LEARNING THROUGH THE BODYMIND:
PHENOMENOLOGY OF AN ACTOR’S EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This thesis examines an actor’s bodymind experience in contemporary Sri Lankan theatre. It investigates how an actor learns to act through cultivating a bodymind consciousness. The thesis adapts Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s key concept of the body-subject to flesh out the actor’s lived experience of knowledge acquisition. Through this filtration, the thesis argues that the actor’s bodymind is an undivided and interdependent phenomenon, operating as a knowing agent in acting. The thesis therefore further argues that bodymind consciousness fulfils an embodied, epistemic and aesthetic function in an actor’s learning process.

The first half of the thesis is a theoretical analysis of bodymind practice. The phenomenal body is theorized in order to understand how bodymind is embodied, spatiotemporal, and dependent upon inter-subjective communion with others. These arguments are then refined via exploration of three major acting pedagogies. Specifically, the acting theories and practices of Konstantin Stanislavski, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba are analyzed for their exploration of psychophysical theatre practice and how they explain bodymind experience in their theories.

The second half of the thesis is a practical exploration of bodymind theories. I offer a phenomenological and first-person description of my early acting practice and apply a retrospective analysis of the way my actor learning functioned and progressed. After this, I discuss how my assumptions about bodymind actor-learning are either consolidated or contradicted by interview material gathered from several Sri Lankan acting practitioners.

The thesis offers conclusions about the way the bodymind sediments acting knowledge through pre-reflective, habituated processes and speculates about the implications of these conclusions for actor training in the contemporary Sri Lankan theatre academy and industry.
Statement of Originality

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

This thesis incorporates interview data gathered through semi structured interviews. Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Bundoora approved the field research carried out during the month of July 2012 till July 2013 in preparation of this thesis. Ethical clearance number is: FHEC No.: #1017-12

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Saumya Liyanage

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For my parents

Hemasiri Liyanage and Kusum Liyanage

From whom I first saw the apotheosis of life
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

There is no inner man, man is in the world
Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception

Something that’s grown so with the years that I wouldn’t know what it was
Lynn Fontanne, Theatre Arts on Acting

Biographical beginnings
This thesis traces the journey of an actor and his bodymind experience of acting in contemporary Sri Lankan theatre. I use this term bodymind to indicate the undividedness and interdependency of the body and its consciousness in human perception. The term bodymind indicates how the actor experiences her body and mind not as separate entities but as phenomenally intertwined as a holistic experience of knowing. The thesis investigates the question of how an actor cultivates this bodymind consciousness as a holistic approach to actor learning and apprenticeship. It further seeks to establish how this holistic approach is an embodied, epistemic and aesthetic endeavour.

I am a self-taught actor. I learnt to act by observing and ‘doing’ rather than following a particular acting theory or practice. My acting career began in 1994 and has encompassed theatre, television and film. My central insight, reflecting on this twenty-year career, is that it is my body that has been the centre of my experiences and achievements. In order to fulfil my acting aspirations, my body has been, through a series of failures and successes, disciplined, trained and habituated. However, after twenty years of acting in the Sri Lankan performance industry, I ask myself a seemingly simple question: how did I learn to act? This thesis attempts to answer this question.

I started learning acting at the age of 22 through countless hours of practice and performing creative acts in various performance situations. I travelled around Sri Lanka and
abroad with my theatre productions and have performed in various theatrical venues interacting with diverse audiences. In my theatre career, I have performed 18 full-length theatre productions consisting of nearly 400 public performances. I have acted in various theatre productions ranging from original Sinhala theatre\(^1\) plays written by contemporary Sri Lankan playwrights to translated versions of some well-known Western and European masters’ work.\(^2\)

An anecdote: in 1994 I enrolled at the University of Kelaniya to pursue a Bachelor of Arts. My first theatre experience was a piece produced by the Department of English. The play was Caryl Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*. Without any prior training, I managed to perform the small character I was given in the play. Memorizing my few lines, and repeating my actions mechanically, I managed to complete the responsibility of my job. It was not a pleasant experience of acting at all. I did not have the chance to experience the enjoyment of playing that character. My body was not relaxed and supple enough to execute the tasks that I intended to do on stage. My body was rigid and always felt attached to the ground. Memorizing dialogue was a difficult task. Even when it was delivered, I was mechanically stressing every syllable of the sentence. As a result, the dialogue did not flow spontaneously but was forceful and mechanical. Moreover, developing a physical connection with my co-actors was also difficult, so I decided to perform alone without having awareness of the other actors’ presence on the stage. Consequently, my portrayal of the character became an individual and isolated task. The only remaining memory I have from that experience is the disconnection of body from consciousness and how I was continually struggling to synchronize the two entities.

