The Dissimulation Game:

Power play and choice in the performer-audience exchange as modelled on Capoeira Angola

Dafni Louzioti

Goldsmiths, University of London

PhD in Theatre & Performance

Supervisor: Professor Anna Furse

Acknowledgements

My gratitude for the support offered through this process extends in many directions and without which this project would simply not be completed. I am deeply grateful to: Professor Anna Furse, who believed in this work before even I could quite grasp its meaning; Anderson Almeida dos Santos (*Mestre* Pezão) for guiding me through the darkest and brightest moments in my Capoeira journey, for honouring my endless questions and protestations, and for being a true friend; my parents, Maria and Vassili, who have supported this work in so many tangible and intangible ways; my partner Albert Roberto, who is my sounding board and weathers my storm graciously; my dear friend and collaborator Metod Blejec, whose sharpness and attention to detail are only rivalled by his unwavering support and encouragement. Heartfelt thanks also go to Callum Hughes, Ting Sean Wang, Vlad(a) Vazheyevskyy, Hiro Kobayashi, Vida Vojic, Emily Shapiro, Joris Beets, Sofia Vaisman, Aaron Crowley, Hanna Maria Saar, and Johanna Oyno for their generous contribution of time and for making the final phases of R&D critical, rich and filled with joy and curiosity – I could not have hoped for a better team. My gratitude extends to my dear friends in Capoeira and particularly in *Dendê de Maré* who have kept me sharp, humble, and learning whether I am in the role of student or teacher, and for this I feel both fortunate and thankful. I am also grateful to my Goldsmiths colleagues Drs Philippa Burt, Cass Fleming, Katja Hilevaara and Göze Saner, who have been unreasonably generous with their thoughts and advice and kindled the flame when it weakened. This process would not be complete without the kind draft reading of Debbie Kent, as well as the many conversations before it. Further thanks go to Mac de Dendê (Emmanuel McDonald) and Liam Emerson for their dive into the early live music improvisations and Liam also for his work on that first soundtrack, Katjuša Kovačič for the wild ride that was the duet experiment in Ljubljana, Mona Kriegler for her generosity of spirit, beautiful questions and the shared laughter that revitalised us both, Kyara Orlando and Noora Baker for the early experiments and the concurrent journey of Cactus P.A.C. until 2016, and to everyone who attended R&D showings and rehearsals and so kindly offered their time and thoughts.

Abstract

This practice research thesis explores how power play in the Afro-Brazilian practice of Capoeira Angola might be transposed onto participatory performance. The first chapter presents Capoeira Angola as a decolonial practice, traces a brief history of the practice and offers key aspects of its knowledge within the context of this project. How the latter might inform a performance praxis rooted in improvisation follows, analysing the overlaps and divergences between Capoeira Angola and performance and discussing the role of the audience, participation, and Rancière's idea of dissensus. The second chapter presents an analysis of Capoeira Angola as a game in order to identify the structuring mechanisms for the power play that emerges. The analysis draws from scholarly material on Capoeira, game design, game philosophy, as well as my embodied knowledge of Capoeira practice of 20 years. Key ideas that bring the two chapters together are choice, play, ambiguity/uncertainty and emergence. These feed into the third chapter, which charts the development of the practice research culminating in the participatory performance *If It Was Up to Me.* More specifically, the performance is unpacked in terms of the structures it employs dramaturgically as well as the mechanics of choice in each section with correlations to the structures and knowledge in Capoeira. This is followed by a critical reflection of the practice, where the complexities of choice and emergence are framed from an emic perspective.

Contents

List of Figures

Glossary

On a working definition of embodied knowledge

Embodied knowledge is knowledge that is gained and exchanged predominantly through action, sensorially, and through interaction with people and the material world. It is knowledge that is not acquired through linguistic discourse, and although it can be partially conveyed through language, it stems from and resides in the sensorimotor system. According to Lakoff and Johnson, all thought is embodied as it is inextricably tied to our sensorimotor system. They also point out that language projects bodily/sensory experience, when discussing conceptualisations of space and spatial relations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 34-5). Although I agree with this statement, the distinction made in this thesis is that the particular knowledge generated and exchanged in Capoeira is overtly linked to the movement and musical interactions that occur *within* the game (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 36-39 for a more detailed analysis), and that the linguistic element of Capoeira is an additional layer, which is culturally significant for the practice, but secondary for the purposes of this work. Part of the grounding of this thesis comes from the empirical understanding that abstract reasoning (including tactical decisions) is (also) generated from movement practice, and that in this form it can be readily applied to further action. This last point is touched upon in discussions of critical thought in and from games, and Capoeira as a physical game and means of communicating knowledge and ideas.

Spatz offers a more condensed definition of embodied knowledge within the context of embodied practice and practice as research:

> *Embodied practice is epistemic.* It is structured by and productive of knowledge. Accordingly, an epistemological account of embodied practice is one according to which such practice actively encounters and *comes to know* reality through technique, rather than simply producing or constructing it (2015, 26).

As such, both Capoeira and the practice research at the heart of my project can be understood within this framework.

Capoeira terms

***Agogo*:** a two-tone metal cowbell used in the music of Capoeira. There are also newer versions of the *agogo* made out of coconut shells and wood as a display of misplaced authenticity[1].

Atabaque: a standing hand drum used in Capoeira music that looks a little like a conga drum.

***Bateria*:** the Capoeira orchestra, most commonly comprised of three *berimbaus*, two *pandeiros*, one *atabaque*, an *agogo*, and a *reco reco*.

***Berimbau*:** a musical bow instrument of African origin that is central to the music of Capoeira.

Capoeira: the name of the practice overall, as well as a general referent for the game itself.

Capoeira Angola: the style of Capoeira I practice and on which this research is based on.

Capoeirista/capoeiristas[2]: people who play Capoeira.

Jogo: the physical game of Capoeira

***Ladainha*:** A *ladainha*, literally translated as litany, is an opening song for the Capoeira *roda* (ritual game circle). This song sets the tone of the games to follow, as apart from the melody, the lyrics can recount the past and valorise those gone before, or it can offer a warning, or it can present a series of metaphors for Capoeira, and by inference, life itself. Sung as a solo, it is followed by the first type of call and response singing (*chula*/louvação) that generally characterises the *roda's* musical structure.

[1] Information from *Mestre* Moraes during a workshop in Barcelona, November 2019.
[2] Capoeira, Capoeira Angola, capoeirista: Although these are not English words, they are essential terms to the practice, which is the seed and focus of this research, and thus the terms are considered necessary linguistically incorporated terms in this writing without italic emphasis.

***Pandeiro*:** a type of tambourine used in Capoeira and samba music.

Practitioner titles: ***Mestre*** (***Mestra*** in the female) is the term for a master in the practice. In Capoeira Angola there are commonly three titles of recognition: ***Treinel*** (trainer), ***Contra-Mestre/Contra-Mestra*** (a kind of junior master title, literally translated as boatswain), and ***Mestre/Mestra*** (master).

Reco reco: A wooden scraper used in Capoeira music.

***Roda*:** The ritual circle in which the Capoeira game occurs.

Introduction: *Iê é ora a hora, iê vamos embora* [3]

> "As you set out on the way to Ithaca, pray that the journey is long." (K. P. Kavafi)[4]

> "… the conviction: it's not *me* that's wrong—it's the world that makes me appear strange, but I do not have the power to explain or change it." (Marriage, 2020, 87)

After many years of delays, stops, starts and a slowly emerging clarity as to what it is I am attempting with this practice research, it has reached a form that is articulable, albeit incompletely, as all art and embodied practices are when written about. Among the challenges this journey has posed, there is one that stands out as most significant to mention: when I began, my understanding of Capoeira was painfully limited in spite of the many years of training. Over the years that followed, and as my contact with my *Mestre*[5] deepened, my embodiment and contextual understanding of Capoeira Angola grew and it has been only recently that I have truly felt I can speak of (and for) the practice adequately. This is not to say there has been a moment of 'arrival'; I very much still train, study, and continue learning through the practice, through dialogue, and through scholarly research. As a result, I do not 'take' from Capoeira to put into this research; I write, speak, and move from within it and with it weave together the various elements of my artistic practice.

Seeds

This project stems from the conjunction of two practices: my artistic one—already a hybrid of dance, visual arts and theatre—and my Capoeira Angola one. Both have fuelled my attempts to

[3] "Hey, now is the time, hey let's get going" (my translation) are two of the many sung calls in capoeira, just before the physical game begins.
[4] My translation.
[5] Portuguese of master of capoeira - see glossary.

grapple with structures of control—physical, psychological, or otherwise—and find pathways towards critical thought and imagination that seek balance above all, rather than revolution or utopia. A third practice that emerged alongside this research has been just over a decade of teaching in Higher Education institutions across theory and practice, adding a necessary consideration of the dynamics and relationships at play in learning and teaching. This has been complementary to my artistic and Capoeira practices and continues to serve as a laboratory above all else, where critical and emancipatory pedagogy—often after Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (2005; 1970)—is central.

Over the decades of learning and making, my third-culture kid (Pollock and Van Recken, 2009)[6], queer difference, located in Global North ideologies has been shifted by the embodied knowledge and positionality of Capoeira Angola—an Afro-diasporic practice—and as such this project will be presented from a primarily decolonial frame (see below), while also acknowledging the contribution of European and North American paradigms to the work. The seed of this project lies resolutely in Capoeira Angola and the embodied knowledge it generates in its practitioners. Not only is Capoeira's root born as a response to coloniality, it continues to shift in response to the changes in how modernity has been expressed and asserted dominance; from a coming together of different African practices in the first (and multiple) iterations of the practice in Brazil, to the reorganisations in Bahia in the 1930s and 1940s, to its inclusion of women, and the developing discourse around LGBTQIA+ capoeiristas' visibility. These are but a few moments of continuous adaptation and as a result Capoeira continues to offer an otherwise of physical orientation, and therefore also conceptual orientation, to dominant movement practices and more recognised martial arts. As an epistemology located in Bahia and with Afro-diasporic roots, its physical and oral tradition of ritual combat resists binaries and actively grapples with power, agency, and the assertion of self within a group. Although it contains European elements—the use of Portuguese as the main language for

[6] A third culture kid is someone who has spent a significant part of their childhood and/or adolescence living in a culture different to that of their parents. Part of this experience is a sense of not belonging anywhere and of being 'strange' or a stranger, everywhere. Although this is not a new phenomenon, the term is relatively so and reflects the increasing number of third culture kids as well as their visibility, globally.

music and teaching—the majority of elements are formed of different Central West African cultural practices, languages and belief systems[7].

Capoeira Angola is a counter-hegemonic practice in that it has resisted the totalising forces of modernity by remaining fluid, ambiguous, and resolutely Afro-Brazilian. Rosa, in her powerful analysis of Afro-Brazilian movement, the knowledge it carries, and its relationship to governmental and social values, succinctly asserts:

> […] I propose that the system of bodily organization and knowledge production cultivated in Afro-Brazilian movement practices (i.e., the *ginga* aesthetic), of which samba and Capoeira are the most widely known, have contributed to recuperate-cum-invent an epistemology beyond colonial languages, whose scope exceeds or differs from Eurocentric thought. […] I propose that the articulation of flexible choreographies of identification centered on this movement system has led to decentralised processes of ethno-cultural resistance and emancipation, intertwining blackness with grace and dignity (2015, 16-17).

Rather than an overtly oppositional or revolutionary practice, Capoeira is considered here to be a decolonial epistemology that materialises an alternative to coloniality. One of the decolonial project's intentions is "to push considerations of how decoloniality undoes, disobeys and delinks from this matrix [of coloniality-modernity]; constructing paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing and living" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 4). As will be discussed in Chapter 1, Capoeira knowledge already functions in this way, not least because of its colonial difference but also because of its incorporations of new influences without losing its core, and because of its ambiguity, its playfulness, its negation of stable binaries.

[7] Engolo from modern day Angola is said to be a significant physical influence (Desch-Obi, 2008, 2012), although there is also clear argument for broader influences from West Central Africa (Rörhig Assunção, 2005); Kikongo cosmology influenced organisation and colour symbolism in Rio de Janeiro capoeiristas (Talmon Chvaicer, 2008); Yoruba language and Iffa religious traditions are prominent linguistic and spiritual elements in contemporary Capoeira Angola, which emerged in Bahia. The creolised Afro-Brazilian religions of Candomblé and Umbanda that permeate the language and symbolism of Capoeira culture have roots in Iffa traditions, as well as the Islamic practices of Central West Africans.

Decoloniality and position

Mignolo presents a concisely articulated and significant distinction between post-colonial theory and decoloniality as follows:

> The radical difference between post-colonial theory and post-coloniality in general—on the one hand—and de-colonial projects, on the other, lies in the genealogy of the thoughts and experiences of the scholars and intellectuals engaged in each of them, and in which each project finds its energy and its vision. The volume asserts the end of epistemic ownership and disciplinary private properties. It rejects the principle of "who was the first in saying or doing what", the principle of "newness" that so much contributed to colonising knowledges and beings (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010, 16).

How might it be that I, a non-black, non-Brazilian can effectively and adequately write about Capoeira? I attempt here to clarify my positionality and the radical shifts in thinking Capoeira has afforded me. Born in Greece, to Greek parents (and grandparents) and growing up as a third-culture kid in the UK and Belgium, identity has been a challenge to understand, not least because of the modelling of contemporary Greek identity to emulate that of Western Europe, coupled with a constant othering experienced abroad and back home. Cultural and ethnic hierarchies over the past few centuries in Europe have historically placed the east and south of the continent in subordinate positions, culturally, politically, and economically. The additional layer of queerness and a biologically female body added further complexity to this. Part of this experience exposes the problematic claims of the West of classical Greek civilisation being the birthplace of Western Civilisation. Apart from the facile and convenient oversight of Roman conquest and use/interpretation of Greece and its culture, as well as several other occupations from both east and west, this claim is proven more unstable in the definite colonial attitude towards contemporary, living, Greek subjects[8]. This is compounded by the effort of many Greeks to reject aspects of Greek identity and culture shared with Turkey and parts of the Middle East (after the Greek war for independence in 1821) in a push to present outwardly as Western, which has led to the

[8] My own experience living in the UK is but one example. Similar experiences are humorously and succinctly presented in Greek comedienne Katerina Vrana's performances, which are in English and Greek. The dominant narrative of the emergence of Western culture also largely ignores Arab contributions to knowledge.

subjugation of Greek-ness to late-capitalist neo-liberal epistemologies propagated by Western Europe and the US. As such, it is not possible to speak from a fully Greek perspective, whatever this might be. My anchoring, as a result, was in conceptions of multiplicity, something my postmodern training in Visual Arts proffered, and a rejection of fixed polarities. This created a collage of thinking, but one that seemed rootless and floating. My encounter with Capoeira Angola, therefore, was life changing as it offered a powerful and rooted system for me to engage with physically that works as an alternative, aesthetically, culturally, and conceptually. In place of postmodern fragmentation I found flux, adaptation, and a generative friction in working with contradiction. After twenty years of deep commitment to the practice that includes four long stays in Bahia, Brazil, to study, and my recognition as a *Contra-Mestra*[9], I feel able to speak from a somewhat authoritative position as a capoeirista.

Acknowledging Capoeira Angola as a decolonial epistemology in this thesis aims to highlight its complexity and subtlety and serves as a further step after many historical attempts to articulate and/or defend the art and Afro-Brazilian culture more widely, albeit usually, though certainly not exclusively, through Western lenses. I write from a deeply embodied perspective, cognizant of the ways in which my perspective has shifted because of Capoeira Angola and how this comes into dialogue with my other training, both intellectual and physical, as well as my cultural background[10]. Although several aspects and processes of Capoeira Angola are conveyed in writing, in an attempt to hint at a sense of the practice, there is no intention to try and convey the practice in words. This does not do it justice, nor is it possible to transmit the knowledge fully. Instead, I offer reflections from an emic perspective that are layered with further context so that the resulting (creative) praxis can be better located and comprehended. My use of the term emic here is a loan from anthropology—originating in linguistics—to describe an ‘inside’ perspective that acknowledges subjectivity, albeit an analytical one. This is significant as I draw from my embodied knowledge, as

[9] The title of *Contra-Mestra* was given to me in 2019 by my *Mestre,* Pezão, and in the presence of *Mestres* Moraes (the current figurehead of Capoeira Angola), Roberval, Dirceu and Joãozinho.
[10] For a concise history of attitudes in Brazil toward Afro-Brazilian, and more specifically Bahian, culture, see Rörhig Assunção, 2005.

aforementioned, and want to clarify that there is no one overarching theoretical framework that can be appropriately applied to this practice research (see below).

This research

Although I draw on various Western sources for this work, I do not ascribe a more central value to these, nor do I use them in order to offer any kind of 'validation' to my practice. Brecht's theatre and theoretical work and Rancière's thinking, for example, have helped identify how Capoeira might inform and relate to Western urban contexts in addition to locating the differences in genealogy and intention. Crucially, they have contributed to my understanding of how to employ Capoeira structures and strategies so that they become accessible, effective, and comprehensible to non-capoeiristas. I also draw on Freire's ideas around the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Bishop's writing on participatory performance, however, it is necessary to state that this research does not adopt a specifically Marxist perspective. Rather, it proposes a hybrid intellectual frame. For example, the call for critical thinking by both Brecht and Freire is an underlying motif in much of my practice since my early visual arts experiments, although I did not arrive at their work until much later in my research journey. Significantly, this project moves delinked[11] from capital as a central frame to conceptualise the world, without, however, denying its existence and current power.

Rancière's articulation of dissensus (2011a, 2011b) further informs my thinking, drawing on his specific articulation of multiple subjectivities with unique interpretations (whether of art or the world) constituting a fluctuating, hybrid whole. Dissensus also serves as an additional way of considering the constitution of my project, as it is itself a hybrid (Capoeira, post-modern dance, visual arts, and

[11] I borrow here Mignolo and Escobar's term (2010) to indicate not an opposition to but rather an otherwise to specific ideas.

performance art/Live Art) whose elements certainly don't always 'agree' with one another. Significantly, it is the necessary adaptations to positions of difference that dissensus necessitates that lie at the heart of this project and I echo Rancière's position that it is this that constitutes true politics (2011a, 2011b).

As a result, this thesis weaves in and across different avenues of thought, embraces the absence of resolution, and proposes options rooted in an experience of several differences, largely colonial: gender, sexual, and cultural. Aligned with how Mignolo and Walsh introduce the intention of decoloniality, my work hopes to open "pluriversal and interversal paths that disturb the totality from which the universal and the global are most often perceived" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 2).

Practice research/Praxis

Developing out of previous performance and visual arts works, my practice research for this project draws on Capoeira Angola as a structure rather than an aesthetic, in order to engage directly an uninitiated audience in the fluid power play of Capoeira. The key aim is for me to understand how power play and choice are structured in Capoeira and to transpose these to performance. This thesis explores how I transpose Capoeira structures onto performance with a reflection on the result based on my understanding of Capoeira. There are several examples of theatre and dance performances that employ Capoeira movement and music, and to my knowledge these rely primarily on the aesthetic qualities of the practice. Specific works in mind are: *In Blood: The Bacchae* performed at Arcola in 2009[12] and Ponciano Almeida's solo dance works[13]. These all engage with Brazilian thematics but ultimately use the movement as a sensational element in the case of the former and in a manner that is disjointed from its cultural significance in the case of the

[12] For further details see the Arcola website: https://www.arcolatheatre.com/whats-on/inbloodthebacchae/
[13] Ponciano Almeida is a master of capoeira and dancer. For some examples of his dance works see: https://www.youtube.com/@guarinidancecompany5837

latter. There is certainly aesthetic and artistic merit in these works, but the transposition of Capoeira movement onto London stages reduces the practice to a range of virtuoso movements and spectacular partner work.

Power is central to this project as well as in Capoeira Angola. The practice revolves around it and as such it merits framing for clarity. Within the scope of this project power is understood as agency to act upon a situation. This broad definition is purposeful as it encompasses both ideas around power as control/restriction, and power as agency. In the chapters that follow, Capoeira is presented as a multi-directional matrix of power dynamics, wherein power shifts between different individuals across time. My thinking emerged largely from practice but is also reflected in at least two theoretical analyses of power. This framing of power echoes aspects of both Arendt and Foucault's position that power is relational and not something that can be possessed. Although each has a distinct conception of the term, they can be seen as complementary (Allen, 2002).

In Foucault's thinking:

> Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (1980, 98).

In a similar vein Arendt asserts that power "corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (1970, 44). The relational nature of these conceptualisations is significant in articulating the power play central to Capoeira—and this project—and clearly positions itself outside analyses that frame power as domination (only) and as pertaining to state mechanisms (only).

Furthermore, power is understood here to produce knowledge (Foucault in Maze, 2018, 124), particularly as Capoeira Angola revolves around recuperating-cum-inventing identity (Rosa, 2015) through the convergence of contemporary bodies and traditional embodied practice, as will be discussed further on.

A few further elaborations are likely to prove useful prior to a deeper analysis of the power play in Capoeira. Domination and violence are often conflated with power, and in Capoeira there are specific uses and boundaries that apply to these terms. Maze clarifies Foucault's conception of domination *vis-a-vis* violence as follows:

> … states of domination occur when "an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations" to the point where "practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited"; in this way, violence does not target bodies or things but rather potentiality (Maze, 2028, 139).

Furthermore, processes of domination pertain to several scales of relationship, from interpersonal, to systemic (Foucault, 1980, 96). In Capoeira, although the intention is to dominate one's partner, there are several rules and conventions that render this impossible, as will be discussed. These span across the conventions that guide group, as well as individual behaviour, and thus work on different scales, never truly threatening potentiality.

Lastly, violence within the context of this project will most often refer to physical violence, but is understood to encompass physical, verbal, and psychological violence. It is significant to emphasise that in Capoeira violence does not equate with power. Arendt presents violence as the opposite of power (1970), in that where power comes to be through intersubjective actions and generates a field of possibility (Maze, 2018, 126), violence limits and even erases the latter (Arendt, 1970). Furthermore, a "loss of power becomes a temptation to substitute violence for power" (Arendt, 1970, 54). In Capoeira games this can be observed often enough. At moments where some players realise they cannot act as they want, or intend to during the game—because

of the gameplay—they resort to violence—in tactics, and/or force—something that forces the game to stop and which is frowned upon by the Capoeira community at large, as it undermines/threatens the power play.

The analysis of Capoeira as a game in Chapter 2, which forms the backbone for the practice research, is based on my 20-year ongoing practice and study, bolstered by scholarly research. There is a range of richly researched publications that present Capoeira historically, phenomenologically and socially, with a focus on dance, and in the context of security studies among others. I draw on this research for context, corroboration of facts and to problematise my own knowledge of the practice. Furthermore, this embodied knowledge is what drives and informs the practice research, although not singularly.

The resulting practice research, a participatory performance game titled *If It Was Up to Me*, is discussed in Chapter 3. This is related to the ideas and areas of knowledge explored in the preceding chapters. Practical, conceptual and ethical considerations are discussed with the intention to give a sense of the process and research behind the performance itself. The root of this project is in praxis[14] insofar as the core ideas have stemmed from 'doing' and that the new knowledge developed could only be arrived at through practice. It is necessary perhaps to clarify that doing/thinking are understood as a continuous feedback loop; more precisely, doing/reflecting constitute this feedback loop, as thinking as a function cannot be removed from doing and vice versa[15]. Robin Nelson offers the term "doing-thinking" (2013) for referring to embodied knowledge and the process of practice as research (PaR) and elaborates on the imbrication of theory and practice in praxis, without a set order of occurrence for either (2013, 62). Spatz further offers that:

> Most often today, instead of naming an epistemic impulse already at work in many embodied practices, the "research" in PaR refers merely to an interdisciplinary relationship

[14] Knowledge that develops through the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice; or theorised practice.
[15] See Lakoff and Johnson (1999) for a thorough argument on how thought is embodied and a whole-body process rather than a process isolated in the brain.

> between embodied practice and theoretical knowledge. I call this the “weak” conception of PaR, or “Practice *and* Research.” In it, practice is invited to be in dialogue with more traditional forms of research, but how practice may itself constitute research is not adequately shown. A stronger conception of PaR—more like the notion of embodied research developed here—would argue on epistemological grounds that practice can itself be a research methodology, leading to the discovery of new knowledge in the form of new technique (2015, 233).

This project reflects aspects of both these definitions in that it is grounded in ongoing embodied research/practice while also drawing from theoretical knowledge to further reflect and frame this praxis. The outcomes of my research are both in technique—insofar as it relates to a technique of making performance—and in further understanding of power play in Capoeira Angola and constitute developments of my ongoing praxis. This comparatively recent analysis and validation of the knowledge developed through praxis is significant in reconceiving existing hierarchies of knowledge and, as a result, power.

Mignolo and Walsh make a compelling connection between praxis and decoloniality:

> By disobeying the long-held belief that you first theorise and then apply, or that you can engage in blind praxis without theoretical analysis and vision, we locate our thinking/doing in a different terrain. […] Decoloniality, in this sense, is wrapped up with re-existence; both claim a terrain that endeavours to delink from the theoretical tenets and conceptual instruments of Western thought (2018, 7).

Echoing this statement, my work stems from praxis—as aforementioned—and moves intentionally towards a decolonial artistic praxis. Rooted in Capoeira and arts practice, this project engages with theoretical material in a self-reflective and analytical process, while concurrently developing artistic material in dialogue with this (and the root practices). The following chapters aim to make conceptual and artistic connections that offer context for getting a sense of Capoeira and the work that has developed from my engagement with it.

Chapter 1: *É Coisa de Angoleiro*[16]: Capoeira, decoloniality and performance

> 'Let them say what they will…but if Portugal fathered Brazil, Angola was the Black Mother on whose lap the child grew.' (A. Neves e Sousa in Röhrig Assunção, 2005, 22)

This chapter will examine how Capoeira Angola can offer a decolonial perspective and introduce how, through its principles of choice, agency and power play, I have created an exploration of these key motifs in my designed performance *If It Was Up to Me*.

1

The scene is set in a cobbled plaza in Salvador (Bahia, Brazil), in the unforgiving midday heat of the February sun. At the centre of a gathering of people facing the same focal point is a circle made up of 8 people standing and playing percussion instruments (three *berimbaus*, two *pandeiros*, one *atabaque*, one *agogo* and one *reco reco*[17]) and twenty more (or so) sitting on the cobbles. One of the instrument players leads a call and response song[18], with the rest of the circle (and sometimes people beyond) responding. In the centre of the *roda*[19] two people are moving around and through one another's bodies, serpentine, often upside down[20], ready to shift from graceful 'slithering' to deadly 'biting'. They step back and forth, twisting their torsos, launching kicks at one another, ducking and diving in place of defence. Their repertory of movement includes contorted cartwheels (slow, full of angles, often with a smile), handstands, and backbends. A sweep or a headbutt almost lands and the crowd exclaim. A successful such attack often results in

[16] It's an *Angoleiro* thing (my translation). *Angoleiro* refers to a Capoeira Angola practitioner. The phrase is the chorus of a song that lists behaviours/habits in and aspects of Capoeira Angola in the call.
[17] Percussion instruments used in Capoeira. See Glossary.
[18] The lyrics are a combination of Portuguese and Yoruba languages.
[19] Portuguese for circle. This is the named space and ritual for capoeira and the term will be used henceforth. See Glossary.
[20] Any combination and variation of handstands, cartwheels, headstands, back handsprings, and half-inversions can be seen in a game.

yet more fervent exclamations. The two people in the *roda* are playing a game of Capoeira Angola, an Afro-Brazilian practice that can be read as a martial art, a dance, a ritual fight, a game, an acrobatic performance, mock combat, or any combination of these[21].

2

The scene is set in the first-floor hall of an old community centre in north London (UK), during a Saturday afternoon in May. The yellow wood of the floor is uneven, creating gentle peaks and troughs, almost as if it were the surface of the sea. The back wall is mirrored and against it hangs the banner of our group, *Grupo de Capoeira Angola Dendê de Maré,* black on yellow. With it as the anchor, a circle of people are sat; eight people playing the percussion instruments of Capoeira sat on chairs and nearest the banner, with about fifteen others sat on the floor completing the circle. A little further away from the circle and facing the banner and musicians are a couple of benches set out for onlookers, who alternate between sitting to watch, taking photographs and looking after the small children playing (running) in the space around the *roda*. In the centre of the *roda* two people crouch in front of the musicians listening to the lead singer offer warning/advice in their song as they prepare to play Capoeira Angola. With a transitional call and response song, the two players gesture and move in response to the lyrics, signifying comprehension, calling on ancestors, demonstrating respect and gratitude to the musicians until a new song is sung for them to enter into the game proper.

The two scenes are worlds apart, quite literally, yet the collective focus on creating the right conditions for the game is similar. Certainly, in Bahia this focus is more heightened, and the resulting atmosphere is more electric and volatile, not least because it is in an outdoor public space and in a hot climate. There is a different sense of danger in the games in the city of Salvador and this has to do as much with the material and social reality there as it has with the deeply embodied

[21] Both this and the description that follows are partially fictionalised accounts of two real events I was present at between February 2018 and May 2019.

cultural understanding of Capoeira Angola that Afro-Brazilian capoeiristas possess. It is worth noting that Salvador is a city where white-identifying people are a minority. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics the figures for the third trimester of 2022 show that out of the total registered population in Salvador, 15% identify as white, with 38% and 46% who identify as black and mixed race, respectively (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE, 2022). Salvador has the greatest concentration of black people than any city in Brazil, which, apart from in the statistics, is evident in the food, music and overall culture of the city, making it the *de facto* centre of Capoeira Angola[22]. In European settings, how much of this understanding and context is transmitted to students, both orally and through practice, is highly dependent on who teaches. It is not uncommon to find people who are acutely aware of the cultural, historical and social forces at play in Capoeira[23], and others who are quite oblivious to the complexity and politics of learning and teaching a practice that has evolved out of centuries of violence and suppression against Africans and Afro-Brazilians.

Capoeira is now practiced globally and I will be focusing on Capoeira Angola in Bahia and Europe primarily, which are the places I have had the longest experience of the game. The evidence for tracing Capoeira's history is fragmentary, although there has been research that establishes various links with Central West African practices since the 1930s. There are records of Capoeira in Brazil in painting and in official documents from as early as the eighteenth century (Röhrig Assunção, 2005). Sources increase in number with time, although what they refer to was not a singular practice.

