigm to humanity: creation or creativity is rarely a solitary task. Applying divine wisdom, Olodumare judiciously selected certain individuals based on their distinct invested ‘*ase*-ability’ and constituted them into His creation team. The Jewish creator-director summoned His creation crew: “let us make man in our own image”. The Ajala-Obatala-Sango-Olodumare-Ogun divine quintuplet represents a dynamic symbolic dimension in the communality of human creation act. Metaphorically, the theatre’s individual-collaborative labour model essentially mirrors this divine creative ethos of individuality’s dissolution into communality. Only Orisa-nla it was among the four others in the quintet whom Olodumare endowed with the unique ‘*ase*’ – to cause humans into being through his sculptural creative faculty:

The office of a “creator” gave Orisa-nla the prerogative to make at will human figures perfect or defective, and of whatever colours he wants them to be. The hunchback, the cripple, or the albino, are special marks of his prerogative or, more often than not, displeasure (21).

Obatala sculpts human forms in the same fashion as playwrights sculpt plays and directors sculpt performances, especially through characters, obeying the unique laws of their crafts. The *ase* that authenticates the creator-deity’s sculpting faculty epitomises him as *being-caster*. This corresponds to the modern theatre director’s art of

*casting* artists and guiding the transition process of *casts* into characters or roles. The creator-director and the modern theatre director, by the potency of the *ase* at their disposal, are *casters of beings*. *Casting* is not a one-off exercise restrained to that crucial moment of performers' identification and selection by the director. *Casting*, more crucially, is the director's progressive moulding of performers, right from recognition and adoption, through complete evolution into that final envisioned role – as the sculptor's sculptures gradually transform from idea into concrete definable images. The rare director-performer/caster-cast-intimacy institutionalised through this *progressively transitioning casting* procedure is what, in directing, is technically termed 'contacting the actor/performer'. *Casting* is more profound than we ordinarily view it. It is tangible to creation and creativity both as 'phase' and as a deeply involving 'art' process.

We are better inclined to comparatively appreciate the spatial animation process in the modern theatre through mythology, the organic prototype. The above records from the two global cultures are stimulants to my philosophical contemplation of the director's artistic personality and the art of directing. Creation, as understood from both models, is not an instantaneous act or sudden manifestation. Life and art are forever emerging revelations. Revelation's antecedent is revolution - that is, new reality. Creation's evolutionary revelation, which artistic creativity mirrors, is the standard pace in all known ethnocultural archetypes. Creation, through directing, in the theatre is a measured revelatory and evolutionary course of action - through the initial clarification of meaning by projecting the philosophical vision; techno-aesthetic conceptualisation; casting; studying and analysis; rehearsals; refining; dress and technical try-outs; and eventual performance. All these are encompassed in the production's journey from revelation to revolution.

Reflecting on the phenomenon of space erupts the conflict between order and disorder and opens a conceptual vista for the spatial animation principle. The two primal spaces, before the divine creator-director's intervention, were distinguished by deadness, chaos and darkness. In the theatre, any stage-space preferred for performance by a director is, hypothetically, a space of chaos, darkness, deadness and nothingness. Empowered by the spatial animation principle, the theatre director triggers his creative

mediationist intellect in enchanting and enlivening the stage-space. Conceptually, then, spatial animation in directing signifies space re-creation. As a practice of directing, it is an art of re-inventing disorder as order; re-fashioning senselessness as sense; re-innovating nothingness as something; invoking art from artlessness; moulding from clay and casting into being. Spatial animation epitomises directing as humanity's obsession: a primeval core of existential self-assertion of control. Its space re-invention priority is an existential habit inherited from the mythical creator-directors. This trait is merely transposed into the modern theatre as the art of direction. Existentially, directing is an art of spatial de-invention, invention and re-invention. Through 'myth' to 'reality'; antiquity to modernity; order - pattern, method, design, structure, organisation, beauty and, ultimately, performance - is restored, through spatial animation, to world-space, the stage.

The spatial animation theatre director's creative intercessory art is the art of spatial instigation. His archetypal mentors are Olodumare and other divinity-directors whose primary or secondary existential intercession recreated the prevailing anarchy by animating its deadness. Metaphorically, spatial animation directing is an existential artistic encounter with the uncreated abyss - symbolically embodied by the script or idea - and the instinctual quest for creative order that is newness. The script's deadness is only too pronounced before its animation on stage. Thus, the director, whose instinctual creative agency derives from that primordial urgency for spatial animation and reordering, is *orisa* (deity)-impersonated: an *Obatala* incarnate - the creative urge of retrieving and restoring life by taming the abyss. Invested with *ase Obatala*, the spatial animation director enchants order from the dead and disordered *scriptive* and *stagy cosmic encounters*. Doctrinally, then, spatial animation directing, is purveying the intercessory instinct by the director in a putatively un-ordered space – the stage. The director's art is an act by which the fate of being and life entirely – humanity - is determined.