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\(^1\) I have been working as an actor mainly in Sinhala theatre performed predominantly in Sinhalese language. English and Tamil-speaking theatre practices in the country are comparatively small in number when compared to the Sinhala-speaking theatre. This Sinhala-speaking theatre is a Colombo-centred theatre where theatre-makers work and perform their theatre seasons in the established theatres located in the city. However, once these theatre productions are premiered in Colombo, directors tend to take their work to other suburbs, cities and villages where they perform in various theatre venues ranging from proscenium to amphitheatres in paddy fields.

\(^2\) Acting for the screen has also been a parallel practice to my theatre acting since I began my acting career. To limit the scope of this research work, I have narrowed down my focus to explore my theatre acting as the key research area of this thesis.
My second incarnation of somatic learning commenced a year later, when I experienced the unpleasant disjuncture of body-mind in acting again. This time I began to experience the difficulty of the ‘consciousness fragment’ (McCutcheon and Sellers-Young 2013, pp. 57-72) while I was doing a theatre production directed by Piyal Kariyawasam. It was Harold Pinter’s famous play, *The Dumb Waiter*, translated into Sinhala as *Kontharāththuwa*. I started learning to play the character of Gus, while Gihan Fernando, my co-actor, played Ben. We both were amateurs and had no prior experience of training for theatre acting.

After a few weeks of rehearsals, I was beginning to notice that my body was starting to attune to the actions that had been developing throughout the rehearsal process. My early unpleasant experience was gradually changing. My conscious awareness and bodily actions were beginning to merge which provided me with a sense of ease and suppleness. It was a unified feeling of body and mind emanating through action. The second epigraph of this chapter, Lynne Fontanne’s notion that her acting skill almost crept up on her, goes some way to describing the unusual metamorphosis that I was experiencing. The disconnected body and mind seemed to be interlacing with each other. The ‘urge of dynamic striving to play’ was beginning to increase (Csepregi 2006, p.13-18). These significant changes were developing through the repetitive practice of the scenic actions that I had been rehearsing. Day by day, the wisdom of the body was becoming evident to me.

Here follows a single example of how this wisdom was functioning in the body and the way this bodily automatism could be interrupted by an interference of conscious acts. There is a scene where Ben grabs Gus and hits him in the chest. At this intense moment, I was supposed to throw myself backward and fall on a chair located in the middle of the stage close to the footlight. This sequence needed to be done precisely and quickly to get the correct intensity and precision of the act. I remember that Gihan (Ben) and I developed finely crafted body movements through a series of improvisations during rehearsals. The moment I threw myself backward without looking behind was executed through a kinetic sense that I developed through constant practice and repetition and resulted in what might be described as a sedimentation of those physical actions into my body.

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3 This thesis uses the term body-mind with a hyphen (−) to indicate the dualistic understanding of the body-mind ontology in both performance practices and philosophy.
We used to rehearse these movements every day but were very cautious about the precision of each movement. I managed to perform this difficult action correctly every time I performed except in one particular instance. On this day, the whole act went wrong. It happened when I tried to be more conscious and thoughtful about the moment of hitting Ben. Suddenly, my body turned in a different direction and Gihan’s powerful blow slammed into the centre of my chest and I was thrown onto the floor. I could not breathe for a few seconds. My ears shut down; my eyes blurred. My surroundings turned into a thick darkness. After being unconscious for a few seconds, I again managed to stand up but could not continue the act. Rehearsals were cancelled for a few days. I learned a valuable lesson through this incident. I managed to perform this difficult corporeal movement every time we staged the play with the bodily ‘autonomy’ I developed through repetitive practice of the sequence. Yet this autonomy was suddenly compromised by the interruption or intrusion of a ‘conscious process’. The conscious mind seemed to be entering this autonomous regime of activities and ruined the flow of action. The integrated wholeness of bodymind had been interrupted and disrupted.