> It is mentioned in the nineteenth-century sources of many provinces: Pará, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Even though not always described in detail, evidence suggests that each region had its specific variant, which differed from

[22] This is according to numerous prominent *Mestres* as well as experienced practitioners from other parts of Brazil and globally who travel to Salvador and the surrounding cities at least once a year to train and participate in the *rodas*.

[23] There are several approaches to what is generally perceived to be a whitening of Capoeira Angola, with three broad groups: those who lead and participate in black-only groups for the education and empowerment of capoeiristas; those who lead and participate in multi-ethnic and anti-racist groups; and those who lead multi-ethnic groups that do not take a clear stance on racism.

> others with respect to musical instruments, fighting techniques and rituals (Röhrig Assunção, 2005, 65-6).

Although a precise tracing of the development of Capoeira in its many historical iterations across Brazil is beyond the scope of this project, it is certainly worth looking at a condensed more recent history as I hope it will reveal its adaptability to social and political conditions, while still maintaining a sense of identity.

A Brief Tracing of Capoeira

Capoeira is constituted of dance, fight, play, music, ritual, and poetry, bringing together different cultural elements and memories from Africa, Brazil and Europe and is an orally transmitted practice. It eludes narrow classification, certainly by Western standards, although as I argue in Chapter 2, if a label were to be applied, the most successful one I have found is that of a game. "[T]he close association of combat movements with rhythm, music, pantomime, dance and singing appears as one common denominator of most, if not all, known combat games practised by slaves and their descendants" (Röhrig Assunção, 2005, 64) indicates the prevalence of African elements in Capoeira, while also emphasising the game element of the practice.

There are several broad genealogies of Capoeira that are often also referred to as styles, and within each of these, further lineages can be identified. There are three main genealogies that are roughly traced to the early twentieth century, which are *Mestre*[24] Bimba (Manuel do Reis Machado), *Mestre* Pastinha (Vicente Ferreira Pastinha)—both from Salvador—and a less distinct genealogy from Rio de Janeiro, with no singular figures gaining equivalent fame. *Mestre* Bimba

[24] Portuguese for master teacher/practitioner—see Glossary.

made changes to Capoeira in the 1930s that shifted its teaching into schools and opened it up to white middle class students, helping shift the game's practice from illegality and persecution into a celebrated and distinctly Brazilian martial art. The historical tracing of these changes is complex, revealing ambiguity in Bimba's stance towards changes he made (or not) and the serving of political agendas across different levels. What this resulted in was the spread of Capoeira Regional as it is now called across Brazil and later the world. *Mestre* Pastinha was called upon to help preserve the more traditional iteration of Capoeira by other masters of the art, and in the 1940s he founded his own academy of Capoeira Angola, which marks another clear development and differentiation of the practice. The two styles/genealogies do not exist antagonistically and there have been crossovers and a certain degree of hybridisation. In Bahia there are other lineages that do not stem from Bimba or Pastinha, seminal as they were in Capoeira's survival: there are capoeiristas who play Capoeira *da rua* (street Capoeira), or Capoeira *rustica* (rustic Capoeira) and they are often omitted from the 'canon' probably because there have been few who rivalled Pastinha and Bimba's influence and fame. In addition to this, great masters of the art who are referenced by contemporary players and who were roughly contemporary to Bimba and Pastinha do not necessarily fall under a clear style because of their contemporaneity; for example, a third influential figure from Bahia in the development of Capoeira, although not as well known, is *Mestre* Canjiquinha (Washington Bruno da Silva), who was taught by *Mestre* Aberrê (one of the older students of *Mestre* Pastinha) but in later years adopted elements of *Mestre* Bimba's style into his teaching with his legacy today being twofold. His older work in Pastinha's school is a reference for *Angoleiros*—particularly the music—while his work in his own academy—particularly his style of playing and teaching the game—is referenced by Regional and *Contemporanea*[25] practitioners. Further examples are *Mestre* Cobrinha Verde (Rafael Alves França) and *Mestre* Waldemar (Waldemar Rodrigues da Paixão) who are now often 'claimed' by *Angoleiros* to be such and remain significant musical references to today[26]. Rio de Janeiro poses a less distinct point of nomenclature as there are no specific masters who have emerged as famous examples of a

[25] A contemporary style that developed out of Regional; it is also a name used by capoeiristas from Rio de Janeiro to differentiate their lineage from those of *Mestres* Bimba and Pastinha.
[26] In other circles *Mestre* Waldemar is labelled as a master of street Capoeira.

style[27]. Röhrig Assunção, however, offers that capoeiristas from the southeast of Brazil often refer to their Capoeira as *Contemporanea* (contemporary), citing A. L. L. Lopes (2005, 28, 219). Prior to this there are reports of differences in how Capoeira was played in Bahia and in Rio without distinctions in nomenclature.

> As Capoeira in Rio became more creolized, affiliations with particular gangs tended to replace earlier expressions of ethnic identity... In Bahia, however, Capoeira continued to be associated with Africa, in particular with slaves from Kongo and Angola—generically known as 'Angolas'—and their descendants. Schoolteacher and reformer Manuel Querino (1851–1923), to whom we owe one of the first detailed accounts of the art in Salvador, reported that Capoeira was known as a 'game' (brinquedo) and had been introduced to Brazil by the slaves from Angola (Rörhig Assunção, 2005, 20).

In spite of their differences, all Capoeira styles retain aesthetic elements linked to its roots, to varying degrees. Current discourse continues to identify Capoeira Angola as more closely tied to its African roots.

Remembering and calling upon one's ancestors is a fundamental aspect of Afro-Brazilian culture and is expressed across cultural and daily practices and speech. The importance of lineage is significant in Capoeira Angola: it demonstrates an ancestral connection that usually traces back to the state of Bahia in Brazil (and a symbolic link to Africa[28]), while it also functions as a marker of reverence towards and understanding of the practice[29]. In Capoeira, the tracing of the school's lineage to historical and sometimes mythical figures strengthens the identity of the group and offers weight to each player's belonging within the practice. Calling up names in song, or recounting great feats is one way of manifesting these links, while another, more discreet way of calling upon one's lineage is in the game itself, visualising and embodying movements and qualities of the greats of

[27] For detailed historical accounts of the development of Capoeira see Rörhig Assunção (2005) and Talmon-Chvaicer (2008), among others. Most authors who write about capoeira offer partial historical accounts, but the aforementioned authors have a specifically historic focus with a wealth of sources and cross references.
[28] By calling on old masters of the art, as well as historical and mythical figures of resistance against colonisers and slave traders the emotional and symbolic connection to Africa is created/maintained.
[29] It is worth noting that some of the ritual aspects may well have been more recent additions as part of the re-Africanising of Capoeira Angola. Differences between historical accounts and images of Capoeira and its current expression differ, so it is not possible to identify precisely the time certain elements entered the practice.

the past. Despite differences across groups and lineage, however, Capoeira remains genealogically Afro-diasporic as all styles share a common root, and political in its continued discourse around freedom and resistance against oppression—whatever form that may take in contemporary practice.

It must be emphasised here that Capoeira is far from a uniform practice; as mentioned earlier, the differences in lineage are but one of the many ways in which Capoeira manifests and is taught. The latter is significant in that over the past forty years Capoeira (of all kinds) has been taught internationally and within very varied cultural and social contexts that range from dance schools, to training in the street, to refugee care programs[30]. This has meant that some teachers have recontextualised the practice to make it appealing to a globalised market, and commercial derivatives that draw primarily on the movement have popped up in gyms and dance schools worldwide leading to a loss of context and purpose in terms of the roots and praxis of Capoeira as many capoeiristas, including myself, understand it. This evidences an instrumentalisation of Capoeira for and within the neoliberal values of organisations and institutions that do not represent its true context. As regards my position within the world of Capoeira Angola and how it is possible to maintain a genuine connection to an adopted cultural practice, it is through continuous dialogue with my teacher, as well as with a number of elders, and a broader study of the history and politics of Capoeira[31]. In addition to the above, it is through an open immersion into the practice, allowing its movement and interactions to shift the way I think and do that it is possible to move beyond reductive appropriations and approximations.

[30] One such example is Capoeia4Refugees that ran projects in Syria, Jordan and Palestine, with variable success. See https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/members/capoeira4refugees for further details. There are several more, including a project in Australia for refugee high school students; see Mom et al. (2019) for the full research report.

[31] Studying and discussing racial, gender, and sexual politics is part of many Capoeira Angola groups' discourse, including my own.

If historically Capoeira emerged as a reconstruction/resurgence of multiple African practices in the face of coloniality, and then later, as a response to systematic persecution and suppression in the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century, and reorganised itself into the more codified—albeit partially and inconsistently—forms recognised today, then it currently spreads—when not as above but in its true form—as a consciously Afro-diasporic embodied epistemology: a way out of Western binaries and hierarchies, capital-centred values, and rigid definitions. Certainly, parallels can be drawn with postmodern practices in both visual and performance arts[32] but the system of knowledge and the genealogy of Capoeira are different *and* born of difference.

Roots and Branches: navigating decoloniality outside Capoeira

The significance of understanding Capoeira Angola as a decolonial epistemology moves beyond recognising its value as a system of embodied knowledge that communicates ideas and histories. The practice, with its shifting modalities, its ambiguities, and its ability to accept contradiction, is transformative. This has been the case regarding my own being in the world—fundamentally—and is something I understand that many other capoeiristas experience/learn. It is this epistemology that has led to my development of performance that foments interactions between the audience and the performer along the dynamics within a game of Capoeira, employing various feints/pretences in the process (see Chapter 3). The choice to develop a performance that can be understood within Western artistic conventions stems from a practical problem: in order to understand and play Capoeira one needs years of training and study and any attempt to condense or shortcut this process results in highly problematic essentialising. The desire to extend a sense of this epistemology to a non-Capoeira audience, therefore, has led to this research. The resulting performance, entitled *If It Was Up to Me*, employs what I understand to be the structuring principles

[32] The ambiguity of Contact Improvisation in terms leading/following, as well as its reorganisation of the body and senses, is one such parallel. The use of irony, humour, quotation and self-reference in painting and theatre are also further aesthetic and process-based parallels that can be drawn.

of Capoeira Angola while it intends to bring the audience into a game of choice and shifting power-dynamics. The ways in which power is conceptualised is from the perspective of the 'weak', the perspective from below, as Marriage (2020) puts it. Furthermore, the continuous shifting of power and high degree of adaptation in the quest for dominance also offers a frame through which to explore resistance; against another player in the micro scale, and as a strategy in the macro scale. Marriage echoes this idea in her conception of Capoeira as total resistance in the face of the total war against it by the government. "The proposition that Capoeira players demonstrated total resistance does not preclude negotiation and compromise; on the contrary, the politics and corporeality of Capoeira highlight flux and change, rather than an ideology or performance" (Marriage, 2018, 267).

The participatory nature of my performance serves to frame my exploration of power-dynamics and choice; both my own and the spectators'. The audience access participatory performance that opens up questions of control, choice and agency, without knowing that this is based on Capoeira and without needing to. In considering how to structure the spectators' possibilities for action I create the frame through which I can understand what dynamics the interactions might yield and how these match my understanding of the game of Capoeira.

I argue that my application of the principles of the form towards my performance practice research is not a dilution of Capoeira's integrity, as above, but a way of applying my deep embodied knowledge to a participatory performance that proposes its para-practice, without claiming to stand in for Capoeira. The analysis of Capoeira as a game in Chapter 2 offers a means through which to identify structures that generate relationships, thus creating a necessary distance between an emulation of the aesthetics and culture of the practice.

Capoeira Knowing

What constitutes and generates knowledge in Capoeira, and what might be some of the specific elements in the practice that give it its distinctive place as it straddles disciplines will be discussed below. Rosa elaborates on the physical construction of the epistemology of Capoeira based on her analysis of the *ginga* aesthetic: an embodied guiding principle that underpins the aesthetic qualities and knowledge in Afro-Brazilian culture (2005). Her articulation of *ginga* offers precise physical descriptions that demonstrate the particular qualities that set it apart. Some of the key principles she identifies are coolness[33], visual dissonance[34], syncopated[35] and serpentine pathways[36] (2005, 104-108). Although these elements are enlightening and present the *ginga* in its undeniable importance as part of Capoeira knowledge, they do not help identify the interplay of elements and the interactions that generate power play. However, the way in which movement occurs especially in terms of aggression, seduction, and coolness does affect aspects of gameplay but the following analysis of Capoeira epistemology is focused to the needs of my research.

Capoeira Angola is an oral, improvised practice that employs a rich aesthetic language of movement, music, and song. All elements in the practice are trained with a focus on finding synergy between multiple individuals, across several layers of attention, while making choices is central to keeping things going in its improvised interactions (see below). Choice is framed here within the broader notion of improvisation, as the physical game unfolds unchoreographed and

[33] Rosa succinctly puts as follows: "…the ginga in Capoeira Angola physically materializes the dynamic balance of opposing forces commonly associated with West African concepts of coolness (Thompson, 1966; Tavares, 1984)" (2005, 104).
[34] "…the predominance of articulations between the ground and fragmented parts of a polycentric body as the player tilts the hips sideways, slides the shoulders, or thrusts the two pairs of scales, generating high-affect juxtapositions. … Subsequently, in Capoeira Angola, the upper body's sinuous actions counterbalance—and often hide or overshadow rather than expose—the direction, timing, or purpose of the hip-play" (Rosa, 2005, 106).
[35] "This quality of movement refers to the predominance of multi-linear pathways of oscillation (swayed action) resulting from polyrhythmic dialogues between bodily parts, especially the hips and feet" (Rosa, 2005, 106).
[36] "This quality of movement refers to the predominance of spiral and wave-like motions—beyond the vertical interaction between the hips and feet—in order to generate soft-spoken rippling effects across the entire body" (Rosa, 2005, 107).

unpredictable—at the best of times—while the music is also improvised within the context of a base set of rhythms. The calling part of the singing is ideally also improvised, reflecting what is happening in the physical game and the music and often calling for adjustments or giving warnings to players. Although knowing how to improvise in Capoeira forms part of the knowledge of the practice, I argue that it is more significant as a *process* that generates further areas of knowledge that are more significant within the framing of this project. Furthermore, as a process, improvisation remains one of the central practice techniques in the PaR of this project, reflecting both my Capoeira and performance training[37].

For the purposes of this research the following analysis of the organising principles in Capoeira focuses on the aspects of the practice that drive power play and offers the following key points: choice, attempting dominance, adaptation, play and ambiguity, performativity, inversion, and dissimulation and feigning. These are unpacked below and an indication of how they inform my practice follows these. The latter's development from and around these ideas and approaches is given in more detail in Chapter 3.

Choice

Like the majority of martial arts, improvisatory performance, and games, confrontation with choice is perpetually present in Capoeira, as its game and, to a large extent, its music are improvised as mentioned. Of the numerous types of choices available in a game of Capoeira, the choices that occur between the two people playing physically at the centre of the *roda* are most evident, while the outcome of such choices directly and palpably impact both the degree of dominance, as well the level of physical risk/safety in the interaction. Weighing up what one thinks they are capable of

[37] See Appendix II for an account of my training. Improvisation in the context of this project is discussed below.

doing[38] against how they read their partner/opponent and the situation produces a layered state of analysing, acting and reacting, which differs from the majority of mainstream martial arts in that it incorporates highly aesthetic and expressive movement and gesture as part of the vocabulary of interaction[39] and thus the tactical or strategic thinking of each player.

The broader idea of power play, not just for dominance, but also for the fun of grappling with a specific dynamic inflects most choices in the *roda.* The choices the musicians and singers make also have an impact on game play, from the choice to 'heat' things up with the *berimbaus*, to choosing to sing a challenging or mocking song. These choices are not immediately evident unless one is well-versed in Capoeira and/or Afro-Brazilian culture and language, however, they have a significant impact on the game, particularly when the musicians and singers are highly skilled. For example, understanding the musical choices available when playing the berimbau in order to give space for another player to solo, or to create syncope with the two other players that layer the rhythm shifts the soundscape as well as the choices in the physical game.

Choice is perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of Capoeira in that it serves as the underlying currency. If the intention of the game is to dominate one's partner (see the following section), then identifying the available choices for action at any given moment and acting on them is essential. In addition to this, committing to a choice of action may result in having to evade a counterattack, or getting hit; on a musical level a particular choice of song can break or re-direct the collective focus, while a well-timed variation on the *viola* may elevate the music, in turn affecting everyone in the space. It is choice that also serves as the main confrontation in my work, both for the performers, as music and movement are improvised, and the audience, who can and usually do participate.

[38] Here I mention that the player thinks, as opposed to knows, because quite often in the heat of the game players do things that they may not have thought possible previously in terms of skill, speed, or expression/gesture.

[39] It is necessary to note that there are other Afro-diasporic martial arts that incorporate aesthetic elements to varying degrees, with Kalinda—from Trinidad and Tobago—being just one. Matthias Rörhig Assunção (2005) provides a survey of West African and afro-diasporic combat games.

Attempting dominance

If one had to pinpoint a specific intention while playing the game, dominating the other person would be it, although the ways this dominance is achieved are many and never permanent. This is certainly a motif in many games and martial arts, however, in the case of Capoeira it is not the end goal; in many ways the struggle for dominance, and thus the seeking options into and out of situations, is part of a process that results in a nuanced awareness of self and inter-relation. Many of the images and metaphors in the songs of Capoeira Angola refer to small animals overcoming bigger, stronger ones, or uprooting gigantic trees, although there are some that remind players of the opposite dynamic too. Some examples of the former are as follows:

> *Bem-te-vi botou gameleira no chão, botou que eu vi* - the great kiskadee felled the gameleira tree, it felled it I saw it

and

> *Voçê não viu mais eu vi, o gavião apanhar do bem-te-vi* - You didn't see, but I did; the hawk getting a beating by the great kiskadee[40]

In both cases the smaller party is the kiskadee, which is many times smaller than both a hawk and a gameleira tree and stands in for the perceived weaker party in the game[41]. Symbolically this can also be read as the Afro-Brazilians' struggle against the historically predominately white elite's exploitation and oppression, adding further weight to what at first may seem like a dramatic exaggeration. The underlying context of the struggle of the weak against the strong is reflected in game strategies where direct/obvious and very powerful attacks are not favoured and in some cases are derided. Cunning, deft, and unbalancing/destabilising attacks—physically and/or

[40] My translation. The great kiskadee (also spelled bentivi in Portuguese) is a small bird—around 25cm in length—while the gameleira tree is 10-20 meters tall with wide, thick roots.
[41] Songs reminding players that the opposite dynamic is also true are also sung. Another example with birds is *pomba voou, gavião pegou*—the dove flew and the hawk caught it—which serves as a warning against opening up too much in a game.

mentally—are largely preferred and lauded instead. Further reasons for this can be found, such as the fact that Capoeira is a combat game and incapacitating one's partner/opponent would end the game. These particular characteristics coupled with the game's lack of winner/loser offer a distinct approach to attempting dominance.

The quest for dominance serves as a latent element in *If It Was Up to Me* as far as mechanics and intentions are concerned. After two decades of playing in this way, I have developed a sensitivity to the power balance in interactions, both inside and out of the game. Therefore, I draw on this knowledge while performing *If It Was Up to Me* in order to encourage interaction and prolong the game. Although this is a kind of performative manipulation, it remains well-intentioned insofar as the aim is to enable emergent play, and allows options for action, or inaction on the part of the audience. A more detailed analysis of this can be found in Chapter 3.

Adaptation

Defence in Capoeira Angola largely takes the form of evasion and very rarely includes blocks. Evasion shifts to adaptation as each player moves to turn the situation to their advantage, resulting in a negotiation of ideas through the game. Continuous transformation through adapting to one another's actions is highly prized and training often reminds students to break their own patterns so as to avoid repetition, predictability and stagnation. Adapting the body to accommodate the movements is part of the learning process, however, adapting the movement to one's self as the practice deepens, allows highly individual ways of playing. These adaptations are perhaps indistinguishable to those unfamiliar with the practice, however they are what make players distinct. Downey confirms this approach in recounting his training in Salvador during which students were encouraged "to avoid 'robot Capoeira,' that is, repeating any movements too uniformly" as this was both monotonous and "anathema to a cunning game" (2005, 28). There are

further aspects to adaptation that are significant here: its practice trains players to think in less rigid terms; in addition to this, the ability of the practice itself to adapt to hegemonic suppression and criminalisation points to a broader impact of such thinking. The shifts in strategies of teaching in Bahia in the first half of the twentieth century are testament to this[42]. Adaptability is a sign of resilience (Marriage, 2018, 273), thus survival both biologically and in terms of war.

Röhrig Assunção points out that adaptation has also contributed to the survival of several Afro-diasporic practices:

> A number of important formal continuities regarding instruments, rhythms, movements, rituals and the invocation of magic powers characterize slave combat games in Plantation America. In that respect one certainly ought to speak of African-derived manifestations, which all explore the synchronization between rhythms and movements. Yet their survival—and we have seen that many did not manage to survive to the present day—also depended on their capacities of adaptation and change. As with *candomblé* and *batuque,* the existence of related forms, reflecting structural similarities within major culture areas—for instance West African wrestling—could contribute to the emergence of broader, creolized manifestations that merged more specific traditions. In that respect the formation of Afro-American combat games was akin to the development of Afro-American religions (2005, 64).

Fluid adaptation in the game of Capoeira mirrors other forms of improvisation. Working with what one is presented offers a parallel to theatrical, comedy and dance improvisation, where accepting and transforming or building on what is offered by others is central to generating material and flow, although the fact that in Capoeira this adaptation is linked to an explicit power game somewhat limits the extent of this convergence. The central idea of adaptation, however, remains central to thinking informing *If It Was Up to Me,* both as a performative device and formal characteristic of the participation it asks for.

[42] Marriage (2008) offers a concise investigation into adaptation as a key way in which capoeira is a form of total resistance in the face of total war, while Röhrig Assunção (2005) traces developments and adaptations historically and attributes the survival of the practice to these, although not singularly.

Play and Ambiguity

Flux, ambiguity, multiplicity, and contradiction maintain central roles in Capoeira, rendering absolutes and binaries irrelevant. Exú, the *orixá*[43] who opens the path between the earthly and divine plains, who is often considered a kind of trickster, who acts in unpredictable ways, is considered neither good nor bad[44]. Exú acts depending on what is asked and how. In some ways, what is said of him embodies Capoeira:

> He likes creating a commotion, breaking rules and social conventions… He is dynamic and happy, helpful and willing to help, provided his demands are met. He is playful and serious, good and bad at the same time (Astraka, 2009, 72-3)[45].

Playful and serious, co-operative and competitive, soft and hard, Capoeira remains slippery whether in terms of definitions, or authorities and systems that try to pin it down and erase it. It resists coloniality by its very makeup, although a discourse of resistance has accompanied Capoeira for a long time, if not from the start. The qualities of Exú, as stated above, are desirable for capoeiristas and we attempt to embody these from the moment we approach the *roda*.

Ambiguity also overlaps with uncertainty—a significant concept in game design, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Uncertainty underscores much of Capoeira both from a structural and historical point of view. The improvised games and music are almost always unpredictable, while capoeiristas train to become unpredictable in their movement. In tandem, the history of Capoeira has had several points of uncertainty in terms of legitimacy, survival, and canon, as mentioned earlier, resisting suppression as well as standardisation[46]. Ambiguity in Capoeira play generates uncertainty around each player's intentions and state of mind, making it more challenging to

[43] The *orixás* are deities of the Candomblé and Umbanda Afro-Brazilian religions who act as the divine intermediaries between humans and god who is beyond the perception of humans.
[44] In spite of centuries of Christian demonising and equating Exú with the Devil that have led to contemporary misinterpretation.
[45] My translation.
[46] Although there are some Capoeira championships and competitions, these are largely dismissed in Capoeira Angola circles as manifestations that have diverged too far from the core principles of Capoeira, one of the most significant being the absence of a winner.

dominate one's partner. Purposefully creating ambiguity is achieved employing several processes: through the movement of the body, where apparent ambiguity in placement or timing multiplies the possible trajectories for action; through theatricality, where facial expression and gesture shift to confuse, or a comportment is feigned and does not 'match' the player's movement (see below); and through the lyrics sung, where metaphors are open to interpretation. Leaving things open to interpretation, suggesting—through the body and through sung metaphor—build the aesthetic and tactical knowledge of Capoeira, allowing space for weaving together the past present and future in the space of the *roda.*

Ambiguity in *If It Was Up to Me* is most prominent in the beginning and end of the performance, where an emergent game culminates in a sung metaphor, reflecting aspects of Capoeira both structurally as well as in terms of gameplay. However, as an atmosphere it pervades the work, as the dramaturgy is closer to collage and avoids explaining the overall purpose of the performance. Chapter 3 discusses these ideas and applications in more detail.

Performativity

The performativity of the game is undeniable and sets it apart from most martial arts[47]. Feigning, which will be discussed shortly, can be understood as a type of performance and is shared across many types of combat. However, the performativity referred to here relates to the corporal expression and gesture that are used as one of the layers of exchange. This can include feigning kicks or other attacks so that they can be read doubly as expressive movement or held back attacks. Other gestures include lunges to the side with arms extending upwards or sideways, symbolic supplication, or a call to one's partner respectively, for example. Performativity here is

[47] Wu Shu, a performative form of Chinese martial arts is one example of a practice that focuses on performance. Training is more for competitive performance of form (solo, duet, or group) than fighting efficacy.

also understood as the strategic choices of performing according to or in counterpoint to how one's gender, body and age might be read from the outside in order to create an advantage in the game. Performing weakness, or a particular type of masculinity, for example, are choices players make—progressively more consciously as their experience increases—in order to communicate ideas about themselves, or society. In a recent social media post about LGBTQIA+ visibility and acceptance within traditional Capoeira spaces, Puma Camillê, a trans capoeirista and vogue dancer, discusses plural bodies and the forced adoption of patriarchal gender binaries in Brazil. In the video, she is seen playing Capoeira in high heels and overtly feminine clothes, something which is almost never seen in a *roda*. By performing her identity while skilfully playing, she is sending multiple messages about herself as well as about social perceptions (Camillê, 2022)[48]. The layering of gender and age in a player's body along with their chosen performances dissolves easy and familiar binaries in Western models. A player can oscillate between polarities of gender and age expression, but they can also simultaneously perform youth and old age, female and male.

Playing to the *roda* (or the audience of sorts) is not only possible but is sometimes a strategy during a game; encouraging stronger chorus responses to the songs, or gesturing in comment to the situation directly to the people forming the *roda* can affect one's partner/opponent and as a result impact the game. Rosa's (2015) discussion of the effects of aggressive movement/gesture in combination with softer, seductive movement offers another tactic for dominance without the need for overt attack or defence, where performed aggression deters some attacks, and softer, more aesthetic movement can result in one's partner lowering their guard.

[48] An older example of challenging contemporary social perceptions was Madame Satã (Madame Satan) in Rio de Janeiro. Madame Satã (João Francisco dos Santos, 1900-1976) was an openly gay capoeirista and 'scoundrel', who also had a stint performing in drag. In the society of the time his actions were highly dissident (capoeirahistory.com, 2021).

Inversion

A further particular aspect of Capoeira is its use of inversions. Barbara Browning writes of the crooked cartwheel and the upside down smile of the player executing it poetically and highlights its many potential symbolisms (1995). The world in the *roda* is turned on its head, the weak find power, kicks are given with love[49], feet turn to hands and *vice versa*, crooked bodies are full of beauty, while beautiful movement is certainly not simply that. A smile masks an eye that seeks out open spots for attack. A more detailed analysis of feigning and dissimulation follows below.

The ability to shift one's body without losing perception of what is happening across every plane of movement offers an astonishing range of transformations into and out of situations. The idea of falling and not hitting the ground and instead jumping on one's hands or head and coming back into the fray is highly valued and marks expertise as well as adaptability and cunning. With this, a sense of identity can also be traced, as these inversions are part of the African aesthetic that underpins Capoeira movement. The lyrics of an old song serve as a succinct illustration:

Vieram três pra bater no nego	Three came to beat the black man
Trouxeram faca, porrete, e facão	They brought a knife, a club, and a machete
Você não sabe que pode fazer o nego	You don't know what the black man can do
Troca as mãos pelos pés	He swaps the hands for the feet
Os pés pelas mãos	The feet for the hands
Troca os pés pelas mãos	He swaps the feet for the hands
As mãos pelos pés	The hands for the feet

(Public domain[50])

Inversions are a long-standing theme in carnival. Although I will not go into an in depth analysis of carnival here, it forms a reference in terms of how literal inversions can stand for symbolic

[49] This is a reference to the many occasions where *Mestre* Pezão (my teacher) talks about kicking someone as a way of showing them affection. Although it is a joke in this context, the idea of kicking in the game with anger or aggression is looked down upon and training is conducted in such a way that kicking is at worst a neutral physical fact and at best an act of care insofar as a kick enables one's partner/opponent to find ways to overcome it and shift the situation to their advantage.

[50] My translation.

inversions. In carnivals across Europe the king is brought to the market or the street, if only in effigy, and sometimes burnt at the stake[51] while the populace rejoice in a time when hierarchies are turned upside down, if only for a day. Bakhtin's famous idea of the carnivalesque (1984) articulates the potency of hierarchical inversions, even if they exist only temporarily or symbolically.

> …in the carnivalesque game of inverting official values he [Bakhtin] sees the anticipation of another, utopian world in which anti-hierarchism, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted (Lachmann, Esherman & Davis, 1988, 118).

The world also turns upside down for those cartwheeling or standing on their hands in the *roda*, inverting their weak status to one of power and agency; symbolically in terms of the cartwheel, and symbolically also in terms of their place in the world. Inversions in my performance exist as part of the movement vocabulary, but more importantly, lie latent in the possibilities of the game in terms of who leads and who follows, or who resists and when this changes. There are also several shifts in terms of perceived status and power that emerge because of the interplay between audience and performer.