Any director primed to fulfil his *being-casting* and *life-fate determining* quest must be armed with the requisite spatial transmutational psychical intellect. This is the *ase* (power) of bringing into being: the deficit of which not only debases the procedural precedents of our archetypal-mythical directors but also renders banal the creative ritual. Once the desirable arena is endorsed for performance, the director deploys his space de-invention, invention

and re-invention gizmos – premeditated creativity properties. These universal action stimulation formulas, invented by our creation deities, are now modern theatre directors’ inheritance. Processed as *elusive atomic creative currents* of sorts, their extraction from the Yoruba creation mythology is purposively culturally affirmatory.

At first unconscious emanations and later, more deliberate applications, they have, over my years of artistic practice metamorphosed into a psychically and mentally explored construct of artistic creative potency. I, here, introduce this creative methodical schema as coded argots constituting a triadic substratum of my spatial animation experiment. Transmitting the cyphers in original Yoruba – their meta-existential and lingua-cultural source - is intentional as attempt at English translation signifies a reductive transference of meaning for lack of exact equivalents. However, English words closest in meaning are considered in explanation. The tripartite cardinal principles namely: (i) *Ase* – the masonic logos of creative accent; (ii) *Imole* – *intexterior* illumined knowledge; and (iii) *Atunda* deconstructive-(re)constructive complex; constitute the model expounded below as spatial animation directing’s *being-casting* and *fate-recasting* techniques.

## **(6) The Triadic Cardinal Principles of Spatial Animation**

### **(a) ASE: The Masonic Accent, Breath, Logos and Power, Force and Will of Creativity**

*Ase* - life force, vital energy, intuitive power and phenomenon’s causative current - is individual possessor-distinct.

There exists creative correspondence between the director’s pre-production stage and mythology’s pre-creation cosmic space. From the Hebrew God proceeded the logos: “let there be light” - “And there was light”. Yoruba Olodumare exhaled life into Obatala’s sculptures. The Amerindian Good Mind breathed living souls through the nostrils into soil-formed images. Thus, through the nostrils, our mythic forebears - clay figures cast in ethnocultural milieus millions of miles apart - transmuted into living beings. Thenceforth, by exerting the creative will, projecting and proclaiming a gestated wish - all affirmative act - the universe evolved, in full livingness, within the pre-creation cosmic space.

When I assert above that the director’s art resides in his possession of the *mystery* and *mastery* of awakening the space and its

innate properties from their primary comatose condition, a state of existential restraint, I speak of the first of the trio, the command, force and intuition that confers the power and prestige of being director. It is the essence that proceeds from the will through speech and/or act: *Let there be! And it manifests!* Here, the modern theatre director impersonates the divine creator-director as he proclaims: *Let there be life in the stage-space!* Thus, propelled by the necessity to evoke life out of deadness, he wills, breathes, utters, pronounces, exhibits and affirms the logos of creativity – *ase* – to be activated within the space and liberates it from dormancy. A Yoruba *ofo* incantatory logos – one of my habitual chants adopted for conscious creative effect at the outset of every directorial engagement - pragmatically communicates the potency of the director's quest:

Ohun ti a wi fun ogbo ni ogbo n'gbo  
Ohun ti a wi fun ogba ni ogba n'gba  
Oro ti okete ba ba'le so ni ile n'gbo  
Ase ina ní ina fi njo  
Ase oorun ni oorun fi n'ran  
Ase osupa lósupa fi n'tanmole kari aye.

*Ogbo* leaf hearkens to what is decreed onto it  
*Ogba*, fence, encloses whatever it is commanded to bear  
When the *Okete* rat speaks, the Earth listens  
*Ase* of fire is its accent of burning  
*Ase* of the sun is its force of shining  
The moon's *ase* is its power of worldwide illumination

In Yoruba metaphysics, *ase*, the masonic accent and cosmic force of *making-into-being*, resides in the relational chthonic interstices between the psyche/mind – *okan*; *ero* – thought; *oro* – spoken word/speech; and *ise* – deed/action. The cosmically pervasive, constitutive energy and essence of everything, *ase* is the *noumenality* of phenomenality. *Ase* is the activating force of activity and the 'act' in 'action'. The closest English term to *ase* is *logos* – defined in stoicism as “the active principle living in and determining the world”. In Christian theology, it is regarded as “the Word of God incarnate” (Geddie, 1966: 626). Thus, comprehended in modern theatrical directorial creativity, *ase* is director's Will materialised; director's Breath embodied; director's Spoken Word substantiated; director's Conviction and Courage incorporated.