Later I realized that this discomfort and disengagement of my own bodily faculties on stage has been a problem that actors throughout history have experienced at various stages of their careers. The French acting theorist, Jacques Copeau, conceived of this problem as an ‘inside-out’ as well as an ‘outside-in’ problem for the actor. He metaphorically conceptualized the actor’s fundamental problem of body-mind as ‘the freezing of the blood’ (Merlin 2001, p. 2). Copeau further describes: ‘the actor tells his arm “Come on, now, arm, go out and make the gesture”, but the arm remains wooden. The “blood” doesn’t flow; the muscle doesn’t move; the body fights within itself; it is a terrifying thing’ (cited in Hodge, 2000, pp. 57-58). It is not an easy task to coordinate what I really want to do on the stage and what my body does in response to this. While the body functions in its own way, my consciousness is trying either to control the body or to guide my body toward what needs to be done. The gap between these two domains seems to be, at least at the beginning of actor training, unbridgeable.

As an inexperienced actor, these occurrences of fragmented consciousness created an impression that the body and mind are functioning independently. But this assumption was beginning to change during my second theatrical experience. In the production of *Kontharāththuwa*, my bodymind began to incarnate as a holistic experience cultivating a
wisdom through which I managed to act on the stage. This wisdom was developing without
having any formal or pedagogical actor training⁴ but through assiduously repeating my
actions every day during four months of rehearsals. This cultivation process provided me
with a great deal of psychosomatic training, developing an inner and outer awareness towards
my enactment. Later this enactment became my habit; habit became knowledge; knowledge
rendered wisdom.

As a performer, I have developed an implicit understanding that my body and mind are
an integrated wholeness that occupies and functions in the acting process. I do not act either
with my mind or body. My acting operates through an implicit agreement between my body
aspects and mind aspects. What I experience is that I am immersed in the enactment when the
bodymind is fully attuned to an action. I reflect that this bodymind awareness has been
cultivated through non-pedagogical⁵ ways of learning acting and, further, that this awareness
developed and functioned tacitly; that is, beneath my conscious experience. These reflections
prompt another series of questions: if my knowledge acquisition is tacit and implicit, how
does this hidden bodymind consciousness teach me to act? How is it possible for an actor to
learn acting beyond his conscious experience? Further still, how does bodymind function
epistemologically and aesthetically in my knowing process of acting? In order to attempt to
answer these questions, I needed to find a method of exploring and explicating this hidden
region of the tacit bodymind: the method I have chosen is phenomenology.

⁴ Etymologically the term ‘pedagogy’ is derived from the Greek expression of educating young learners.
However, in general pedagogy means teaching as a professional practice. It further encompasses the practical
and theoretical aspects of learning and how and why learning occurs (Wallace, S. 2009). I use the term
pedagogy in this thesis to indicate the systematic exploration of performance practice and actor training mainly
derived from key theatre practitioners such as Stanislavski, Grotowski, Meyerhold or Brecht. These
investigations, teaching and training of actors have always been based on some sort of an ideology of acting
practice and developed as systematic explorations of learning acting in Western academia. Therefore the
institutionalisation of training actors is a twentieth-century pedagogy developed through such modern

⁵ The articulation of the term ‘non-pedagogical’ is used with the term ‘tacit’ as a synonym to indicate the non-
reflective ways of learning and apprentice in the performance practice. One may argue that this tacit knowing
can be a mode of learning or rather a social-pedagogy of learning and apprenticeship. My position in this
argument is that although non-pedagogy can be another mode of pedagogical learning, this learning process is
not systematically delivered by a particular tradition or a system of education. Whereas this tacit dimension of
knowing occurs not only through the conscious experience of the learner but through the unconscious occurring
within social integration.
**Encounter with Phenomenology**

Phenomenology offers, or at least attempts to offer, answers to the questions I have posed above concerning the experience of actor learning. The exploration of the metaphysics of body-mind in Western philosophical traditions, in particular the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty\(^6\) (1908-1961), investigates, via its interpretation of human experience and the role of the body, the intersection between the actor’s experience and her organic relationship with the theatrical atmosphere (Garner 1994, p. 89).

My application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to my experience of becoming an actor has been in the form of a conversation – a conversation between an actor and a phenomenologist, both of whom share common ground. I, as an actor, work with my lived body: phenomenologists describe how this lived body functions in the individual’s experience. Reflecting on both my practice and phenomenology, I realise that my practice and phenomenology intermingle. This intersection between my tacit body and the phenomenal body offers me a pathway to flesh out my non-pedagogical ways of learning acting.