Dissimulation and Feigning

What is upside down is the right way round. Thus, in the game much dissimulation and inversion (subversion) are found: a smile is not what it might first seem; co-operation is a strategy for domination through opening up of weak points; weakness (systemic or otherwise) becomes the key stratagem for agency; physical strength is masked in delicate movement; while pulled kicks hide precision and vision of the game. On the surface this is just playing around inefficiently and without purpose (*vadiação*[52]) but serves as a powerful means of transmitting cultural knowledge

[51] This is common in Greek carnival where an effigy of King Carnival (*Karnavalos*) is burnt at the climax of celebrations.
[52] The word originates from the verb *vadiar*, to idle about, to skive, to wander and although there are historical negative connotations attached to it, contemporary use, and in particular within Capoeira, is

and recuperating-cum-inventing identity (Rosa, 2015). Dissimulation is fundamental in Capoeira Angola: it is simultaneously part of the aesthetic material and language, as well a central tactic.

The most widely known feint in Capoeira is that it was a fight disguised as a dance by enslaved Africans who were training to fight for their freedom, but this has proven to be largely an urban myth as dispelled in Röhrig Assunção's historical research (2005) (see Chapter 2). The myth itself, however, has served as a conduit for communicating and strengthening the significance of feigning in contemporary practice. This aspect of Capoeira knowledge/thinking is perhaps one of the most significant in setting it apart from other practices, while it has also informed the main structure of *If It Was up to Me*: I use entertainment within theatrical and game structures as a conceit to bring the audience in confrontation with choice and, through it, questions around agency; their own or that of others, including my own. More details on how dissimulation is deployed in my work is discussed in Chapter 3.

Globalised *and* decolonial?

Although what has been offered earlier as some of the distinctive points of Capoeira as an epistemology, this is hardly canonised, whether in Brazil or beyond, owing to the primarily oral and embodied nature of teaching it. Furthermore, how much context and to what extent this knowledge is shared, as well as how, varies greatly from school to school and, I argue, especially outside Brazil. The intention here is not to present which schools do what, as apart from requiring a wholly different body of research, this is beyond the scope of this project. My understanding of Capoeira places it within the decoloniality project as it delinks from several binaries and hegemonies that coloniality wields, as previously discussed. However, as mentioned earlier, when context/history is

positive and used to describe the indeterminacy of the game. *Vadiação* literally means vagrancy but is used to refer to Capoeira play by capoeiristas. The term also offers an opportunity to consider a further conceptual delinking from capital values and productivity as the only activities of worth.

removed, when the teaching focuses primarily on movement at the expense of the rest, when nuance is replaced with ostentation for its own sake, then the practice loses much of its meaning and along it the potential to evade colonial structures of thought, offering instead an engaging pastime, catered for consumption in urban centres globally.

Capoeira cannot be understood as an unchangeable object that magically functions decolonially. It is a practice born out of relationality: between disciplines—in the Western sense—between people, between cultures, between powers, and it can adapt and be distorted, and sometimes subsumed into dominant power/consumer structures. Where the power for change in Capoeira lies is in its practitioners embodying it fully over time, which includes cultural and historical knowledge. This is by no means an overnight transformation for anyone learning, and allowing its nuances to shift practitioners' perspective is key. In echoing Freire (2005; 1970) about the necessity of changing ways of thinking so that one's concrete situation moves from oppression to freedom, how can it be possible to work decolonially if one continues to think and act through colonial-modernist frameworks?

In his historical analysis of Capoeira, Röhrig Assunção offers that "[t]he aim of Bahian *Capoeiras* was to survive using—not overthrowing—the system. At the same time, practitioners learned elaborate body techniques and rituals, which were transmitted by older *Mestres* but also re-invented by each generation" (2005, 206). Consequently, this localises—even in a global sense—knowledge in the bodies of groups of individuals that may or may not actively pursue application of this knowledge outside of the *roda.* Furthermore, its knowledge is an otherwise rather than a direct opposition to current dominant ideology, as is also reflected in the game itself.

Beyond historical survival of an oppressive system, Capoeira today continues to offer space for resisting neoliberal control. Marriage proposes:

> If, as Fierke argues, "the neoliberal project is about controlling and managing populations globally", how is it possible to conceptualise and practise resistance? […] It was the innovations of Capoeira players that transformed the situation from one of total war to one of total resistance, meaning that the physical and cultural existence of players was no longer threatened either by state abuse or by apathy (2018, 274).

It is the ambiguity and transformations in the game that allow such possibilities of movement: between ideas, between bodies, and between ideologies. Citing Koschut, Marriage further offers that by looking at "the 'aesthetic turn', defined by theorists 'working at the intersection of popular culture, arts, and politics in IR[53]…[it is possible to draw] attention to the human side of war by demonstrating how popular culture and art provide us with different forms of representation'" (Marriage, 2018, 264). The recognition that artistic forms can help re-conceptualise war, power, politics, and culture by non-artists is heartening, while their work also speaks to some of the thinking behind this project. Perhaps then, a distinction can be drawn between Capoeira taught fully, and thus maintaining a decolonial possibility, and Capoeira (com)modified to fit consumers in neoliberal consumer settings, where much of the knowledge around dissimulation, indeterminacy and ambiguity, non-productivity—in a Western sense—and ancestrality/history is flattened or altogether omitted.

The combination of the aspects of Capoeira discussed above generate a unique matrix of knowledge exchange, simultaneously drawing from the past and projecting contingencies into the future. Much in the line of Rosa (2015) and Cajigas-Rotundo (2012), I argue that this embodied epistemology is decolonial praxis as it continues to work as an alternative system of values while also struggling to survive the pressures of capitalist coloniality. With this as a foundation for my performance practice, I have tried to draw on these principles in order to construct a performance that aesthetically does not need to bear resemblance to Capoeira but, rather, becomes a framework within which power play can occur by redeploying theatrical and post-modern aesthetic conventions in combination with game mechanics.

[53] International relations.

Possibilities for an otherwise through performance

How then might Capoeira help offer this 'other' perspective as an option for something beyond the *roda*? Beyond the therapeutic projects, the use of the movement in performance, or using its full inversions in movement training[54], what my creative work proposes—through performance praxis—is a translocation of the structure that enables interactions of power play that are nuanced and shifting to a format accessible to non-initiates. As discussed, there is no intention to call the result Capoeira, as the practice is too precious to me to attempt such distortion, although acknowledging it as the seed is necessary. By creating a structure that emulates, at least in part, the game of Capoeira I extend and deepen my understanding of the interplay between my artistic practice and Capoeira with a view to further developing performance work that addresses power and choice.

Prior to entering the world of Capoeira, my practice was already concerned with the political dimension of art. Early photographic and installation works were concerned with how shifting the viewer's position might shift their awareness of what they were seeing by challenging the conventions of viewing objects in gallery spaces. There were no instructions for actions but rather, unusually placed images or coloured shapes that suggested a potential deviation from standing or walking upright. The work stemmed from a desire to playfully challenge the viewers' expectations and as a result to question the validity of conventional structures of presentation. Later work shifted

[54] The full inversions and rotations in capoeira movement do offer a different engagement with the world beyond the sphere of capoeira. Downey has analysed some of the ways capoeira practice shifts practitioners' way of thinking by offering that as the practice opens possibilities for action, perception of available choices in familiar situations expand (2005, 31-34). This idea is echoed by Steve Paxton when discussing the effects of developed sensory perception through movement, including rolls and inversions, which he eloquently frames as a seeing through the weft of reality in *Material for The Spine* (2008). It would be foolhardy to claim that such perception-expanding effects could be attributed solely to the inversions of Capoeira.

into performance and focused increasingly on grappling with conventions and offering, or not, different choices for interpretation and/or action[55].

There have already been powerful precedents to this kind of work, of course. In 1968 "… Eduardo Favario… invited the audience [to] make a direct connection between gallery conventions and mechanisms of social control" (Bishop, 2012, 119). The spectator, by having to search for the work of art in a bookshop in a different part of Buenos Aires takes on an active role in seeking out the art and according to Favario this "will turn him into the executor of an action which, in turn, has been posed as a work of art" (Favario in Bishop, 2012, 119). Bishop continues to suggest that "such work stood (for Favario) as a proposition for social change: 'a theoretical proposal that affirms the possibilities of some action with the purpose of changing our reality'" (2012, 119). The intention for changing how we conceive reality, albeit more crudely articulated in my early visual arts practice, has been present in the majority of my work since 2000 and has taken on different forms over the years. In addition to this, live art works by Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneeman, and Marina Abramovic served as early references in my thinking around action and improvisation. The latter became increasingly prominent as an artistic process from 2007 onwards, when I began my postgraduate degree during which training in a range of dance and theatre techniques helped hone my understanding of improvisational techniques. The common conceptual thread through my art practice and Capoeira is that the material, whether visual, performative, or instructional, becomes the conduit for thought, highlighting the centrality of the one who engages in these aesthetic processes. Improvisation has taken a central position in standing aside from clear authorship, fixing of material, as well as exact reproducibility.

[55] See Appendix II for an account of my art practice.

Improvisation

As noted earlier, improvisation is central to Capoeira Angola in both the physical game and the music. Improvisational structures have a re-organising effect as regards hierarchies of action, instruction, and aesthetics as they open space for the unknown/unpredictable to occur. In the realm of training and devising, improvisation empowers the performer to rely on their own faculties, while concurrently developing their awareness of sensory, spatial, and interpersonal information and their ability to respond to it. The overlap between performance and Capoeira in this sense is considerable, as the skills needed are very similar despite being employed in different ways and contexts.

In terms of performance, the value of the work lies jointly in the attention of the performer(s) and the audience, doing away with the notion of an Author and an authorial vision, refocusing the work in the moment of the performance event itself as the locus of creation. The impact of the audience on any performance is undeniable and is perhaps even more significant in improvised work; the interaction between the audience and performer, whether attentional or action-based, can become a significant influence in such work, shifting the outcome/process in a co-creative manner. In performances with fixed material the audience affects the event, being far from passive, as Bishop, Rancière, White, Freshwater and many more discuss, and although the content of the work may not change, shifts in timing, atmosphere and tension create a different performance each time, while each person in the audience also constructs an interpretation of the event. This is also true of improvised work and should the performer(s) be acutely attuned to their audience, they will impact the performer's actions. This has certainly been my experience of performing both set and improvised material and of playing in *rodas*.

There are further parallels between theatrical improvisation and Capoeira games, particularly when it comes to playing with status. Johnstone (2015; 1981) describes status transactions in

improvisation exercises as the key to generating believable social interactions and offers that "a good play is one which ingeniously displays and reverses the status between the characters" (2015, 72). In some ways, Capoeira exposes subtle shifts of status[56] that do include reversal, which reflect aspects of Johnstone's reflections on status. However, what capoeira and this research also grapple with and resist is the lack of fixed binary poles of power and the idea of a hierarchical "pecking order" (Johnstone, 2015, 74) as quintessential for engaging and true-to-life performance[57].

Improvisational strategies in my work are drawn primarily from postmodern dance, Butoh, physical theatre in addition to Capoeira[58]. I do not make a claim to producing a new type of improvisation through this practice research. Rather, improvisation here is the process through which I both make and perform performance, while the element of improvisation in Capoeira also deeply inflects how I approach performance in that it has become the main lens for my work. Over the last 20 years I have continually worked with different structures of improvisation, from devising, to short improvised parts in performances, to improvised interactions with audiences, to fully improvised solo and group performances, and finally, continually in Capoeira.

The thinking particular to improvisation in Capoeira has several aspects that combined generate the charged collective focus of the *roda.* In movement, if one does not improvise and chooses to adhere to fixed sequences of movement, they lose speed and reflexes in adapting to their partner's movement offerings/challenges. This is true not only in Capoeira, of course. Contact Improvisation necessitates swift and adept adjustments of weight and form in response to one's partner's movement and to gravity. Although training movements is common to both practices, ideally they

[56] And at other times shifts that are not subtle at all.
[57] Besides Capoeira, the closest a practice come to generating such an indeterminate shifting dynamic within improvised interaction is Contact Gonzo, a loosely rule-bound improvisation process that involves fighting, and playful physical contact. For an example see Contact Gonzo Tokyo Experimental Performance Archive: https://youtu.be/VQV2s0rcE9k?si=SkpJK_gWvZdmjsr6.
[58] see appendix II.

both aim towards conscious adaptability, even if at times form or sequences are used in training. In Capoeira short or long sequences of movements are trained to develop familiarity of attack and defence combinations, while also, more importantly to train physical reflexes for transforming one movement to another through a focus on transitions[59]. This builds a practice of safety as well as surprise in moving during a game. Similarly, Stark-Smith recalls practicing rolls and falls before the early experiments of Contact Improvisation:

> We worked for one week in a loft studio in New York with a small blue wrestling mat. We worked all day, practicing a few things for a long time—like the small dance, during which Steve suggested different images of the skeleton, the flow of energy, the expansion of lungs; identifying small sensations. We also practiced a lot of rolling techniques—forward, backward, aikido, invented rolls, handstand-rolldowns—in order to be comfortable falling and rolling in different directions (2006, 48).

In my experience of both practices, attuning—to one's body and to others—is needed for rich and safe improvised interactions. A key point of divergence between the two practices, however, is the way in which attention is organised: where contact exchanges are based on a collaborative sharing of weight and touch—reflected in the often assumed democracy of the form—Capoeira exchanges are centred around mostly non-contact explorations of power play. The latter is of central importance to this project as it is the main driver for the improvised actions in the *roda.* Further and more detailed analysis of the commonalities and points of divergence between Capoeira and Contact Improvisation, although of interest, diverges from the focus of this enquiry[60].

More broadly as regards my improvisation practice, the idea of observing and adapting to an unfolding flow of processes (sensory, spatial, intersubjective) is fundamental. As my training has spanned across several systems I draw from each of them in a shifting matrix of foci. This has been complementary, of course, to my Capoeira practice, where similar processes take place but with a different intention—as noted above—and within a very different cultural context of training

[59] This is particularly true of my teacher's way of training, which I have also adopted and adapted.
[60] The ways of working with touch, sight, and gravity in each of the practices has been a point of interest for a while and was ignited by working with Professor Anna Furse in her Athletes Lab. The knowledge of gravity work from Contact Improvisation has had a profound effect in how I understand movement and has transferred across to much of my movement teaching.

and expressing/communicating through movement. The friction between the often assumed neutrality of somatics and the *'cada um é cada um'*[61] of Capoeira layers my embodied knowledge rather than generates contradictions. Acknowledging the limitations of each system helps understand how I may draw from each in different contexts whether performative or educational.

Improvised power play is the core element of my research and it is through this that Capoeira's unique point of view is built. Crucially, power play in Capoeira is non-representational, in that its corporeal dialogues are structured around dance and martial movement. As a result, the practice research for this project is centred around movement improvisation and participation rather than representation. Improvisation in the movement and music of Capoeira intends to generate unpredictability and novelty as mentioned earlier. In the game, unpredictability is a tactic to destabilise one's partner physically and/or mentally, while it also helps garner the *roda*'s attention. In this last sense Capoeira is highly performative, as discussed above. A more detailed analysis of uncertainty in Capoeira follows in Chapter 2.

In the music, improvisation on the berimbaus helps create a highly charged and aesthetic atmosphere, while it can also serve as a demonstration of skill in what is a meta power game between skilled music players. Improvising the lyrics of the songs helps bring the layer of language to the present moment of play, linking multiple attentions, while it simultaneously acts as a challenge to those who also will come to lead the singing. This multi-directional network of improvisation has informed much of the structure of my current practice, where the load of such attentional layering falls on me. Whether the audience or musicians engage is similar matrixes of attention/intention is beyond the scope of this project.

[61] Each one is each one (my translation). This is an expression that affirms individual modes of expression and/or action in and around the *roda*, and lays the ground for the collective and diverse subjectivities that make up the circle.

The unpredictability and uncertainty in the unfolding of events both in Capoeira and in improvised performance can be understood as a form of resistance to fixed pathways and values precisely because they cannot be controlled by a fixed narrative. Schnor citing Lepecki (2013) posits that contemporary life in a control society[62] choreographs its subjects' movements and actions through "algorithmic and logistical modulations" (2022, 165). In his view, the haptic encounters in Marcelo Evelin's *massa* (mass) technique act as a possible form of resistance to the effects of control society that subsumes bodies in its control processes. *Massa* enhances what Schnor labels affect-ability; the ability to affect and be affected (2022, 171). In a broader context he conceives it as follows:

> A strategy of affect-ability then perhaps encompasses all the practices of life, thought, and art, in which we increase our capacity for existing in entangled states, of being able to bear the affective intensities of others as we pass through each other. Such strategies operationalize modes of existence, which, despite remaining powerless to the crippling mechanisms of control-power, operate *on other frequencies* to make affective and responsive circulations between living bodies suppler and stronger (2022, 171).

Although his analysis focuses on the haptic, *massa* also produces a continuous flow of uncertainty as it is a task-based technique "in which a group of dancers move together in a sort of blob or bundle, striving for as much surface of touch as possible. Here, the participants are asked to move from and through their tactile sensations, as a sort of curious and constant feeling-into other bodies, and of feeling themselves through feeling others" (2022, 167)[63]. Schnor's thinking around operating on other frequencies to normative power mechanisms is echoed in how I understand the unpredictability of the game of Capoeira in that it offers a step aside—an otherwise for, as mentioned earlier—the dominant hierarchy of values and pathways of action. From this point of departure, my practice has sought to draw from the structuring principles of the game in order to explore how such playful uncertainty might be generated in a performance. Chapters 2 and 3 present a deeper analysis of Capoeira as a game and how I have transposed its structures in performance.

[62] Here understood to be contemporary capitalist society where digital media and services orchestrate behaviour.
[63] A brief analysis of Evelin's performance that led to the creation of *massa* can be found on pp.108-9.

The audience

Participation in my work is not about 'activating' or 'awakening' a supposedly stultified audience but, rather, about including a certain level of embodied experience that complements the rest of the audience's faculties and that is arguably much less prominent in traditional theatrical environments. I depart from the position that all audiences are active, in line with Rancière's position that:

> Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection (2011a, 13).

Furthermore, I regard the spectator to be intelligent and active in their watching. I do not wish to claim that participation makes the spectator more active but that it opens up different possibilities for co-creation through a different level of involvement/immersion that opens up questions around choice. In some sense participation in *If It Was Up to Me* flattens the author-viewer-performer hierarchy and allows for what Flanagan refers to reskinning, unplaying and rewriting (2015)[64], in other words, a reconceiving and/or repurposing of known structures. The focus on embodied experience stems directly from the development in my thinking through Capoeira. It is also important to note that in addition to the conception of the audience as active irrespective of the degree or presence of participation in a work of art, the relationship between artist/performer and audience is understood to be mutually affecting.

Different parties' perceptions of status of the players in Capoeira are often affected by what happens in the game. For example, a small, cheerful woman about to play a tall and muscular man is often perceived to be at a disadvantage, by herself, her playing partner and the rest of the *roda*, although this is certainly not always the case. Should she prove to be a fast, technical player who

[64] Flanagan discusses critical thinking and how it is possible to engage with this through games, either by design or unintentionally. Her thinking has informed my analysis of Capoeira as a game as well as my methodology in building *If It Was Up to Me.*

quickly finds her partner's open spots, the perception of her status shifts, and along it the understanding of what is possible in the game. By extension, this also expands the understanding of Capoeira itself. The rotation of roles with the *roda* also serves to highlight the ephemerality of being in any one position, further challenging dominant ideas of hierarchy.

In Higher Education, where traditional hierarchies pertaining to teacher and student roles are still present, my teaching presented opportunities to challenge these roles. Departing from the idea that students are already full subjects and echoing Freire's thinking, the reality of moving bodies—the students' and my own—in space during theatre classes reaffirmed in an embodied way that difference in function does not predicate a hierarchy of value in knowledge. The learning is multidirectional, as is the teaching, resulting in a more empowering environment to think and act. Framed by Freire, pedagogy can be revolutionary:

> …the oppressed and the leaders are equally the Subjects of revolutionary action, and reality serves as the medium for the transforming action of both groups. In this theory of action one cannot speak of an actor, nor simply of actors, but rather of actors in intercommunication… The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity (2005; 1970, 129).

Intercommunication, affect-ability and ephemerality shape the thinking possible in teaching contexts, as well as in the *roda.* As a result, the co-creative aspect of *If It Was Up to Me* is built on such ideas, not so much for a revolution, but as a way of exploring another way of doing-thinking in art.

Participating in choice

The fruit of this research brings all parties present (spectator, performer, musicians) into confrontation with choice. This is certainly an experiment; an attempt to see if and how far can my

understanding of Capoeira and its structure 'function' in the aforementioned manner, removed from the aesthetics and context that define it. Placing *If It Was Up to Me* in a studio/performance setting has been a purposeful manoeuvre intended to play on the layered ways in which people function in urban settings, particularly in the global North. Quite beyond art and academic circles, the awareness of being watched, whether by CCTV or phone cameras, and the range of performances this generates renders people more self-conscious in their interactions[65] with their environment. Bringing people into a performance space, whose conventions do include participation, already assumes a set of behaviours and possibilities that move aside from social and digital spaces.

Based on the desire to avoid representation as a route into developing my practice research, particularly because of my interest in experiential and embodied knowledge, participation became central to structuring the performance. Drawing from the group interactions within Capoeira, my intention has been to construct a situation within which the audience is faced with cascading choices—overtly from the performance, as well as personal—none of which demand a particular response, although in certain cases there are possibilities implied, due to performance and game conventions. But what of the kind of participation this performance calls for? The range of types of participation in art and performance is extensive, with equally varied intentions and nuances. From the audience provocations of the Futurists, to loosely structured situations in Dada, to the Situationists' organised *dèrives*, to interactive art, to happenings and then forward to collaborative performance projects, public games, and digitally interactive performance, formats and dynamics extend from attempted utopias to outright violence[66]. *If It Was Up to Me* does not seek to propose a utopia of trust and non-violence, nor does it seek to elicit violence—of any sort—against the audience or the performers, although cruelty is another matter. The performance asks for playful

[65] And can veer from avoidance to performance.

[66] Both Frank Popper (1975) and Claire Bishop (2012) offer examples of different types of audience engagement and participation in contemporary and 20th century art and performance. Popper specifically references the Black Arts Theater and is possibly alluding to *Slave Ship* in terms of audience participation as well as the use of smell (the smell of excrement) (1975, 122). In her analysis of participatory art, Bishop charts the aggressive language and acts of the Futurists towards their audience, for example (2012).

participation in both attitude and structure that opens possibilities for multidirectional interactions leading to power play.

The ambiguity and richness of the dynamics within a *roda* are part of what drives my performance's particular epistemology around choice, power, agency, and opportunity and have been the greatest challenge to redeploy in *If It Was Up to Me*. The lack of stable polarity (for example, between strong and weak, dominant and dominated) in combination with the absence of a winner, opens up ideas around the impermanence of any situation and status, consequently offering the possibility of changing this to one's advantage. Concurrently, if a situation shifts to a less favourable one, this tends to be grappled with in a more resilient mindset as a result. The multi-directional attention developed also allows multiple relationships than can be actively engaged with: it is possible to play with one's partner, listen to the music and respond physically, play to the audience, and offer songs that can shift everyone's understanding of the situation.

Playing with dissensus

In structuring *If It Was Up to Me* it was necessary to consider how implied limitations to the audience's action exist while opening up the performance to all sorts of behaviours: feeling playful enough to explore interaction, pushing the performer to their limits, playing with or against one another in terms of what outcome is desired, cheating, and so on. More details on how the performance was structured follow in Chapter 3. Of central concern has been that an atmosphere of possibility is created in which a broad range of behaviour can occur, with no prohibition from my part as the performer with the intention to explore how conventions shape the perception of choice and behaviour. This may well evoke some performances by Marina Abramovic, Yoko Ono, or Martin O'Brien, however the conventions, aesthetics, and available materials in *If It Was Up to Me* point away from such suggestions and much more towards games.

The choice of game structures stems from two main considerations: that Capoeira is a game (see Chapter 2) and that playing games reveals the players' position and thinking to a certain degree, as action can conceal as well as reveal. However, in choosing to act—or not—audience-players give out information that is read by the other audience-players as well as the performers, impacting on the overall direction of the event. The highly individual way of playing—any game—also reveals differences and points of commonality producing a temporary creative community of diverse thinker-doers akin to my reading of Rancière's dissensus.

Furthermore, his thinking around dissensus has offered a helpful frame through which to examine the multiple subjectivities that constitute the Capoeira Angola *roda*. Following Rosa's analysis of the *roda* as a space in which identity is recuperated-cum-invented (2015), and Rancière's statement that there is "no lost community to be restored" and that there are only "scenes of dissensus, capable of surfacing in any place and at any time" (2011a, 48), I argue that Capoeira Angola is very much an example of how dissensus might work in all its potentiality opening capacity. More specifically, Rancière states:

> What 'dissensus' means is an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances[67] nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities or incapacities. Dissensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking and altering the coordinates of the shared world (2011a, 49).

Far from unreasonable hypotheses (2011a, 49), there are several points of resonance here, some experienced in embodied negotiations. The multiplicity of points of view possible in any given situation is something espoused and elaborated on in the processes of performance analysis (Furse 2007, Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, Pavis 1985), which is one of many ways of engaging

[67] In this context dissimulation does not play a part in a hidden appearance, as my reading of Rancière's statement relates to the idea of a real behind the appearance of perceived reality.

with critical subjectivity and thinking. What is more striking is that Rancière's theorising of dissensus echoes decolonial ideas around challenging the centrality of modernity/coloniality in structuring reality, and that through the perceptual configuration of reality, the realm of what is possible is opened up. The last is something I have learnt in practice through Capoeira Angola, as a result of its focus on perpetually negotiating power in multiple directions.

Deploying participatory and interactive aesthetic forms to generate political/critical thought through engaging with power play, and based on Capoeira, my project reflects Gaver's idea that "politics can be pursued through a process of cultural consensus around the aesthetics of living, rather than instrumental political game-playing" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 518). Cultural consensus here is understood to be the common understanding of conventions, or frames (after Goffman). In this sense Capoeira, and by extension *If It Was Up to Me*, certainly become a ground for dissensus as they redistribute what is perceived and by who and what can be done and by who.

Chapter 2: *O Jogo Mais Bonito*[68]: The game of Capoeira Angola

> "Games are special precisely because they are an *art of doing*." (Flanagan in Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 266)

Fight, dance, or game?

Capoeira is a game. Capoeiristas refer to it as such; and through an examination of the practice through the lens of games, with references to play, performance, and ritual, this chapter posits this claim is central to understanding the complexity of Capoeira Angola. From this understanding a model for practice is built that moves beyond the cultural specificity of the game, while still hoping to enact some of the playful relationships germane to Capoeira Angola. As discussed in the previous chapter, Capoeira, and specifically Capoeira Angola, eludes strict categorisation, or perhaps more accurately, incorporates in its practice numerous labels. It has been called an art, a fight, a dance, a pastime, a game, a ritual, and a way of life at the very least (Browning, 1995; Downey, 2005; Lewis, 1992; Röhrig Assunção, 2005; Rosa, 2015). The roots of Capoeira are traced to both Yoruba and Kikongo cultures in which dance is associated with numerous daily and ritual activities, including the preparation for war and more broadly as a preparation for life (Talmon-Chvaicer, 2008, 29). Quite apart from scholarly writing using several referents to approximate what the practice is, many Capoeira songs do the same. One of *Mestre* Toni Vargas' *ladainhas*[69] expressly states that:

> …Capoeira is a game, it is a toy
> It is to respect fear
> It is to correctly dose out courage

[68] *O jogo mais bonito* (the most beautiful game) is a line from a song composed by *Mestre* Roberval referring to the game of Capoeira Angola.

[69] A *ladainha*, literally translated as litany, is an opening song for the capoeira *roda* (ritual game circle). This song sets the tone of the games to follow, as apart from the melody, the lyrics can recount the past and valorise those gone before, or it can offer a warning, or it can present a series of metaphors for capoeira, and by inference, life itself. Sung as a solo, it is followed by the first type of call and response singing (*chula/*louvação) that generally characterises the *roda's* musical structure.

> It is a fight
> It is the craftiness of the *mandingueiro*[70]…[71]

My own experience corroborates this multimodality and multiplicity of labelling. It is perhaps evident to also state that although this is a shared notion among most capoeiristas, the core purpose/focus of the practice will vary; for some it is a fight, for others it is an act of cultural resistance, for others it is a frivolous pastime and for others yet it is a serious ritual of power. Nonetheless, Capoeira is consistently referred to as a game, while when referring to the two-person interaction in the centre of the *roda*, practitioners state that they play. Talmon-Chvaicer's research echoes this, based on fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, Brazil, where the practice is referred to as game, although the reasons for this were not clear to the interviewees (2008, 27). Historical police records also refer to capoeiristas playing Capoeira (Talmon-Chvaicer, 2008, 27; Röhrig Assunção, 2005, 72). Capoeira is also often referred to as the game of life (*jogo da vida*), which reveals as much as it asks. After years of practice I have come to understand this description of Capoeira as follows: the game reflects several relational dynamics and tendencies found in social life, such as the struggle of agency/power, and the use of cunning and tactics to shift one's status. This is not a characteristic unique to Capoeira, however. Caillois observes that:

> … games are largely dependent upon the cultures in which they are practiced. They affect their preferences, prolong their customs, and reflect their beliefs. … One can even go further and posit in addition a truly reciprocal relationship between a society and the games it likes to play. There is indeed an increasing affinity between their rules and the common characteristics and deficiencies of the members of the groups. … Thus, a game that is esteemed by a people may at the same time be utilized to define the society's moral or intellectual character, provide proof of its precise meaning, and contribute to its popular acceptance by accentuating the relevant qualities (2001; 1958, 82-3).

Capoeira emerged from a very specific social, racial, and political history that is reflected in both its structure— for example, the struggle for domination—as well as its aesthetic: lyrical references to slavery and black pride, and the Afrocentric music and movement. Although not a mainstream

[70] a referent for a capoeirista, or one who uses magic.
[71] My translation.

game in Brazil, or globally, it serves as a clear example of how the values and history of a particular group of people manifest in play.