For humans, *ase* is rooted in the Psyche, our link with the Cosmic Mind. Thus, *ase* is human psyche's sovereignty in the domain of Will; power to 'wish'; authority to 'speak'; supremacy to 'act'. *Ase* is Thought mutated into Word and Word activated into Act or Deed. Resident in that Psyche-Thought-Word-Act quadrangle is creativity's formula. The mythological creation protagonists owe their *Supremacy* to their investment with *ase* – the 'quintessence' of 'essence'. In spatial animation creative direction, *ase* is the utterance whose activation invokes being from non-being, commands being into becoming, and causes being to be.

Although the theatre director naturally inherits, retains and dominates a personal *ase* - an exclusive creative DNA, the unique varieties accessible from each of the theatrical artistic code are his entitlement. Knowledge of the masonic force, the *ase* of each element ascertains the noumenal and phenomenal density of the director's private *ase*. Being a breed that brings forth new realities, the director is licensed to decree and manipulate any of the elements to the zenith of his creative requirement and willpower. *Ase* is the salt of the director's palate and the currency and refinement of his directorial style.

Space is Earth and Earth is Space. Spatial animation is a trans-substantiation directing principle: the director appropriates a space as his creation stage, activates his creative urge, courage and energy, *breathes-into* or *pronounces-unto* the arena and bonds - instantly in *oath* - with the Earth of that stage-space. The stage-space evolves as the director's creative *terra firma* as the work progressively evolves, and in cumulative time as his artistic identity evolves. One essential rite which defines us as humans is creativity – “the process of bringing something new into being” (May: 1975: 37). *Earth* is the universal mother and elemental womb in which the core of nature is nurtured and from which most products of nature proceed. Yoruba *gelede* mysticism rightly purveys an enlightening prospect of *ase* being the “procreative power on which depends the survival of... the human race” (Lawal, 1996: 79). Here, *ase* is situated in the matricentric sphere through the procreative energy encoded in the *Earth-Woman-Womb* fertility mystery.

Metaphorising creative intuition, cogitation and concretisation as *procreation* deepens further *ase*'s substance in humanity's self-actualisation quest. Procreation - through natural

maternity prism or artistic discernment - is begotten through a procedure of activating the procreative *ase* energy. *Ase* is, therefore, the power, sign and mystery of procreative *coming-into-being* in maternity and artistic parameters. This suffices that maternal procreation's existential import is metaphorically self-replicated in artistic creative procreation. *Ase*, then, is impregnated with humanity's operational will and power - held and exercised in proxy by the director - to activate its survivalist, self-replicatory and self-edificatory intuition. In this existential pursuit, art is the agency, the artist, the agent. In spatial animation directorial agency, *ase* is an integral technique to the task of casting and recasting life. The vigour of a director's *ase-ability* in a spatial animation encounter shapes the potency and exercise of *ase* in his creative arsenal.

**(b) *Imole*: Illumined Knowledge, Vision of Creativity**

*Imole* illumines the mind's pathways to insight. Sight unshrouds the veil on clarity. Clarity is creation revealed. *Imole* – illumination or light – is divine and psychical font of revelation. Mythology reveals *imole*, on creation's hierarchy of emanation, as the first evoked phenomenon through the Creator's invocation and activation of *ase*. Prior to *imole*, the universe was uncreated, uncharted and in total chaos. The force of *imole* lit up that formless abyss revealed as creation - proof of the Creator's alertness to the essentialness of illumination and the irrevocability of insight and sight concerning creativity. Etymologically, *imole*, dissected, is composed of '*imo*' and '*le*'. The predicative noun – *imo* – means 'knowledge' or 'knowing' while the inferred adjunctive verb – '*le*' – may imply '*ile*', 'earth', with the letter 'i' elided. It may also connote 'to spread'/'wide'. Thus, *imo* + '*ile*' = '*imole*' - connotatively signifies 'knowledge of the earth' or 'widely spread or broad knowledge' or earth itself codifying knowledge. That, by extension, encompasses ideas like exposure, enlightenment, civilisation, experience, wisdom, understanding, perception, etc., which describe the artist's psychical and mental maturity. This deconstructivism exposes the term's foundational component – *imo*, knowledge – as the real substance of its meaning. Hence, *imole*, beyond superficial transliteration as 'light' or 'brightness', is, more profoundly, illumination conferred by knowledge, wisdom and understanding – *laakaye* in Yoruba.

