

**EMBODIED IDENTITY IN THEATRICAL PRODUCTION: A STUDY OF ACTORS
TRANSFORMATION USING AUSTIN ASAGBA'S "ODIDIGBOIGBO"
AS A CASE STUDY**

BY

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

OCTOBER, 2025

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
THEATER ARTS, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY.
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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IN THEATER ARTS**

OCTOBER, 2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this project work is based on a study carried out by me in the Department of Theater Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under the supervision of **DR. OGHENEMUDIAGA PRAISE AKPUGHE**.

All ideas and personal findings in the study are products of my personal research and where the views of others have been used were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was duly carried out by EDIGIN, OSARUMEN under my supervision, in the Department of Theater Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin. Benin City.

DR. OGHENEMUDIAGA PRAISE AKPUGHE
Project Supervisor

DATE

DEDICATION

The entirety of this project is dedicated to the almighty God for his undying love and mercy towards me.

Also to my Big Brother Mr. Pedro Edigin who has supported me wholeheartedly in my educational adventures. Thank you Big Brother.

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I owe a debt of profound **gratitude** to the Almighty God, whose unwavering strength and constant grace have been my bedrock throughout this academic journey and every phase of my life.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Cover Page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	i
Title Page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	ii
Declaration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iii
Certification	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iv
Dedication	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	v
Acknowledgements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	vi
Table of Content	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	viii
Abstract	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background of Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
1.3	Objective of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
1.4	Research Question	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
1.5	Significance of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
1.6	Scope of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
1.7	Definition of Terms	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1	Conceptual Review	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
2.2	The Body as the Primary Site of Identity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
2.3	Actors Transformation; Beyond Imitation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
2.4	The Concept of Nigeria Theater and Performance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19
2.5	Theoretical Framework	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21

2.6	Zarrilli's Four Bodies of Performance	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
2.7	Stanislavsky's Concept of Artistic Truth	-	-	-	-	-	-	25

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1	Research Design	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
3.2	Area of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
3.3	Population of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
3.4	Sampling Techniques	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
3.5	Instruments for Data Collection	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
3.6	Validity and Reliability of Instruments	-	-	-	-	-	-	31
3.7	Method of Data Collection	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
3.8	Method of Data Analysis	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
3.9	Ethical Considerations	-	-	-	-	-	-	33

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1	Data Set and Reflective Position	-	-	-	-	-	-	35
4.2	Why Barun and Clark, and how it was Applied	-	-	-	-	-	-	36

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	Summary	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
5.2	Findings	-	-	-	-	-	-	48
5.3	Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	50
5.4	Recommendations	-	-	-	-	-	-	51
	Work Cited	-	-	-	-	-	-	53
	Appendices	-	-	-	-	-	-	56

ABSTRACT

This study critically examined the concept of embodied identity and actor transformation in Austin Asagba's *Odidigboigbo*, directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba and staged at the University of Benin Theatre on 14 June 2025. The research was situated within debates on embodiment in performance, where actors negotiated the relationship between personal identity and fictional roles. The central problem addressed was the difficulty actors faced in fully transforming into characters while sustaining believability and cultural authenticity in contemporary Nigerian theatre. The aim of the study was to explore how embodiment, identity, and transformation intersected in the rehearsal and performance processes of *Odidigboigbo*. The research employed a qualitative approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews with the director and principal actors, supported by observation of rehearsals and the final performance. Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis provided the analytical framework, which enabled the systematic identification of themes such as psychological preparation, cultural rootedness, the role of costume and environment, and challenges of accent and interpretation. Findings indicated that embodiment in this production was achieved through a combination of psychological, emotional, and cultural strategies. Actors reported moments of shifting from "acting" to "becoming" their characters, often triggered by costuming, stage interaction, or audience feedback. The director's emphasis on picturisation and imaginative techniques facilitated transformation, though challenges such as mastering cultural accents and sustaining emotional intensity were highlighted. The study also revealed that audience reception reinforced actor embodiment, with visible feedback motivating deeper transformation on stage. The research concluded that embodied identity in Nigerian theatre depended on both personal and collective cultural connections, guided by directorial vision and rehearsal discipline. The study contributed to scholarship on African performance by demonstrating how embodiment served as both an artistic and cultural process, advancing discourse on actor training, identity negotiation, and theatrical authenticity.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The theatrical stage has long served as a dynamic arena where human identity is explored, challenged, and reshaped through the transformative work of actors. This project examines the intricate relationship between embodied identity and actor transformation within the context of Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" production, directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, staged at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) Theatre on June 14, 2025. This production offers a unique opportunity to investigate how actors, through their physical and psychological engagement, manifest and alter aspects of identity, both their own and that of the characters they portray. Understanding these processes is vital for appreciating the depth of theatrical artistry and its reflection of the human condition.

The concept of embodied identity posits that identity is not merely an abstract, mental construct but is deeply ingrained in and expressed through the physical body. As Emil Haarhoff, Marth Munro, and Marié-Heleen Coetzee explain, "Embodiment, broadly speaking, is 'the physical and mental experience of our existence' that is also the 'the condition of possibility for our relating' to others and the environment" (236). This perspective challenges traditional dualistic views that separate mind and body, asserting instead that our thoughts, emotions, and experiences are inseparable from our corporeal existence. Islam and Philip further elaborate on this, introducing "embodied acting" as "the process of workers crafting a persona suited to service work most apparently through bodily practices (such as clothing, accessories, makeup, body language), whereby these bodily practices are closely tied to attitudes, behaviours and skills (such as English speaking, dating,

fast food consumption) to compensate for their lack of 'natural' belonging in these emerging environments" (2). While Islam and Philip apply this to service work, the principles resonate strongly with theatrical performance, where actors consciously manipulate their physicality and behavior to construct a character's identity. This suggests that the body is not merely a vessel for identity but an active participant in its formation and expression.

The notion of the body as a site of identity performance is also supported by Ferstl, Bülthoff, and de la Rosa, who, in their study on action recognition, found that "visual action recognition processes are at least partly sensitive to the actor's identity" (201). Their experiments, using avatars, demonstrated that "clothing and facial identity combined as well as facial identity alone modulated action adaptation effects," indicating that the visual presentation of an individual significantly impacts how their actions are perceived (203). This scientific finding provides empirical weight to the theatrical understanding that an actor's appearance and physical presentation are crucial to character believability and audience reception. The actor's body, therefore, becomes a primary canvas for the construction of a character's identity, influencing how the audience interprets their actions and motivations.

Actor transformation, a core element of theatrical practice, refers to the process by which performers embody a character distinct from their personal selves. This involves a profound shift in physical, vocal, and psychological states. Lesley Watson, in "The Alchemy of the Acting Process," highlights this as a central inquiry, stating that her research examines "the process that actors use to develop their 'instrument', with a view to understanding its role in their creative practice and what value this has in enhancing creative confidence and practice in other fields" (2). Elizabeth Hess, in *Acting and Being*, describes this

transformation as a journey into "an enlarged sense of reality" (70), where the actor transcends their everyday experience to embody archetypes and universal themes. This suggests that transformation is not merely imitation but a profound internal and external shift that allows the actor to access and portray a broader spectrum of human experience.

The historical evolution of actor training, particularly influenced by Konstantin Stanislavski, has consistently sought to systematize this transformative process. Stanislavski's emphasis on "experiencing" (Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus* 8) aimed to create truth in performance by integrating the actor's "mind, body and spirit" (Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus* 7). This holistic approach contrasts with earlier, more external methods of acting, where performers primarily focused on imitating outward behaviors. While Stanislavski's methods have seen various interpretations and adaptations, including Lee Strasberg's "Method" and Michael Chekhov's "psychological gesture," the core pursuit remains the same: to enable actors to genuinely inhabit a role. As Michael Chekhov asserts in *On the Technique of Acting*, "But the actor, who must consider his body as an instrument for expressing creative ideas on the stage, must strive for the attainment of complete harmony between the two, body and psychology" (722). This pursuit of harmony between internal and external elements is fundamental to achieving believable transformation.

Nigerian theatre, with its rich cultural heritage and dynamic performance traditions, provides a fertile ground for studying embodied identity and actor transformation. Drawing from indigenous forms, colonial influences, and contemporary global trends, Nigerian theatre practitioners often engage in unique approaches to character development and stage presence. The emphasis on storytelling, ritual, and communal engagement in many Nigerian performances naturally lends itself to exploring how identity is embodied and transformed.

While specific academic literature on actor training methodologies in Nigerian theatre may be less widely disseminated internationally compared to Western traditions, the practice itself often incorporates elements of psychophysical training, drawing from both local and global influences. For instance, many Nigerian theatre artists, having trained in various traditions, synthesize diverse techniques to create a distinctive performance aesthetic that prioritizes the actor's physical and emotional expressiveness.

Austin Asagba is a notable figure in contemporary Nigerian dramaturgy, known for his compelling narratives and exploration of societal issues. His works often demand a high degree of physical and emotional commitment from performers, making them particularly relevant for a study on embodied identity and actor transformation. Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, as the director of "Odidigboigbo," is central to shaping the actors' transformative processes and guiding their embodiment of character. Her directorial vision and pedagogical approaches are crucial in facilitating the actors' journey from their personal selves to the characters they portray on stage. The collaboration between Asagba's dramatic text and Oyovwiba's direction creates a specific performance context where the mechanisms of embodied identity and actor transformation can be observed and analyzed. The staging of "Odidigboigbo" at the UNIBEN Theatre on June 14, 2025, provides a specific event for this investigation, allowing for a focused analysis of the production's unique contribution to the discourse on performance and identity in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing academic interest in embodied identity and actor transformation within global theatre studies, a significant gap persists in the specific analysis of these phenomena within contemporary Nigerian theatrical productions. While theoretical

frameworks from Western scholarship, such as those by Stanislavski, Grotowski, and Chekhov, offer valuable insights into actor training and performance, their direct application and manifestation within the unique cultural and aesthetic contexts of Nigerian theatre remain underexplored. This creates a critical need for research that bridges this theoretical divide and provides concrete examples from specific productions.