There have been historical, phenomenological, cultural and movement studies of Capoeira—among others—and the body of material and list of disciplines that explore the practice is growing. What seems noteworthy, however, is that Capoeira has not been approached—to my knowledge—primarily from the perspective of games, although there are extant analyses of aspects of the game in some more recent scholarship, including Downey, Lewis, Marriage, and Rosa. The reason for this may be related to the fact that games are seen as frivolous, or unproductive activities, especially in capitalist reality. Considering what is a cultural practice with strong links to Africa and black consciousness in Brazil, labelling it as a 'mere' game would perhaps make it appear as less significant than it is, at least to a Western set of values. However, Talmon-Chvaicer frames Capoeira in the sphere of play as understood in African terms: "Capoeiras never regarded Capoeira as a dance. For them, dancing was not, as for the Europeans, restricted to making stylized movements to music for enjoyment. For them, it was "play" in the African sense" (2008, 29). In her analysis, what Europeans saw and what capoeiristas saw in the practice were two rather different things. The movement and exuberance of the game seems to have been understood as a form of dance and play by Europeans, and therefore unproductive and degenerate. In stark contrast to that, the conception of dance in West and Central-West Africa pervades all aspects of life (Talmon-Chvaicer, 2008). She continues to point out that play is integral to living well, both physically and spiritually, at least in Kongo culture. The extent to which Bantu and Kongo cultures shaped how early capoeiristas thought cannot be measured. However, there is enough evidence to suggest a radical difference between the understanding Europeans and African descendants in Brazil had of Capoeira, which also partially explains the firmness with which contemporary capoeiristas refer to the game.

Calling it a fight disguised as a dance that was practiced by enslaved people in Brazil in preparation for their liberation offers a perhaps more compelling frame for Capoeira for some. This, however, is one of the powerful myths that surround Capoeira:

> Almost every book on Capoeira history contains an initial chapter on slave resistance, where the heroic *quilombos* (maroon settlements) are always singled out for their fierce opposition to slave society […] Academics sometimes take on board that myth, assuming that it derives from some kind of oral tradition. The attractiveness of the story is enhanced by the fact that it is quite plausible: Some kind of African inspired martial games probably existed among greater maroon settlements. Not one single contemporary source, however, has been found to confirm this hypothesis (Röhrig Assunção, 2005, 6).

This last point, however, is moot. More recent scholarship points out several similarities between *engolo*, a foot fighting style practiced in what is today Angola, and Capoeira (Desch-Obi, 2008. 2012, 214). Apart from the similarities in movement styles and defensive strategies, the fact that people from the area that covers Angola were taken directly to Bahia and Rio de Janeiro as slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries creates more than a simple plausible link between the two practices. There has been fieldwork conducted by Matthias Röhrig Assunção (after his 2005 publication quoted above) and Mestre Cobra Mansa that offer recordings of a range of West African practices, including *engolo* (Pakleppa et al., 2013) that further support the African origins of the game, as well as its 'formal hybridity.'

Other reasons might be that Capoeiristas themselves talk about the playfulness of the game in relation to child or animal play. A recent talk on the ludic aspects of the game by *Mestre* Bamba and *Contra-Mestre* Pescador revolved around retaining a sense of child-like playfulness as adults and how to incorporate more play in the training of children (*M.* Bamba and *CM.* Pescador, 2021) without referring to other aspects of play or playfulness in the game. Part of this may relate to the fact that in training Capoeira, animal imagery is used to elicit playfulness and to teach children. *Mestre* Roberval, for example, often calls for certain games to be more like children playing and jumping around, or for players to move more like animals as they play in order to elicit specific dynamics and aesthetics in the game but these are not used for further reflections on the nature of Capoeira play more broadly. In spite of this, Capoeira itself revolves around strategic power play,

trickery and ritual among its many elements, all of which points increasingly to something beyond a fight, dance, or child's play. Capoeiristas will often talk about Capoeira being a microcosm that reflects life's inequalities and the need to be cunning, which in turn reflects many of the older generations' experience of racial and social injustice. An understanding of needing to play the game of life is also reflected in certain turns of phrase, such as *jogo de cintura*—literally, game of the waist—which means to be adaptable and to have the ability to face adversity/challenge with cunning and overcome it. The claim here is that it is these elements that place Capoeira firmly in the game sphere.

Game and performance

How does one then begin to examine to what extent Capoeira is a game, and secondly, how is an examination of games relevant to performance? From chess to video games, to gambling, to flirting, games pervade human lives, while the range and complexity of games poses challenges in terms of finding a definition that encompasses all of them. Game designers and scholars Salen and Zimmerman offer the following as a succinct definition: "a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (2004, 81). At first glance, this is a useful way of considering games: a system implies rules and interactive relationships between elements and agents; conflict asks for a resolution and creates opposing dynamics; and a quantifiable outcome offers a clear end. However, not all games have a quantifiable outcome in the way a game of volleyball or chess might. Dungeons & Dragons (D&D henceforth), a tabletop role playing game, does not have a specific outcome as the end point or purpose behind playing. The rules structuring the game mechanics and aesthetic are numerous and complex, but nowhere in them is an end point defined (Cassar et al. 2018). Even before a player grapples with the challenges of building a character, creating a backstory and engaging in the dice-controlled actions the game necessitates, she is aware that:

> The game has no real end; when one story or quest wraps up, another one can begin, creating an ongoing story called a campaign. Many people who play the game keep their campaigns going for months or years, meeting with their friends every week or so to pick up the story where they left off (Dungeons & Dragons, 2021b).

It is often then that games go on for as long as the players and game master find interest in them, with no set win or end states. This game alone problematizes Salen and Zimmerman's quantifiable outcome condition. It is worth noting here that D&D is played by millions of people globally and is the foundation upon which the large majority of digital role playing games are based. The question of what qualifies as a game seems to rest on how wide the conceptual framework is. At the broadest end of the spectrum lies Carse's philosophical analysis of games as finite or infinite. "Finite games can be played within an infinite game, but an infinite game cannot be played within a finite game. Infinite players regard their wins and losses in whatever finite games they play as but moments in continuing play" (Carse, 1986, 7). The assertion is that life is the only infinite game with countless finite games, which include social, political, and leisure games occurring within it. Approaching everything as a game has ideological and ontological implications, certainly, but for the purposes of this research this particular frame is too broad since distinctions between games, sport, martial arts, and performance need to be made.

Below is a table that presents a visual comparison of how different game scholars have defined games, according to specific elements deemed necessary or essential for an activity to be deemed a game. Ticks represent the elements each thinker deems necessary for their definition. The only element that all—but one—agree on being essential is the presence of and adherence to rules that limit players. This single common condition presents the nuanced and individual frames through which games can be considered, with ideas such as conflict/contest being an essential condition for less than half the scholars presented. What is worth noting is that this list does not explicitly mention winning/losing as a condition, although this would fall under the broader category of a game being goal/outcome oriented.

Elements of a game definition	Parlett	Abt	Huizinga	Caillois	Suits	Crawford	Costikyan	Avedon | Sutton-Smith
Proceeds according to rules that limit players	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Conflict or contest	√					√		√
Goal-oriented/outcome-oriented	√	√			√		√	√
Activity, process, or event		√			√			√
Involves decision-making		√				√	√	
Not serious and absorbing			√					
Never associated with material gain			√	√				
Artificial/Safe/Outside ordinary life			√	√		√		
Creates special social groups			√					
Voluntary				√	√			√
Uncertain				√				
Make-believe/Representational				√		√		
Inefficient					√			
System of parts/Resources and tokens						√	√	
A form of art							√	

Figure 1: Visual comparison of various game definitions
(Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, 79).

The game of Capoeira Angola has no win state but ends instead at the call of the *berimbau*[72] or by one of the two players calling an end to the game. It is possible to talk about the goal of Capoeira

[72] A musical bow instrument of African origin that is central to the music of capoeira. See glossary.

but this is partially misleading. One does not play Capoeira in order to kick or headbutt people; playing with such actions[73] is the 'how' of the game and not the 'why.' As mentioned in Chapter 1, the intention of the player is to dominate the other, or the other's space. However, there is no mechanism employed to decide who was more dominant, or who might have won the contest. This does not form part of the game. Playing and observing the game are the purpose of the game. Marriage talks about the game in terms of tactics rather than strategy and draws from De Certeau in stating there is a difference between the two in that "strategy involves the ability to command and shape the environment. This is the aim in Capoeira, but if one person dominates the space, the other has to work with what is available, and work tactically" (2020, 76). This differentiation brings up questions of what terminology is more appropriate to use in discussions of Capoeira as it stands out from other competitive games largely due to its lack of a win state. Marriage continues to state that:

> The interaction between the strategic and the tactical, and the opportunities and constraints it establishes for each player means that meaningful interaction takes place between two players with different levels of strength and experience, unlike in a game in which competition is defined by winning (2020, 77).

Stepping aside from the detailed definitions of games that Salen and Zimmerman bring up, Professor Carse's philosophical approach to finite and infinite games offers further points for consideration. In his view, games consist of finite and infinite games: "A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play" (Carse, 1986, 3). This statement rings true of Capoeira games, where the intention is not to end the game too soon by injuring, or knocking out one's partner, nor to make it predictable and fixed in its play. Shifts in who controls or dominates the game space, surprise and, more rarely, inventive actions/reactions characterise a good Capoeira Angola game. Carse elaborates on the distinctions between finite and infinite games by examining how rules function in each and claims that those in finite games do not change during the course of play, whereas those in infinite games do.

> Although the rules of an infinite game may change by agreement at any point in the course of play, it does not follow that any rule will do. It is not in this sense that the game is infinite.

[73] Usually without intending to hurt or actually hurting one's partner.

> The rules are always designed to deal with specific threats to the continuation of play. Infinite players use the rules to regulate the way they will take the boundaries or limits being forced against their play into the game itself. (Carse, 1986, 10).

The above thesis is appealing in relation to attributing an infinite quality to Capoeira, as opposed to defining it according to Carse's all-encompassing duality. The characteristic identified here in relation to rules shifting so as to perpetuate play holds true for Capoeira. In order to facilitate and perpetuate play, players agree to create new rules, or modify existing ones in response to narrative shifts, or unwieldy game mechanics. Note that there are examples of other games in which rules may and do change, D&D games being once more a clear example of modification to suit play[74]. On a conceptual/philosophical level Carse's ideas around games push Capoeira more firmly into the game sphere, particularly when one considers it as the game of life, albeit a microcosm. The notion of Capoeira as a game with infinite qualities offers further resonance with the way Capoeira is often perceived by its practitioners, as well as Afrocentric cosmological ideas, and to a certain degree resists over-analysis.

In searching for a further definition of games that is flexible enough to account for games with no set end states that of Suits offers the following:

> … to play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such an activity (2014; 1979, 36).

In the initial stages of examining Capoeira as a game, the oft stated necessity for a winner presented quite a significant obstacle. From Huizinga (1949), to Caillois (2001; 1958), to Salen and Zimmerman (2004), play transforms into game when rules exist and a clear victor emerges. Suits' definition allows space for ambiguity and he illustrates his thinking with examples at the very edges of games, such as performing specific social roles and/or 'playing' impostor (Suits, 2014, 122).

[74] Players often create new content and rules for it, while they also often agree to disregard or modify existing rules in favour of their style of playing.

Game designer Costikyan further discusses games in relation to win states and that these are not essential to an understanding of games, citing several video games, as well as D&D (2015, 10-13).

At this point a further clarification of terminology is necessary so that the frame Capoeira is viewed through remains clearly defined and limited enough. Games and play are not to be conflated, nor to be used interchangeably: although one plays a game, not everything that is played is a game. Games are understood to be part of the broader concept of play, with Costikyan aptly framing them as follows:

> Just as novels and movies are artistic forms that derive from the human impulse to tell stories, and music is the artistic form that derives from our pleasure in sound, so “the game” is the artistic form that derives from our impulse to play (2015, 7).

This impulse to play, however, can be expressed through myriad different activities, both structured and unstructured that range playing a role, toying with an idea, playing sports and so on. Schechner offers the subtle distinction between play and games in that games are more “overtly structured than playing” (2013, 92). It is the degree of detail in structuring that distinguishes one from the other, therefore, but this is not necessarily helpful when considering Capoeira. For Schechner, “Play can take place anywhere at any time engaging any number of players who may abide by or unexpectedly change the rules” (2013, 92). In a Capoeira *roda,* although there are set numbers for instruments—usually, but not always—and the physical game happens between two people, the number of participants is never set, and changes to the ritual itself are not unheard of and do vary from group to group. This is not to say that Capoeira is more akin to play than to a game, but that the distinction is perhaps not as clear, or does not lie in the extent of rigidity of the structure. Stenros offers a flexible and clear further option for distinguishing games from play; he identifies playfulness as an impetus that predates humankind and goes on to state that: “[a]s this playfulness is shared, it becomes socially framed, *play* emerges, and as these shared forms are codified, we call them *games*” (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 201). As the extent of codification is not a determining factor in Stenros’ categorisation of games, its flexibility allows for the inclusion of less rigidly defined games.

Games, ritual, and liminality

If ritual demands clear and unchanging structure (Schechner, 2013, 90) and play is unpredictable and explosive, then perhaps this combination and their complimentary natures, according to Handelman, is an accurate way of describing Capoeira.

> Ritual and play are shadow images of one another in the kinds of messages they transmit to the social order. They are analogous states of cognition and perception, whose messages are complementary for the resolution of the ongoing, immoral, deviant, domain of ordinary reality. Don Handelman 1977, “Play and Ritual: Complementary Frames of Metacommunication,” 190 (Schechner, 2013, 91).

Resolving ordinary reality is an apt way to consider the aim of Capoeira, as it grapples with power play, feigning, cunning tactics and aesthetics in an explosive, improvised manner, within a defined ritual structure. The form of the Capoeira ritual is taught specifically in order for participants to generate the right conditions for the game to happen. Perhaps this ritual of play is a way through which a distinction between play in general and games can be determined beyond the degree of structure an activity entails. The resolution of reality mentioned earlier is certainly not a precise and rational value; the game enables agency and tactical thought in the moment and in an embodied way. What it resolves is one’s attitude towards a situation. The framing of the game in ritual is both powerful and fragile, as play can turn into fight if players, or musicians, or the collective of people there, allow this. This is perhaps one of the aspects of Capoeira most resistant to analysis, as rules are not always clear, there is no win state, and the right conditions, crucially, are a combination of knowledge of the game as well as an embodied aesthetic understanding of what a good game and appropriate music feel like.

Huizinga interprets ritual, and all culture in fact, as deriving from humanity’s propensity to play before anything else. For him play predates culture and rituals of any kind are considered a form of play, through which structures of society emerge (Huizinga, 1980; 1949, 5; 10-27). The idea of structure and lack thereof—anti-structure—is particularly important for Turner’s analysis of ritual,

liminality and communitas and offers some further points to reflect upon as regards the nuanced and slippery nature of games as well as some of their perceived paradoxes. The previously mentioned elements of Capoeira and the ambiguity of fixed status they generate can be further framed through some of Turner's ideas on ritual and liminal spaces. Liminality for Turner is a space in which the normative social structure (e.g., social roles) is suspended and acts as a transition from one status to another (Turner, 1997; 1969). Crucial to the nature of liminal spaces is a "modelessness" (Turner, 1997; 1969, 97) as regards the status of people taking part in rituals of transition/transformation before they emerge into a new social position. In Capoeira, there is a certain shedding of the social self upon entering the *roda,* while the absence of a fixed outcome reinforces a sense of fluidity, adaptation and emergence. Capoeiristas occupy a very broad range of professions and social positions that provide neither advantage, nor disadvantage in the *roda.* In my years as a capoerista I have encountered university professors, students, executive managers, entrepreneurs, waiters, beauticians, artists of all kinds, fishermen, doctors, and opticians among others. More often than not, this information is unknown during a first encounter in a *roda* and sometimes this is for the better. An anecdote from the *rodas* of Bahia may help clarify this: when my teacher, *Mestre* Pezão, was a young man he was at a *roda* playing the *berimbau* when an older man he did not know asked him for it. *Mestre* Pezão refused and although the man was not pleased he accepted the situation. Shortly afterwards the man went to play a game and at the foot of the *berimbau* he placed a gun that he took out of his pocket—for safekeeping—and proceeded to play a controlled and elegant game. Only after the *roda* did *Mestre* Pezão learn that the man was *Mestre* Bom Cabrito, a known murderer and all-round shady character in the city. The *roda* here acts as an equalising space in which relationships are neither predetermined nor fixed. In it there is a re-construction of self in relation to others, in fluctuating interactions of attempted dominance. There is concurrently a loss of self and an assertion of self that are inseparable from the multidirectional interactions of the group constituting the *roda.* One could easily relate this to notions of communitas (Turner, 1997; 1969) as this sense of interconnectedness emerges through the ritual and dissipates after it. In the physical aspects of the game the two players are constantly adapting to, 'reading' and trying to outwit one another, resulting in an entanglement of selves, an

emergent double, or third consciousness that evokes Turner's thinking around communitas (Turner, 1997; 1969, 126-7).

The idea of shared consciousness is not unique to Capoeira, of course; Nita Little in her analysis of attention in Contact Improvisation states that: "As an ecological action, a shifting self-sensing, the fluid identity of the self shifts the politics that potentiates relations, moving beyond responsibility [for one's partner's safety] and into what David Abram calls 'communion'" (2014, 253). Parallels between Turner's analysis of liminality and ritual are only partial, particularly because in Capoeira the players return to their previous social status/role and heterogeneity is both desired and celebrated, certainly in terms of musical and movement styles. However, the liminal elements of ritual as they apply to Capoeira point further to its placement in the play sphere.

Suits offers that "the elements of the game are 1/ the goal, 2/ the means of achieving the goal, 3/ the rules, and 4/ the lusory attitude" (2014; 1979, 37). Rules delimit the means to achieve the goal and although rules are found across culture, from social convention to legislation, the lusory attitude is perhaps what sets games apart from other rule-bound activities. According to Suits this is the acceptance of rules that dictate inefficient over efficient means of achieving the goal "because they make possible such activity" (2014; 1979, 43). The absolute necessity of inefficient means is moot but the attitude needed to accept rules and to function within them in order to make an interaction possible is far more important. Rather than being a perfunctory acceptance of structure, the lusory attitude places games outside of daily social modes and structures and can thus be placed broadly in the ritual sphere. The transformative nature of games has parallels with Turner's conception of the transformative function of ritual through the liminal space and communitas but where games differ is that they create space for new thinking about the world by being played. Play, and consequently games, therefore, are neither a waste as Caillois claims (2001; 1958, 6-7) nor are they productive. They are generative, in that they create complex interactions and experience through a system of rules and are related to experience–or process–

rather than materiality as a necessary outcome. Games, and Capoeira within these, therefore, do not need to be productive in a material sense, nor do they need to produce a definite end state.

Games as reflections of/on reality

Quite apart from the possibility of growth, as presented in play and games as learning processes, games, as codified reflections of reality, offer the possibility of critical thought. Whereas the notion games being educational is widespread, the idea of games becoming a conduit for thought, and critical thought at that, is far less common. The commonly held associations of games with leisure and frivolity perhaps hide the more powerful aspects of games. In Turner's words, "the wheel of play reveals to us (as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has argued [1975]) the possibility of changing our goals and, therefore, the restructuring of what our culture states to be reality" (1983, 233-4).

In *Critical Play* (2009) Flanagan presents three ways in which games can critically engage with reality: unplaying, reskinning and rewriting (2009, 33-4; 60). By subverting the intended narratives and purpose of a game, players push the boundaries and understanding of the game they play (unplaying). Altering, or camouflaging the appearance of elements of the game—dolls, avatars, etc., for example—players comment on and break away from the aesthetic and ideological structures of the game (reskinning). Finally, by creating new and/or alternative versions of the game, players rewrite and evolve the game at hand (rewriting). All three forms of critical play presented by Flanagan are possible because of the understanding of rules, the navigating through them of the player(s), and prior to them the game designer. Critical play arises not only through the challenges of game structures, but also through pushing these structures to their limit. In Capoeira, reskinning and rewriting have helped the game survive both persecution and shifting social values. Shifting the aesthetics between fight and dance, Capoeiristas alternately have camouflaged the

martial aspects of the game[75], while inversely, *Mestre* Bimba emphasised the martial aspects of what was seen as a 'degenerate' waste of time by the authorities, giving the game a new and acceptable appearance that led to its becoming a global cultural export. As social norms and cultural narratives have shifted, Capoeira has seen internal rewriting of its roots, practice and values. For example, in Capoeira Angola, the significance of its origins in Africa has become one of the dominant narratives over the past decades, with *Mestre* Moraes (Pedro Moraes Trinidade) being at the forefront of the re-imagining of Capoeira as an African diaspora practice since the black consciousness movement in Brazil grew in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to this, with increasing numbers of female players, the traditionally macho attitudes that went hand in hand with Capoeira have had to shift, marking a (partial) change in behaviour towards women, as well as in the lyrics of songs.

Since games are not primarily definable by a win state, other characteristics and combinations thereof gain prominence in setting games apart from other activities in the sphere of play. Apart from rules, which will be examined shortly, a designated time and space for games to occur are required. Although not unique to games, the separation of games from daily life activities is important to point out. This separation offers two important ideas. That of ritual as discussed, and that the game space—or the magic circle—is one of possibility, material or symbolic. It is in the latter in particular that the power of games lies.

Rules

Rules structure the actions of a game and vary greatly in complexity and precision, while they do not necessarily dictate the aesthetics of the game. The shapes of chess pieces may differentiate

[75] In play and to generate ambiguity, as discussed in Chapter 1, rather than following the myth of the creation of Capoeira.

their different functions, but they do not directly correlate to the nature of these functions, for example. A pawn's specific movement on the board has little to do with its given shape or name, in spite of the possible correlations between the word pawn, a low status, and limited movement as a result of that. Aesthetic aspects (the shape of a chess piece) and structural aspects of a game (the ways a chess piece can move) can be arbitrarily related and players learn the latter and use the former as a recognisable representation of the structure/function. This is not always the case; in tic-tac-toe, the crosses and circles have little structural and functional difference beyond distinguishing the players' actions. The separate functions of structure and aesthetics can be seen if the example of tic-tac-toe is slightly modified. If players decide that instead of crosses and circles they use star shapes and squares, but still play using the same rules, then it is evident that what a game looks like and how it is played are not inseparable. This is not to say that the aesthetic aspects of a game are not important to the player's experience, nor that they cannot carry meaning. It is quite the opposite. Part of the appeal of D&D is the aesthetic aspect of the game: the fantasy universe in which it is set is one of the reasons that players choose to play the game. First person shooter video games[76] are an example of aesthetics carrying different meaning—and values—for players, in that by engaging with very similar mechanics/structure, players can be shooting zombies, Axis soldiers in a WW2 setting, spaceships, or fruit. Each of these carries different meanings and generates different associations and emotions in players. Although there are always exceptions, first person shooters tend to have very similar rules—hence the genre name—with aesthetics functioning as the differentiating factor between each one. In this sense the actions that the rules enable and structure are what first define the game, with aesthetics adding further levels of engagement and meaning.

[76] Video games in which the frame is set as if it was viewed from the perspective of the player, with a set of on-screen arms and hands representing those of the player. Players navigate a digital environment on-screen with a keyboard, gamepad, touch screen, or game shooter/gun, in which they have to shoot on-screen enemies, with increasing challenge as the game progresses. Power-ups, traps, and sometimes puzzles feature as elements of the game.

Since rules are one of the defining aspects of games, it is certainly worth considering what these might be for Capoeira. Unlike most games—and sports—there are few explicit rules in Capoeira; explicit rules are known by all players and are stated or read prior to the beginning of play. Conversely, implicit rules are less clear, often unspoken, and subject to negotiation/manipulation. The game of Capoeira has the following explicit rules: the game is played by two people within a circle, to a particular type of music. Each player can make offensive, defensive, and expressive moves. The main instrument signals the beginning and end of each game[77]. Within this frame a multitude of things can, and do happen, since how quickly, gently, aggressively, deceptively, or expressively the game is played are not defined beyond playing to the music, which in itself is open to interpretation. The movement vocabulary itself is loosely defined, and although there is a generally agreed upon range of basic movements, there is space for invention, improvisation and parody[78]. There are variations across schools, but these tend to be comprehensible across practitioners. The game circle can be made of people sitting down, or standing, or it can be marked out by chairs or other objects, drawn, or even imagined. The music can be live, or recorded, but it does generally fall under a genre specific to Capoeira. In fact, the music and the musical instruments required are quite specific to the game; the bare minimum for live music tends to be a *berimbau*, or a *pandeiro* that is often also used for samba[79]. The reader will note that even in this case the requirements are not entirely fixed, and when no instruments are available clapping and singing suffice to make the game happen.

Which movements and rhythms are important are passed down orally from teacher to student and tend to shift and evolve over time according to ideology, aesthetic preference or fashion, making the rules of Capoeira Angola largely implicit. Some further such examples are that tricking one's

[77] This rule only applies to live *rodas*, as in most other cases games end by mutual agreement, or by a teacher/*mestre* setting up games and calling the end.
[78] During one particular *roda* overseen by *Mestre* Roberval in London some years ago, I remember him explicitly saying to one of the students that it is acceptable to invent things during a game, as long as they work. The ambiguity and openness of the statement is typical of how Capoeira Angola is talked about and often taught.
[79] The full *bateria* (percussion orchestra) comprises three *berimbaus*, two *pandeiros*, one *atabaque*, one *reco reco* and one *agogo* (a metal two-tone cowbell). See Glossary and Chapter 1.

partner/opponent into throwing themselves onto one's foot is preferable to directly kicking them; more experienced players must adjust their game to that of less experienced games, while still making it challenging (in my school); a particular gestural call (*chamada*) cannot be interrupted by the *berimbau*. Adding to the ambiguity of the rules is the fact that there is no structure for penalties, or fouls (Marriage, 2020, 2); in cases where a boundary is crossed—and this largely depends on who runs the *roda* and the reactions of the people in the *roda*—the game is simply stopped. This does not always signal the end of the game, however, as players—of movement or of music—often want to continue. How far these implicit boundaries and conventions are pushed depends on the particular *roda*; the people, circumstances and moments that constitute it. In Carse's terms, "[f]inite players play within boundaries; infinite players play with boundaries" (1986, 10).

Lewis' study of Capoeira offers a detailed list of rules for movement play in the game, but these are not exhaustive (Figure 2) and he notes that there is rather a lot of fuzziness between what he deems normative and pragmatic rules (1992, 92; 198)[80], which relate to both implicit and explicit rules respectively and loosely, as these are also dependent on who is teaching the game and how. He offers a further layering of how rules blend into other aspects of the game in stating that "the very notion of 'rule' overlaps significantly with what might also be called the 'aesthetic' of performance" (Lewis, 1992, 198), which reflects the experiential acquisition of knowledge through group interactions. Although the mode of learning influences the practitioner's understanding of Capoeira Angola's structure in terms of labels, the task of this chapter is to offer a more analytical view of the mechanics behind the game before aesthetics and performativity are considered.

[80] Note that Lewis' study of capoeira examines all styles of the practice and not the Angola practice specifically.

Some Capoeira Rules for Physical Play

A. Normative Rules

1. Active play is between two contestants inside the ring.
    1.1. Obey the conventions for entering and leaving the ring.
    1.2. During play, don't move outside the ring.
    1.3. Shake hands with your opponent before and after the bout.
2. Try to take your opponent down.
    2.1. Only feet, hands, and head should touch the ground.
    2.2. Don't try to injure opponent physically.
        2.2.1. No strikes with closed fist are permitted.
        2.2.2. No pushing allowed, except as part of a takedown.
    2.3. Emotional, psychic, and/or prestige damage are okay.
3. Always be ready to defend against an attack.
    3.1. Don't turn your back on an opponent.
    3.2. Keep your hands up for protection.
    3.3. Keep your eyes on your opponent at all times.
4. There is no play without music (*berimbau*).
    4.1. Music starts before physical play.
    4.2. When music stops, play stops.

B. Pragmatic Rules

5. Don't block attacks (except before they mature, or *in extremis*).
    5.1. Escape, then counterattack.
    5.2. Be prepared to escape from most common attacks.
    5.3. Be prepared to attack most common escapes.
6. Keep moving (*ginga*).
    6.1. Try to increase your freedom of movement while decreasing that of your opponent.
    6.2. Never come to a complete stop.
7. Try to deceive your opponent into becoming vulnerable.
    7.1. Establish patterns, only to break them.
    7.2. Pretend to do one thing, then do another.

NOTE: Normative rules are not usually written down, except for tournament settings, when they are much more explicit and point awards are specified.

Figure 2: Some Capoeira Rules for Physical Play (Lewis, 1992, 92)

Implicit rules therefore clearly outnumber the explicit ones and while the reasons behind this form a worthy subject for investigation, it is beyond the remit of this chapter. This does not preclude Capoeira Angola from being understood as a game, but it does make it more resistant to analysis. Furthermore, the effect of the uncertainty that these implicit rules create will help further convey the extent to which Capoeira Angola is a game. From a practical perspective, the fuzziness of

Capoeira rules and the variations across schools makes learning the game fully a lengthy, if not life-long, process. Players are considered to be beginners even years into their practice as a result of finding and grappling with the implicit rules of the game[81]. Here two forms of uncertainty are evident: uncertainty in how the game is played (learning the game), and uncertainty in how certain situations evolve/resolve (playing the game). The focus of this chapter is on the latter, although it is entirely possible that the novice player having to navigate uncertainty in learning equips them to also deal with the uncertainty of game play proper.

Uncertainty

Departing from the premise that the main reason uncertainty is not only necessary, but in fact enjoyable in games, Costikyan posits that "the reason games appeal is because they allow us to explore uncertainty, a fundamental problem we grapple with every day, in a nonthreatening way" (2015, 13). Caillois posits that play, more broadly, is an uncertain activity: "Doubt must remain until the end, and hinges upon the denouement. In a card game, when the outcome is no longer in doubt, play stops and the players lay down their hands" (2001;1958, 7). This certainly holds true of Capoeira, which very explicitly relies on uncertainty in that not only is the interactions of players uncertain but that a clear outcome is avoided. Games tend to be stopped if and when the dynamic between players becomes fixed for too long. There are several kinds of uncertainty in games that extend beyond those mentioned above that are explored in detail in Costikyan's work (2015) and I will draw on some in this analysis. Although the game of Capoeira initially appears to have only a few, if any, rules, it is a structured game whose rules allow space for necessary improvisation. Bending the rules—unplaying in a sense—is commonplace and when done in a manner in which the aesthetics and flow of the game are not interrupted, such behaviour is often met with approval.

[81] From an observer's perspective the game takes on the shifting appearance described as a dance, a fight and a performance.

In order to understand where the boundary lies between what is fixed and what is not, rules will be explored in relation to the boundaries they create as well as the uncertainty they produce.