*Imole* is the determining imperative of the director's interpretational depth and broadness of the directorial vision. In

Aristotelian metaphysics, *imole* is the directorial art's "substantial form" (Panthanmackel, 2003: 200). Spatial animation directing holds that every facet of the creative act must be permeated by *imole*, vista of *laakaye*-embodied creativity. *Imole*-processed clarity of thought and understanding in intrinsic-extrinsic or interior-exterior (*intextrinsic* or *intexterior*) magnitudes must inform ideation, perspectivisation, visioning, approach and conceptualisation. Intrinsically, the director's notch of enlightenment is *imole*-crystalised, and it radiates in the production extrinsically.

A North American Indian myth, narrated in Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (2010), underpins the supremacy of illumination, which only *imole* bestows, to the creative vision. Primarily thematising the good-evil dichotomy, the account reinforces the instrumentality of *imole* in negating the pervasive existential dearth of vision triggered by primeval darkness. To the Amerindian mythic creator-director, creating light is inevitable in negating the primal chaos:

The Good Mind, *not contented to remain in darkness, wished to create a great light*; the Bad Mind desired that the world should remain in its natural state. The Good Mind *took his dead mother's head and made it the sun, and of the remnant of her body he made the moon. These were to give light to the day and to the night. Also, he created many spots of light, now stars: these were to regulate the days, nights, seasons, years...*The Good Mind continued the creation...He formed two images of the dust of the ground in his own likeness, male and female, and by breathing into their nostrils gave them living souls, and named them Ea-gwe-howe, that is "real people"... (291. Italics mine).

This perspective finds correspondence in the Yoruba account:

Ile Ife was the beginning of Sunrise...the world was at one time in total darkness. The only element that occupied the earth was the Sea (Olokun). When Olodumare wanted the earth to evolve, *he commanded the Sun to rise*. But the sun faced many difficulties shining through to the surface of the sea. Eventually the clouds gave way and *the sun was able to reach the surface*. After that, the creator sent Obatala with the earth from heavens and a five-toed

rooster to spread the earth on the surface of the Sea...  
*After that, the other energies began to descend on Earth*  
(Ologundudu, 2008: 69 – 70. Italics mine).

The mythological traditions converge on the elemental prominence of *imole* in the creative act. To confront the vast, dark space and create tangibility therefrom, the creator-director's sight – psychically and physically - must be faultlessly percipient in identifying and selecting the materials relevant to His craft among the numerous ones available. Light, an *ase*-embedded elemental energy, among others with uniquely embedded *ase*, then precedes any other act of creation. The ethic and value of light, physically, metaphorically and symbolically must be cultivated by the artist-director as preparatory and precautionary technique before furthering other aspects of creation. In thematic, psychical, mental and philosophical realms, *imole* – perception, clairvoyance, illumination – is a major prerequisite. One primary attribute that a theatre director must possess is the power to evoke *imole* to stimulate the inertial illumination within the creative stage-space. *Imole* is the impulse of vision. Prescience and lucid visualisation derivable therefrom are the ultimate preconditions in theatre direction.

*Imole* animates the foundational chaos of creation and production. Thus, beyond being, ordinarily, an element of vision, it is primordially material to order. While I often insist that the primary responsibility of the director in a theatrical production is meaning-making, I must hasten to add that the essence of that meaning resides in the ethico-aesthetic order of the world which his production projects. The metaphor of *imole*, its authenticity and imperative in theatre directing is factually and symbolically implied in contemporary theatre's activities and procedures. Cosmically, the sun, moon and stars “regulate the day, night, seasons and years” just as their recreated symbols - technology-induced lighting machines, effects and pyrotechnics aesthetically regulate and determine the temperature, texture, pace, tempo, mood and rhythm of scenes, acts, movements and liveness of a performance-in-production.