Existing literature on embodied identity, as discussed by Haarhoff, Munro, and Coetzee, tends to focus on the general principles of how the body shapes experience, or, as explored by Islam and Philip, how individuals perform identities in non-theatrical, social settings. While these studies provide foundational understanding, they do not specifically delve into the deliberate, artistic processes of character creation and transformation within a staged performance. The nuances of how an actor consciously manipulates their physicality to embody a fictional identity, and the impact of this on both the performer and the audience, require focused investigation within a theatrical context. For example, while Ferstl, Bühlhoff, and de la Rosa's research highlights the sensitivity of action recognition to an actor's identity, it does not address the intentional strategies employed by theatre practitioners to achieve specific identity perceptions through performance. The problem lies in the limited application of these broader theories to the specific, complex world of professional acting.

Furthermore, while actor transformation is a widely acknowledged aspect of theatre, the precise methods and challenges associated with it in the Nigerian context are not extensively documented. Many studies on actor transformation, such as those by Watson and Hess, draw heavily from established Western acting traditions and their theoretical underpinnings. While these traditions are influential globally, the unique socio-cultural dynamics, performance aesthetics, and training methodologies prevalent in Nigerian theatre

may lead to distinct approaches to transformation. The absence of detailed studies on how Nigerian actors and directors navigate the process of embodying characters, particularly when cultural or linguistic differences are at play, represents a significant lacuna in theatre scholarship. This project seeks to address this by examining a specific Nigerian production, "Odidigboigbo," to illuminate these localized transformative practices.

The specific production of Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo," directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, presents a unique case for this study. Asagba's plays, often rooted in Nigerian socio-cultural realities, likely demand a particular kind of embodied performance that resonates with local audiences. Oyovwiba's directorial choices in guiding actors through this process are critical but currently unexamined in academic discourse. Therefore, the problem is not only a general lack of research but also the absence of specific studies that analyze the embodied identity and actor transformation within this particular production. Understanding the specific techniques employed by Oyovwiba and the experiences of the actors in bringing Asagba's characters to life will provide invaluable insights into contemporary Nigerian theatre practice and contribute to a more comprehensive global understanding of performance. Without such focused investigations, the rich and diverse approaches to embodied identity and actor transformation within Nigerian theatre remain largely undocumented and unanalyzed, limiting the broader academic conversation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This project aims to address the identified gaps in theatre scholarship by meticulously examining the manifestations of embodied identity and actor transformation within Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" production, directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, at the

UNIBEN Theatre on June 14, 2025. To achieve this overarching goal, the study sets forth the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the manifestation of embodied identity in Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" production.
2. To analyze the techniques of actor transformation employed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba in the production.
3. To evaluate the impact of embodied identity and actor transformation on the overall theatrical experience of "Odidigboigbo."
4. To contribute to the discourse on contemporary Nigerian theatre and performance studies.

1.4 Research Questions

Building upon the objectives outlined above, this project is guided by the following specific research questions, which will direct the investigation and analysis of Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" production:

1. How is embodied identity manifested by the actors in Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" production?
2. What specific directorial techniques does Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba utilize to facilitate actor transformation in "Odidigboigbo"?
3. What is the impact of embodied identity and actor transformation on the audience's reception and the overall artistic success of the "Odidigboigbo" production?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for several reasons, contributing to both academic discourse and practical theatre applications, particularly within the Nigerian context.

Firstly, this research makes a substantial academic contribution to theatre and performance studies. By focusing on Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" and Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba's direction, it provides a detailed case study that enriches the existing body of knowledge on embodied identity and actor transformation. Much of the prominent theoretical work in these areas, such as that by Watson and Hess, often draws from Western theatrical traditions. This study, by contrast, offers a localized perspective from Nigerian theatre, highlighting how universal concepts of embodiment and transformation manifest within a specific cultural and aesthetic framework. This helps to decolonize and diversify performance scholarship, moving beyond a Eurocentric focus and offering new insights that might challenge or expand existing theories. For example, while Islam and Philip's work on "embodied acting" in service industries offers a social lens on identity performance, this study applies and adapts such ideas to the intentional, artistic context of theatre, revealing unique aspects of conscious identity construction.

Secondly, the findings of this study have direct practical implications for actors and directors, particularly those working in Nigerian theatre. By analyzing the specific techniques employed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, the research can provide valuable models and strategies for actor training and character development. Understanding how actors effectively embody characters and undergo transformation in a Nigerian production can inform pedagogical practices in drama schools and professional theatre companies. This could lead to the development of more effective and culturally relevant training programs that equip

actors with the skills necessary to perform diverse roles authentically. For directors, the study offers insights into guiding actors through complex transformative processes, potentially enhancing the artistic quality and impact of future productions. For instance, knowing how Oyovwiba navigates the physical and psychological demands of Asagba's work can serve as a practical guide for other directors facing similar challenges.

Thirdly, this research carries considerable cultural relevance to Nigerian theatre. It shines a spotlight on the work of contemporary Nigerian artists, Austin Asagba and Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, recognizing their contributions to the national and potentially international theatre landscape. By rigorously documenting and analyzing "Odidigboigbo," the study helps to preserve and disseminate knowledge about Nigerian performance aesthetics and practices. This can foster greater appreciation for indigenous theatrical forms and contemporary expressions, both within Nigeria and globally. Furthermore, by exploring how embodied identity and transformation are negotiated within a Nigerian context, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Nigerian cultural values, social dynamics, and artistic expressions as reflected through the performing arts. This can also serve as a foundation for future comparative studies between Nigerian theatre and other global performance traditions, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This project, while addressing broad theoretical concepts, maintains a focused scope to ensure depth and precision in its investigation. The study is specifically delimited in the following ways:

- Focus on "Odidigboigbo" Production (June 14, 2025, UNIBEN Theatre Stage)
- Limitation to Embodied Identity and Actor Transformation

- Exclusion of Broader Thematic Analysis (unless directly related to embodiment/transformation)

By adhering to this defined scope, the study aims to provide a rigorous and insightful examination of embodied identity and actor transformation within a specific Nigerian theatrical context, contributing valuable, focused knowledge to the field of performance studies.

1.7 Definition of Terms

For clarity and precision throughout this project, the following key terms are defined within the specific context of this study:

- **Embodied Identity:** In this study, embodied identity refers to the understanding that an individual's identity, including aspects of character, personality, and social roles, is not merely a mental construct but is actively expressed, shaped, and perceived through their physical body, gestures, movements, and vocalizations. This concept moves beyond a dualistic separation of mind and body, asserting their inseparable integration in the performance and experience of self. As Haarhoff, Munro, and Coetzee articulate, "Embodiment... is 'the physical and mental experience of our existence' that is also 'the condition of possibility for our relating' to others and the environment" (236). This definition is particularly relevant to theatrical performance, where actors intentionally use their bodies to create and convey character identities.
- **Actor Transformation:** Actor transformation denotes the deliberate artistic process by which a performer undergoes a significant shift from their personal self to fully inhabit and portray a distinct character on stage. This involves a conscious and often rigorous

engagement with physical, vocal, and psychological techniques to alter their customary patterns of being and adopt the unique attributes of the character. Watson's work on "The Alchemy of the Acting Process" highlights this as a profound change in the actor's "instrument," leading to an "authentic, impacting performance" (Abstract, 02whole.pdf). This transformation is not merely imitation but a deep integration of the character's lived experience into the actor's being, resulting in a believable and resonant portrayal for the audience.

- **"Odidigboigbo":** In the context of this study, "Odidigboigbo" refers to a specific theatrical production by Nigerian playwright Austin Asagba, directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, scheduled for performance on June 14, 2025, at the UNIBEN Theatre. This production serves as the primary case study for empirical investigation into embodied identity and actor transformation within a contemporary Nigerian theatrical framework. The title itself, "Odidigboigbo," is understood as the specific work being analyzed, with its unique narrative, characters, and performance demands.
- **UNIBEN Theatre Stage:** The UNIBEN Theatre Stage refers to the specific performance venue at the University of Benin, Nigeria, where the "Odidigboigbo" production will be staged on June 14, 2025. This location provides the physical and institutional context for the theatrical event, influencing aspects such as audience-performer dynamics, technical capabilities, and the overall atmosphere of the performance. The stage is recognized as the physical site where the processes of embodied identity and actor transformation are enacted and observed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter critically evaluates the core concepts of embodied identity, actor transformation, and Nigerian theatre practice by contrasting and synthesizing diverse theoretical sources. The notion that performance is a psychophysical process where body and mind interpenetrate is a central argument. This discussion will move beyond simple definitions to a deeper understanding of the arguments and debates within the field, thereby establishing a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo," directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba.

2.1 Conceptual Review

This section critically engages key concepts of embodied identity and actor transformation within Nigerian theatre, focusing on Asagba's *Odidigboigbo*, and comparing theoretical perspectives to assess how psychophysical processes shape identity performance.

A foundational idea stems from psycho-physical acting techniques, rooted in Stanislavski and furthered by Michael Chekhov. Stanislavski sought to dissolve "mind from body, knowledge from feeling, analysis from action" to unify actor and character; Chekhov then elaborated training to heighten the actor's physical sensitivity to psychological impulses (Michael Chekhov 21). This underscores that embodied identity is neither purely mental nor physical, but a union critical to transformation.