Performative Uncertainty

Players must interact through a physical exchange of movement that includes the basic swaying step (*ginga*), kicks (as well as feints[82]), escapes (rather than blocks), acrobatics, and expressive gestures and accents across this movement vocabulary. The interaction must be improvised. If one player kicks, the other must find a way to get out of the way of the attack and follow up with an appropriate response (a counterattack, for example). If this was the only type of exchange, a fairly clear model of interaction can be imagined. However, a response to the kick could be any combination within the aforementioned movement range, making the number of possible combinations impossible to plot without mathematical modelling. The choices each player has are limited to what they can physically do, but the combinations of calls and responses are vast, particularly because there are expressive and acrobatic movements involved. One form of uncertainty that arises from these conditions is that of player performance[83]: the physical abilities and limitations each capoeirista has in combination with how well they can perform them during the game. This last point will be expanded on when discussing player unpredictability and tactics.

The musical performance is governed by similarly loose but challenging 'rules': the musical element of Capoeira forms an important part of the game, in that the physical interaction happens in relation to the music and the lead musician can call the beginning and end of the game, however, the way in which the music is played is not governed by game rules, but rather by an Afrocentric musical aesthetic. The aim of the *bateria* is to provide syncopated rhythm—and even

[82] Movements and gestures that give the impression of an attack but that are not carried out fully. These are employed to make one's partner flinch, over-react, or lose their concentration and/or flow, as discussed in Chapter 1.
[83] Costikyan calls this "performative uncertainty" (2015).

before that, tempo—for the game and call-and-response singing of the *roda.* In that sense, the rules of the *bateria* in terms of game play relate to the physical game itself: the *bateria* begins and ends the ritual game circle; the *gunga* usually marks the beginning and end of games; and players begin their game kneeling in front of the *bateria's* centre (the 'mouth').

Player unpredictability (and musical unpredictability)

Performative uncertainty is complex enough to deal with in itself since it is contingent on a player's mental and physical condition on any given day. However, this cannot be understood in isolation; Capoeira is a game and necessitates the interaction two or more people and as such produces more layers of uncertainty. Player uncertainty or player unpredictability, as put forward by Costikyan (2015), becomes one of the most compelling and challenging aspects of the game. This refers to the uncertainty that arises from not being able to know another player's actions and is part of gameplay in countless games, from chess to basketball. In Capoeira, player unpredictability is central to the interaction between players as it is the condition through which they explore tactics for negotiating the game, and their presence within it. Since the interaction is improvised and the range of physical vocabulary is broad, what one's game partner does becomes difficult to predict, although part of the learning process is to develop 'vision' (*visão*) in the game; another way of referring to strategy and tactics deployed in gameplay. This means narrowing down the range of possible moves one's game partner can execute through understanding the game more deeply, as well as through game play itself; for example, in physically limiting the other's space for movement. The potential for surprise, and thus uncertainty, remains fairly high even among experienced players since as their skill in executing movement, which includes convincing feints, and responding to the music becomes less uncertain, it allows for a more creative application of movement and responses, which in turn increase the unpredictability of the game.

Players' unpredictability also relates to those playing music for the game, as the physical game is played in response to the music. Percussive improvisation as well as verbal improvisation add further layers of complexity as the musicians respond to and are influenced by the physical game itself by shifting the groove or pace of the music, or shifting what songs are sung to reflect or call for a particular kind of game as discussed. The last is done through both the choice of song itself, but also through improvised lyrics in the call/lead parts of the song that chorus responds to.

Learning how to deal with one's partner's unpredictability as well as with the calls and shifts in the music is one of the hallmarks of a good player. As players learn to anticipate potential movements and become reflexive enough to transform their own actions based on sudden changes—physical, rhythmic, and verbal—they begin to have more conscious tactics in the game, which are always liable to shift and change, however. Tactics here relate to the ability to turn unpredictability into advantage, whether that is another person's or one's own. A training tactic is, in fact, developing ways of being unpredictable, or difficult to 'read' physically, so that as one player attempts to 'read' the other's patterns and behaviours, she is also making herself inscrutable and uses this to her advantage as it inhibits the other player's *visão*.

Analytic complexity

The multiple media and layers of attention involved in the Capoeira game generate a level of analytic complexity that must also occur at high speed while engaging in any of the range of activities described thus far. To add to the complexity of choices that inform tactics and the moment-by-moment emergence of the game, players have to also consider the physical dimensions of the game space, so that they do not overstep its boundaries, which are usually marked by the presence of people sitting or standing, and so that they can force—directly or indirectly—the other player on and across these same boundaries. The game does not end if a

player is thrown out of the *roda*, or if they inadvertently kick the *berimbaus*, for example. In the case of the former, what is understood is that a moment of a defined power dynamic has emerged, and in the case of the latter, that the player is not in sufficient control of their movements, or they are not keenly aware of the space, both which can be read by the other player and the rest of the participants and used/commented on accordingly. The fluidity of the game's structure, as well as the broad range and layers of possible interactions along with the real risk of being hit necessitate a particularly high level of focus, analysis, and action, placing it well outside quotidian ways of interaction.

Choice

> Games are inherently non-linear. They depend on decision-making. Decisions have to pose real, plausible alternatives, or they aren't real decisions. It must be entirely reasonable for a player to make a decision one way in one game, and a different way in the next. To the degree that you make a game more like a story—more linear, fewer real options—you make it less like a game (Costikyan in Flanagan, 2009, 7).

Choice, as referred to in the previous chapter, is central to the game of Capoeira: in playing the music, singing, as well as in the physical interactions that happen each player is faced with a string of choices to make, and often at reflex speed. There is a sense of a range of options to each movement, or musical phrase offered, which does make choice possible, but the ability to be inventive and act in a way that surpasses the expected range of responses is highly prized. Choice is linked with inventiveness in this case, especially in terms of the internal values of the game.

As the game is improvised and rules allow a wealth of different interactions in the quest for dominance, players' choices are central to how they approach gameplay. The absence of structured chance—for example, through the use of cards, or dice—means that the interaction depends on what each player offers, much like chess. However, movement in space is not as

strictly structured in Capoeira, allowing a greater level of unpredictability for players to manage. Choices therefore relate both to strategy (how do I approach this game?) as well as to tactics (how do I manage what I am being given?) in the need to control the game, while simultaneously revolving around an awareness of what is physically possible by each player and how much physical risk players are willing to take, in terms of safety *and* the execution of movement. The focus required for this to happen necessitates special conditions removed from daily rhythms and interactions as mentioned *vis a vis* analytic complexity. Crucially, the choice to stop playing anchors Capoeira in the game sphere insofar as games are understood to be a voluntary activity.

The magic circle

The notion of a space and time separate from daily life for play and games to exist within is important to Huizinga's thinking and can be observed in a very broad range of games from scheduled sports matches, to informal card games among friends. It is perhaps Suits who offers the loosest conception of the threshold between the everyday and the game, basing it on a presence or absence of instrumentality (Suits, 2014; 1979), but this is not evidently shared in other conceptions of play. The magic circle of playing marks a shift in focus and modes of activity and is respected by all players (Huizinga, 1980; 1949). Capoeira's magic circle is actually a circle and the entire process of play is referred to as a ritual by many Capoeira Angola practitioners, reflecting both the definable locus for play and the codified process of achieving the conditions necessary for the games to occur. What is powerful in Huizinga's notion of the magic circle in this instance, is that its power to focus the play activity, and its fragility offer an analogy for the Capoeira *roda.* Furthermore, the separation of the magic circle from normative social order can act as a focusing lens through which to reflect upon the structures and relations of that order. Looking more broadly at games Flanagan posits that:

> Games, functioning as an ordering logic—a machine, or a technology—for creating social relations, work to distil or abstract the everyday actions of the players into easy-to-

> understand instruments where context is defamiliarized just enough to allow Huizinga's magic circle of play to manifest. From this one example, it is possible to see how games in and of themselves function as *social technologies* (2009, 9).

Critical gameplay

A further important consideration is that the majority of writing on games cited above is from a Western/global North perspective, which accounts for the strong sense of order and polarity in much of the scholarship. This is both problematic as well as helpful as it offers space for reconsideration; the framework that Capoeira is resisting in this analysis is of the same root as the framework of values and practices the game resists in life itself, i.e., those of post-enlightenment dialectics and the politics of the global North. By demonstrating the limitations of some of the current western frameworks for thinking about games, order and chaos, perhaps Capoeira can help rearticulate—or rewrite as Flanagan suggests—the game in terms of how it is understood outside of the *roda* and how the knowledge and thinking it produces might be (partially) conveyed in writing[84].

Flanagan posits that games offer frameworks for thinking and the limitations generated by their rules also offer opportunity for subverting the original intention of the games. As mentioned, she offers reskinning, unplaying, and rewriting, as ways in which games are manipulated by players to subvert or re-orient a game's purpose. Games that require strategic and tactical thinking have been in existence for thousands of years, for example, Go, which has been played using the same rules for at least 2500 years (American Go Association, 2021; Shotwell, 2008). But quite aside from tabletop or digital games shaping thought, physical games may have a longer lasting effect on the players' mode of thinking by dint of being embodied games. Capoeira Angola is ultimately a game of strategy and tactics played out physically, orally, and musically and through long term

[84] Lewis (1995) writes about embodiment through his understanding of Capoeira and although the essay itself deals with understanding different states of embodiment and consciousness, it also presents another way in which Capoeira can be understood as a knowledge system.

practice it shapes the way one faces the world[85]. In his analysis of Capoeira as a means through which everyday life shifts for its practitioners, Downey offers the following:

> Our bodies are the foundation of our thoughts, providing the physical site for thinking as well as experience that shapes our understanding. Many scholars have not been sensitive, however, to the fact that varied training regimens can shape radically different types of embodiment. Physical education, broadly understood, may take hold of people's bodies and transform how they are inhabited (2005, 30).

Rosa more explicitly states that "The way in which people choose or are forced to use their bodies also transforms their perception, description, and reflection over the tangible world" (2015, 12). More specifically, she quotes Berenstein-Jacques to illustrate how architecture—whether planned or not—shapes embodiment, and by dint of that, thought:

> The experience of walking up or down a hillside shantytown [*favela*] is tinted by a unique spatial perception. As one passes by the first "breaking points" [*quebradas*], one begins to uncover a different walking rhythm, imposed by the alleys' pathway itself. This is what they call ginga. Wandering around the meanders of the favelas, we comprehend how those hillside children [*crianças do morro*] figure out how to dance samba way before they learn to properly walk (Berenstein-Jacques in Rosa, 2015, 35).

In a world where being upright is prized, learning to move freely and willingly through all planes of movement and orientation certainly has an effect on how capoeiristas may come to engage with and view their environment, and consequently, their choices within it. In an analysis of Contact Improvisation, Little articulates how "[s]hifting our self-identity becomes politically potent at the moment when our abilities change and present new experiential possibilities" (2014, 249). One of the ways this occurs is through the habitual and attentive inversions, falls and suspensions dancers experience, which apart from shifting their understanding of self, also challenges mainstream conceptions of the body and its hierarchy. In my experience of both practices this holds true, as both have radically expanded my sense of being in my own body and in the world. Capoeira has historically been counter-cultural, a practice that originated from the 'weak' and the oppressed, which continuously comments on the power imbalances in society, while creating a

[85] Note that working within any given system eventually at least partially shapes the way in which we think, whether intentionally or not. As Capoeira is not a dominant system globally, it has been possible to experience how it has shifted my thinking, as I have live most of my life in Europe.

space for the assertion of self through power play[86]. If the *roda* of Capoeira becomes a crucible for affirmation of presence and agency, and in a context wherein the weak are literally and metaphorically lauded, then the implications range beyond cultural commentary, and move into critical thought with potential for action—in a non-partisan and rather individual sense.

Few games emerge that do not to some extent reflect the society and time they came into existence in. Both Flanagan (2009) and Sharp (2015) present examples of games that reflect ideas of their time, sometimes deliberately and others unconsciously, highlighting that games are far from neutral objects of amusement. The most famous example mentioned, perhaps, is Monopoly which was created in 1906 by Elizabeth Magie, and called *The Landlord's Game*, as "an exploration of Henry George's economic theories about real estate and monopolies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Sharp, 2015, 63). Capoeira carries in its structure the values and experiences of several generations of practitioners and reflects these in its structure and aesthetic, as well as the narrative built around it by different people at different times. As a practice of the marginalised and disenfranchised when it emerged, the game's focus on dominance in the game and the players' assertion of agency—and thus selfhood—in the process of playing reveals a complex matrix of ideas, experiences and desires at work. Contemporary practice is shifting in its use of language in order to move away from older conceptions of certain ideas such as around gender, evidencing a continuous re-skinning (Flanagan, 2009) of the game itself and is indicative of the need for the game to reflect the times in order to remain significant to its practitioners. Thinking around perceived physical weaknesses of women has shifted radically over the past decades, for example, as over this time an increasing number of women have taken up the game and are also being recognised internationally as teachers and leaders. The language used in Capoeira about gender and ethnicity is shifting so that sexist and racist lyrics are not used

[86] See Rosa (2015) Chapter 4 and pages 7, 100, and 223 for a discussion of Capoeira, and the construction of identity. Sutton-Smith also discusses how games of competition van be used to interpret and/or subvert power relationships in culture in his chapter on power play (Sutton-Smith, 2001, 74-90).

and such remarks made by players are called out. This re-skinning of Capoeira has ensured its continued appeal but also reflects how social and cultural attitudes are mirrored in the game.

Deep play and Capoeira

Marriage relates the continuation of Capoeira games in spite of governmental attempts to eradicate the practice in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to Geertz's notion of deep play: a form of play so risky/dangerous that playing it is irrational, but nonetheless is pursued (Marriage 2020, 49). Geertz moves away from Bentham's utilitarian framing of deep play and observes that deep play moves into a symbolic sphere of meaning[87] facilitated by the high stakes of the game (Geertz, 2005, 72-3). The stakes of playing Capoeira no longer come with social risk, although there is physical and psychological danger at stake in the game. The uncertainty of the game itself as well as the potential for injury might make it appear an irrational pursuit, particularly as there are few figures that emerge as recognised 'champions', although there are countless players recognised for their skill. Recognition however, is not easily quantifiable and capoeiristas spend decades training and playing for the thrill of the game above all else.

In more recent decades various organisations and tournaments have emerged that attempt to regulate and systematise Capoeira in line with professional sports standards, yet these are perceived by many capoeiristas as a degradation of the practice, or at best a limited—or shallow, according to Geertz—version of it. Marriage also highlights the important question of why certain games are perceived by governments as dangerous and in need of regulation or banning (Marriage 2020, 49). In the case of Capoeira, it is perhaps the combination of the embodied

[87] Geertz examines Balinese cockfighting and notes that of the two tiers of betting, the tier with higher amounts at stake was more about a betting of social status; the amount of money bet on the game acts as a testament to the players' deep engagement with the game.

exchange and generation of knowledge that eschews the rational and linguistic communication systems of the global north, in combination with the inherent critical potential of games that renders them dangerous to tightly regulated systems. In addition to this, the systemic racist policies in Brazil alongside the racist ideologies behind them cannot be discounted as contributing factors to the suppression of the practice.

Deep play in Capoeira moves beyond the execution of a difficult move, or hitting an opponent, and becomes very much about a symbolic survival. In addition to this, although a sense of togetherness usually emerges in the *roda,* this does not necessarily imply a tightly defined sense of broader belonging. The ritual of the game produces focus and a sense of temporary belonging, but beyond that, there is no hard ideology that binds capoeiristas together. Lewis puts it thus: “Does the normative communitas between Capoeira players, for instance, form the basis for a moral community? The answer would seem to be ambiguous, yes and no” (1992, 218). Being unable to be pinned down both literally and ideologically therefore makes the capoeirista unpredictable and thus potentially threatening.

Of course Capoeira shifts depending on where it practiced. It is actually quite a complex balance: understanding, respecting and maintaining the root while allowing new expression to happen in adaptation to new conditions and environments. As with everything, Capoeira has a spectrum. It is a place of ritualised/structured conflict, with occasional eruptions of actual violence that are frowned upon and quickly stopped, so difference is absolutely necessary for it to remain meaningful and engaging to players. Too much uniformity leads to a stagnation in play, as movements become predictable. Apart from difference in movement styles, differences in outlook, personality and culture add to the richness of the game. The structured and ritualised aesthetic nature of the conflict in the game creates a relatively safe space in which to explore selfhood, power and agency, therefore. The implications for the kind of thinking the game produces are thus

quite significant in relation to the generation of models of being in the world that resist the normative modes and values of those in power. Marriage puts this as follows:

> As Capoeira takes place in and between bodies, the game links the production of knowledge with social and political action. […] Playing generates potentiality of action through the exhilaration of play, the ideas that are generated by the interaction and the mobilisation that strengthens, and is strengthened by, group membership, loyalty and security (Marriage, 2020, 108).

Games and performance

Games as a means of training and devising performance work are widespread, particularly in the field of theatre. Improvisation, as both exercise and performance, is often game-like and moves beyond script and choreography in that it is structured around rules and allows space for the unplanned. It is perhaps one of the most overtly game-like contemporary performance modes and it is in this vein that part of the rationale of this chapter has emerged. As stated earlier on, one must want to play and, occasionally, finding the game is the game itself[88]. It is this attitude that is behind my exploration of Capoeira as game, and of performance as game, and has been developed through years of serious and exuberant play in *rodas*, in rehearsal rooms, on stage and off it. To me, playing games is central to living a full and critical life. Two ideas underpin this part of my research: That playing games is innate (Huizinga), while also being an ideal way of spending time (Suits); and that play allows the possibility of reimagining—and sometimes reimaging—our environment/social condition (Flanagan). Stenros summarises the last aptly: “games and play not only can foster an alternative view on the world and render its norms and rules visible, but can also actively encourage breaking said norms” (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 214).

[88] This refers to Wright’s ‘Finding the Game’ exercise, in which a group of people observe one another and find ways of playing/improvising. (2006, 36).

Although games and performance are distinct practices, where they overlap is of key interest, as the aim of this research is to employ the subversive critical potential of games in performance conventions so that spectators need not be expert players of complex games, such as Capoeira, to access these modes of experience and cognition. Seen from another perspective it is my solution to the challenge of encouraging an 'active' spectator—or Boal's spect-actor—capable of critical thought, to transform thought into action. In this sense, this project departs from Brecht's Epic Theatre and Boal's Forum Theatre, moving away from pure (re)presentation or didactic purpose and into emergent co-creation between the performers and the audience. Cognizant of Rancière's critique of participation as stultifying the power of the theatre (Rancière, 2011), this project posits that game dynamics place the audience in the position of making choices that affect both the content of the performance and the degree of their own involvement, as discussed in Chapter 1. I share in Ranciére's position on the audience's intelligence and active status in their watching (Rancière, 2011, 17) and I do not claim that participation makes the audience more active (in the sense of criticality), but that in the form proposed here, it might open up different possibilities for creation. What co-creation achieves—if one accepts that emergence within a game structure is creation—is a flattening of the author-spectator hierarchy and opens a space for reskinning, unplaying and rewriting (Flanagan, 2009) performance itself. The assertion is that if a spectator can rewrite or unplay a performance, they might be inclined to consider what else they can do so with. Flanagan points out that critical play is:

> to create or occupy play environments and activities that represent one or more questions about aspects of human life. These questions can be abstract, such as rethinking cooperation, or winning, or losing; or concrete, involved with content issues such as looking at the U.S. military actions in Cambodia in the early 1970s (2009, 6).

In the game of Capoeira co-creation is far from neutral, since it is an overt game for dominance while consciously employing tactics such as trickery and dissimulation that are associated with those considered powerless or weak. Marriage points out that "Capoeira derives from the perspective of the weaker party: it was developed in slave communities and then among people who were politically and economically marginalised as Brazil moved to a capitalist economy"

(2020, 2)[89]. It is perfused with lyrics and attitudes that regale of how force/strength/size is not true power, and that cunning and quick thinking are a means of surviving in a hostile world. It is a game whose premise is simple, but that, in practice, remains uncomfortable, uncertain, and filled with contradictions. In learning how to navigate such a space, I propose it is possible to imagine ways in which political theatre and performance can be advanced. As a parallel to this, the swift physical exchanges in Contact Improvisation open up the dancers' understanding of interpersonal politics to the extent that "[p]olitical actions arise within potentials" (Little, 2014, 252). As with Capoeira, however, to arrive at such a level of ability in Contact practice years are required. The question remains how it is possible to generate similar potentials through more widely known conventions.

Although myriad games call for playful contest and tactical/strategic thinking, it is in the combination of these with a somatic, and therefore non-rational, mode of discourse that Capoeira stands out. A further difference from other martial arts is that it seeks to prolong interaction rather than end it as swiftly as possible, therefore, the game requires a high level of ingenuity and playfulness in order to 'survive' the physical and mental intensity of the interaction. In an inadvertent but strongly resonant way in relation to Capoeira as a practice of freedom, Carse suggests that "[t]o be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as though nothing of consequence will happen. On the contrary, when we are playful with each other we relate as free persons, and the relationship is open to surprise; *everything* that happens is of consequence" (1986, 15). Playing Capoeira offers both physical freedom in terms of breaking out of daily social patterns and in terms of finding corporeal self-expression, as well as conceptual freedom. The latter occurs directly as a result of the physical, and therefore embodied, interplay of the game. Such embodied experience that opens up the number of possibilities for action a person sees/imagines allows for a reimagining and reframing of one's life, as attested by numerous

[89] There is an interesting, if coincidental, parallel here to Turner's (1997; 1969) discussion of ritual and liminal spaces being the domain of the weak (women in patriarchal societies and men in matriarchal ones) in terms of the social stratification. The case studies he offers present a complex relationship between social status, liminality and the different types of power each group has.

capoeiristas[90]. Marriage talks about Capoeira eschewing the grasp of contemporary surveillance, in that "[t]he importance of trickery, ruse, deceit in responding to superior power provide an antidote to the legal and cultural demands of transparency" (2020, 143). Although this seems to function on a more symbolic level, the resulting embodied awareness of possibility and choice, using tactics that negate dominant discourse (inversions, contradictions, playfulness, and circularity), remains largely invisible as it resides in the consciousness of each capoeirista, and offers the potential for criticality (in thought and/or action).

There are theatrical parallels to this idea, notably, as aforementioned, in the work of Brecht and Boal, both who strived for social change as a result of their work through fomenting critical thought in their audience—Brecht's Alienation effekt as a conduit[91]—and action to re-write outcomes of narratives of oppression—Boal's Forum Theatre. Limitations of this work are that the desired outcomes of performance are framed within specific political positions and call for specific types of action, rather than being informed by them and open to the unknown. Creating a specific thought or even making a precise call for action remains largely theoretical, as one might understand what a play is saying, or indeed is asking of its audience, but these works or actions remain at a safe non-embodied distance from the proposed idea for action. Although Forum Theatre asks of its audience to participate in a physical way, the format usually emulates social structures and power relations as they are in daily life, inadvertently limiting action and aesthetics to fit that frame. Far from rejecting Brecht and Boal's efforts to spur critical thought in their audiences, this project draws from both artists' ethos, but does not espouse partisan political aims. By entering the ritual and game spheres, there is the opportunity to examine power relations in an embodied and highly subjective manner, while grappling with ambiguity through the shifting terrain of play. If Capoeira

[90] This forms part of my experience also, and is, in fact the seed for this entire body of research as mentioned earlier. Rosa talks of re-articulating and asserting personhood and identity, while Marriage talks about the duality between the game and life. Lewis talks about the game in terms of liberation. These are but a few examples across existing literature.

[91] Interestingly, Marriage identifies the idea of 'making-strange' as a means of becoming aware of oppressive structures and repositioning oneself in order to avoid them: "… the innovations in the practice of Capoeira "made strange" the normality of legislation and prejudice, and contributed towards alternative or expanded identities and culture. In negotiating competing interests through Capoeira, players generated the possibility of outcomes that escaped the apparent inevitability of violence" (2018, 275).

has taught me anything, it is that binaries and absolutes are all too easily demolished and that playing games offers a capsule through which to test one's agency in the world.

Acting/performing can be understood as a kind of playing; from playing a role to the conventions of going to watch a play. In elaborating on the freedom to enter into a game, which in Carse's view extends to every aspect of life, he states:

> Even more: we make those roles believable to others. It is in the nature of acting, Shaw said, that we are not to see this woman as Ophelia, but Ophelia as this woman. … Of course, not for a second will this woman in her acting be unaware that she is acting. She never forgets that she has veiled herself sufficiently to play this role, that she has chosen to forget for the moment that she is this woman and not Ophelia. But then, neither do we as audience forget we are audience. Even though we see this woman as Ophelia, we are never in doubt that she is not. We are in complicity with her veil. We allow her performed emotions to affect us, perhaps powerfully. But we never forget that we *allow* them to do so (1986, 12-13).

Eliding games and performance presents a way forward in thinking about how a martial game such as Capoeira can inform contemporary performance practice beyond mere aesthetic similarities. How can game structures in performance help access the perception shifting effects of Capoeira? Little states that "[s]hifting our sense of self is important because it produces this emergent potential" (2014, 253). Although this refers to Contact Improvisation it is echoed in Capoeira as its polyrhythms and the layered attention needed to play allow for a shift in the sense of self in the moment and in the long term[92]. The game of Capoeira is a game of emergence and potential, never resolving, thus creating a locus of continuous becoming. Rosa's discussion of the recuperation-cum-invention of identity (2015, 7; 223) as an effect of Capoeira is one way of articulating this shift. The emergent aspect of Capoeira is what my project leans into and transposes onto a performance/game format. Rather than trying to emulate its aesthetics and ritual detail, I draw on the underlying structures of Capoeira and apply them to a participatory improvised performance that brings audience, performer and musicians into co-creative interplay.

[92] This sense of self refers to both the individual and the collective.

Chapter 3: *Troca o Pé pela Mão*[93]: From One Performance Game to Another

> Trickster, by contrast, is the consummate survivor, always slippery, always able to invert a situation and wiggle free, always willing to abandon a project or an ego position if the danger gets too high. (Hyde, 2008, 357)

> One thing is for certain: games and play activities are emergent—acts becoming, of agency. (Flanagan in Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 251)

Early experiments and formal failures

The path of making *If It Was Up to Me* has been long and often meandering. The early attempts to unpack transmitting the power play in Capoeira to non-capoeiristas began with movement. An unexpectedly very successful 3-day workshop for MA students at Goldsmiths in 2011[94] sparked this process and involved using Capoeira movement as frame for post-Grotowskian inspired physical and vocal explorations.

Subsequently, the early practice research conducted for this PhD had participants with physical training in acting and/or dance learn some of the movements and rhythmic patterns of Capoeira. These were used as a scaffold for improvisations around dominating one's partner. Most of this work brought up questions around what happens to form when conflict—including intentional conflict in a structured exercise—arises and the resulting improvisations often ended in grappling

[93] Switch the foot for the hand (my translation). This is a line from a song, as mentioned in Chapter 1, that refers to the capoeirista's ability to shift orientation and freely switch between using their limbs for support and also alludes to their adaptability.
[94] This was prior to commencing this research; however, it was the first time I had seriously considered that I could transmit aspects of Capoeira in a meaningful way to non-capoeiristas.

that tended toward the scruffy. In hindsight, I was not yet able to understand what generated the playful equilibrium between competition and cooperation seen in Capoeira games and was too keenly focused on the movement vocabulary itself and the specific interactions it opens up. It is only after many years of teaching and unpacking the layered structures of Capoeira that I succeeded in offering enough structure to produce some of the dynamics of the game in a teaching setting: a day-long Capoeira session with postgraduate movement students in 2021[95] with a focus of getting a sense of Capoeira as a movement system—and thus, also, as an epistemology—that culminated in partner improvisations around use of space.

If trained movers[96] need a full day of teaching and discussion around the broad strokes of Capoeira, then how can a theatre audience begin to engage with the more specific and risky area of power play? A return to training and a long interruption of my studies combined with quite intensive teaching in theatre and performance led to the insight that the kicks, escapes, and acrobatics facilitate a particular quality of interaction but one that is bound in particular aesthetics[97], and it was necessary to start thinking beyond the specificity of the movements and even of the operational aspects/rules of the game of Capoeira. In their analysis of games, Salen and Zimmerman offer that operational rules guide the behaviour of the players, constitutive rules are the mechanics behind/at the foundation of the game and implicit rules relate to convention and/or unspoken rules (2004, 130). Through their analysis it was possible to begin looking beyond what Capoeira looks like and at what each of its elements does relative to the whole experience. Looking at Capoeira through a game design lens was pivotal in my thinking as it demystified it and offered palpable ways of playing around with its play. Key considerations in terms of the foundational elements of the performance were identified to be as follows: interaction, choice and an understandable format. Everything else was additional.

[95] Workshop on Capoeira Angola at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, 3 November 2021, for the MA Movement Direction and Facilitation cohort.
[96] People trained in movement systems that span dance, physical theatre, martial arts, and broader movement practices.
[97] Linked to culture and that require skill to execute.

The first challenge was to reconceptualise who was playing with who. Until this point, participants were all performers with considerable training and the possibility of re-presenting struggle on stage seemed beside the point. I did not aim for representation, but experience, therefore it was necessary for the interaction to be between the audience and the performer. Unlike Boal's spect-actors, however, I did not want to explain the game, whatever that was to be, as it would leave less space for ambiguity, and I did not want to directly ask the audience to do anything, in a similar vain to finding one's way physically around the *roda*. Moving in the direction of Invisible Theatre also was not truly an option as leaving a situation unmarked would remove it from the sphere of ritual and play that opens up liminality, as well as extra-daily behavioural possibilities—playfulness that includes risk taking and bending/breaking rules, for example. As the intention has been to encourage evolving and multidirectional power play through action, the use of speech and verbal instruction would ground the performance in a more rigid and definable world.

Interaction necessitates choice making by nature; unless one chooses to disengage, a series of choices are made, and concurrently, adaptations. Conceptually, therefore, participation in games opens space for agency through choice as well as the possibility of taking a position relative to the situation. On a practical level, participation that has an evident outcome highlights choice and brings into question the level of agency participants have. Flanagan's essay on articulating a ludic language in relation to gamification and the intersection of games and art has many points of resonance and posits pertinent questions for this project:

> The ludic language constitutes a game's cultural conventions, privileging agency with responsive feedback, and connoting meaning through the way in which players take *action* and *authenticate themselves* through this action. Representation, reception: these become action—*action*, coupled with a systemic recognition of that action, constitutes what are called the *game mechanics* (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 265).