The director is the mascot, the lamp-bearer whose torch illuminates the interpretation of the idea or script. His torch of knowledge, from exposure and grounding in *imo*, is to guide and lead every other artist involved in a production from actors to dancers and designers in fulfilling the theatre's meaning-making intent. The

director's enlightenment lights and mediates the material for the audience's understanding by providing knowledge in leading the team of performers – crew and cast - into the corridors of interpretation. Therefore, the bulk of adjectives with which he is commonly qualified - interpreter, coordinator, storyteller, organiser, art-leader, harmoniser, controller, orchestrator, protector, propagator, etc. – would only be superficially relevant if comprehended in isolation from his inherited status as the presiding deity of *imole* – agent and agency of vision - in a theatrical production.

Knowledge - depth of interpretive precognition - is *sine qua non* to being director, the theatrical production's meaning-making touch bearer. Idea clarity is prime for animating the stage-space. This dwells in the grandeur of the director's approach to meaning elicitation and interpretation. The bulk of theatre's accomplishment is hugely indebted to the depth and lucidity of the director's mind. After all, what business has the theatre aside the performance of meaning? Spatial animation's acknowledgement of *imole* – enlightened perception – as one of its three occupational principles hinges on its capacity to illuminate the vast void in the *pre-creation* mind of the audience expectantly awaiting the stage's transformational experience. To directors, I can only admonish: seek ye first *imole*'s force of illumination and all acts shall be revealed!

**(c) *Atunda*: The Deconstructivist-(Re)Constructivist Complex in Theatre Directing**

Spatial animation's third directing compositional formula is the *atunda* complex. Impressive narratives of origin of theatre directing abound, especially from received western sources. However, a maturer source can be found in the human appetite for rebellion, criticism and the artist's exercise of the destructive-constructive, rupture-nurture will. The director's mechanism as storyteller, philosopher, interpreter, adapter, detective and animator mandates cultivating a sharp critical sensibility. As a critical art, theatre directing activates the creative-destructive act thereby authorising the critico-deconstructivist license. Spatial animation surrogates the director's constructivist art to the critico-deconstructivist impulse, declares it a principle governed by the *atunda* ideal, projects the critic-director as *Atunda*-persona, and directing, *atunda* act.

Yoruba mythology constructs Atunda as the muse of rebellion, critical instinct and knowledge/skill democratisation. He is Yoruba's variety of rebellion-imperiled avatars like Prometheus, stealer of fire from Hephaestos for human domestic and metallurgical edification. Thus, Atunda personifies the altruistic mental provocation and intercessory intuitiveness imperative for directing. An enigmatic luminary in the origin myth, his name resonates in the conceptualisation of *ori* - intrinsic head or destiny; deity-duplication from the arch-divinity, Orisa-nla; and the etymological origination of the term 'Orisa'. A chapter of the creation myth submits that following the certification of the earth as habitable, Orisa-nla, the appointed sole administrator of that universe, begot for himself an assistant. The chapter continues:

Once, there was only the solitary being, the primogenitor of god and man, attended only by his slave, Atunda. We do not know where Atunda came from ... However, the slave rebelled. For reasons best known to himself he rolled a huge boulder on the god as he tended his garden on a hillside, sent him hurtling into the abyss in a thousand and one fragments (Soyinka, 2005: 27).

Atunda, radical patron of mutineers, was the first to pragmatically democratise knowledge and creativity: "the creation of the multiple godhead began a transference of social functions, the division of labour and professions among the deities whose departments they were thereafter to become" (Soyinka: 28). Atunda, critically riled by the existing unitarian authority structure defined by the godhead's orthodox knowledge arrogation and creative intellect monopoly, terminated Obatala's sole authority multiplying him into four-hundred and one *Irunmole* - dismembered shards of the primordial fount of all knowledge and creative spirit, each representing an epistemic capsule and creative resource. Today, theatre directors are universal heirs to Atunda's audacious fragmentation of creative intelligence.

The modern theatre director is *atunda*-artist-philosopher-critic par excellence. His deconstructive-constructive inquisitiveness terminates the playwright's creative monopoly regarding the sanctity of the dramatic text and reallocates its various components – speech, acting, dance, design, management, media, etc. – to various other artistic personnel for expression and mastery. Until about the mid-

nineteenth century in western conventional theatre, “the director was only an ideal” (Chinoy, 1963: 3) without a definitive identity. His role was usurped by playwrights, actors and excitement-seeking self-indulgent monarchs like one Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen: historicised in western theatre as world’s pioneer professional theatre director. Through rigorous application of the critical lens, the director de-re-constructs the dramatic text-encoded intellect and creativity hoarded by the playwright. Directing liberates the secrets of the text and sub-text and splits apart the veil spread over creativity by pre-creation inertia into multiple unitarian fragments and smaller departments for easier comprehensibility, engagement and specialisation.