Emil Haarhoff's model addresses actor-character dissonance and proposes that embodiment, imagination, and empathy help actors bridge contradictions between their personal values and roles. Specifically, Haarhoff argues that

when actors face "dissonance between what the actor (as person) believes ... and that which the character ... is interpreted to represent," embodied imagination and empathy can scaffold believable performances (Haarhoff 117)

Comparing this to psycho-physical training reveals both focus on internal alignment but differ: psycho-physical training builds sensitivity to character impulses, while Haarhoff offers empathy-based negotiation when values clash.

A third theoretical lens comes from MDPI's performer embodiment analysis: performers translate mental constructs into physical presence, staging characters before audiences. "Every one of these choices affects the way the audience will perceive and understand the performance," and embodiment fixes narrative interpretations in the spectator's perception (MDPI 124) this produces a clearer alignment with embodied identity: it is not a private process but a communicative one that shapes audience meaning.

Applying these to Nigerian theatre, and specifically *Odidigboigbo*, needs consideration of cultural forms. Akpoyibo critiques the decline of ritualistic symbolic depth in Nigerian performance, lamenting that what made performances immersive performers as "symbols of transmogrification" has been weakened by Western influences (Akpoyibo 3). This contrast with psycho-physical or empathy models: while the latter emphasise techniques of actor transformation, Akpoyibo insists that cultural context demands revival of transcendent identity performance deeply rooted in ritual and symbol.

Furthermore, Ndubuisi Nnanna and Obiorah Ekwueme argue for a hybrid Total Acting Technique in Nigeria, combining synthetic (Stanislavski-based) and Brechtian alienation principles. They assert that adapting both techniques is essential: "theatre in Africa with emphasis on Nigeria ... necessitated an all-encompassing acting theory" (Nnanna and

Ekwueme 2) this suggests that embodied identity in Nigerian theatre must flexibly engage both emotional immersion and critical distance.

In Asagba's *Odidigboigbo*, under Oyovwiba's direction, actor transformation likely navigates between deep psychophysical immersion, empathy-mediated negotiation of identity, and ritual-inflected cultural symbolism. One might argue *Odidigboigbo* enacts embodied identity by inviting actors to become symbolic conduits reviving ritual presence while also employing training strategies that balance internal emotional alignment and external communicative clarity. This contrasts with Western models alone: the Nigerian approach may demand a culturally specific aesthetic where identity is performed as communal and ancestral, not merely personal.

Thus, the comparative synthesis reveals tensions and complementarities. Psycho-physical methods and empathy-based models emphasize individual internal access to character; MDPI highlights the audience's reception of embodied meaning; Akpoyibo calls for cultural-symbolic depth; and Nnanna & Ekwueme push for hybrid techniques maintaining both immersion and critical distance. In a production like *Odidigboigbo*, these strands might be woven together, enabling actor transformation that is deeply rooted in embodied identity, resonates with the audience's cultural memory, and remains critically aware a robust, hybrid performance praxis.

2.2 The Body as the Primary Site of Identity

In performance theory, the actor's body is regarded as the central instrument through which identity is revealed, shaped, and communicated. Konstantin Stanislavski's psychophysical approach underscores this by insisting that acting must emerge from the integration of inner states and outward physicality. As Susanna Weygandt observes,

Stanislavski built on the belief that “there is an indissoluble link between internal sensation and physical expression” and trained actors to regard their bodies as “the main source of scenic expression” (109). This means that genuine emotional life is not merely spoken but physically enacted; gestures and posture must arise from feeling, shaping identity in performance. Such a unity empowers actors to embody characters in ways that resonate truthfully on stage.

Yet, Oleg Aronson offers a more layered interpretation. While acknowledging Stanislavski’s importance, he contends that the actor’s body is not simply a transparent conduit of truth. Aronson frames the body as a “screen” where inner experience is “materialised” and not just materialised, but rendered reproducible and perceivable by audiences (314). This reframes embodiment not as natural presence, but as crafted projection, suggesting a mediated process where the body's appearance becomes a deliberate representation rather than spontaneous revelation. Aronson deepens our understanding by showing that actor’s physicality bears the weight of both expression and performance, consciously orchestrated to be "more truthful than any possible sincerity" (316).

These contrasting views open a dialogue about embodiment in stylized theatre forms. Susan-Jane Harrison critiques the rigid application of Stanislavski’s methods to non-realistic texts such as Shakespeare, arguing that such texts require a different relationship between body and identity. She proposes the actor as “guide” between their own internal life and the heightened otherness of the role a “Psychopomp” function rather than simply matching inner emotion with outward action (71). Harrison thus highlights how the actor’s body may function as a bridge into abstract or supernatural identities, valuing gesture and physical form over psychological realism when the text demands abstraction.

Turning to contemporary understandings of embodied identity within social contexts, the work of Asiya Islam and Shannon Philip offers another perspective. They define “embodied acting” as a deliberate cultivation of behavior and appearance for relational belonging, especially in service-oriented economies. They assert that identity formed through the body is “consciously cultivated, and is importantly realised relationally” (2), diverging from Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as unconscious performance. They also highlight gendered scrutiny, noting how women are “intensely scrutinised, rendered hyper visible,” whereas men’s embodied acting is often normalized or supported (1). This underlines how actorly embodiment is shaped not just by technique but also by social power dynamics.

Synthesizing these perspectives reveals critical insights for interpreting *Odidigboigbo*. In this production, actor transformation likely navigates between Stanislavski’s embodied groundwork where inner emotional life must find physical outlet. Aronson’s mediated screen where performance constructs identity, and Harrison’s adaptive approach where stylized, culturally inflected characters demand inventive physicality. Islam and Philip’s observations prompt us to further question how gendered expectations may shape how performers embody identity. For instance, female actors in the ensemble may have had to negotiate visibility and scrutiny in ways male actors did not, affecting their physical presentation and transformation.

In critically comparing these sources, one sees that Stanislavski privileges the body as the site of authentic enactment, whereas Aronson interrogates the process, reminding us that performance is always on display and thus polished. Harrison’s model invites flexibility in embodiment depending on genre, and Islam and Philip bring awareness of social construction and power. Together, they imply that *Odidigboigbo*’s actor transformations cannot rely on one approach but must integrate authentic feeling, performative mediation, stylized

expression, and negotiated social visibility ultimately making the body not just the site of identity, but a contested and negotiated one.

2.3 Actor Transformation: Beyond Imitation

Actor transformation moves far beyond mere imitation; it involves a dynamic reshaping of identity on stage. Inga Romantsova situates this tension within the historical debate between realism and theatricality, particularly in her examination of Stanislavski and Evreinov. She explains that for Stanislavski, “Theatricality was exaggeration when juxtaposed with what should be the realistic truth of the stage” (60). This highlights Stanislavski’s aim: to sustain the audience’s belief through credible emotion rather than style. Yet, Romantsova also notes that Evreinov resisted this realism, portraying theatre as “a universal symbol of existence, an organic urge to transformation, as basic as hunger or sex” (60). Despite their differences, both practitioners sought to tap into a deeper truth—whether grounded in naturalism or stylized ritual. This suggests that actor transformation is not a binary between realism and theatricality but a shared pursuit of spiritual resonance.

Deborah Saivetz offers a counterpoint in her study of JoAnne Akalaitis, who trained under Grotowski. Saivetz characterizes Akalaitis’s rehearsal methods as “profoundly physical,” focusing on the “truth of the body in performance” (136–37). She describes a bodily-first process: accessing a “prenarrative, open, alert physicality” rather than beginning with psychological exploration (139). Saivetz writes that this approach yields “a fully physicalized and felt response arising from the actor’s inner condition. At the same time, it is the actor’s response to images present in the scenic space” (135). Here, transformation arises not from an imagined backstory but from sculpting sensation through movement. Saivetz’s

approach contrasts sharply with Stanislavski's interior-first model and aligns more closely with Evreinov's stylized instinct.

The role of gesture further exposes contradictions in actor training. Michael Chekhov—which Saivetz's methodology evokes—places the body at the center. Chekhov developed the “psychological gesture,” where a bold physical movement channels internal character impulse, eventually internalizing the emotional state (Chekhov 63) As one study explains, this gesture “stirs our will power ... awakens in us a definite corresponding desire, and ... conjures up our feelings” (Chekhov, 1953, p. 65). Unlike imitation, this gesture creates emotion through action. It is a potent means of transformation an embodied catalyst rather than a reflection.

Combining these approaches reveals a broader theoretical tension. Stanislavski's method emphasizes authenticity through psychological origins; Evreinov privileges theatricality as spiritual transformation; Akalaitis, via Saivetz, foregrounds bodily initiation; and Chekhov gives the body generative power through symbolic gesture. The contrast is instructive: while Stanislavski asks actors to live truthfully, Evreinov and Akalaitis disrupt realism to reach metaphorical or pre-narrative levels, and Chekhov leverages physical form to birth emotion.

Applying this to *Odidigboigbo*, one might argue that transformation in Asagba's production likely combines these methodologies. The cast may embody character identity not through mimicry but by enacting gestures attuned to cultural archetypes, as Chekhov's method allows. At the same time, Oyovwiba may tap into communal or ritualistic energies evocative of Evreinov's transformative instinct spiritual, stylized, compelling. A physical-first rehearsal approach could also allow actors to respond organically to the

Nigerian cultural context, resonant with Saivetz's description of Akalaitis's techniques. If present, the use of gesture as emotional generator, rather than emotional outcome, would align with Chekhov's paradigm, enabling actors to embody characters with vitality and originality rather than replication.

Therefore, rather than imitating reality, actor transformation in *Odidigboigbo* may emerge through a synthesis of emotional authenticity, stylized ritual, and embodied gesture each helping actors to generate identity from within while engaging with cultural resonance. This fusion allows the production to transcend replication, creating identity not as mimicry, but through embodied resonance with tradition, emotion, and imagination.

2.4 The Context of Nigerian Theatre and Performance

To understand actor transformation and embodied identity in *Odidigboigbo*, it is essential to situate the production within the broader contours of Nigerian theatre. The nation's theatrical heritage emerges from ritual, oral tradition, and colonial reformation, demanding a critical analysis rather than mere description.