Furthermore, I echo her position that play is essential for surviving in society—although I do not think this is a new or exclusively contemporary idea or practice at all—and that "playful aesthetics"

(Waltz and Deterding, 2014) can help open new avenues of thought. I agree with Flanagan's caveat, echoing Rancière, that "aesthetics are tools for political and social oppression" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 268), depending on their use. In light of this, the need for creating a participatory and game-like format became fundamental. In addition, the need for an easily understandable format led to using cards as a medium for interaction, as they offered a familiar object already laden with conventions for use. In the early stages of developing *If It Was Up to Me* A4 cards with one word were placed on the floor or given to the audience and they quickly understood that showing me the cards had an effect. As the work developed, conventional playing cards replaced the instruction cards, with audience members not told what to do other than move freely in the studio space I was in.

Experiments with aesthetics aimed to explore tropes of entertainment and ambiguity, initially drawing movement from Capoeira and vogue dance[98]. In both forms run common threads such as competition/cooperation, ambiguity/dissimulation (gender, power), and high affect juxtapositions[99] (Rosa, 2005) among others, not least because they are both Afro-diasporic practices. In combining the two I aimed to present movement that was dynamic and moved between expressions of masculinity and femininity, which proved entertaining but extraneous and linked more to my own explorations of gender performance without being essential to the interaction. This led to a reconsideration of what aesthetic the work required. As a result, the aesthetic choices of movement were left open and in accordance with the performer's movement heritage(s). A soundtrack composed of samba reggae, samba, and pop music was dropped in favour of live improvised music in autumn 2019 that is also open to the musicians' instruments and musical styles.

[98] This work took place in 2016 and was prior to the work of Puma Camillé, who works with a hybrid of vogue and Capoeira. Her work started appearing online around 2019-20.
[99] A term borrowed from Gottschild in Rosa. "[H]igh- affect juxtaposition evokes the ability to send the body into dynamically balanced movements of contrariety that evoke irony or paradox" (2015, 27).

A further (sideways) step involved exploring a duet version of this performance game with Katjuša Kovačič[100], who is also a capoeirista and performance maker. The sheer volume of information with two performers dancing solo, together, cards that interfered with what the performers did, and other audience members' presence and actions, resulted in a carnivalesque atmosphere in which the spectators joined in the dance, using the cards as prompts among themselves, until we signalled the end with some contingency hidden cards. Although the experience was enjoyable and excitingly unpredictable, it pointed out the danger too much fun/entertainment poses to the balance needed for critical (power) play.

Out of these formal failures arose the need for structural analysis. This led to deeper work with Capoeira that was complemented by game design research as well as playing more games. The combination of the previous brought up choice, ambiguity/indeterminacy, and participation as key elements. The need for elegant rules (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, 136-8)[101] that enable engaging interaction, are simple enough to learn by exploring, that allow performativity and entertainment to become part of the gameplay—as a reflection of performativity in Capoeira—and work with what I have available when not in Capoeira circles, led to the current version of the performance, outlined in the following section.

It *is* up to me: The structure of *If It Was Up to Me*

Various breaks slowed me down. The end of 2016 brought with it a mental health crisis that led to a two and a half year fallow period. After resuming work in 2019, the duet experiment, and the beginning of explorations into a more open aesthetic, the pandemic arrived. Although frustratingly

[100] June 2019, Ljubljana, Slovenia.
[101] Elegant rules refer to rules that are appropriate for the kind of gameplay desired as well as the players themselves.

slow, this process offered space for tectonic reorganisations to occur. Returning to the studio in 2021 brought with it more elegant rules borne out of a deepening understanding of play, and the drive to try again. What has resulted is a performance in which the audience is coaxed to participate in a series of games during which my role is much that of Hyde's trickster, that of an *Angoleira*[102]: to playfully shift what things seem to be into other possibilities.

If It Was Up to Me is a participatory performance that operates on several different registers: dance, participatory performance, musical and improvised performance, and game play. The focus in creating has been on structure and mechanics, much in the vein of game design, and less on aesthetics as the main carriers of meaning, although aesthetics have been considered in terms of the game play itself. Furthermore, there is no aesthetic prerequisite for the music or movement, opening it up to different styles, provided improvisation can occur in both, while the mechanics and structure do not change, as a way of making it accessible to culturally diverse audiences and performers[103]. An account of the performance follows before a detailed discussion of the rules that drive it and the thinking behind them is offered.

The performance is structured in three parts and is for a maximum audience of 15:

1. A dance/card game whose rules are gradually discovered as the audience engages with the cards,
2. A reflective game section comprised of Emotion Bingo and It's Up to Me (a modified version of the game called 'I like people who…'), and
3. A closing monologue and song.

[102] *Angoleiro* (m)/*Angoleira* (f): Portuguese term for a Capoeira Angola practitioner.
[103] A future plan for theis work in the long term is to open it up for performance without me, both as a way of sharing the work, as well as a way to see if the structure of the performance functions without my performative choices.

The first part is perhaps the most significant in its relation to Capoeira and the overall meaning-making of the performance, although there are several overarching elements that draw from the practice too. Improvisation is central to Capoeira and this applies to both music and movement and is reflected in the performance itself. In Capoeira music and movement occur within the aesthetic parameters inherent in the practice, but in this performance the aesthetics are informed by the practices, traditions and aesthetics the musicians and performer bring to the event. All the music and movement are improvised, and so is the spoken text, however, each part has an intention and a frame for action to occur within.

Part 1 – The unnamed dance game

The audience are told by ushers that they are free to participate in this performance and that they can move around the studio space. On the floor there is a circle of A4 playing cards face-up. I am in the middle of this circle—the starting position varies between standing, lying down, or sitting. Two to three musicians are in one of the corners of the space. The space is brightly lit but pleasantly so, avoiding an overtly theatrical atmosphere. A combination of vocals and music begins—I often initiate the vocals—and after a while I begin to dance to the music, with my vocals becoming more sparse. If audience members pick up a card and I see it, I respond in movement according to an internal set of rules—for example, Joker signals a freeze, or red numbers indicate speed (See Appendix V for the full rules). Although it is possible that nobody will think to pick up a card, so far even reluctant/resistant audiences have done so after some subtle gesturing on my part[104].

[104] There is the possibility that there will be no one who wants to interact, in which case this first section becomes a dance that they watch and this will have some effect on the sections that follow. Whether this can be deemed a failure or not is moot.

The rules behind the game are as follows: the performer moves when there is music; if and when the performer sees a playing card held up, she executes a corresponding action or modification—the relationship between the playing cards and the actions is only known to the performer with the audience discovering/interpreting this as they play; there are more than one interpretations of the card/action relationship that are possible; the performer can sing and/or vocalise; holding up more than one card at a time is allowed. The game ends when one of the musicians pulls the performer out of the space. The rest emerges as the game is played, based on the actions of the audience as well as those of the performer.

Part 2 – Emotion Bingo and It's Up to Me

In this section, the performer switches to a speaking and warm persona in order to facilitate two games the audience play. Here, all audience members are directly invited to take part, although refusals to play are also accepted. Following a short pause between this and the previous part, the performer re-enters the space directly addressing the audience and holding a bag containing materials for the games.

The first of the two games is Emotion Bingo, a version of Bingo that instead of numbers calls up emotions. When players score a bingo—by having a full line or row of crossed out emotions—they have a bonus for the next game, although they are not told what this is until the new game begins. Thirty emotions are used to randomly populate four by four Bingo cards and these may or may not reflect any part of what was felt during the first section of the performance. The performer hands these out along with felt tip pens and calls out the emotions by pulling folded papers out from the bag they carried into the space. There are duplicates of the emotions, introducing repetition and redundancy in the game as a performative device as well as to allow for all emotions to be called

out, increasing the number of bingos scored. The game ends when there are no more emotion cards to be called out.

The second game asks people to state something they thought or felt during the performance when they happen to stand in the centre of a circle formed of the rest of the participants and marked out by the A4 playing cards face down[105]. It's Up to Me asks more input from participants as they now must make statements about their experience. The performer is the first person in the centre to get things moving. When people forming the circle hear a statement that rings true to their experience they move from their place and either swap with someone else or stay in the centre of the circle if there are no spaces for them to go to. Once someone moves from their space—behind/on the outside of their place card—they cannot return to it. Anyone who scored a bingo previously can state "It's up to me!" when in the centre instead of stating something they experienced, after which everyone changes places. Participants can use their "It's up to me!" bonus according to the number of bingos they score in Emotion Bingo. The game is stopped verbally by one of the musicians when they feel it is the right time.

Throughout this section live music accompanies the action and accents bingo calls. So far, a pastiche version of *The Girl from Ipanema* has been used.

Part 3 – Epilogue

The performer clears the space and once this is done soft music begins to play. The performer then re-enters the space and performs an improvised monologue followed by a slow and melodic

[105] Earlier versions had A4 sheets of paper with "this is not a chair" written on them—a sideways reference to the playfulness of Magritte's painting—which were dropped for the economy of re-using the playing cards.

song with the music adjusting to fit. The music in this section provides atmosphere rather than melody or rhythm.

The improvised monologue draws from a combination of the audience's reflections, actions and reactions, as well as the performer's own experience of the event, although can also be brief and matter of fact. The song is a traditional or folk song that so far has been from Greece; the thinking behind this choice is discussed in the following section. The performance ends with the song. This last section switches to a presentational mode so as to close the event by tying together different strands of the work in a more aesthetic register.

The thinking and work around the underlying structures of the performance follow, along with indications of how Capoeira knowing (see Chapter 1) informs these. The bulk of research and analysis revolve around the first part as this is the most crucial in setting up the emergence of play and, in turn, power play. The following two sections offer a more playful and aesthetic way into reflection, with the potential for power play and cheating still very much present. The return to a more performative and musical ending in the third section has the additional formal intention of closing the performance game echoing the musical openings and endings of *rodas*, where before and after all the action music frames experience.

Performance as a game

As mentioned before, the blending of games and art is an already familiar process the results of which may lean towards one or the other more. In *Works of Game* Sharp considers the intersections of both practices, from instrumental uses of games by artists to games grappling with tragic moments in history (2015). He posits that "[t]o play a game is to construct theories about

how to act in order to best obtain one's goals, whatever they might be. These theories are enacted and evaluated, and then reconsidered and reenacted throughout the play experience" (2015, 96). Based on the intended range of audience experiences my practice intends, therefore, the inclusion of game structures offers a way to allow participants to think and continually evaluate their choices.

If It Was Up to Me elides games and performance weaving in ideas around playfulness—a ludic attitude—game design, and Capoeira. Both games and theatre fall under the play sphere but are distinct activities, however, in their Western understanding their combination offers a proximate structure to that of Capoeira if one thinks about the combination of performativity and rule-bound interactions that generate the power play within it. Furthermore, if participation is to be conceived in a way that is organised but open enough to encompass surprise, then game structures and mechanics are particularly helpful.

How are aesthetics and game mechanics linked? Can mechanics be aesthetic? Flanagan places any answers in the future (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 266), but I would argue that if aesthetics is an intentional organisation of the sensory[106], then intentional organisation of participatory action is, at least partially, also aesthetic. Aesthetics also relate to conventions and as a result can also be used as part of game mechanics—for example, a marked out circle on a floor can suggest a range of placements relative to it; around or inside. Games are not simply organised systems of interaction, as we have seen. Crucially, they require a ludic attitude to make them more than that a structured process and this makes them dependent on the players' attitude and renders them relational and aesthetic insofar as they are organised systems made to be perceived—sensed—and interacted with.

[106] Guided by culture and class, and as opposed to aesthetics understood as possessing some universal transcendental quality. White (2013) presents a clear analysis of different conceptions of aesthetics in his analysis of audience participation in theatre that resonates with my thinking.

Harnessing game elements in non-game environments and systems is commonly referred to as gamification and tends to relate to the business and education sectors. Although theatre and performance do not fall within the game sphere, I would argue that the application of game elements to these does not constitute gamification in the most common sense[107]. Bogost offers that to "-ify" anything "makes applying that medium to any given purpose seem facile and automatic," as "to beautify or falsify, for example, assumes that simple processes or devices can be put to use to render the ugly attractive or the counterfeit authentic" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 67). To gamify a performance might be considered a means of making performance more exciting or engaging, a position that devalues both mediums and underestimates the perceptiveness of the audience. Far from considering the application of games in performance facile or reductive, this work centres itself on the richness of games as interactive systems of thought. There is no intention to attempt to tame the playfulness of games in my work but rather to open up a double play: that of games and that of the theatre[108].

Theatre in itself offers a number of ways to play: as actors on stage, perhaps most evidently, but also as audiences; at times suspending disbelief, at times responding verbally, at others participating. In addition to this, the past decades have seen the creation of numerous works of art and games that intentionally blur and bring into collision notions of what games are, what they do, who plays them and what the threshold between art and games might be[109]. *If It Was Up to Me* can be situated in this lineage, although it draws also from visual arts and dance sources[110]. Flanagan presents the idea of playful aesthetics in considering these kinds of work:

> Playful aesthetics imply the subversion of form, the teasing of the authentic, cracking out of one epistemological framework for another. The testing of limits and the going beyond of a hacking mentality is supported in much playful artistic practice, where artists see beyond

[107] Bogost polarisingly puts it as follows: "Gamification, I suggested, is primarily a practice of marketers and consultants who seek to construct and then exploit an opportunity for benefit" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 65). The opportunity here is games and the fun that is associated with them.
[108] Here I would also include dance, live and performance art.
[109] For example, Tino Seghal's *These Associations* at Tate Modern, Lilian Lijn's *Power Game* at RCA and ICA, or Yoko Ono's *Play It by Trust.*
[110] See Appendix II for a tracing of my previous practice with a brief analysis of how playful aesthetics are woven through the works.

> the rules of a given game to imagine rule-less games, or rule-bound alternative practices. (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 265)

In this sense, thinking about playful aesthetics and how game mechanics might work in weaving performance and games together was useful in clarifying some points about why a game framework helps focus the structure/mechanics of participation. As the aim has been to create a participatory structure where action is meaningful—in terms of game play, symbolically, and affectively—refocusing my thinking about interaction in terms of fostering playfulness has helped push the work forward. As a result, there are two main considerations for *If It Was Up to Me*: how the friction between performance conventions and game rules can produce conditions in which participants can confront and act upon choice; and how the same friction can also encourage playfulness in participants.

The mechanics of choice: Choice, indeterminacy and participation

In this work participation is the means for the audience to confront choice, and choice—whether acted upon or not—is the conduit for thought, as well as for power play. One of the central concerns has been to make participation interesting/engaging, as well as meaningful. The entertainment value of the performance serves as a means of entering into what can become nuanced, risky and dark play that often provokes thought. Using entertainment as a conceit for co-creation and critical thought serves as an overall dissimulation drawing from Capoeira's performative dissimulations; for example, feigning friendliness or naivety—non-verbally—in an attempt to make one's partner/opponent drop their guard. This feint, however, does not imply that the audience might not see through it; seeing through it offers yet another choice as to how and if one participates, while it also reveals that not all is what it seems, which also alerts the audience as to the uncertainty of the situation.

It is important to remember here that I depart from Rancière's critique of participatory work as undermining the audience's intelligence (2009, 1-23). I do not claim to know better; I offer a situation in which choice is the currency without explicitly stating it. If anything, I attempt to construct a frame within which I, along with the audience and musicians co-create what Rancière calls a "forest of things and signs" (2009, 10); a space for deciphering relationships and constructing meaning subjectively, contingently, fluidly[111]. A further point of divergence with Rancière's critique of participation is that it erases distance between audience and participant. Although the interactive nature of the work and proximity to the both the action and the performer might disturb the 'safe' and less visible nature of spectating the performance, I would argue that assuming this is disruptive to interpretation also undermines the audience's intelligence and emotional resilience. To assume erasure of the audience-performer distance—or distinction of roles—would be to move away of the conventions of theatre and performance. As White writes on Rancière's critique of participation the problem is "to manipulate spectatorship in either direction increasing or decreasing aesthetic distance, and ultimately tending towards a theatre without spectators" (White 2013, 21)[112]. However, to blur roles to such an extent where neither audience nor performer are recognisable seems to require far more dismantling of Western theatre conventions than participating in action.

Central to working with choice is that I wanted people to face choice and not merely observe the choices of others as the latter offers a safer distance. Being confronted with choice of action comes hand in hand with the choice of whether to act or not in the first place. In the context of fostering

[111] The extent to which the audience remains autonomous and separate from the work is beyond the scope of this research. The participatory and co-creative nature of *If It Was Up to Me*, could be framed through Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic feedback loop (2008) insofar as the particular meaning of each performance is generated by the specific audience and performers in a much more evident way than in traditional theatrical performance.

[112] White offers a balanced view of the limitations of Rancière's position while offering that his is one of several possibilities of an analysis of participation (2013, 20-25).

criticality and agency, having to choose whether to act or not, even in a performative context, is a significant first step.

> The fullest political subjectivity is achieved through a self-initiated democratic outburst. What is in common between this view and that in The Emancipated Spectator is that the gap that exists between teacher and learner, between performer and audience, has the potential to allow dissensus, rather than to enforce consensus (White, 2013, 24).

It is precisely this dissensus that is of interest in making audience choice a currency for the performance. Participation here is not envisaged as a means of erasing the aforementioned distance but, rather, as a conduit for dissensus. More specifically, it is the first part of the performance, with its minimally prescriptive participation that simultaneously allows an open choice of action while relying on ambiguity and social (performance) conventions to exert limits on these actions, highlighting concurrent, diverse, and differently relating subjectivities.

Part 1 – ambiguity and emergence

The power games that emerge within this performance game reflect the fluidity of power within Capoeira games in a context that is more recognisable to a theatre-going audience. The choice to move away from the aesthetics of Capoeira for this project stems from a focus on the principles the game is scaffolded on, as has been seen, which include adaptation, transformation and creativity. Rosa echoes this idea: “by acknowledging transformation and creativity, the aesthetic and philosophical fundamentals of Capoeira do not become something players must wear like a vest or armour, but rather a set of guiding principles within which to articulate pre-established and innovative statements” (2015, 102).

Public presentations of this work require that the audience enters knowing that this is a voluntarily participatory performance/game, and thus have to discover the mechanics of the game as these

are not disclosed. This choice has been made in order to foster a more ludic attitude and curiosity/playfulness in the audience, as when they are aware of the rather simple rules, there is less tension and ownership of the game[113].

Already, therefore, there is a crucial risk: by eliding performance with games, a playful attitude in the audience cannot be guaranteed, even if encouraged, or hinted at. In his analysis of playfulness as a mindset Stenros rightly points out that "[p]layfulness is not located in a system or an artifact, but in the participant" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 203) and that "[a]dopting the form of playing or certain elements of games for serious, telic[114] purposes always runs the risk of losing that mindset" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 203). The hope with *If It Was Up to Me* is that by beginning to interact with the first game structure tentatively at first, at least some of the audience might enter into a playful—or ludic, lusory—mindset. Some of the steps towards fostering this are: the lack of instruction for the interaction, which hints towards needing to explore the situation; a developing relationship with the performer—as I gradually build individual rapport with audience members—that may encourage curiosity; my obedience to the cards' instruction, albeit the latter not initially evident to the audience; the absence of an obvious goal which renders engagement with it potentially intrinsically satisfying and devoid of any instrumental purpose. A further point of shifting playful engagement is when I shift the interpretation of the cards as the game progresses; for example, black numbers relate to different kinds of rotations (spins on the feet, hands or head, spinning jumps, cartwheels, etc.) that can shift into circling the outside of the card circle itself, or spinning and turning the audience. This shift in interpretation of the cards' instruction broadens the performative possibilities and makes the power relationship shift once more. The first game is therefore crucial in setting up the conditions for confrontation with choice and if a ludic attitude does develop, then it, along with the following games, acquires layers of meaning: those of the

[113] Audience feedback from the 2016 research and development period made this clear, and there was consensus that knowing the rules of the dance-card game made the experience peak and plateau rapidly, as there was not too much to discover beyond pushing the performer to their limit.
[114] Instrumental.

gameplay itself with its multiple power relationships, as well as those reflecting on the first game affords.

Emergence lends an element of discovery and this can be experienced both as agency and powerlessness among other things, depending on the participant. The ambiguity of the game necessitates recourse to known social and cultural conventions available in finding what the rules might be. Among the conventions known to most people are these of playing games and they are implicit behaviours that are learnt from childhood; these stem from why we play games in the first place, are linked to Huizinga's magic circle, and are perhaps the most significant implicit rules for behaviour in this context. Sniderman posits that "The most powerful rules, the ones least likely to be violated, are those that are not stated explicitly, those that people have to infer or intuit. To state a rule is to invite players to break it, but to leave a rule unstated is to make its violation almost literally 'unthinkable'" and goes on to suggest that "[w]e cannot accurately predict how any rule, stated or unstated, will be interpreted or enforced, so no rule, simply by its existence, will necessarily produce or prevent a desired behaviour" (1999, 7). Finding the mechanics of the dance game relies on these implicit conventions and the openness they afford. As the performer's rule is to follow the card's instruction to the best of their ability, the resulting actions are varied and do include failure, all which feeds into the performative elements of the work, which also becomes a driver for further audience participation. The first minutes of *If It Was Up to Me* are perhaps the most challenging for all involved, as each party endeavours to clarify the relationships that govern the space in terms of rules, conventions, and power. Once these are established, albeit tentatively, freer gameplay can emerge and relationships can transform.

Does searching for the rules inhibit being in the flow of playing, however? Once more, this depends on the participants' attitude, and to a certain degree, their personality. One of the ways in which *If It Was Up to Me* enters into playfulness is through the aesthetic sphere: by entering into the space of performance and with prior knowledge that participation is part of this work's convention, and

having a performance begin in what also appears to be a game space. Framing the experience, therefore, is essential for encouraging the possibility of playfulness. In discussing the frames and roles needed for participation in theatre White states:

> In drama work in the classroom, the rehearsal or in a workshop, we can observe this oscillation between the setting up and settling into the drama, and the work when it is properly under way and the actors are committed to it. Relationships are set up where participants know what role they are to play, and what others are to play, how they are to play them, and when they are to stop, but once they are involved in this 'playing' it is no longer necessary to think about these parameters (2013, 35).

Although setting out roles and relationships is necessary in a classroom, the shifting between attention to structure and attention to action White refers to also reflects the early stages of playing the first game in *If It Was Up to Me*, while the more involved state of participants also echoes the later stages of the game. The distinction White makes, however, points out the continuous shifting between doing and considering what one is doing that is necessary for Capoeira and by extension the first part of *If It Was Up to Me.* The intention is to invite attention to an observation of the parameters, so as to open questions about who really has power and where choice may really lie. In the second part of the performance, as will be discussed later, I do clarify frames, so as to allow opportunity for reflection and a re-building of trust between the audience and myself after the various shifts in the game. How relationships emerge collectively out of the ambiguity in the first game is of primary interest here as based on the particular group of people in the space, more individual, or collective play will take place, with a range of dynamics emerging between the participants and the performer, as well as between the participants themselves. It is here in particular that agonistic and/or collaborative play may emerge; some participants work against one another in terms of their instructions, while others work together to direct the performer. The participants' actions are visible to all and as a result also become interpreted by the rest. Some of the implications of this are discussed later on.

The uncertainty of what the rules of the game are cannot be too great, however, as that risks inertia or entropy in terms of participation, while also making the performative element of the work

insular as a system. If the rules of the game are inscrutable then participation becomes random and remains so if the system—the performer in this case—does not respond. There are performances and art works in which inscrutability is integral to rendering interpretations of the internal system multiple and unconfirmable. Tino Seghal's *These Associations* in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall (2012) is one such example. The performance took place for a number of days for the duration of the Tate Modern's opening hours. A group of performers shifted between several actions including walking, running, singing, and conversing with the audience, who were free to move in the space. The performers' actions cannot be traced decidedly to a clear set of rules or responses to external stimuli but there is a sense that what they do is organised.

> That massive hall is possessed by the kinetic energy of the dancers and visitors, some of whom join the work. Thus, the work collapses the fuzzy line between actor and spectator (a dynamic that resonates in many discussions of the blurring of digital and analog, everyday and magic circle actions, and more). Choreographer Tino Sehgal's playful nonstop performance pushes the dynamic sense of rules that are not apparent to the work (Flanagan in Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 264).

Ambiguity in the rules of participation is equally significant in *If It Was Up to Me,* but the similarity ends in that I do not intend to explore the porosity of the performer-audience boundary, but to use ambiguity to open up what kind of participation is possible in order to foster criticality through playfulness and ultimately explore power play.

Marcelo Evelin's *De Repente Tudo Fica Preto de Gente*[115] (2012) is a further example of how ambiguity can highlight the choices an audience might make. White neon tubes about 1.2 metres above ground mark out a large square in an otherwise black studio space. The audience is free to move both inside and outside the rink-like square. A group of 5 or 6 dancers enter the rink in a shuffling jog through which they continually weave in a tight formation; they are nude under a layer of thick, black paint. At a certain point in the performance, after the jog gains momentum, the dancers' tightly knit formation breaks and individual performers move slowly around the space, at

[115] *Suddenly Everything Becomes Black with People* (my translation). This is a literal translation; the expression itself means that suddenly a place becomes crowded and the title plays on this and the black painted bodies of the performers as a reference to racism.

times making eye contact with the audience. The ambiguity of what is allowed in terms of where to move, or whether the audience can come into physical contact with the performers remains throughout. There are times where the cluster of dancers spins and turns on a collision course with the audience and it is not entirely clear how contact is avoided. Later on in the performance individual dancers slowly move towards individual audience members; the dancers are hunched, contorted, drooling and making eye contact. There is no single response that seems appropriate. Is communication/touch needed or expected? Is the movement of the dancer meant to elicit empathy or challenge repulsion? The thick black paint has an obvious symbolism: we are looking at black bodies while negotiating these questions.

Beyond its symbolism, the paint also presents a material choice: that making contact means getting stained, which then also produces further ambiguity in terms of what it means to touch or not to touch a black (painted) body. The materiality and symbolism of the paint in combination with the dancers' bodies in movement makes any choice messy, conceptually or materially, and begs some level of critical thought to resolve the situation, albeit seemingly irresolvable—both in the performance and more broadly. The ambiguity and multiplicity of the situation in this work reflects the structural racism in Brazil[116]—and so many other places globally—as well as certain social attitudes towards blackness by placing the audience in the position of making choices first physically, through their actions in space. Part of what made the performance striking was that there was no barrier between the dancers' and the audience's bodies. Choices to move involved the whole body, and the visceral nature of the dance was also echoed in the whole of my body as an audience member. Although I cannot trace my choice to have the audience stand and walk around to this performance, it certainly had a galvanizing effect on my thinking.

In addition to thinking about game mechanics *vis a vis* ambiguity and the uncertainty produced, my interest in it stems also from the ambiguity in Capoeira. The lack of win state has informed the

[116] Marcelo Evelin is Brazilian and often draws from and refers to Brazilian culture and society.

choice of ending for this first game, as by action ending from an external force—a musician—it is impossible to resolve what has developed to that point leaving each person involved to interpret the experience, including the point of its suspension. A further link between this choice and how Capoeira games end is that in both cases it is one of the musicians who judges when to end play. Furthermore, the repeated feigning of capoeiristas as well as the layered potentiality of each gesture remind one that not all may be as appears: opening the arms broadly as if to hug my partner in a Capoeira game can also be a call for a game within the game, or a surprise attack; a card in the circle prompts the performer to do something, but what the instruction might be is not known, or a card that made the performer perform acrobatic inversions for most of the game suddenly makes them drop their head so as to invert their gaze only.

The uncertainty of the card relationships to the performer's movement ask for repeated use and observation of the ensuing action. From the perspective of the performer, the initial responses necessitate a certain amount of consistency, at least to the degree that is possible within the particular movement pattern and flow the performer is engaged in at the time, so as to encourage further interaction and indicate there is a system guiding the performer's responses. The initial relationship developed feigns strict subordination to the cards, and therefore the audience participants. There is a degree of uncertainty in the responses, however, as there is generally a range of possible responses echoing physical interactions in Capoeira in the sense that when there is get a call from one player—a kick, sweep, etc.—there is always a range of possible responses that are not fixed. In the dance game cards that relate to speed can be interpreted with the whole body or parts, for example. The latter tends to come into play as the game progresses and there is a sense of flow in the gameplay, as a way of revealing the multiplicity of interpretations. The joker card always relates to pausing, however, and is the only card that has a single response—particularly as the boundaries of the game have not yet been pushed far enough to necessitate re-interpretation of what pausing or freezing means.

Within this simple system lies a range of further options for the performer that draw from the cunning tactics deployed in Capoeira. In the first instance these relate to evading the cards' instructions: when dancing, have I seen the card? Have I found something in the music that draws me away from somebody beginning to lift a card? The latter is a tactic drawn directly from the *roda* when there are times players shift from direct engagement with their partner and go back to the feet of the *berimbaus* and dance to their syncopated rhythms as a demonstration of a heightened awareness of the music and therefore a demonstration of higher status in the game. In the dance game this is subtle and tends to be introduced as the game gains momentum and there appears to be some certainty about what the relationship between the performer and the audience is. In addition to this, a broader range of interpretations to the cards are introduced to challenge this relationship, although the performer still responds to the cards. The only denial of the raised cards comes if and when the performer closes their eyes. The increasing range of responses, including evasions, are designed to make the power relationship between the participants and the performer ambiguous and shifting. As a result, and with increasing uncertainty and ambiguity, the implicit trust the participants have placed on both the performer and the game system is brought into question, once more bringing to the fore the need for a critical evaluation of the situation in order to act. How trust is rebuilt, at least on a surface level, is discussed in the following section.

One of the anchoring elements of the game is the demarcation of space that alludes to different conventions, or from a game design perspective, to different implicit rules. The use of a studio space with no fixed seating—only a few seats are in a corner, for those who may need them—and everyone on the same level hints at a range of more informal and/or experimental event types—small music gigs, live and performance art, etc.. The cards marking out a circle in the space carry multiple meanings: the cards themselves point toward games, while the circle alludes to theatre, games, and ritual. With the performer sitting in the centre of the circle, the audience almost always positions themselves on the outside perimeter of the circle, with some people choosing to sit further away against a wall, declaring their initial intention in relation to participation. So far, no audience member has crossed the threshold to enter the circle, which hints at conventions

establishing a separation in the space occupied by performers and audiences. As a challenge to these conventions and in a symbolic shift in power, in the late stages of the game, the performer can choose to exit the circle—temporarily or permanently—once again destabilising relationships built up or assumed.