Rather than in its holistic voluminosity, the spatial animation director cognises idea in fragments. He later collates the accrued revelations in slices, applying his mediatory skill, for reconstruction and casting into performance, subsequently audienced, in the theatre. Artistically, the emergent fractions and portions from this deconstruction process – just as the Yoruba mythic lore’s *okanlenirinwo irunmole* (401 deities) evolved from the fragmented godhead – are today the knowledge splinters constituting the theatrical complexus. These sub-sets comprise the diverse elements of theatrical production: acting; stage management; music; acrobatics; directing; design arts of costume, set, light, make-up, props; masking, etc.

The theatrical production’s pantheon of creativity - a college of artists – then, is designed with the director, the principal instigator and chief visioner, as the arch-deity. Other artists – as variously assigned to oversee specific art-designated creative offices - collaborate as co-visioners, co-creators and co-equals. Spatial animation’s third directorial practical formula, therefore, via the Yoruba mythic prism, is a legacy of the deities’ conflict drama - an insurrectionist enactment that objectivised knowledge-retrieval from a hitherto monopolistic conservative artistic godhead. Stepping into Atunda’s ethical shoes, the spatial animation director pragmatically unfetters capacity to think and act; and re-distributes creative knowledge among potential artistic skill-holders for exploration and interpretation of meaning. His is a modest, creatively generous ethos – a proof that real mastery of art resides in ‘knowing so much about so little’.

### **(7) Conclusion**

Theatre's universal organic conflictual superstructure is African theatre scholarship's veritable blueprint. In theory and practice, African theatre's retention of a substantial backlog of the continent's decolonial remains provides basis for dissent. African scholars' momentous resistance against imperialist scholarship's initial 'writing-out-of-Africa' from theatre history by a decisive act of 'writing-Africa-back-into' global history, signalled the age of dissent in African theatre scholarship. That age of dissent keeps maturing as Nigerian theatre scholar-practitioners continue to advance neo-African ideas emanating from original independent thinking as substitutes for old received conclusions and theories. The current exercise is yet another act in that rite of epistemological decolonization of the theatrical humanistic discipline. 'Writing back' to alien theatre doctrines and 'looking back' at indigenous cultures by Nigerian theatre scholars have yielded alternative histories and theories. Soyinka (1976) and the essays in Ogunbiyi's (1982 & 2014) compendium are among early reliable testaments to this process. Latest iterations in theatre directing are continuities of this decolonial pursuit. Fosudo and Babatope (2022) track alternative beginnings of organised theatre directing to 16<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba court entertainment and masque dramaturgy. And Adeoye's neo-alienation aesthetics (2019), Bakare's performative trinity and Yerima's total theatre (Oladele, 2024) are intentionally invented private directorial techniques and styles.

Performance is drama's actual impulse. Thus, a drama's staging is not - and cannot be - the drama, authentically, but only its performance-recreation, therefore its artefact. Herein lies spatial animation direction's conviction that our definition of direction needs conceptual 're-direction'. Proffering a perception of directing, then, as 'an approach to the interpretation' of the drama or the material, in contradistinction to the long-held assumption that directing is 'the interpretation' of the drama or the material itself, spatial animation critically returns to theatre's organic instinct – intercessory/mediatory (re)enactment. As a sense of direction, a compulsive space-mediational impulse, an interpretational technique, thus a meaning-making principle, the spatial animation direction ethos is thus definable as a modus of creative intercession in the theatre's primarily uncreated stage-space through the mediation of a material veritable enough for the act. Mirroring primal creation, the hitherto dead,

formless, chaotic stage-space is animated by unloading life-energies, form and order through the director's *being-casting* and *breathing-into* processes – two related creative trans-substantiation mechanisms impelled by the psychical and sensory activation of the director's intercessory instinct. Spatial animation utilises three key masonic creative sub-principles derived from the Yoruba masonic heritage: the *imole-ase-atunda* triad, as practical operational assets, currents and accents.

This conceptual artistic reflective prequel lays the foundation for the conversancy of the three operational argots as pertinent devices for the director's stage-space enchantment art. Demonstrating their integrity as trans-substantiation tools shall preoccupy the sequel planned as a testimonial exposé on my application of spatial animation ethos in my directorial creative research undertakings. Reminiscing on their operationalisation in productions – histrionic canvasses of concretising abstraction and animating *dead stage-spaces* – the triadic cardinal principles are substantiated as potent catalysts of the theatre director's spatial animation intercessory act and meaning-making art.

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