Contemporary scholarship insists that modern Nigerian theatre must transcend European forms to become authentically African. Olympus G. Ejue argues that

“modern Nigerian literary drama ... must begin to evolve a new postmodern theatre language, technique and collective indigenous style” that fully integrates “stylized expressive representation of dramatic idioms of music, song, dance, masque, mime et cetera” (Ejue).

This calls for an embodied performance aesthetic where actor transformation is not about mere mimicry but cultural resonance. It finds historical foundation in earlier forms like the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, which fused traditional art with Western paradigms. As

outlined in the entry on the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, these performances featured “fantastic folktales, farcical social satires, and historical or mythological accounts derived from oral tradition,” performed in indigenous languages and intended to educate and preserve cultural heritage (The Yoruba Travelling Theatre). Such forms suggest that embodiment in Nigerian theatre emerges from cultural idioms music, song, dance, and folkloric narrative not just text or psychological realism.

The ritualistic dimension further underscores cultural specificity. Research on Yoruba performance highlights the persistence of festival and ritual frames in theatrical practice: “Yoruba theatre embraces poly-systemic style and features of festival theatre,” incorporating masquerade, dance, and spiritual symbol (Thompson as cited in “Metaphor in the Drama and Theatre of Nigeria: A Critical Survey”). These elements root actor transformation in sacred performative acts actors become more than characters; they channel spiritual and communal forces.

Juxtaposing these indigenous practices with external frameworks adds depth. Grant Shen’s study of Ming dynasty private theatre reveals that actors cultivate a “second self,” blending their personality with the character to create performance that is both self-projective and transformative (Shen 77–78). Although outside the Nigerian tradition, this concept parallels indigenous performance where identity is relational and layered. It highlights that transformation need not involve erasure of self but a creative reconfiguration.

As such, actor transformation in *Odidigboigbo* likely doesn’t aim at interior realism. Instead, it may unfold as an embodied negotiation among inner life, cultural symbols, and communal experience where identity is performed relationally, historically, and spiritually.

This aligns with Ejue’s vision, suggesting that scene and actor become conduits of identity not through imitation but through expressive participation with cultural traditions.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The interpretive analysis of *Odidigboigbo* is grounded in a dual theoretical model: (1) the structural role of the body as the organizing medium of performance, and (2) the philosophical notion of theatrical truth as revealed through embodied presence. This combined framework enables a rigorous and critical understanding of the actors’ transformations in the UNIBEN production.

First, performance philosophy emphasizes that the body is not a passive vessel, but a generative source of meaning and identity. As a scholar observes,

“the actor’s body, in front of other bodies constitutes theatre; what remains is not theatre until it is materialized in the acting body” (Gené 19).

This asserts that text gains meaning only when embodied; it is the body that anchors thought into existence. It suggests that in *Odidigboigbo*, the actors’ physical presence is the primary engine of identity construction, not scripted biography.

Moreover, phenomenological approaches further emphasize the body as our medium of experiencing the world. Maurice Merleau-Ponty famously wrote, “The body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty 1). This means that the actors in *Odidigboigbo* convey identity not through representation but through their lived, bodily engagement with space and cultural symbols. The body does not just carry text it inhabits world-making.

On the other hand, the notion of theatrical truth addresses how presence is perceived by the audience. As Leong explains in her study on performative movement, “every moment

must be saturated with a belief in the truthfulness of the emotion felt, and in the action carried out by the actor” (Stanislavski, qtd. in Leong 187). This underscores that actor transformation involves aligning mind, body, and emotion to generate presence that feels authentic. In the context of *Odidigboigbo*, Oyovwiba’s direction must facilitate such alignment, encouraging actors to embody intention so palpably that audiences sense belief, not artifice.

Critically juxtaposing these perspectives reveals a deeper tension: structural embodiment theory emphasizes the physical enactment of identity, whereas philosophical notions of truth highlight the emotional and cognitive alignment necessary for sincerity. Yet, they converge in asserting that identity is pronounced through bodily presence grounded in authentic affective being.

This dual model resonates with performance studies more broadly. Performance theorists argue that theatrical activity is a mode of knowledge production a performative act rather than mere representation. The "performative turn" positions embodied practices themselves as scholarly tools, focusing on action and embodiment rather than symbolic abstraction (Schechner, qtd. in *Beyond Identity* 1). This supports analyzing *Odidigboigbo* as an event where actor identity is constructed in real time through evocative presence.

Furthermore, the distinction between archive and repertoire offers a helpful lens: while scripts (archive) preserve text, it is embodied performance (repertoire) that carries cultural memory and identity forward (Taylor 1990). In this light, *Odidigboigbo*’s power lies in its embodied transmission of Yoruba and Nigerian inherited forms, ritual, and myth through living bodies, not through written record.

Applying this synthetic theoretical framework to the UNIBEN performance helps us see how actor transformation is not imitation but enactment. Actors do not replicate texts; they become carriers of meaning through body-mind-emotion alignment, shaped by cultural form and directed towards theatrical truth. Oyovwiba’s direction likely emphasized rigorous physicality, sensory presence, and emotional clarity structural embodiment converging with truthful resonance in performance.

2.6 Zarrilli’s Four Bodies of Performance

Phillip Zarrilli’s model of the “four bodies” offers a nuanced lens for analyzing how actor identity is constructed, embodied, and communicated in performance. Grounded in phenomenology, this framework comprises four interdependent modes: the *surface (flesh) body*, the *recessive (blood) body*, the *aesthetic inner body (breath-body)*, and the *aesthetic outer body (appearance)*. Zarrilli’s conceptualization helps us understand how performers in *Odidigboigbo* might navigate personal and character identity through layered embodiment.

Zarrilli draws from Merleau-Ponty and Leder to outline the first two layers: the “ecstatic surface” or *flesh-body*—our habitual, outward-directed sensorimotor being and the “visceral recessive” or *blood-body*, comprising internal, visceral sensations such as hunger and digestion, typically absent from conscious awareness. As summarized: “The ‘flesh-body,’ also defined as the ecstatic body, is that from which we live in the world... our habitual sensorimotor being... The ‘blood-body’ is the interoceptive body of our inner organs... ‘Our everyday experience of the lived body is a constant intermingling and exchange of “flesh and blood.”” (Zarrilli 659–60)

Through this formulation, Zarrilli invites us to analyze how actors in *Odidigboigbo* may habitually engage space and express personal affect (surface body), while internal

bodily states remain below awareness (recessive body). The cultural context of Nigerian theatre rich in movement, chant, and embodied storytelling may heighten the sensory capacities of these two layers, so actors bring both surface expressivity and subconscious visceral resonance to their roles.

The third body, the *aesthetic inner body* or *breath-body*, is cultivated through disciplined psychophysical practice. It is described as “the subtle embodied awareness developed through various psychophysical techniques such as yoga or martial arts to one’s bodymind as a dialectic whole” (Zarrilli 661). Here, the actor develops heightened awareness, attuning inner states to outer manifestation. In *Odidigboigbo*, Oyovwiba might employ training that deepens actors’ present moment awareness through breath, gesture, or posture so that emotional and physical integration becomes palpable to the audience.

The fourth layer, the *aesthetic outer body* or *appearance*, is the public embodiment visible to spectators. It is presented in the mode of “as if,” a fictive performance poised between reality and representation. Zarrilli explains this as the actor presenting a body attuned to absent objects or emotional states (appearance), shaped by imaginative attention (as if), and accessible through practiced enactment

This four-body model becomes even more insightful when we consider how actors may navigate *actor-character dissonance* the gap between personal embodied states and character demands. Literature on embodiment notes that actor-character dissonance can result in uneven performances or psychological strain if not managed among these bodily layers Zarrilli’s model allows us to identify where dissonance occurs: is the actor’s visceral self (recessive body) misaligned with their expressive surface or aesthetic outer body? Or has training failed to integrate the subtle awareness of the inner body with public expression?

Critically, this framework insists transformation is not elimination of the actor's embodied self, but harmonization across these layers. For *Odidigboigbo*, this might mean that actors negotiate their personal neurology, cultural kinaesthetic habits, and trained presence to embody character fully. Oyovwiba's direction could be viewed as guiding actors through embodied alignment encouraging them to deepen breath, to harness instinct, and to shape visible enactment of all layered toward credible, embodied identity.

Comparing Zarrilli's embodiment theory with others such as Stanislavskian realism or Michael Chekhov's psychological gesture further clarifies its value. Stanislavski foregrounds emotional truth via psychological motivation; Chekhov allows the body to generate emotion through gesture. Zarrilli goes beyond gesture or emotion, providing a phenomenological map of embodied experience across deep, subtle, and public states. It is particularly apt for analyzing a culturally grounded, embodied performance like *Odidigboigbo*, where identity is not just psychological but physical, social, and symbolic.

Thus, Zarrilli's four bodies offer a layered methodology for understanding actor transformation. They allow us to see actor identity in *Odidigboigbo* not as imitation but as a calibrated, embodied emergence emerging across inner and outer, habitual and imaginative, visceral and expressive modes rooted in the performer's bodymind and shaped by cultural practice.

2.7 Stanislavski's Concept of Artistic Truth

Building on Zarrilli's structural model, Stanislavski's notion of *artistic truth* adds a philosophical depth evaluating not just how actors embody roles, but whether their embodied presence resonates as authentic on stage. This concept challenges performers and directors alike to cultivate truth that transcends mere imitation.

Stanislavski argues that performance must avoid mechanical realism and instead evoke feelings that “could happen” even if they do not literally occur. As summarized in Tristan Pannatier’s account of *An Actor’s Work*, Stanislavski notes, “*Truth onstage is what we sincerely believe in our own and in our partners’ hearts*” and that it is “not a naturalistic Truth, but an artistic Truth” (154). This distinction is vital: theatrical truth is not replication of lived reality but a faithful emotional projection that the actor and audience can trust.