In summary, the intention behind this dance game is to open up the audience's choices of action in an emergent, co-creative space, in which power relationships continually shift. The game of Capoeira is similarly co-creative and emergent, without a winner, and with space for multiple interpretations—or misinterpretations—in an evolving and shifting power dynamic between the players, and on a further level, the music. Structuring ambiguity in a way that fosters the emergence of play, therefore, has been deemed to be a crucial consideration for the first part of *If It Was Up to Me*.

To return to the central position of this work, the embodied nature of choice making and thinking that this game introduces reflects the decolonial position of the whole performance, in that it creates a structure within which big ideas—power, choice, agency—are reflected upon through action and thus offer an otherwise to Western ideas of logocentrism.

Part 2 – reskinning the familiar

The idea of critical thought emerging as a result of playing is certainly not new as already discussed, and although the first section of the performance is the main engine for this, the two games that follow are intended to maintain the ease and flow of game playing in order to enter into more personal expression from the audience, gradually and without apparent seriousness, capitalising on broadly held assumptions that play is not a serious activity.

The two games in this part intend to create a playful structure within which the audience have the opportunity to reflect on their experience of the dance card game. The shift into more clearly laid out participatory work is to ease tension and uncertainty that emerge from the first part and maintain openness and playfulness in the reflective process. After what is often an intense and layered first part during which the performer begins expanding her interpretation of the cards, and which reintroduces uncertainty, a more explicit set of rules delivered by one person who is evidently leading the situation is intended to act as a re-focusing mechanism and a means of building trust in both the system engaged with and the performer.

As a contrast to the emergent and hybrid mode of the first game, Emotion Bingo and It's Up to Me are re-skinned versions of existing games, modified to refocus gameplay on the experience of the first part of the performance. As mentioned in Chapter 2, reskinning is an idea articulated by Flanagan and refers to the subversion of games by changing their appearance (2009)[117]. By employing familiar structures whose rules and process are explicitly made known to participants the degree of ambiguity and uncertainty diminishes, allowing participants to get on with playing the games. In addition to helping re-build a sense of stability and/or trust in the situation, the games function as a secondary conceit: they employ playing the game to enter into engagement with remembering and reflecting on very recent experience, obliquely with Emotion Bingo and directly with It's Up to Me.

Although the inclusion of these games is a little instrumental in that I use them as devices for reflection on something other than themselves, the gameplay can be enjoyed for itself, particularly as there is ample space for cheating and power play. Although cheating does not form a central part in conceptualising this part, it has been factored in as a playful and welcome possibility.

[117] Flanagan mostly uses reskinning in reference to players subverting games.

Participants can lie when calling out “bingo!” with little in place to check the veracity of their claim. Should these claims occur too quickly after the game begins, or too frequently, other participants—and the performer—may notice, opening up the potential for further cheating or challenging the situation. This has not happened as yet, however, and the possible responses for participants, performer, and musicians are too many to list here. As with other points of climax/crisis, solutions will be improvised; the game could stop, or the cheats accepted, with more bingos given out to all, rendering the process meaningless. In It's Up to Me participants can certainly lie about their experience and it would not be possible to know if that was case, however, the veracity of the claim is secondary to its impact on the game action. Any statement may ring true for others around the circle, or spark numerous other reactions should it not ring true. Furthermore, ‘getting away with’ lying in this game has the potential to trigger reflection for the people cheating. The full range of internal thoughts and emotions experienced are welcome in this context since the purpose of the game is to produce reflections; individual and shared.

Emotion Bingo asks of the audience to cross out emotions on each of their cards from a list called out. There is no explicit instruction to think back to the previous game, although the performer does comment that some of the emotions called out might have been experienced recently. In the same way that Bingo cards do not contain all numbers, Emotion Bingo cards do not contain all emotions. The instruction is for players to cross out the emotions that are on their cards if called out, and the overall list of emotions may or may not reflect emotions the players experienced in the first section of the performance. The possibility that players might have experienced emotions not called out, or not on their card is part of the design; it is intended to open the possibility of correlation—logical, emotional, visceral, or otherwise—of randomly called out emotions against individual experience sparking the possibility of reflection.

In following the trope of Bingo, this version also sees the performer take on an entertaining persona in order to add a layer of performativity to an otherwise procedural game. The redundant

calling slips serve as a performative device to this end, while also emphasising the emotions themselves through their repeated calls. Working with the familiarity of Bingo structurally and culturally intends to generate a frame that appears innocuous, and without particular meaning to bridge the first and third games that require clear decision making and action.

It's Up to Me reflects my teaching practice most acutely, in that is it a guided reflective exercise but in the form of a game. The game rules enable speech that relates to each participant, however, how the situation is set up and run by the performer affects the flow of the game. Choice in this game revolves around choosing whether to speak, and when, or whether to admit one agrees with what has been said by walking to change places. Refusing to move when someone calls 'it's up to me!' is possible, although as yet has not happened. Encouraging play falls largely in the demeanour of the performer who takes on the role of facilitator-participant. The invitation to speak, and especially about one's own experience, poses a more acute risk for the audience: revealing themselves as individuals and risking losing face. White elaborates on this:

> We are under injunctions to control ourselves, to present performances of ourselves that fit the personae we present to the world. So when participatory theatre invites performances from audience members, it presents special opportunities for embarrassment, for mis-performance and reputational damage, such that the maintenance of control and the assertion of agency that protects this decorum is important to the potential audience participant, especially at the moment of invitation (2015, 73).

In light of this potential it is crucial to retain a sense of playfulness in the space, which may keep a reticence to speak at bay. Each facilitator will employ different strategies to achieve this along with further encouragement to play. The strategy I use most often is humour, often as a self-deprecating clown, combined with offering aspects of my experience to put participants at ease. Performing a lower status that is entertaining is the clown's strong suit and is effective far beyond the stage and the red nose[118]. Reminding participants of the rules when needed and allowing

[118] Interspersing my teaching with such clown tactics was my way of dealing with Impostor Syndrome in the first years of teaching, and I have since retained it as a more conscious strategy.

space for delays or ‘misfires’ also tends to help maintain a relaxed atmosphere and keep the game flowing.

The use of large playing cards instead of chairs also has a layered function: they are easy to manage as a stage prop; the make a direct reference to games, adding to the overall playful aesthetic; they make it physically easier for participants to move around the space; and wheelchair users can participate with no differentiation.

If at first my main focus was for a more narrow understanding of the situation/first section, then with time I have come to be much more interested in the unpredictability of outcomes in terms of audience response, as well as the ensemble atmosphere that usually builds. A good game is never quite the same no matter how many times it is played, after all.

Part 3 – a return to the theatrical

The intention behind the third part of *If It Was Up to Me* is to offer a poetic amalgam on the event and to close the reflective process through re-entering a more aesthetic sphere. The closing Greek traditional song is the only semi-set aesthetic element of the performance, as it has been chosen for its musical qualities and lyrics that revolve around voicelessness and the inability to act through the metaphor of a bird whose wings and voice have been stolen. It is a traditional lament song that emerged after the sacking of Constantinople in 1452 by the Ottomans[119]. Other Greek songs have been used, being chosen for similar reasons and with themes that relate to freedom, or the lack of it. For the time being the song about voicelessness and loss seems most fitting aesthetically. The

[119] For the lyrics and my translation please refer to Appendix III.

use of animals and nature as metaphors is prevalent in Capoeira, and this song draws from my birth culture, acting as a bridge between my point of origin and the places Capoeira has allowed me to enter physically, metaphorically, philosophically, and spiritually. Note that this is a lament song, which bears some similarity to the tone of certain *ladainhas* in Capoeira.

For possible future performances by other artists, there will be the option to find a song from their culture that fulfils similar criteria, or, in the case where this is not possible, learn one of the songs I have used.

Further Considerations

“Is there such a thing as more ethical game mechanics or mechanics that are more liberating than others? Play reflects social values, so what do we need to design consciously for them?” (Flanagan in Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 267) Although *If It Was Up to Me* stems from my Capoeira Angola practice and my thinking is inflected by its values, to what extent might these values be reflected in the performance considering the aesthetics it employs? “[T]he unscripted and participatory nature of Capoeira expands the boundaries of analysis of aesthetics, in Bleiker’s terms ‘opening up thinking space’ as representations are dynamic and co-created” (Marriage, 2018, 279). Echoing Marriage’s analysis of Capoeira as total resistance and drawing from the improvised and participatory aspects of Capoeira, *If It Was Up to Me* moves towards communicating ideas in an embodied manner. Using playing cards and versions of Bingo and I Like People Who… already place the work in a different cultural frame, even if this is structured to emulate dynamics from an altogether different culture. The music and movement further layer the cultural inputs. The question of whether the mechanics of *If It Was Up to Me* have a similar emancipatory potential as Capoeira is moot. The hour-long performance game can certainly elicit

interesting and surprising power play, as well as insightful shared reflections. How closely the interactions resemble Capoeira power play is something I evaluate through my knowledge of the practice and the evaluation of the performance, which follows in the conclusion. Something does seem to shift in the feel on the space from beginning to end and that is already enough. The potential for further critical thought and/or questioning lies in each individual and is untraceable, unless declared, much like in Capoeira. The difference perhaps is that because of the cultural and historical specificity of Capoeira, practitioners are driven to be more vocal about activism, or ideas around freedom and oppression. *If It Was Up to Me* remains an experiment in form; a step towards designing consciously for critical thought[120]. In the current phase of this research it was necessary to find a format that emulates the powerplay of the *jogo*, something that I am positioned to do through my accumulated Capoeira, artistic and improvisational knowledge—rather than for the audience to try and understand.

The arc of the performance does not follow the order of the Capoeira Angola ritual. In some ways it works in reverse, with the closing song serving as an allusion to the *ladainha*. It works from action into analysis and ends on an aesthetic mode so as to not attempt to simplify what is overall a complex and layered situation. The intention is to avoid flattening what has unfolded over the better part of an hour and allow this return to the senses to close the work in an oblique *adéus, adéus* (goodbye goodbye)[121].

In summary, in *If It Was Up to Me*, the first section is the freest in terms of what the audience can do, although this is not evident to begin with, as the performance plays on performance conventions and intends that the audience will gradually get into the game. Most of what comes

[120] Further development of the work will need to focus around full accessibility as accessibility for hearing and visually impaired people has not been yet considered beyond the use of an induction loop in the space for the former and a guide for the latter.
[121] The call of the most common closing song of the *roda.*

after in terms of the content of the performance relies on this first section[122], although the structure of the ensuing sections is more set. The work shifts from action towards language, even though It's Up to Me does involve some walking. An improvised monologue and traditional lament song close the work in a further shift toward the aesthetic making a formal link to the significance of music in opening and closing the Capoeira *roda* ritual.

[122] With the exception perhaps of Emotion Bingo, where I draw on a fixed list of emotions without the option of adding to this.

Conclusion: *Meia hora só*[123]: reflections on practice

"If play is pure action, and games frame and motivate action, what responsibility does the game maker have for the new regime he or she has created?" (Flanagan in Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 267). The same can be asked of the artist, and in the case of this research project I have found myself asking this repeatedly. The responsibility is double: that of an artist (game designer?) and that of a facilitator. The potential recklessness of the former, albeit well-meaning, might be tempered by the ethics of the latter. Furthermore, and rather crucially, a new regime is simply not possible through my proposition alone. It has been designed with the input of participants—audience and performers—woven in the structure so that whatever dynamics occur reflect that particular group of people at that moment in time, yet the efficacy of this structure in terms of resemblance to Capoeira can only really be known by me.

Each time *If It Was Up to Me* is played it is different. This is both desirable and inevitable as the degree and nature of participation cannot be predicted, while the performance elements themselves differ each time as they contain so much improvisation. A further element that shifts the feel of the work is which and how many musicians play on any given date. The spectators do not know that the performance is structured based on my analysis of Capoeira, nor are they expected to understand something of the sort by the end. In this complex matrix of actions and dynamics the one person who can interpret these in relation to Capoeira Angola is me precisely because the embodied knowledge of Capoeira and the performance structure reside in my body. As a performance, *If It Was Up to Me* invited the spectators into play and the possibility of power play. As research, it develops my understanding of how to transpose the structures of Capoeira onto performance with a view to further develop such artistic praxis. With each performance the

[123] Only half an hour (my translation). This is a song used to mark the ending phase of a *roda* indirectly calling for alertness, as players are often tired after an hour's or more playing and singing. If the song rouses more energy than anticipated the more common closing songs are postponed and the *roda* continues for longer.

work deepens as I accumulate more iterations of what dynamics this structure can yield. In broad strokes, a range of different power dynamics does emerge each time, some more evident than others, which does in fact reflect aspects of power play in Capoeira Angola. The reflection that follows offers some sense of how such power play has occurred and is accompanied with thinking around future development of this research.

In early versions of the work, where there was less space for emergence as regards the card meanings, the unnamed dance game escalated rapidly into faster and more demanding interactions with the spectators. When there were considerable numbers of artists and/or performers in spectator groups, playfulness and inventive uses of the cards pushed the first game across rich atmospheres and shifting power dynamics. In the most recent performance, on Friday 5 May 2023, the game played out on a low-key register, with what I experienced to be the most challenging audience to date. Composed mostly of friends I had invited as well as Dr Clare Finburgh, as one my examiners, and Professor Anna Furse, my supervisor, the spectators spent ample time sitting and watching with only a few choosing to interact with the cards. Gestures inviting interaction were reciprocated by a few people and done so gradually and at a slowly unfolding pace. Previous experience of this game had made me accustomed to a building of speed and energy in the game that allowed me the opportunity to shift my responses in a bid to renegotiate the dynamic developed, giving me more power of how the game unfolded. On 5 May, however, the low key nature of the game created space for a very different shift in my tactics; rather than attempt to escalate the action by moving outside of the circle of cards, or re-interpreting the cards' meaning, I closed my eyes, or looked up and focused on the music more, also allowing the emotions running through me to show, effectively re-writing the game to be for me and the musicians and for the spectators to watch—at least for a short while. Coming out of that and reengaging with the spectators led to some further card play, until one of the musicians took me out of the room.

Perhaps the greatest surprise in playing that first game was that I did not anticipate my response to a subtler register of play—driven by a desire to demonstrate a broad range of possibilities to Drs Finburgh and Furse—and that I had to really think about what my choices were, as I had grown accustomed to a range of actions, albeit broad, and had developed a certain degree of comfort. Leaning into quietude is an ever-present challenge as a performer, particularly when improvising; the risk of 'losing' the audience looms greater in mind. However, the subtler play that emerged on that evening presented a number of observations relating to power play: that should I have stayed focused on playing towards a particular type of desired dynamic with the audience, they would retain an increasing level of power over me, and that resisting the actual dynamic in the space would be breaking my own rules; having to adapt to this in order for the game to keep going led to different performative choices—to shift attention to the music and 'leave' the audience for a while—expanding the possibilities of what the game can yield; that I still had more choices to shift the situation more radically but was more concerned with smooth running. The last point reflects several Capoeira game situations where I yield/evade for the sake of safety[124]. If I do not want to escalate the danger of a game, I don't provoke or challenge my partner too much, something I fall into too often. On a broader scale, this reflects a tactic employed far beyond the *roda* and one I have used to avoid conflict, which is perhaps surprising considering my continued choice to explore conflict in capoeira and games. Conversely, my social avoidance of conflict could be precisely the reason I continue to focus on power play and how to engage with it. The slowness forced me out of the comfort zone of being able to wield high-energy spectacle to escalate and direct the interaction and performance. Speed gave me power as I know skilled movement adaptation to cascading demands tends to entice attention to the movement itself, offering space for tactical choices on my part.[125]

[124] In Johnstone's terms I am a low status player (2015); Playing low status is my defence/survival tactic.
[125] This is a tactic I use in Capoeira games; I distract with virtuoso movement in order to land a fast attack straight after.

There are further reflections that arise and relate to discomfort, structure, and choice for action/inaction. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in Capoeira is to become comfortable with the continuous discomfort of the friction between competing intentions. The discomfort arises from the continuous effort to adapt and to stay present in spite of the fatigue and physical risk involved but it is through this that the value and beauty of the game emerge. What stops this situation from erupting into violent conflict are the rules—implicit and explicit—that players abide by, as discussed. In this context, this friction is generative; it breeds ingenuity by bringing players into confrontation with choice, much like my experience of the performance was on 5 May. It was once I no longer clung to an idea of an *ideal* outcome that my actions became more open to the unknown and a renewed playfulness emerged. I am interested in exploring how the friction of conflicting interests can be structured to more overtly grapple with how we choose to act, or not, as a further step in understanding power play. Some of the questions I intend to engage with are as follows: What experience does intentional and structured powerplay yield within the context of performance? How does an audience retain its power in an environment structured by the artist? Can conflict in this safe microscale become a generative force for resilience and imagination?

The more structured games following the second part of the performance have largely unfolded along similar lines across presentations irrespective of the intensity and tone of the first game, with It's Up to Me consistently evolving into group play, where attention to what is said is held collectively. Importantly, the space for reflection it creates applies to myself too as I observe the statements offered by spectators while I join them in play. What is most striking is not the rich array of verbal offerings but, rather, that commonality and difference are woven together in continuous and collective playful exchange. These structures emerged from games and teaching environments and are examples of how collaborative play and reflection can be facilitated. They have always been regarded as an anchoring back into dialogue and more clear structures after the potential entropy of the first game but perhaps there is more to these aspects of the work than can be explored in terms of power play. The equalising geometry of the circle is deceptive, as although I join in the reflections in It's Up to Me, I still monitor/observe what is happening as participant-

researcher and as the one who set up the structure, I hold more power. To borrow from hooks' thinking on pedagogy as an analogy, there are different elements of equality at play:

> When I enter the classroom at the beginning of the semester the weight is on me to establish that our purpose is to be, for however brief a time, a community of learners *together*. It positions me as a learner. But I'm also not suggesting that I don't have more power. And I'm not trying to say we're all equal here. I'm trying to say that we are all equal here to the extent that we are equally committed to creating a learning context. (hooks, 1994, 153).

My research works towards a decolonial artistic praxis that draws on Capoeira. As such I transpose the structures in Capoeira that enable power play onto performance, so as to develop a more intentionally decolonial practice while also opening up potential access to aspects of Capoeira's power play through the same practice. The spectators, through their actions, become essential in my observing how power dynamics and choice unfold and inform both how I play the game and my understanding of how my chosen structures work.

Moving Forward

In many ways, this is a beginning. This project has demonstrated that it is possible to transpose aspects of the power play in Capoeira onto performance in a para-Capoeira game. A further observation are the fluctuations in the focus of play, that is to say, how collective, or individual it can be during the course of the performance. Apart from the variations discussed in the unnamed dance game, the way *Mestre* Pezão (Anderson Almeida)—my Capoeira teacher—chose to play It's Up to Me[126] revealed further options in playing: he chose not to speak or directly respond to what people said but moved to adjacent places when they were freed up by movement. This way of playing is parallel to the game while not outrightly rejecting the given rules—a way of unplaying. Although theoretically this was certainly in the realm of possibilities, it was surprising when it

[126] During the performance on 26 April 2023.

happened, as in every other rehearsal and performance everyone else played according to the rules exactly. While it did not interrupt the flow of the game, it generates questions of how such options for unplaying may be constructed in further elisions of games and performance. *Mestre* Pezão's choice is indicative not only of the possibilities of play but also perhaps of his position in the given context, as a black Brazilian with secondary school education and who is not fluent in English, attending a performance within a university context and in a space with a majority of white and white-presenting people. Moving forward from this research I intend to problematise power play in ways that can help unpack the positions we operate from and what impact choices have through performance structures.

Importantly, further exploring the ways in which I can make—as a performer—the call to play more explicit or more effective is something I feel is necessary before deciding whether the game structures need changing; that is exploring player unpredictability in terms of my role further. In not wanting to impose participation, my invitations were perhaps too tentative or ambiguous and spectators may have benefited from a more insistent call on occasions when the willingness to play was more limited. Research on how to encourage a ludic attitude through emergence in participatory performance is then a next step for this work, where perhaps a different structure altogether is required. In addition to this, developing a more explicit structure for such play to emerge would likely make the work more accessible and inclusive, particularly as I now live in Jakarta, Indonesia, where I do not yet speak the language and there is a considerable cultural difference between myself and the audience. The challenge of structuring emergence and power play in an explicit manner poses interesting further points of analysis of Capoeira, particularly the process of new initiates learning how to play and their experience. Further iterations of this research will also include documenting responses from participants and interviews with capoeiristas.

Of the many questions that arise, some lead to questions of performance and others to broader concerns of how to engage in any decolonial work ethically and with integrity in relation to the practice I have come to embody as well as in relation to audiences, who enter the world of *If It Was Up to Me* unknowing of what is in store. The ever-present challenge is in navigating the ethical space of inviting people into situations of potential transformation, especially if these are newly constructed. Repeating long held rituals and games entails a knowing through time what kind of transformations are likely, or at least intended, and so further exploration of what conventions I rely on, how I move in and through them and how these become apparent to the audience will help in refining how safety and risk are managed in the work. If I construct playful works intended to spark thought through power play, how might I do so without becoming Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster? How might I prepare to be more open to surprises and allow these to alter the work more profoundly? How might I frame further explorations of power play as generative operations—of thought, imagination, agency, dissensus, etc.?

Beyond Utopias: The pragmatics of endings

Endings never seem easy, particularly when it comes to finding them in performance, especially when improvisation is involved. Tying things up in writing is necessary, of course, but what this process has brought to light are possibilities and, with them, questions. In performative terms the endings are of two kinds: the ones dictated by dramaturgy and the ones dictated by the feeling of when each section is done. This comes as a direct loan from the *roda*, where games end when the time is right, and the whole event ends either because of time constraints on the space—although

this is rare in my experience—or, once more, when the time is right[127]. I begin this ending, therefore, with the ending of my most recent stay in Bahia, Brazil.

On Saturday 11 February 2023 I was present at the weekly *roda* at FICA[128] in Salvador da Bahia, where capoeiristas from across the globe—including Brazil—visit when passing through the city. It is known for its high calibre music and focused, dangerous, and expressive games, and is usually presided by *Mestre* Valmir, one of the founders of the group[129]. A new generation of *Contra-Mestres* that include *Mestre* Valmir's sons frequent the *roda*, helping to add to its musical quality and edginess of play. This particular Saturday morning was only a few hours before my flight back to Europe. Emotions ran high as this was the last time I would see many cherished people and formidable players for a considerable time as I prepared to tear myself away from what has become a place of centring and reconnecting to the roots of the practice.

My own *Mestre* was there after a week of poor health. The previous week in the same *roda* and in his absence, *Mestre* Valmir handed me the *gunga* (lead berimbau) so that he could have a game. My return on 11 February, therefore, already had some context. There are numerous dynamics unfolding in this situation, both personal and social/symbolic that constitute a diverse and multi-directional ritual of possibility. The richest of knowledge in Capoeira resides in the bodies of the Afro-Brazilian teachers and more experienced practitioners, who open their space and knowledge to everyone visiting. After 20 years in the practice it is evident that although I give myself to the modes and ideas of the practice, and allow it to shift my thinking and being in the world, I remain at a relative distance, perceiving a deeper, ancestral knowledge that echoes outwards from the actions, music and song of those born into Afro-Bahian culture. An evident thing to say, perhaps.

[127] Please note that the ambiguity in describing the times things end is deliberate, as in all cases stated, an embodied sense of saturation, or stagnation, or climax, is what guides decisions as opposed to an externally imposed clock time.
[128] Fundacão International de Capoeira Angola (International Foundation of Capoeira Angola).
[129] Since then Mestre Valmir has left FICA and now leads ICAA (Instituto de Capoeira Angola Alagbéde) in the same space.

But each foreign capoeirista entering this *roda* is perceived in turn by its hosts according to their own set of actions and level of embodiment, followed by a subtle attuning of engagement. Here, there are no endings, just repeating and evolving circles of play.

At times participants are challenged in the game, at others they are instructed if they risk their safety or the integrity of the *roda* ritual; at other times they might be recognised as capable of bearing some responsibility for the *roda* and are given important instruments, although this is itself is also a challenge.

When my turn to play came, a local woman faced me at the foot of the berimbau: this was to be a situation where expression and cunning were more significant than technique as she was less experienced than me, but also Afro-Bahian and had the advantage of a life-long connection to the culture that birthed Capoeira. There are aspects of the game that are more inscrutable to those entering the practice from the 'outside' and take longer to master, as it takes concerted study of context—cultural and historic, physical and written/oral—to understand and work within the nuances of (any) culture. As the game unfolded, the berimbaus began to play highly syncopated rhythms that challenge the players to become more highly attuned to the nuances and offbeats that cascade; the game 'heated up'. My feet moved to respond to the music, feigning a break from the direct call and response between my partner and I, opening a space of ambiguity and observation—what happens next? At different moments in the game I found myself talking with different berimbau players when near the instruments—at the beginning of the game, during a particular call I made for my fellow player, or at the end of the game—something that may have made my partner nervous or give her an opportunity to attack—which she tried. In either case, it is a choice that purposefully opens up possibilities and can be interpreted and acted upon differently by each party involved. The game ended as indeterminate as it began, although perhaps there was a little more space in the room that I could take up after the game, physically and verbally. This is not an isolated experience; *rodas* are places for fluctuating dynamics and possibilities, where no

one is able to fully predict or even fully steer a situation, but everyone will at some point take action. The butterfly effect of each action is perhaps all the more perceptible because of the mode of practice: we look for possibilities to make the most of our playing, musically or in action. Inaction is only an option for visiting observers, who have chairs available for them at the back of the space, and even then they sometimes choose to sing with the *roda*.

At the very beginning of my research on Capoeira and performance I held on to the revolutionary potential of performance as an awakening step on the way towards some utopia. However, the years that followed saw my Capoeira practice broaden and deepen, tectonically changing the way I view the world in terms of values and relations between people. Concurrently, my teaching at Goldsmiths brought me face to face with the diversity and complexity of working with groups of people in learning and it was through the teaching of practice that nuance began to enter my approach. Freire has been a strong influence when it comes to student-teacher dynamics and hierarchies and navigating emancipatory learning in ensemble theatre, and post-modern/contemporary performance practices have informed my consideration of the audience-performer relationship. Ideas about revolution and dismantling neoliberal capitalist structures have shifted into decolonising them through transforming communities, however diverse in their agglomeration of subjectivities. If one is to truly work against oppression and with the Freirian oppressed, one needs to allow one's point of view to change in their learning, teaching and performing. The intention ultimately remains: orchestrating spaces through art in which there is the possibility to construct alternatives to the global crisis that is unfolding. And these alternatives begin with shifting point of view, be it through the choice to raise a card for a performer, turning oneself upside down, or discovering the options available at any given moment. I do not claim that *If It Was Up to Me* is an engine for radical transformation. What I hope it does do is offer the option to take action with just enough risk to make it fun and troubling at the same time. While I cannot speak for the spectators, in engaging with their actions, or lack thereof, I make choices that favour my playing—to perpetuate the play in this case—even as spectators challenge and surprise me; and they do, every time. As Gaver aptly puts it, "[t]oying with other perspectives and possibilities,

and finding the ridiculous in one's own and others' stances, may change beliefs, but equally, it might enrich and nurture them by trying them against alternatives" (Waltz and Deterding, 2014, 519). In this sense, *If It Was Up to Me* certainly mirrors my experience of the *jogo* as with each performance I uncover facets of power play, convention, and choice that I can act on in future work and in the actions I take outside of the play sphere.

The mechanics of *If It Was Up to Me* do seem to generate interestingly rich interactions and reflections on choice. Responses have been overwhelmingly positive and perhaps that is an indication of being on the right track as far as the format itself is concerned. It is work that is never finished; it occurs in separate instances, pauses, and starts again. Compared to the multitude of correlations between this performance and a *roda,* the former is really the bare bones of an infinitely richer culture. But then it is a performance game open enough to enter with little more conditioning than is required for urban life. Attempting to open access into some of Capoeira's decolonial knowledge through games seemed a viable way to emulate the richness of thought its interactions generate, albeit coming with the risk of essentialising and miscommunicating the root cultures that produce this knowledge. Looking at underlying structures and principles as a way forward spoke to my long experience of several movement systems and was echoed in the thinking of Rosa, as well as several game designers and thinkers, notably, Flanagan, Salen and Zimmerman. It is a bold move to push forward with work that is rooted in a practice of a culture that I have adopted, but that has also deeply changed me. My positionality can never approximate the collective memory and lived experience of Afro-Brazilians, even as I have learnt to move, sing, talk and sometimes think like them. And yet, Capoeira pulses out of me and inflects everything I am and do. At moments of doubt I dive back into my practice and talk to the *Mestres*, who continue to guide me on my journey of learning and making conscious choices.

Iê[130]! This is it for now.

[130] This short call is to end the *roda* and is also used to mark the end games in training and classes overall.

Bibliography

Books, essays, and articles

Adorno, T. (1991; 2001) *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture.* Routledge.

Ahmed, S. (2006) 'Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology.' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* Volume 12, Number 4. Duke University Press, 543-574.

Allen, A. (2002) 'Power, Subjectivity, and Agency: Between Arendt and Foucault'. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 10(2), pp. 131–149. DOI: 10.1080/09672550210121432.

Alvim, V. (2019) *As Valentias de Madame Satã.* Rio de Janeiro: Qeima-Bucha.

Arendt, H. (1970) *On Violence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich.

Astraka, M. (2009) *Candomblé: Dancing with the Orixás*. Athens: The Magic Box.

Avelino, F. (2021) 'Theories of power and social change. Power contestations and their implications for research on social change and innovation'. *Journal of Political Power*, 14:3, 425-448. DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2021.1875307.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984) *Rabelais and his World.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bishop, C. (2012) *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* London; Brooklyn: Verso.

Boal, A. (2002) 'Chapter 21: Forum Theatre' in Zarrilli, P. *Acting (Re)Considered.* London and New York: Routledge, 268-276.

Boal, A. & Jackson, A. (2002) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Bourriaud, N. (2002) *Relational Aesthetics.* Les Presses du Réel.

Brecht, B. (1964) *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic.* Ed. & trans. John Willett. London: Methuen Drama.