My orientation to phenomenology offers an opportunity to understand how the phenomenal body is already operative in my body. Merleau-Ponty calls this the ‘natural I’ or ‘body-subject’ (Kwant 1963; Langer and Merleau-Ponty 1988). It is a body-subject because the body and the mind are one and the same. This operative body-subject reflects upon me providing a mirror via which I begin to see my hidden bodymind consciousness emanating through that image. This body-subject is the phenomenal body (le corps phenomenal) that Merleau-Ponty extensively articulates in his magnum opus, *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002). The body-subject, as Merleau-Ponty argues, operates, learns, perceives and even makes meaningful relations beneath conscious human experience.

Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that the mind is the centre of human understanding. Instead, he argues that human understanding operates not within a particular mind region but through corporeally-cultivated somatic intelligence. This somatic understanding functions as a hidden agency of the body (Merleau-Ponty 2002; Shusterman 2012; Watkins 2012). The

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\(^6\) Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) has been a key thinker of phenomenological philosophy among other leading philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre. In his short expansion of life, Merleau-Ponty has written very influential books, among them *The Structure of Behaviour, The Primacy of Perception, Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and Invisible* are prominent.
body as a consciousness operates through bodily networking with the world. Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the body as a consciousness offers a bodily dimension of how bodies learn through interaction and tensions maintained between individuals and the world (Watkins 2012, p. 16).

The body-subject is tightly connected to its environment: there is no gap between itself and the surroundings. The body-subject and the world incarnate from the same elements. For example, when I am standing, I do not necessarily assume that I have to stand with my lower limbs, straighten my torso, maintain my balance, observe my surroundings, et cetera: I simply stand. Csepregi captures this autonomy of the body thus: ‘sometimes, as we come to a rest, we ask ourselves: How did we do it? How did we ever come to perform such a movement? We then perceive our living body with a sense of unity and a feeling of harmony’ (Csepregi 2006, p. 13).

This encounter verifies to me that the body-subject is a lived body without separation between mind and body. Because it is an embodied subject, it indwells in the world, interacting and engaging with others. Because it is flesh it sediments knowledge through this mutual engagement. In this way, the body-subject reflects upon me as a mirror image prompting me to articulate how the bodymind is operative in my learning process. This thesis therefore traces this journey and the encounter between my acting body and Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of the phenomenal body.

Phenomenology has broadened my interest towards Eastern philosophy, particularly a phenomenology developed in conversation between Continental philosophy and Buddhist psychology.7 Primarily, Japanese philosophers such as Yuasa Yasuo (1925-2005) and

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7 Phenomenology has been influential to develop two branches of philosophical traditions found in contemporary philosophy. They are continental and analytical philosophy (Luft and Overgaard 2012, p. 1). Continental philosophy here refers to the philosophical tradition explicated by Edmund Husserl and developed through numerous philosophers such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Similarly, there are many phenomenological analyses of body-mind philosophy found in the Asian region (Kopf 2001; Sarachchandra 1958; Shaner et al. 1989; Yasuo 1987, 1993). These Eastern phenomenologies are based on Buddhist psychology and perception (Hamilton 1995, 1996; Harvey 1993; Wujastyk 2009). I here particularly refer to the Japanese phenomenological tradition developed by contemporary Japanese philosophers such as Yuasa Yasuo and Ichikawa Hiroshi. They have been heavily influenced by depth psychology and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and Martin Heidegger (for more details, see Nagatomo 1992; Shaner et al. 1989).
Nagatomo Shigenori have addressed the problem of body-mind in human experience and self-cultivation (Nagatomo 1992; Yasuo 1987, 1993). Yuasa combines Western and Eastern phenomenology to argue the importance of a holistic approach to human action and perception (Nagatomo 2006; Yasuo 1987, 1993). Nagatomo has developed a theory of attunement which explains what he calls bodily bilateral engagement with the world. In my exploration into phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty’s body-subject, I see commonalities between Yuasa and Nagatomo’s phenomenological analysis of the body and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. For instance, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of body schema and Yuasa’s analysis of the body scheme explain how the body is central to somatic learning and being as a primordial agent in the world. Nagatomo’s theory of attunement converges with Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the operative intentionality of the body (Nagatomo 1992). Nagatomo’s theory of attunement explains different stages and modalities via which the body develops this bilateral engagement with its surroundings and how the body is affected by its engagements. This bilateral engagement is not just an engagement between objects. It is the body-subject, a sentient being that engages with another object or subject. This engagement thus, renders feelings, emotions, and complex conscious experiences for the body-subject. Nagatomo addresses these affective capacities of the body (Nagatomo 2002, 2003). In this sense, I presume that Nagatomo’s analysis of attunement further enhances Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the body-subject. This Asian phenomenology expands my understanding of the affective and aesthetic aspects of the body-subject. I do not intend to explore this Asian phenomenology in this study, but I will reference these ideas in the main body of the thesis, especially when they offer refinements or differences of emphasis to Merleau-Ponty’s observations, which will continue to provide my main theoretical foundation.