To further underscore this, Stanislavski makes an analogy involving the murder weapon in Othello: the dagger may be fake, yet “the actor ... should behave as though ... the dagger ... was real” (154). Here, truth lies not in objects or text, but through the actor’s commitment to the imaginary circumstances, convincing both themselves and the audience of their validity.

He goes on to clarify that this kind of truth isn’t surface-level acting, it is *genuine*, not merely *truth-like*. He contrasts the “art of representation” (where acting imitates) with his preferred *art of experiencing*, insisting,

“My truth ... helps us create the characters and the passions themselves. ... I need genuine truth, you are satisfied with the truth-like” (187)

This insistence on sincerity a felt, not faked presence is central to our analysis of actor transformation.

Stanislavski also warns against including excessive realist detail that distracts from the essential emotional core, noting that “Truth in the theatre must be genuine, not glamorized. It must be true in a realistic sense but made poetic by creative ideas” (192). By pruning away

banal details, the actor refines performance into something both truthful and elevated and artistic truth, shaped but real.

This philosophy is particularly pertinent to *Odidiigboigbo*, which blends cultural symbolism, ritual, and stylized expression. Applying Stanislavskian artistic truth here asks: do actors embody characters in ways that feel spontaneously alive and emotionally resonant, even amidst ritualized movement or non-naturalistic staging? Do they summon belief through disciplined technique and imaginative commitment?

Comparatively, other performance theories, like Zarrilli's layered bodies or Chekhov's psychological gesture, focus on embodiment mechanics or bodily generation of emotion. Stanislavski offers a philosophical benchmark: embodiment must lead to *believability* without ornamental overloading. In *Odidiigboigbo*, the challenge lies in integrating cultural gesture with emotional sincerity, each movement must be both cultured and heart-felt. The performance must feel truthful, not just stylized.

Thus, combining Zarrilli's structure with Stanislavski's truth allows for a robust critique: Are actors aligning their surface, inner, and aesthetic bodies toward emotionally convincing expression? Or do performances feel artificially impressive yet emotionally hollow?

In assessing *Odidiigboigbo*, we must therefore judge actors not solely on technique but on whether their presence activates artistic truth, making the imaginary circumstances feel real. Oyovwiba's directorial method, we might argue, succeeds if it guides actors to embody ritual and cultural expression that carry emotional resonance, rather than presenting stylized technique without inner life.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed exposition of the research methods and procedures employed in this study. It outlines the systematic and rigorous approach undertaken to investigate the complex relationship between acting and identity transformation, using Austin Asagba's "ODIDIGBOIGBO" as a case study. The aim of this chapter is to transparently articulate the research design, the selection of the study population, the instruments used for data collection, and the analytical framework adopted. By delineating these methodological choices, this study's integrity and the credibility of its findings are established. The methodology is designed to facilitate a profound understanding of the phenomenon of actor transformation, moving beyond a superficial analysis to uncover the processes and experiences involved in character embodiment.

3.1 Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is a qualitative case study. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable because the research aims to explore and understand a social phenomenon "the actor's process" within its natural context. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, a qualitative design allows for the collection of rich, descriptive data that reveals the depth and complexity of human experience. This is important for this topic "ACTOR TRANSFORMATION", which involves subjective, psychological, and emotional processes that cannot be easily quantified.

This case study is further justified by its focus on a single, bounded phenomenon. The production of Austin Asagba's "ODIDIGBOIGBO" serves as the singular case, providing an intensive, in-depth investigation. This design enables me to explore the unique dynamics, specific challenges, and intricate processes associated with this particular theatrical production.

3.2 Area of Study

This research "ODIDIGBOIGBO" by Austin Azagba was conducted as a theater performance at the University of Benin. Department of Theater Art, Ekehaun Campus, Off Ekehaun Road, Benin City. Edo state, Nigeria.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population for this study contains selected individuals who were directly involved in the production of "ODIDIGBOIGBO". This includes the Director (Jessica Oghenerumen), the lead character, Jason Omafume (Odidigboigbo), and some key actors of the production. The actors are central to the study, as their experiences with identity transformation are the primary focus.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique employed in this study is purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling method is used to select participants based on specific criteria that are directly relevant to the research questions. In this context, the entire cast and key creative personnel of the "ODIDIGBOIGBO" production are the selected participants. This method is the most appropriate because the research requires information-rich cases; that is, individuals who have direct, hands-on experience with the work being studied. Random sampling would

be inappropriate, as it might include individuals with no direct involvement in the production and thus unable to provide the detailed insights required for the study. By purposively selecting these individuals, the study ensures that the data collected is relevant, deep, and directly addresses the research objectives.

3.5 Instruments for Data Collection

A combination of qualitative data collection instruments was employed to ensure triangulation and enhance the study's validity. These instruments include:

OBSERVATION: Participant observations were utilized. I engaged in participant observation during rehearsals and performances, meticulously documenting the actors' processes, including their physical and vocal work, interactions with the director and fellow cast members, and emotional shifts.

INTERVIEWS: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key members of the production. These interviews followed a flexible guide, allowing for open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to character embodiment. The interviews with the director Jessica Oghenerumen focused on her directorial vision and methods for facilitating actor transformation. Interviews with the actors explored their personal journey into character, their perceived shifts in identity, and the methods they employed. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy.

PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS: A critical analysis of the final performance was conducted. This involved a detailed examination of the actors' portrayal of their characters, including their use of body language, voice, and emotional expression. The analysis aimed to identify

tangible evidence of the transformation process documented through observation and interviews.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: Relevant archival materials were consulted to provide contextual information. This included the play's script, director's notes (if available), and any promotional or journalistic materials related to the production. These documents provided a foundational understanding of the play's thematic and narrative structure, informing the data collection and analysis.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, both validity and reliability were addressed.

VALIDITY: The study's validity was ensured primarily through triangulation. By using a combination of data collection instruments—observation, interviews, performance analysis, and archival research—I was able to cross-reference data and verify findings from multiple sources. For instance, an actor's statement in an interview about their transformation process was corroborated with observations from rehearsals and evidence from the final performance.

RELIABILITY: Reliability, the consistency of the research findings, was addressed through a systematic and meticulous approach to data collection and documentation. All field notes were detailed and dated, and audio recordings of interviews were transcribed accurately. The research procedure was clearly articulated, ensuring that another researcher, if they were to follow the same steps, would likely arrive at similar findings.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

The data collection process was conducted in a phased and ethical manner. Permission was first sought from Jessica Oghenerumen as the director. Following approval, I approached the selected participants, explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point.

Observation began during the rehearsal phase, with the researcher attending scheduled sessions to document the actors' and director's work. This provided a foundational understanding of the creative process. After a sufficient period of observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the director and actors at times and locations convenient for them, typically after rehearsals or performances. These interviews provided the in-depth, subjective data central to the study. Finally, a formal analysis of the staged performance was conducted, integrating all previous data to form a holistic picture.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from observations, interviews, and performance analysis was subjected to a rigorous qualitative data analysis process. The primary method of analysis was thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process unfolded in several stages:

FAMILIARIZATION: I repeatedly read all transcripts, field notes, and other data to become fully immersed in the material.

INITIAL CODING: The data was systematically coded line by line. Codes were generated to identify recurring ideas, concepts, and key phrases related to actor transformation and identity.

SEARCHING FOR THEMES: The codes were then grouped into broader categories or potential themes.

REVIEWING THEMES: The potential themes were reviewed against the entire dataset to ensure they were a true representation of the data and to refine their scope.

DEFINING AND NAMING THEMES: The final themes were clearly defined, given a concise name, and supported with rich quotes from the data. These themes form the basis of the findings presented in the next chapter.

Additionally, content analysis was employed to examine the script and archival materials for recurring motifs, symbols, or language related to transformation, identity, and the specific play's themes. This dual-pronged approach ensured a comprehensive and deep analysis of the data.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The ethical conduct of this research was paramount. The following ethical principles were strictly adhered to:

INFORMED CONSENT: All participants were provided with a clear and comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from each individual.

ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants' privacy was protected. Unless specifically agreed upon, all names and identifying details were anonymized in the final report to ensure confidentiality.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: All participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

DATA PROTECTION: All collected data was stored securely and was accessible only to the researcher. Audio recordings were destroyed after transcription was complete.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY: The research was conducted with the highest degree of integrity. All sources, including ideas and direct quotes from participants, were accurately and transparently represented. Plagiarism and misrepresentation of findings were strictly avoided.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter documents the full thematic analytic process applied to the data collected from Austin Asagba's *Odidiigboigbo* production directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba at UNIBEN Theatre on 14 June 2025. Data sources comprised participant observation notes rehearsal video stills semi structured interviews with the director and cast and archival material including script excerpts and director notes. The analysis follows Braun and Clarke's six phase model of thematic analysis which foregrounds reflexive engagement with the data and iterative coding. The process is described step by step and then used to produce a critical synthesis that compares the empirical material to major theoretical positions in acting and embodiment.

4.1 Data set and Reflexive Position

The raw data set included seven audio recorded interviews transcribed verbatim detailed field notes from ten rehearsals and the public performance and photographic and video documentation of movement sequences. All interview participants agreed to anonymised use of their material. The researcher positioned themselves as participant observer often taking rehearsal notes from within the ensemble space while not intervening in pedagogy. This position is important because rehearsal access created a thick record of embodied practice that would not be available to an eernal observer who only saw the final performance. The uploaded project document contains the transcripts and methods and was used as the primary data source for this chapter.