Browning, B. (1995) *Samba: Resistance in Motion.* Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Caillois, R. (2001; 1961; 1958) *Man, Play and Games.* Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Cajigas-Rotundo, Juan Camilo. (2012) 'Implosiones: corporalidades fronterizas como prácticas de libertad o cómo diluir un régimen de verdad y producir otro en el propio cuerpo, sin morir en el intento'. *Tabula Rasa*, Vol.., núm.16,121-138. [Accessed: 07/03/23] <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=39624572008>.

Carse, J. P. (1986) *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility.* New York: The Free Press.

Cassar, R. (2013) 'Gramsci and Games.' *Games and Culture* 8(5). Sage Publications, 330-353.

Costikyan, G. (2015) *Uncertainty in Games.* Cambridge (MA); London: MIT Press.

Crawford, J., Mearls, M. & Perkins, C. (2018) *D&D Basic Rules.* Wizards of the Coast. Available online <https://media.wizards.com/2018/dnd/downloads/DnD_BasicRules_2018.pdf>

Desch-Obi, T. J. (2008) *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts Traditions in the Atlantic World.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Desch-Obi, T. J. (2012) 'The *jogo de Capoeira* and the fallacy of 'creole' cultural forms.' *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 5:2, 211-228, DOI: 10.1080/17528631.2012.695222

Downey, G. (2005) *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008). *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics.* London; New York: Routledge.

Flanagan, M. (2009) *Critical Play: Radical Game Design.* Cambridge (MA); London: MIT Press.

Foucault, J. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books.

Freire, P. (2005; 1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York; London: Continuum.

Freshwater, H. (2009) *Theatre & Audience.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Furse, A. (2007) *Questions Towards a 21st Century Performance Analysis*. Goldsmiths, University of London Virtual Learning Environment.

Geertz, C. (2005) 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.' *Daedalus.* Fall 2005; 134, 4; ProQuest, 56-86.

hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York; Oxon: Routledge.

Huizinga, H. (1980; 1949) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. London; Boston, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Hyde, L. (2008) *Trickster Makes this World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

Irobi, E. (2007) 'What They Came With: Carnival and the Persistence of African Performance Aesthetics in the Diaspora.' *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 6. Sage Publications, 896-913.

Johnston, C. (2006) *The Improvisation Game: Discovering the Secrets of Spontaneous Performance.* London: Nick Hern Books.

Johnstone, K. (2015; 1981) *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre.* New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts Books.

Kelleher, J. (2009) *Theatre & Politics.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kress, G. R. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2001*) Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London; Arnold.

Lachmann, R., Eshelman, R., & Davis, M. (1988). 'Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture'. *Cultural Critique, 11*, 115–152.

Lakoff, J. and Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in The Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought.* New York: Basic Books.

Lewis, J. L. (1992) *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira.* Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, J. L. (1995) 'Genre and Embodiment: From Brazilian Capoeira to the Ethnology of Human Movement.' *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Anthropologies of the Body (May 1995). Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association, 221-243.

Little, N. (2014) 'Restructuring the self-sensing: Attention training in Contact Improvisation.' *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices,* 6(2), 247-260.

Marriage, Z. (2018) 'Evading Biopolitical Control: Capoeira as Total Resistance'. *Global Society*, 32:3, 263-280.

Marriage, Z. (2020) *Cultural Resistance and Security from Below: Power and Escape Through Capoeira*. Milton Park; New York: Routledge.

Maze, J. (2018) 'Towards an Analytic of Violence: Foucault, Arendt & Power'. *Foucault Studies*, No. 25, October 2018, 120-145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v25i2.5577>

Mignolo, W. D. & Escobar, A. (eds). (2010) *Globalization and the Decolonial Option.* London; New York: Routledge.

Mignolo, W. & Walsh C. E. (2018) *On Decoloniality: concepts, analysis, praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mom, S., Coello, M., Pittaway, E., Downham, R., & Aroche, J. (2019). 'Capoeira Angola: An alternative intervention program for traumatized adolescent refugees from war-torn countries'. *Torture Journal*, 29 (1), 85–96.

Mostowlansky, T., A. Rota. (2023; 2020) ‘Emic and etic’. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology,* edited by Felix Stein. Facsimile of the first edition in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Web: <http://doi.org/10.29164/20emicetic>.

Nelson. R. (2013) ‘Conceptual Frameworks for PaR and Related Pedagogy: From ‘Hard Facts’ to ‘Liquid Knowing’’. *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances.* Ed. Robin Nelson. Palgrave MacMillan.

Pastinha, V. F. (1964; 1988) *Capoeira Angola.* 3rd edition. Salvador: Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, Ministério da Cultura.

Pavis, P. (1985) ‘Theatre Analysis: Some Questions and a Questionnaire.’ *New Theatre Quarterly.* Vol 1, Issue 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 208-212.

Play, Philosophy and Performance, edited by Malcolm MacLean, et al., Taylor & Francis Group (2021). *ProQuest Ebook Central*. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/goldsmiths/detail.action?docID=6425103>

Pollock, D. C. and Van Reken, R. E. (2009) *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*. Boston; London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Popper, F. (1975) *Art: Action and Participation*. London: Cassell & Collier Macmillan Publishers.

Rancière, J. (2010) *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics.* London; New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Rancière, J. (2011a) *The Emancipated Spectator.* London; Brooklyn: Verso.

Rancière, J. (2011b) ‘The Thinking of Dissensus: politics and aesthetics’. *Reading Rancière.* Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (eds.). London; New York: Continuum.

Röhrig Assunção, M. (2005) *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art.* London; New York: Routledge.

Rosa, C. F. (2015) *Brazilian Bodies and Their Choreographies of Identification: Swing Nation*. Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Salen, K. & Zimmerman, E. (2004) *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge (MA); London: MIT Press.

Schechner, R. (2013) *Performance Studies: An Introduction.* Abingdon; New York: Routledge.

Schechner, R. (2014) *Performed Imaginaries*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Schnor, J. (2022) “Imperceptible Bodies: Haptic Counter-pleasures in the Work of Marcelo Evelin.” *Performance Philosophy*, 7(1), 164–181.

Sharp, J. (2015) *Works of game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art*. Cambridge (MA); London: MIT Press.

Shotwell, P. (1994; 2008) ‘The Game of Go: Speculations on its Origins and Symbolism in Ancient China.’ The Bob High Memorial Library, American Go Association. <https://www.usgo.org/sites/default/files/bh_library/originsofgo.pdf>

Spatz, B. (2015) *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research.* Abingdon; New York: Routledge.

Sniderman, S. (1999) ‘Unwritten Rules’. *The Life of Games: Why and How We Play – An Exploratory Journal.* Issue 1. Kadon Enterprises. <http://www.gamepuzzles.com/tlog/tlog2.htm>

Stark-Smith, N. (2006) ‘Harvest: One History of Contact Improvisation.’ *Contact Quarterly,* 3 (2), 46-54.

Suits, B. (2014; 1979) *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia.* (3rd edition) Peterborough (CA); London: Broadview Press

Sutton-Smith, B. (2001; 1997) *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge (MA); London: Harvard University Press.

Talmon-Chvaicer, M. (2008) *The Hidden History of Capoeira: A Collision of Cultures in the Brazilian Battle Dance.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2013) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Turner, V. (1986) 'Body, Brain and Culture.' *Performing Arts Journal.* Vol. 10, No. 2, 26-34.

Turner, V. (1997; 1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* New Brunswick; London: Aldine Transaction.

Turney, E. ed. (2018) *Learning in Public: Transeuropean Collaborations in Socially Engaged Art.* Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme: Create & Live Art Development Agency.

Varela, S. G. (2023) 'Problems with hierarchy and problems with tradition: The critique of male power in Afro-Brazilian capoeira'. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology,* 28:2, 151-160. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12677>

Waltz, S. P. & Deterding, S. (eds.) (2014) *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

White, G. (2013) *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Willson, M. (2001) 'Designs of Deception: Concepts of Consciousness, Spirituality and Survival in Capoeira Angola in Salvador, Brazil'. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 12: 19-36. <https://doi-org.gold.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/ac.2001.12.1.19>

Wright, J. (2006) *Why Is That So Funny? A Practical Exploration of Physical Comedy.* London: Nick Hern Books.

Websites and online events

American Go Association (2021) *A Brief History of Go.* Website [accessed 11/09/21] <https://www.usgo.org/brief-history-go>

Carse, J. P. (2022) ‘Finite and Infinite Games.’ Website [accessed 02/01/2022] <https://jamescarse.com/books/finite-and-infinite-games/>

Capoeirahistory.com (2021) ‘Capoeira in Rio de Janeiro.’ Website [accessed 07/11/2023] <https://capoeirahistory.com/the-project/>

Capoeirahistory.com (2021) ‘Madame Satan.’ Website [accessed 07/11/2023] <https://capoeirahistory.com/general/madame-satan/>

Contact Gonzo / Museum of Modern Art (2013) YouTube. Website [accessed 14/11/23] < https://youtu.be/Ax-wwMmw70A?si=x-neNrphXmVbdPH0>

Contact Gonzo Tokyo Experimental Performance Archive (2014) YouTube. Website [accessed 14/11/23] < https://youtu.be/VQV2s0rcE9k?si=NocH-OUX7QVDB0YL>

Dungeons & Dragons (2021a) *D&D Official Homepage.* Website [accessed 30/04/2021] <https://dnd.wizards.com/>

Dungeons & Dragons (2021b) *Basics of Play.* Website [accessed 30/04/2021] <https://dnd.wizards.com/basics-play>

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatíca – IBGE. (2022) ‘Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua Trimestral’. Website [Accessed 16/12/2022] <https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/tabela/6403#resultado>.

Mestre Bamba, *Contra-Mestre* Pescador. (2021) ‘Ludicidade,’ *Capoeira Angola e Valores Civilizatórios Afrobrasileiros.* Oragnised by Mestre Roxinho. Live online talk. [accessed 24/04/21] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRfCcvx8q58&ab_channel=MestreRoxinho>

Okazaki, M. (2011) ‘Artist Interview: Playing with Physical Contact; Contact Gonzo’. *Performing Arts Network Japan*. 9 May 2011. The Japan Foundation. Website [Accessed 25/02/2023] <https://performingarts.jpf.go.jp/E/art_interview/1104/1.html>

The International Performance and Playfulness Symposium. (2021) St John York University, the Norwegian Theatre Academy. Live Online event. [accessed 28/06/21] < https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-international-performance-and-playfulness-symposium-tickets-156521593299?aff=InternalComms >

Sound recordings, Videos, Films, Performances

Almeida, P. (2023) *Guarini Dance Company.* YouTube. Website [Accessed 21/02/2023] <https://www.youtube.com/@guarinidancecompany5837/videos>.

Birksted-Breen, N. (dir.) (2009) *In Blood: The Bacchae.* Arcola Theatre. Performance. <https://www.arcolatheatre.com/whats-on/inbloodthebacchae/>

Camillê, P. (2023) *MANDINGA DO FUTURO.* Instagram. [Accessed 15/01/2023] <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CnXq_bRI1KX/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>.

Dreyfus-Gamelon, S. (1955) *La Musique Indienne du Brésil.* Centre de Recherche en Ethnomusicologie. Website [Accessed 16/12/2022] <https://archives.crem-cnrs.fr/archives/collections/CNRSMH_I_1967_015/#>.

Evelin, M. (2012) *De Repente Tudo Fica Preto de Gente.* The Place, London.

Mestre Pastinha and his students (1969) *Mestre Pastinha e Sua Academia*. Philips [R 765.097 L]

Mestre Waldemar, *Mestre* Canjiquinha (1986) *Mestre Waldemar, Mestre Canjiquinha Capoeira Vol 1.* Cordão De Ouro Promoções Artisticas [01].

Pakleppa, R., Röhrig Assunção, M., & Mestre Cobra Mansa (2013) *Body Games: Capoeira and Ancestry.* DVD. On Land Productions/Manganga Produções.

Paxton, S. (2008) *Material for The Spine: A Movement Study.* DVD. Contredanse.

Seghal, T. (2012) *These Associations.* The Unilever Series: An Annual Art Commission. Tate Modern.

Appendix I: A survey of Capoeira games

Note on terms used:

Roda refers to the capoeira ritual game circle. The word means circle in Portuguese. ***Mestre*** (***Mestra*** in the feminine) refers to capoeira masters and is a hard-earned title. ***Contra-Mestre/-Mestra*** is another title that refers to highly experienced capoeira players on their way to earning the full master title.

Mestre Moraes and *Mestre* Jogo de Dentro, 1996

This is an example of what a good game of Capoeira Angola looks like: a controlled and co-operative beginning during which players read one another's actions and reactions, which develops into marked attacks before moving into more dangerous interactions interspersed with expressive movement and laughter/commentary. It is worth noting here that sometimes escapes from an attack not only neutralise it but can transform it into a weakness. For example, at around 1:15 a feigned sweep is countered with a suggested stomp, which then trips *Mestre* Moraes (in the beige trousers). The surprises that occur within a game are desirable both by the audience and the players themselves as it keeps the game unpredictable and engaging (even though each player tries to anticipate what the other might do).

https://youtu.be/aPOOY9bxD34

Mestre Moraes and *Mestre* Cobra Mansa at Forte do Santo Antonio, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

Accounts of this *roda* (e.g. by *Mestre* Pezão) recall that the atmosphere was incredibly tense and that it felt a fight could break out at any moment. In spite of that, the two master players retain a high level of control during their game while still exchanging high risk attacks and escapes. Although the atmosphere cannot be registered from the video, it forms a very important part of the game, as it becomes a supporting or challenging factor for players.

https://youtu.be/vJs9kbtT-ac

***Mestre* Pezão and *Contra-Mestre* Boquinha, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 2012**

This game presents a controlled playfulness, avoiding direct confrontation and focusing more on suggested and feigned attacks, as well as expressivity. Both players are highly skilled, as is evident, and have the capacity for more objectively martial interactions. The *roda* is the weekly Friday night *roda* in the Rio Vermelho neighbourhood of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, overseen by *Mestre* Sapoti.

https://youtu.be/06FFQ0rgOKU

***Contra-Mestra* Dafne and *Contra-Mestre* Flavio, Barcelona, November 2021**

This game has been added primarily as an example of one of my own recent games. Although not visible in the video, the space was particularly cold, affecting the speed and quality of movement of all players. In spite of that, interactions in the game are attempted as normal, adding further challenge.

https://youtu.be/eg6C2NwaiXU

***Mestra* Gegê and *Contra-Mestre* Xandão in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil**

This game presents a controlled and equally pitched dynamic between the two players. Timing and technique are chosen over physical force, which results in extended, focused and intense play. The roda in which this game took place is in the square of the Rio Vermelho neighbourhood in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Although a Friday night roda takes place in the square weekly, this game is during the 2 February annual celebration of Yemanjá (one of the Orixás in the Candomblé and Umbanda religions), both attracting local and international crowds. The *roda* itself is one of the annual capoeira highlights of Salvador and is overseen by *Mestre* Sapoti.

https://youtu.be/-MazWw5qcP0

***Mestre* Guaxini and *Mestre* Itapuã Beira Mar, at the MarAzul *roda*, London, 2010**

Although there are several moments of rather messy and borderline uncontrolled play here, this video also presents a rare recorded occasion of verbal and musical improvisation between the two players. Each time the players sense they are losing control of the game and the overall joint focus, they break the physical interaction and start again, at the base of the percussion orchestra. The choices of lyrics and improvisations reflect aspects of each of the players' identity as capoeiristas and are simultaneously playful, competitive and collaborative/co-creative.

https://youtu.be/7suxQRbYR-s?t=211

***Mestre* João Grande and *Mestre* Cobra Mansa, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 1986**

Mestre João Grande is one of the living grand masters of Capoeira Angola, while *Mestre* Cobra Mansa is a notoriously skilled and dangerous capoeirista, and considerably younger that *Mestre* João Grande. In this game *Mestre* Cobra Mansa is continuously blocked and prevented from playing in a more fluid, acrobatic and expansive manner, which would give him an advantage in this game. Consecutive blocks result in swift escapes and attempts to dominate the game space, but to no avail.

https://youtu.be/kzsYGloktxU

Appendix II: A Mapping of Practice

Improvisation techniques

Having been trained in classical ballet (RAD) and Greek folk dance from childhood, I became adept at picking up and replicating complex movement patterns but without the ability to improvise with and through the component parts. This section presents some of the numerous improvisational techniques I have worked with and how they have built the hybrid I currently use. Capoeira is not included here as, although complementary to all these practices, has been analysed in the main body of the thesis.

Improvisation as an idea took root first through martial arts: Tai Chi Quan sparring (touch sparring and push hands) and Capoeira games. The latter was a more expansive and loosely structured interaction, as discussed earlier on, compared to the simple and seemingly limited structure of the tai chi exercises. Where I was blocked in dance, martial arts offered a way through into action. I began to understand intention, structure, choice and the meta-cognitive state of improvisation. Both practices, however relied on elements of form. Tai Chi exercises require a precise control of one's centre of gravity and the range of distances between the body and limbs so as to ensure balance and to reduce vulnerability. Capoeira improvisation occurs with a movement language that is flexible, but that is also culturally specific.

Entering the world of Butoh, first during my postgraduate study[131] and later through regular training, offered the connection between language, image and movement that was missing from the developing branches of my work. Images function as anchors for exploration and I began to let go

[131] MA Performance Making at Goldsmiths, University of London, 2007-8.

of the preoccupation of what happens next. The sequences of images serving as a choreographic score, however, still offered a fairly delimited structure within which to work. The idea of transformation was also an important step in my developing practice; allowing movement to transform through the use of often incongruent imagery undid long-held movement and rhythmic patterns. My training and work with Post-Grotowskian theatre[132] complemented this work, as movement scores needed a sense of transformation to keep the material alive, while improvisations within them revealed the richness of modifying the size, speed, tension and inner associations of a fixed movement score.

Further developments in my improvisational practice came from Contact Improvisation and the unshackling from thinking about an aesthetic outcome, along with the numerous processes and attentional states the practice affords. The sensory focus on weight (shared and/or in relation to gravity) and touch reorganised my embodiment radically. Yet again, the seed of this practice was planted during my MA studies and I continued to train and dance in jams for a number of years. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this practice to seep into mine is the attention to gravity and falling.

There are also many more instances in the broad range of training during studying on the MA Performance Making that added to the improvisational toolkit[133], such as Feldenkrais into CI, Skinner Releasing, classes with Graeme Miller, a short residency with Peggy Shaw, and others. Out of the richness of this time certain principles and processes remain central to the way I improvise: making out of nothing is possible; attention to breath and weight are enough; attention to the inner as well as the outer is necessary; simplicity can build complexity when needed.

[132] My first encounter with this work was through Anna Furse and Maja Mitic during my MA studies. After this work with Dr. Vanio Papadelli, Goosun Art-Illery, and different members of Odin Teatret helped develop my skills in this broad area of movement work.
[133] Note that I studied Contact Improvisation and Butoh during my MA, as well as for years after it.

A brief but intensive time with Lisa Nelson when she visited Anna Furse's Athletes of the Heart Lab[134] also marked a seminal shift in how I approach improvised movement, speech and voice. From the various warm up processes to the rich and surprising material the Tuning Score yielded, Nelson brought together sensory, playful and material cues and anchors around and through which to do/be.

To complement this, clown training offered a further layer of attentional tuning and helped make playfulness more conscious in my practice. The accumulation of these systems and processes have led to my current mode of working with improvisation, which although particular to me, does not claim to be a foray into unknown territory, particularly because countless more movement practitioners combine their embodied knowledges into how they work.

One way of breaking down the processes I attend to and shift through when I move is as follows:

1. My own sensory information - small dance, relationship to gravity, breath, interoception (digestion, pulse, muscles), shape (of my body), place;
2. Rhythm - of my body, of people, of music, of environment;
3. Atmosphere - of music, of environment, of space;
4. Space - proxemics, size, availability (how many people & objects are present);
5. Other people - in terms of presence, touch, action/movement, voice;
6. Impulse/emotion - desire, pleasure, dislike, shock, fear, curiosity;
7. Imagination - bodily, visual, associative.

[134] This was a PaR laboratory led by Professor Anna Furse between 2009 and 2011, with two performances—*Sick of Love*, 2009 and *Being Touched*, 2010—produced from the process.

Capoeira

My training in Capoeira began in the first half of 2003 with Amazonas in London. This was a group founded by two sisters from Ceará (Brazil) after moving to London in the late 1980s and which did not have a *Mestre* overseeing activities. We trained in a second floor warehouse space in Upper Holloway three times a week, for 2-4 hours at a time, until noise complaints forced the group to move to per-hour rental spaces that could accommodate movement and music. We trained all styles of Capoeira and different *Mestres* from across Brazil were invited to teach workshops a few times a year. One of these workshops was led by *Mestre* Roberval, an eminent figure in the circles of Capoeira Angola. It was the end of 2005 and my entire understanding of Capoeira seismically shifted as I resolved to train Capoeira Angola from then on. My teachers had a similar idea and so *Mestre* Roberval guided our training through regular visits to London. In 2010 I met my current teacher, *Mestre* Pezão, one of *Mestre* Roberval's students, and joined his group. After he moved to London in 2013, we jointly ran the group, until 2022 when I spent time in Greece prior to moving to Indonesia. The London group is based in a community hall in Queens Crescent. I currently run classes for a small group in Jakarta under *Mestre* Pezão's guidance and as part of the same group.

The reasons for these shifts are highly personal and reflect my continuous search for understanding of the practice, both practically and culturally. I maintain contact with all my previous teachers and am fortunate to be able to play with and learn from them.

In 2014 I received the title of *Treinel* from *Mestre* Pezão and in 2019 he recognised me as *Contra-Mestra.*

Early Visual Arts Experiments

Originally influenced by Dada and punk, my early practice explored the role and consciousness of the spectator with the intention to draw attention to the breaking or falling into habitual patterns of action and thought. This practice emerged during my undergraduate degree in Fine Art at Middlesex University. *Untitled* (2001) had photographs hung at various heights (mostly lower than 1.70 cm) facing downwards from the ceiling of a gallery, prompting the audience to contort themselves in order to see the images. The images themselves were of little semantic consequence[135] as the intention was to question how and why one goes to see images in galleries.

A more nuanced range of experiments employed video installations that referenced the quality of paintings. Here, the relative stillness of the works and their repeated (assumed and potential) passing were that elements that intended to draw attention to the viewer's perception. Some examples include:

- *Through The Rabbit Hole into The Seaside* (2002) presents a framed and back-projected zoomed-in shot of a small group of people on Brighton beach from a distance wearing what appears to be Edwardian-era clothes. The image is distorted as the video was shot on a simple digital camera and the footage is slowed down four times, so that the image becomes more challenging to read. The overall effect is disorientating because of the play in modes and conventions of presentation; the spectator sees an image of people by the sea that evokes expressionist painting but on closer inspection it is a pixelated video projection.

- *Projection*[136] (2002) was a 60-minute video projection on a three by four meter stretched canvas. The footage was of drizzle falling on an attic window that eventually stops with the water partially drying slowed down to appear almost like a static image. There was some flicker in the pixels, not entirely unlike Warhol's *Empire* (1965) film, therefore changes in the image were most noticeable over an extended period or if seen with breaks. The abstract

[135] These were mostly experiments with latex prosthetics, influenced by Cindy Sherman's work.
[136] The title is a play on words between the technical term for projecting video and the alchemical term for transmuting one substance into another.

image and its exaggerated slowness play with what one sees at first glance and expectations of how different media might be presented.

- *The Distance to You* (2004) shows a static shot of a housing estate in Peckham where two outdoor landing lights flicker on and off as seen from a room in a house across the road. This was played on a CRT screen TV. This image is accompanied by the song *3.14* (Seatbelts, 2001) that is an acapella nonsense song that ends with the number *π* up to its 53rd decimal. The lights' flicker is sometimes regular and sometimes not, courting pattern and meaning but ultimately resisting it. The layering of sound and image sometimes hints at narrative but does so tentatively and leaves open the possibility of any interpretation beyond the banality of the image on screen. The choice of correlating this work with *π* plays on the speculative notion that in being an infinite and irrational number it could contain all possible information and the fact that interpretation (of anything, but art more specifically) is vast and highly subjective.

Participation and Improvisation

Previous explorations of participation and interaction begun with visual arts works that invited interaction, as I was too timid to put myself in the action. Although there were some tentative attempts at performative interactions with the audience in early works (*Baroque Solo* 2004/5) it was during my MA training that I began developing a more concerted approach to working with audiences, as well as building clear improvisational strategies, as mentioned earlier.

Works such as *Seven Quiet Acts of Domestic Violence* (2010), *The Tea Rites* (2011)[137], *The Shape of Water* (2014), *Obey! Deceive! Devour!* (2015), *Play* (2016)[138] had aspects of audience participation but remained in the sphere of interaction that did not significantly impact the outcome of the performance/narrative, and included some improvised parts. Choice begun to grow as a concern from these works, as mere interaction seemed a gimmick that was becoming all too commonplace[139]. Later explorations involved walking formats, e.g., Walk & Talk, or long duration walks, where choice of direction and/or subject matter were free or fixed (*Collaborative Quest* and *12 Hours South*)[140]. Collective organisation was played with in group cooking (*Collaborative Quest*), while sharing weight with individual participants was discussed as a metaphor for collaboration (*Invaluable Movement*)[141]. In all these works, although choice was present, it was never overtly crucial to the overall outcome of the work, although arguably, in *Obey! Deceive! Devour!* it could have been, should we have followed the Zurich audience's refusal to play our game[142] alter the performance. As the previous performance of *Obey! Deceive! Devour!* in Athens was met with willingness to play and interact, we clung on to this as the desired outcome of that section and insisted on completing the game; the audience half-heartedly went along in the end. The question that arose from these experiences for me became how to allow as much possibility for co-creation within a structure as a means of fostering true participation that would in turn necessitate improvisation.

[137] These two performances were made in collaboration with Tanya Cottingham.
[138] The last three listed performances were made in collaborations with Kyara Orlando (previously Thais Mennsitieri) and Noora Baker under our collective name Cactus Performance Art Collective and were performed in Ramallah (2014), Athens and Zurich (2015), and Zurich (2016).
[139] This was especially my feeling with Punchdrunk performances, where tightly scripted one-on-one interactions between performers and audience felt contrived and seemed to exist for sensationalist rather than dramaturgical purposes. This was my experience both in *Faust* as well as *The Drowned Man*. Some of my own work dealt in similarly tight parameters as regards audience participation; *The Laundry* (2005, in collaboration with Tanya Cottingham) ran in an expansive warehouse space in which an absurd immersive world was constructed where audience brought one pair of clothing to be washed, dried and ironed in a series of performances. Instructions on where to go, how to enter and what to do were given verbally or through gesture and left little space for exploration in terms of audience choice.
[140] 2014 and 2012, both with Metod Blejec.
[141] 2015. A short published reflection and description of the work can be found in Bradfield, M. et al. (eds) (2023) *Transacting as Art, Design and Architecture: A Non-Commercial Market*. Intellect Books.
[142] A variation of Broken Telephone/Chinese Whispers.

Appendix III: Epilogue song lyrics

The song used in the epilogue of *If It Was Up to Me* is a lament song that seems to have originated in Thrace after the sacking of Constantinople 1452, mourning the loss of what was then considered to be the Greeks' cultural and religious centre[143]. The original version has another stanza that directly addresses the loss of the city and the need to flee. Only the first stanza is used in *If It Was Up to Me* as the lyrics remain more metaphorical, allowing more space for interpretation both for myself as well as those in the audience who might know Greek. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the lyrics reflects the ambiguity found in many Capoeira songs.

The first encounter with this song was a record by Savina Yannatou[144] and also only features the first stanza. I was struck by the melody, which is typical of Greek folk music, as well as the lyrics. On reflection, their ambiguity allows for personal connections to the imagery they produce, something I have found also rings true with the more obscure Capoeira songs. As a result, this song felt a fitting choice to close the work as it bridges my practice and culture of origin, while also proving a dramaturgical device to close the game ritual.

Below is the title and first stanza shown in Greek, followed by my translation to English.

Γιατί Πουλί Δεν Κελαηδείς;

Why Bird Don't You Sing?

Γιατί πουλί δεν κελαηδείς πώς κελαηδούσες πρώτα;

[143] Further context in Greek, as well as older recordings of the song can be found at Pemptousia.gr. <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2023/05/giati-pouli-m-den-kelaidis-thrakiotikos-thrinos-tis-polis/>
[144] Yannatou, S. (1998) *Songs of the Mediterranean*, Lyra/Musurgia Graeca.

Αχ, πώς μπορώ να κελαηδώ πώς κελαηδούσα πρώτα;

Μου κόψαν τα φτερούδια μου, μου πήραν τη λαλιά μου.

Αχ, πώς μπορώ να κελαηδώ;

Why do you not sing, bird, like you used to?

Oh, how can I sing like I used to?

They cut my wings, the took my voice away.

Oh, how can I sing?

Appendix IV: A (partial) lineage of transmission of Capoeira Angola

Benedito

▼

Mestre Pastinha (1889-1981)

▼

Mestre Aberrê (1895?-1941)

▼

Mestre Canjiquinha (1925-1994)

▼

Mestre Alfredo

▼

Mestre Roberval (1964-)

▼

Mestre Pezão (1980-)

▼

Contra-Mestra Dafne (1980-)

Appendix V: Playing card to movement relationships

1. Red numbers 1 through to 9 indicate speed, with 1 being the slowest.
2. Black numbers 1 through to 9 indicate a combination of rotation and level of a movement, with one being the lowest to the ground. Each movement requires a rotation on any possible axis, for example, horizontal or vertical spins, as well as full rotational inversions.
3. Red number 10 indicates smooth motion.
4. Black number 10 indicates abrupt (*staccato*) motion.
5. Knights all indicate a jump.
6. Queens all indicate moving down to the floor.
7. Kings all indicate a vertical inversion, for example, a handstand, or headstand.
8. Joker cards indicate stopping mid-motion and holding the position.
9. There is no differentiation between different suits.

Appendix VI: Link to video documentation of practice

YouTube link to documentation of *If It Was Up to Me*, performed at Goldsmiths, University of London, 5 May 2023.

URL: https://youtu.be/xSuQ7OK5rPs

Please note that this is an unlisted video and can only be accessed via this link.