Merleau-Ponty’s key assumption, the body-subject, provides a basis for me to articulate my arguments about bodymind consciousness in acting practice. Merleau-Ponty provides ontological categories in which this body-subject operates and makes meanings. I borrow these ontological categories related to the live body, lived time, lived space and lived communion to articulate my acting experience. For instance, I examine how the actor’s bodymind learns and makes meaning through being in these phenomenal fields. I describe what it is like to be a bodymind in the lived spatiality and temporality; how the spatiality and temporality is embodied and makes meanings for the actor’s acting experience; what it is like to be in communion with other actors; and how the bodymind learns and engages with the other actors in the rehearsal environment. Combining these phenomenological theories with
my tacit knowledge of my acting, I shall describe and analyse how bodymind consciousness operates within the pre-reflective domains of the actor.

Acting pedagogy

My quest to understand bodymind consciousness also involves exploration into contemporary acting pedagogies. Among many practitioners and theorists in current acting scholarship, I have selected Konstantin Stanislavski, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba’s articulation of bodymind practices in acting. These acting theorists generally represent what current acting scholarship identifies as a psychophysical or embodied acting tradition (Hodge 2000; Zarrilli 2012). Stanislavski is regarded as the founder of psychophysical acting practice (Zarrilli 2012), Grotowski further extends this psychophysical acting practice, elaborating some of Stanislavski’s key ideas blended with his artistic needs, and Barba further develops this mode of acting practice and continues to work with intercultural collaborations. The unification of the body and mind in acting, which is fundamental to each of these theorist-practitioners, is obviously directly relevant to this thesis; each theorist potentially offers the non-pedagogical actor a better understanding of his own practice of acting. While phenomenology offers insights into the body as a lived existence, these theories of acting demonstrate how this lived body enacts in pragmatic ways in various masters’ articulation of bodymind practices.

Considering the scope and vast body of literature, I limit myself to illustrating the relevance of three selected key concepts to the bodymind practice of acting. For this purpose, I consider Stanislavski’s key concept, ‘experiencing’ (perezhivanie) (Carnicke 1998; Stanislavsky and Benedetti 2010), Jerzy Grotowski’s concept of via negativa (Grotowski and Barba 1991; Richard Schechner 1997; Richards and Grotowski 1995) and Eugenio Barba’s concept of ‘presence’ (Barba 1985, 1988, 1989). I examine these three concepts of bodymind practice through the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenal body.

This study does not examine a particular acting style or a tradition of acting. Although I have selected these acting regimes, they have been selected on the merit of their implications for embodied acting practice. The emphasis is on how these practitioners describe and theorise the actor’s body and mind as an integrated wholeness in performance practice. In this sense, it concerns the most primordial being of an actor and how the actor deals with such a bodymind experience in the theatrical enactment. As Zarrilli argues, there
are many ways of developing embodiment in acting in the current practice of theatre. Furthermore, every mode of practice entails meta-theoretical questions of acting (2012, pp. 41-42). Citing Robert Gordon’s analysis of contemporary acting genres, Zarrilli explains how these practices of acting can be varied from the realistic psychological tradition, post-dramatic or fragmented approaches to psychophysical embodied practices in contemporary theatre (ibid, p. 41-42). What interests me in this thesis is how the meta-theoretical questions such as body-mind and its relationship to the actor’s work are exemplified by psychophysical acting theories. In that sense, I want to examine how these three acting theorists and their key notions are related to the lived body of the actor.