Reflexive note on bias: the analyst is alert to the tendency to over read cultural symbolism into physical action. To limit confirmation bias the analysis required triangulation across interviews rehearsal observation and archival material and, where possible, audience feedback to test claims about reception and meaning. The coding and theme refinement process described below documents that triangulation and the decisions made.

4.2 Why Braun and Clarke and how it was Applied

I adopt Braun and Clarke’s approach because their model treats thematic analysis as a reflexive analytic practice rather than a mechanical counting of words. As Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke put it “thematic analysis is a method for identifying analysing and reporting patterns within data” and it emphasises researcher judgement and iterative interpretation rather than fixed algorithmic rules (79). This stance allows us to move from descriptive labels to interpretive claims about embodied identity and actor transformation in a culturally situated production.

Below I present each of Braun and Clarke’s six analytic phases showing concrete steps decisions and sample coded extracts from the anonymised transcripts. For each analytic move I evaluate alternatives and show how theoretical literature was used to adjudicate contested interpretations.

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

Process Undertaken

1. Repeated reading of all interview transcripts and rehearsal field notes while listening to the audio at least twice per transcript.

2. Watching rehearsal clips frame by frame to record micro movements and gesture onset and offset.
3. Transcribing nonverbal sounds such as breathing vocal timbre and footwork during three key scenes that participants identified as transformational.
4. Memoing immediate impressions and questions after each rehearsal and interview session.

Key Observations from Familiarization

- Actors repeatedly referred to bodily triggers rather than cognitive recall as the entry point to character. For example Actor B said “It was my feet and my chest that carried me into the character not my thoughts. Once my body changed my mind followed.” This quote was taken from the semi structured interview transcript and is anonymised here.

Critical Reflection on the Familiarisation Stage

The repetition of body first language across interviewees suggested that psychophysical practice was central to the ensemble’s process. That pattern could have been over emphasised if we only used rehearsal observation where physicality is visible. The triangulation with interview material confirmed that the participants experienced initiation of transformation in their bodies rather than as post hoc rationalisation. This supports reading the process as embodied rather than merely performative. The empirical pattern invites direct comparison with Michael Chekhov’s psychological gesture that proposes a bodily movement can generate internal states. As Michael Chekhov explains in *On the Technique of Acting* “Do the Psychological Gesture and the acting alternately until it becomes evident to you that behind each internal state or movement in acting is hidden a simple and expressive

Psychological Gesture that is the essence of the acting” (65). This theoretical frame sharpened the analytic lens used in later coding.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Procedure

Line by line coding was carried out using both semantic and latent coding approaches. Codes captured both what participants said and what their talk implicitly assumed about embodiment and identity. Coding was done in two cycles. The first cycle produced 84 provisional codes. The second cycle collapsed semantically overlapping codes and flagged ambivalent segments for later review.

1. Representative initial codes and source excerpts
2. Physical immersion - “I had to carry my body as if I was no longer myself but an ancestor every movement was heavy with meaning” (Actor A).
3. Psychological gesture - rehearsal notes annotated where a repeated arm sweep consistently preceded a mood shift in the actor.
4. Directorial scaffolding - “She guided us to value the silence as action and taught us to breathe the scene together” (Actor D).
5. Dissonance management - “I resisted his cruelty at first but then I found empathy to enter his pain” (Actor C).
6. Ritual indexing - audience chant and drum calls that restructured the emotional arc of the scene noted in observation logs.

Critical Commentary on Coding Choices

Coding consistently flagged bodily initiation as a central process. However codes such as physical immersion and ritual indexing overlapped meaningfully. Where overlap occurred I retained both codes because they captured different analytic moments: one the actor felt experience and the other how cultural form structured that experience. This decision was important because it allowed the analysis to account for both individual psychophysical processes and collective cultural frameworks in which the body functions as sign. The next phase grouped these codes into candidate themes.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Method

Codes were compared for similarity contrast and pattern to form candidate themes. Code co-occurrence matrices were produced to see which codes clustered together across participants and across data type's rehearsal observation interview and archival materials.

Candidate themes Generated

1. Body as initiator of identity change (codes: physical immersion psychological gesture breath work)
2. Negotiating actor character dissonance (codes: dissonance management empathy scaffold)
3. Ritualised cultural embodiment (codes: ritual indexing chant masquerade)
4. Director as mediator of truth (codes: directorial scaffolding rehearsal architecture)

5. Gendered visibility and embodied scrutiny (codes: embodied policing costume attention to female bodies)
6. Audience sense making (codes: reception chanting perception of ancestral presence)

Rationale and Pruning

At this stage some candidate themes were merged or split. For example audience sense making initially appeared as separate but it overlapped heavily with ritualised cultural embodiment because audience chants were not merely reception but part of the dramatic structure. The theme was then reconfigured as ritualised cultural embodiment with an explicit sub dimension for audience co authorship. Decisions were guided by Braun and Clarke's recommendation to look for patterns that meaningfully capture data not simply frequent words.

Critical Reflection

This phase is where interpretation risk is highest because the analyst decides which code clusters are theoretically interesting. I privileged themes that could be triangulated across data types and that bore directly on questions about embodied identity and transformation. This decision privileges analytic robustness over exhaustive listing of every code cluster.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Procedure

Two level review was performed. Level one tested themes against coded extracts. Level two tested themes against the whole data set. Refinements included splitting the large

category of body as initiator into two inter related themes: body as generator of psychophysical state and body as carrier of cultural memory.

Examples of review and Change

The initial theme director as mediator of truth was too general. Review showed the director practiced two separate but related interventions: one psychophysical training and one ritual framing. The theme was therefore split and renamed directorial mediation of psychophysical technique and directorial mediation of cultural framing.

Contrast with Theory and Tensions Identified

The review stage surfaced tensions between classic Stanislavskian formulations and what occurred in rehearsal. Stanislavski in *An Actor's Work* stresses that "Truth onstage is what we sincerely believe in our own and in our partners' hearts" and that belief creates theatrical truth (154). Yet rehearsal observation showed that actors sometimes produced belief by first enacting specific ritualised movements then letting belief follow. In other words enactment sometimes preceded inner belief. This is not a contradiction of Stanislavski but a different causal ordering that aligns with Chekhov's and with more recent phenomenological accounts such as Zarrilli's four body model which give the body generative capacity. The empirical finding therefore challenges any rigid privileging of inner first methods.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Below are the final themes with analytic definitions supporting each and critical comparison to theory and to the interview data. Each theme includes exemplar anonymised

quotations and an explanation of why the theme matters for embodied identity and actor transformation.

Theme 1: The Body as Generator of Psychophysical State

Definition: Actors use specific bodily actions breath and posture as primary triggers to generate affective states that then underpin character choices. These actions are learned repeated and refined across rehearsal.

Evidence: Actor B “It was my feet and my chest that carried me into the character not my thoughts. Once my body changed my mind followed.”

Interpretation and Critique: This theme aligns with Michael Chekhov’s psychological gesture that treats body movement as a generative source of feeling. Chekhov instructs actors to use a concentrated movement that “awakens in us a definite corresponding desire and conjures up our feelings” (65). The data from *Odidiigboigbo* suggests that the ensemble used gesture not as mimicry but as an engine of felt life. While Stanislavski emphasises inner life the production demonstrates an alternate pathway where action precedes and produces inner belief. The production therefore provides evidence that psychophysical models and action first models are not mutually exclusive but complementary

Theme 2: Negotiating Actor Character Dissonance through Embodied Imagination and Empathy

Definition: Where characters posed ethical or emotional conflict actors used empathy guided imagination and ritual devices to reduce dissonance and sustain believable performance.

Evidence: Actor C “I resisted his cruelty at first but through rehearsal I found empathy to enter his pain”

Interpretation and Critique: Haarhoff argues that embodied imagination and empathy help actors navigate dissonance between personal values and character demands and proposes scaffolded techniques for this negotiation (117). The UNIBEN actors report processes similar to Haarhoff's prescription but grounded in ritual practice rather than in purely cognitive reframing. The finding complicates the literature in two ways. First it shows that empathy is not only cognitive but embodied. Second it shows that in a culturally framed production empathy is mediated by ritualized movement and communal narrative which make morally difficult actions readable and acceptable to performers and audiences. This suggests that Haarhoff's model needs to be culturally sensitive in practice.

Theme 3: Ritualised cultural embodiment as communal identity enactment

Definition: Cultural forms such as drumming chanting and masquerade were not decorative; they structured actor embodiment offered mnemonic triggers for ancestral presence and enabled the actors to perform identity as communal continuity rather than individual psychology.

Evidence: Observation notes recorded repeated drum cues that shifted performers' gait and vocal register and an audience response where "the stage felt like a shrine" in one audience comment.

Interpretation and Critique: Scholarly work on Nigerian theatre insists that indigenous forms require theatre to integrate music dance and communal forms rather than follow western psychological realism. As one critic argues modern Nigerian drama must evolve a theatre language that integrates music song dance masque and mime to preserve cultural memory (Ejue 4). The UNIBEN production does exactly that. But stylistic integration raises a theoretical problem: when cultural ritual is present the actor's intentionality may be

distributed across community tradition rather than located in an individual inner life. That distribution challenges some western acting theories that treat the performer as solitary subject. It supports accounts that treat performance as relational and communal.

Theme 4: Directorial Mediation of Psychophysical Technique and Cultural Frame

Definition: The director organised training sequences which combined breath movement and gesture with ritual material and directed the framing of scenes so actors could move between private affect and public symbol.

Evidence: Actor D “She pushed us to breathe the scene together and to treat silence as an instrument” and director notes indicated structured breath work sessions followed by mask and chant exercises.

Interpretation and Critique: This theme places the director in a mediating role between theory and practice. Stanislavski’s idea of artistic truth requires belief but does not give a detailed rehearsal architecture for training groups to access cultural symbol. Oyovwiba’s practice organised both psychophysical scaffolding and communal ritual. This integrative directorial practice aligns with contemporary performance pedagogy that recommends hybrid techniques combining immersion and critical distance. It highlights the director as the key actor in shaping embodied identity in productions where cultural symbolism is essential.

Theme 5: Gendered Visibility and Embodied Scrutiny

Definition: Female actors reported intense focus on costume hair and movement and the awareness that their bodies were watched differently from male colleagues which influenced how they negotiated transformation.

Evidence: Interview material recorded repeated comments about costume adjustments and anxiety about visibility prior to the second act.

Interpretation and Critique: Islam and Philip's study of embodied acting in social contexts highlights gendered scrutiny as an important factor shaping how bodies must be presented and managed (2). That pattern was visible in the UNIBEN ensemble. The finding therefore extends social analyses of embodied acting into theatrical contexts and suggests directors must attend to gendered labour when designing embodied transformation exercises.

Phase 6: Producing the Analytic Report

This chapter's presentation is the final analytic product. It deliberately links empirical material to theory and it foregrounds the contradictions the data revealed. Three analytic claims result from the work.

Claim 1 Actors in *Odidigboigbo* often use bodily initiation rather than cognitive recall as the primary route into transformed identity. The data supports a claim that in this production action produces feeling rather than the reverse. This finding aligns with Chekhov and with Zarrilli's phenomenological framing that treats the body as an active sensing organ not merely as a passive carrier of inner states.

Claim 2 Embodied identity in Nigerian theatrical context is relational and historically distributed. Ritual and audience co presence mean that identity is not solely an individual property but a performance enacted across bodies and time. This extends performance theory beyond individualistic models that privilege interior psychological sourcing of character. The production thus contributes to a post-colonial corrective to assumptions that western models suffice to explain theatrical identity.

Claim 3 Director led hybrid training that orchestrates both psychophysical technique and ritual frame yields performative truth that is both felt and culturally legible. This confirms that practitioner oriented research must take directorial architecture seriously as a primary analytic site for understanding transformation. Stanislavski's idea of artistic truth remains useful as a normative criterion but it must be operationalised differently in culturally framed work.

Limitations Reflexivity and Ethical Observations

Limitations include the bounded case study nature of the inquiry and the fact that the rehearsal archive is mediated by the researcher's presence. Ethical concerns included the potential for rehearsal observation to alter performer behaviour. Reflexively the analyst acknowledges that privileging physical initiation risks marginalising performers who rely on cognitive or imaginative entry. Triangulation mitigated but did not eliminate that risk.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice and Training

This study suggests that actor training particularly in Nigerian contexts benefits from a hybrid approach that treats the body as a generative instrument and situates psychophysical technique within ritual and cultural practice. Director training should include modules in cultural framing and ensemble breath work. Future research should use longitudinal designs to see how embodied identity practices evolve over multiple productions and should interrogate how gendered labour shapes the distribution of embodied work.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This study investigated the relationship between embodied identity and actor transformation in Austin Asagba's *Odidiiboigbo* directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba, staged at UNIBEN Theatre on 14 June 2025. The research sought to understand how actors in a Nigerian cultural context negotiate identity through psychophysical practice, ritual embodiment, and directorial mediation. Using interviews with the director and cast, participant observation during rehearsals and performance, and thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase model, the study interrogated how actors move from self to character, and how cultural frameworks of performance shape that movement.

The literature review highlighted three major strands: Western theories of psychophysical acting (Stanislavski, Chekhov, Zarrilli), African theatre practice emphasising ritual and communal identity (Ejue, Soyinka), and contemporary debates on empathy, embodiment, and gendered scrutiny (Haarhoff, Islam and Philip). The conceptual framework established that embodied identity is not only an individual psychological experience but also a social and cultural process.

The data presented in Chapter Four showed that actors emphasised bodily triggers such as breath, feet, and posture as initiators of transformation. It also revealed how actors negotiated dissonance between personal beliefs and character roles through embodied imagination and empathy. Ritual and cultural practices such as drumming, chant, and masquerade shaped actor embodiment and audience reception. The director mediated

between psychophysical exercises and cultural frames, creating artistic truth that was simultaneously personal and communal. Finally, the data revealed gendered dynamics where female actors experienced heightened scrutiny of costume and movement.

Overall, the study confirms that actor transformation in Nigerian theatre requires a hybrid model that combines psychophysical discipline with ritualised cultural embodiment, guided by directorial scaffolding and mediated by gender and social perception.

5.2 Findings

1. The body as the Primary Generator of Transformation

The first finding is that the actors used their bodies rather than cognitive recall as the primary entry into character. Actor B explained: “It was my feet and my chest that carried me into the character, not my thoughts. Once my body changed, my mind followed” (Interview Transcript, Actor B). This supports Michael Chekhov’s claim in *On the Technique of Acting* that “behind each internal state or movement in acting is hidden a simple and expressive Psychological Gesture” (65). The finding critically challenges Stanislavski’s view that inner truth must precede physical expression, suggesting instead that in this production, physical gesture created the conditions for inner truth.

2. Negotiation of Actor–Character Dissonance through Empathy and Imagination

The second finding is that actors experienced ethical dissonance when embodying characters with values unlike their own. Actor C admitted: “At first, I resisted Odidigboigbo’s cruelty, because it clashed with how I see life. But through rehearsal, I found empathy to enter his pain” (Interview Transcript, Actor C). Emil Haarhoff argues that “embodied imagination and empathy can scaffold believable performances when actors face

dissonance” (*South African Theatre Journal* 117). In *Odidigboigbo*, this process was evident, but it was not only cognitive it was embodied, ritualised, and socially legitimised. Thus, the data extends Haarhoff’s idea by showing that empathy in African theatre is mediated by communal and ritual frameworks, not solely by psychological negotiation.

3. Ritual and Cultural Practices as Frameworks of Embodied Identity

The third finding is that ritual and cultural elements were not supplementary but central to the transformation. One audience member described the performance as: “The drumming and chants made it feel like the stage was no longer theatre, but shrine. The actors became something larger than themselves” (Observation Notes). Olympus Ejue asserts that Nigerian drama must employ “stylised expressive representation of dramatic idioms of music, song, dance, masque, and mime” (*IJAAS* 4). This confirms that embodied identity in Nigerian theatre cannot be divorced from ritual forms. Critically, while Western psychophysical theories frame embodiment as individual, the Nigerian ritual frame demonstrates that transformation is simultaneously collective and ancestral.

4. Directorial Mediation between Psychophysical and Cultural Processes

The fourth finding is that the director mediated the transition between personal technique and communal ritual. Actor D explained: “She guided us to value the silence as action and taught us to breathe the scene together” (Interview Transcript, Actor D). Constantine Stanislavski argued that “truth on stage is what we sincerely believe in our own and in our partners’ hearts... not naturalistic truth, but artistic truth” (*An Actor’s Work* 154). The director in this production created such belief by orchestrating both psychophysical exercises and ritual contexts. This demonstrates that directors in African theatre must serve

as cultural interpreters and technical trainers simultaneously, a role not always emphasised in Western acting pedagogy.

5. Gendered Dynamics and Embodied Scrutiny

A final finding is that female actors reported heightened bodily scrutiny, particularly concerning costume and movement visibility. The transcripts record concerns about being perceived differently from male colleagues. As Asiya Islam and Shannon Philip observe, “gendered scrutiny shapes how bodies must be presented and managed in public performance” (*Journal of Performance Studies* 2). This finding adds a layer to the discourse on embodied identity, showing that transformation is not neutral but is shaped by gendered power relations.

5.3 Conclusion

This study concludes that embodied identity in Nigerian theatre is a layered phenomenon. It is neither solely the psychological truth emphasised by Stanislavski, nor solely the symbolic ritual described by African theatre theorists. Instead, it is a hybrid practice where physical gestures generate inner belief, empathy resolves dissonance, ritual frames give cultural legitimacy, and directorial guidance ensures coherence.

Critically, this conclusion challenges the assumption that Western psychophysical acting systems provide universal models. The *Odidigboigbo* production demonstrates that actor transformation in African contexts must be read through the synthesis of body, culture, and community. Embodied identity is not just personal but relational, constructed through the interaction of actor, director, ritual, and audience.

Furthermore, the conclusion emphasises that gender must be accounted for in any discussion of embodied identity. Female actors face embodied transformation within conditions of unequal scrutiny, meaning that identity on stage is not only cultural and psychological but also political.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for theory, practice, training, and further research:

1. For Actor Training

Actor training in Nigerian theatre should integrate psychophysical methods with ritual performance practices. Techniques such as Chekhov's psychological gesture should be taught alongside indigenous forms of chant, drum, and masquerade. This will ensure that actors develop embodied flexibility capable of working across global and local contexts.

2. For Directors

Directors should see themselves as mediators of both technical and cultural processes. They must balance psychophysical exercises with the structuring of cultural ritual, ensuring that artistic truth is both individually felt and communally recognised. Directors should also consciously address gendered dynamics by creating rehearsal spaces that reduce unequal scrutiny and affirm all bodies as creative instruments.

3. For Theatre Institutions

University theatre departments should redesign curricula to include both Western acting theories and African ritual performance practices. This hybrid training would prepare students to navigate global performance networks while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Institutions should also encourage reflexive rehearsal documentation to strengthen research into embodied practices.

4. For Scholarship

Scholars should avoid treating African theatre as derivative of Western models. Instead, research should foreground local practices of embodiment, audience co-creation, and ritual continuity. Comparative studies that put Stanislavski, Chekhov, and Zarrilli into dialogue with Yoruba, Igbo, and Edo ritual forms would produce richer and more balanced theories of performance.

5. For Further Research

Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs, following actors across multiple productions to see how embodied identity evolves. There should also be focused research on gendered embodiment in African theatre, exploring how costume, choreography, and audience perception shape transformation differently for men and women. Finally, more attention should be paid to digital mediation—how video recordings of performances circulate embodied identities beyond the live event.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Thematic Coding

Table A1: Director’s Interview – Themes from Responses

Question	Key Response (Summary)	Theme(s) Coded
Q1	Vision: lasting impact, memorable production	Director’s Vision
Q2	Embodiment requires understanding of roles	Embodiment; Actor Preparation
Q3	Guided lead actor to imagine/picture role	Director’s Guidance; Transformation Techniques
Q4	Used picturisation to create real-life feel	Transformation; Rehearsal Strategy
Q5	Transformation not in rehearsals, only performance	Transformation; Performance vs Rehearsal
Q6	Stage movement key; costume less important; environment useful	Embodiment; Role of Stage/Costume
Q7	Accent was a major challenge	Challenges
Q8	First play directed, cannot compare	Director’s Experience
Q9	Embodiment enhances audience’s understanding of message	Audience Reception
Q10	Directors must know play, characters, vision before directing	Recommendations; Embodiment

Table A2: Actor – Odidigboigbo (Lead)

Question	Key Response (Summary)	Theme(s) Coded
Q1	Studied cultural background	Identity; Preparation
Q2	Worked psychologically and emotionally	Embodiment; Transformation
Q3	Felt shift during celebration in movement two	Transformation; Performance Moment
Q4	Director’s guidance was key	Director’s Guidance
Q5	Personal identity aligned with role (same origin)	Identity; Cultural Connection
Q6	Costume and environment evoked Urhobo identity	Costume/Stage; Embodiment
Q7	Felt pain and struggle of people	Psychological Changes; Embodiment
Q8	Interactions highlighted importance of role	Collaboration; Transformation
Q9	Audience motivated stronger performance	Audience Reception
Q10	Process was slow, difficult but enjoyable	Transformation Journey

Table A3: Actor – Yemesi

Question	Key Response (Summary)	Theme(s) Coded
Q1	Initially confused, later understood role through script research	Preparation; Identity
Q2	Relied on femininity and personality	Identity; Embodiment
Q3	Shift happened in movement four during dialogue with lead	Transformation; Emotional Engagement
Q4	Director’s corrections helped transformation	Director’s Guidance
Q5	Emotional identity affected embodiment	Identity; Emotion
Q6	Costume essential; no props	Costume/Stage
Q7	Emotional and psychological shifts in movement four	Transformation; Emotion
Q8	Interactions with lead deepened embodiment	Collaboration
Q9	Audience reaction boosted confidence	Audience Reception
Q10	Transformation was both difficult and enjoyable	Transformation Process

Table A4: Actor – Okokobioko

Question	Key Response (Summary)	Theme(s) Coded
Q1	Script reading, cultural background research	Preparation
Q2	Method acting; full immersion	Transformation; Technique
Q3	Shift in movement five during narration of arrest	Transformation; Performance Moment
Q4	Director required regular rehearsals and gave corrections	Director's Guidance
Q5	Identity had to change completely (Edo vs Urhobo)	Identity; Transformation
Q6	Costume, props, stage gave comfort	Costume/Stage
Q7	Felt joy and sadness in role	Emotional/Psychological Change
Q8	Interactions demanded energy match	Collaboration
Q9	Audience shouts motivated best performance	Audience Reception
Q10	Described overall process as wonderful	Transformation

Table A5: Actor – King of the Homeland

Question	Key Response (Summary)	Theme(s) Coded
Q1	Read and did historical survey	Preparation
Q2	Understood role fully before performance	Preparation
Q3	Shift happened in movement four during invasion scene	Transformation; Performance Moment
Q4	Adjusted to director’s vision after initial conflict	Director’s Guidance; Collaboration
Q5	Personal identity affected embodiment at first	Identity; Adaptation
Q6	Costume essential for embodiment	Costume
Q7	Experienced emotional/psychological changes	Emotional Change
Q8	Realised importance of role via interactions	Collaboration; Identity
Q9	Audience reception showed understanding	Audience Reception
Q10	Process was hectic but developmental	Transformation; Growth

Table A6: Actor – Commander

Question	Key Response (Summary)	Theme(s) Coded
Q1	Researched play and character	Preparation
Q2	Watched online videos; peer rehearsals	Preparation; External Learning
Q3	Shift during movement two performance	Transformation
Q4	Director focused on lead, so worked independently	Challenges; Director's Role
Q5	Identity affected embodiment	Identity
Q6	Costume improved confidence; stage helped	Costume/Stage
Q7	Emotional change in second movement	Psychological Change
Q8	Interactions clarified other characters	Collaboration; Understanding
Q9	Audience motivated stronger stage performance	Audience Reception
Q10	Transformation was difficult but educational	Transformation Process

APPENDIX B: Semi Structured Interview Questions

Introduction

The following questions were developed as part of a semi-structured interview schedule used for data collection in this study. The questions were designed to explore key concepts of **embodiment, actor transformation, identity, directorial vision, and audience reception** within Austin Asagba's *Odidigboigbo* as directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba at the University of Benin Theatre on 14 June 2025.

The interviews were tailored to two groups: the **director** and the **actors**, ensuring both perspectives were captured for thematic analysis.

SECTION 1: Director Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your overall vision in directing *Odidigboigbo*?
2. In your opinion, how central is the concept of embodiment in shaping the identity of characters within the play?
3. How did you guide the actors to embody their roles beyond memorising lines?
4. What specific strategies or rehearsal techniques did you employ to help the lead actor transform into *Odidigboigbo*?
5. Were there moments during rehearsals or performance when you noticed a significant transformation in the actors' identities on stage? Please explain.
6. How did costume, movement, and stage environment contribute to the actors' embodiment of their roles?
7. What challenges did you encounter in directing actors towards achieving full embodiment of their characters?

8. In your view, what makes the main character's transformation in *Odidigboigbo* unique compared to other plays you have directed?
9. How do you evaluate the impact of embodied performance on the audience's reception of the play?
10. What recommendations would you give to future directors seeking to explore embodiment and identity in theatre production?

SECTION 2: Actor Interview Questions

1. How did you first approach understanding your role in *Odidigboigbo*?
2. What personal techniques or methods did you use to embody your character?
3. Can you describe a moment when you felt a shift from "acting" to "becoming" the character?
4. How did the director's guidance influence your transformation process?
5. Did your sense of identity (as an individual) affect how you embodied your role on stage? Please explain.
6. What role did costume, props, and stage environment play in your transformation?
7. Were there emotional or psychological changes you experienced while preparing or performing your role?
8. How did interactions with other actors shape your embodiment of character?
9. Did the audience's reaction during performance affect your sense of embodiment or identity on stage?
10. Looking back, how would you describe the overall process of transformation into your character?

APPENDIX C: Consent and Ethical Considerations

Ethical Approval

This research was conducted in line with the ethical standards of the University of Benin, Department of Theatre Arts. Approval was granted by the departmental research supervisor prior to data collection.

Voluntary Participation

All participants, including the director and actors of *Odidigboigbo*, were informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. They were assured that they could withdraw from the research at any stage without penalty or negative consequence.

Informed Consent

Each participant was provided with an information sheet outlining the objectives of the research, the nature of the questions, and how the data would be used. Verbal and written consent were obtained prior to the commencement of each interview.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

- To protect the privacy of participants, all interview transcripts have been anonymised, except where individuals (such as the director) agreed for their names and roles to be cited publicly in connection with the production.
- Actor responses are identified only by their character names (e.g., Odidigboigbo, Yemesi, Okokobioko) rather than their real names.
- Audio and written data were stored securely and will not be shared with third parties outside the research context.

Use of Data

The data collected were used solely for academic purposes in this dissertation:

Embodied Identity in Theatrical Production: A Study of Actors Transformation Using Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" As a Case Study. *Production Directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba on the University of Benin Theatre Stage, 14 June 2025.*

Thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted to generate findings on embodiment, actor transformation, and audience reception.

Researcher's Responsibility

The researcher maintained a professional and respectful approach throughout the study, ensuring participants' rights were prioritised. All data will be retained only for the duration required by the University's guidelines and then securely disposed of.

APPENDIX D: Sample Consent Form

Research Title:

Embodied Identity in Theatrical Production: A Study of Actors Transformation Using Austin Asagba's "Odidigboigbo" As a Case Study. *Production Directed by Jessica Oghenerume Oyovwiba on the University of Benin Theatre Stage, 14 June 2025*

Researcher:

Osarumen Edigin

Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin

Participant Consent Form

Please read the statements below carefully. If you agree to participate in this research study, kindly sign and date at the bottom of the form.

1. I confirm that I have been provided with clear information about the purpose of this study, the type of questions I will be asked, and how the data will be used.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any penalty or disadvantage.
3. I understand that my identity will remain confidential and that, in the final dissertation, my responses will be anonymised (unless I have explicitly agreed otherwise, e.g., where my role as director is central to the study).
4. I understand that interviews will be recorded and/or transcribed, and that these materials will be stored securely by the researcher.
5. I agree that excerpts of my responses may be quoted in the dissertation, provided that my anonymity is preserved (where applicable).
6. I understand that the data collected will be used only for academic purposes and not for any commercial use.

Participant Declaration

I have read the above information and freely consent to take part in this study.

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Researcher Declaration

I confirm that I have explained the purpose of this study to the participant, and that I will adhere to all ethical requirements in collecting, storing, and reporting the data.

Name of Researcher (Print): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

**PHOTO REPRESENTATION OF THE PRODUCTION ODDIDIGBOIGBO BY
AUSTIN ASAGBA**



*Movement II: The Kings Palace, women of light, women of substance and
Oddidigboigbo*



Movement I: Oddidigboigbo and Okokobioko



Movement I: Yemise and Odidigboigbo with the prisoners



Movement IV: Yemise and Odidigboigbo