**Acting practice**

The early stage of this research project was a struggle between not being able to grasp the validity of my own recollection of ideas of acting as a ‘knowing subject’ and how to articulate my intuitive bodily knowledge (tacit knowledge) within an accepted academic discourse. As with many other autobiographical works, this research has also been initiated from ‘specific’ and expanded into ‘general’ (Chang 2008, p. 62). It means that this project started with a self-exploratory journey to describe the fundamental assumptions of my acting practice, and later expanded into an investigation of a selected community of actors in order to verify or challenge my assumptions. The actor’s urge is to act, or rather enacting how others act, and sharing those meanings through communion. As Malekin and Yarrow argue, ‘[i]n its very fragility, theatre brings forth the web of becoming and all its networks of power. Theatre is always other: it is not what it seems; it is always less and always more’ (Peter and Ralph 2001, p. 59). Thus, the actor’s experience and the way she learns in the enactive situations cannot be isolated from her inherent connection to other bodies and the environment. This confirms that my aim is not only to examine how the bodymind works for me to learn acting. Rather, I seek to look at how others in my acting community reveal their approaches to acting practice. I assume that I can be an informant as well as be informed by their experiences. Acknowledging the diversities and complexities of individuals and their experiences, I argue that these conversations with actors may broaden the discussion that I intend to bring forward in the thesis. Therefore I explore, analyse and evaluate four actors’ interview data gathered during my field research. This juxtaposition of my experiences and those actors’ interviews provide insights into my quest of bodymind experience in acting.
Phenomenological enquiry can render tensions, departures and convergences between the researcher and the target group. As Barnacle argues, ‘[f]or the meaning of a text—whether a life-world, art work, etc.—to be revealed, the researcher is required to open up and be receptive toward the voice of the text’ (2001, p. viii). But that doesn’t mean that the researcher is able to arrive at final conclusions and grasp all the meanings of the text. The text under scrutiny always remains ‘dynamic and living’, so it continues to reveal meanings and new insights every time it is observed (ibid, p. viii). In my encounters with actors, I observe that I have a common ground that I share with them. I am a self-taught actor and they are the same. Working beyond this common ground, I ask if my experience of bodymind and learning acting contradicts or confirms the experiences that they have shared with me.

Nexus

In this project, I situate myself as a centre, a meeting point where all these forces of phenomenology, acting pedagogy and practitioners meet together in conversation. I notice that my encounters with these multiple streams have been enriched, challenged and perhaps contested by my tacit experience of acting. First, my fascination with phenomenology provides me an opportunity to merge with the body-subject as akin to my bodymind. This overlapping offers many convergences between my tacit bodymind and the lived body. Secondly, acting theories provide insights into pedagogical relevance of the bodymind practice in acting. Thirdly, communion with acting practitioners further offers convergence or perhaps departures through testing my assumptions with their own lived experiences. Learning phenomenology, exploring theories related to acting practices and finally discussing actors’ experiences of acting, I intend to describe how my bodymind consciousness has cultivated and learned the craft of acting in the contemporary Sri Lankan theatre.

I intend to achieve this goal primarily by providing a description. It is a phenomenological description of my bodymind experience of learning acting in the production *Kontharāththuwa*[^8] produced in Sri Lanka in 1995. As I have stated, my acting practice has expanded in theatre and film. Performing in two mediums involves different

[^8]: This Sinhala production of *Kontharāththuwa* is the translation of the play *The Dumb Waiter* by Harold Pinter. This play was translated by Gaya Nagahawatte and directed by Piyal Kariyawasam. The play was first premiered at the Youth Drama Festival, held at National Youth Council, Maharagama, Sri Lanka in 1995. Later it was staged at the State Theatre Festival in 1996.
methods of embodiment pertaining to the different techniques and technologies involved. In order to limit the scope for this thesis, I have selected this production that I have acted in my apprentice years to describe my bodymind experience. It is a narrative in which I offer a phenomenology of the actor’s experience and knowing process described within selected ontological categories.

As I have argued, phenomenology evokes a framework to build my description about acting in theatre. Phenomenology values first person singular narratives and the experience that explains how an individual describes his lived experience (Roth 2012). Accordingly, I adapt a first person singular narrative via which I intend to describe my experience in theatre acting. It is a difficult exercise to perform a complete definitive analysis of the experiential body. I am not able to describe the whole of my lived experience in this thesis. Rather, I can only explore and define some aspects of the experiential body. The other aspects of this lived body are yet to be discovered.

I claim that the actor’s learning process is informed through her own awareness of bodymind. The bodymind is the actor’s nexus from which her giving and receiving operate. It is the centre where all the actions are germinated and worked towards the outer world, and in return where all the information and reactions are absorbed and sedimented. Without putting the actor’s body in the centre of this investigation, one cannot conduct a fruitful discussion about how the actor learns and overcomes the body-mind problems in acting practice. Unlike other professions, the actor’s art always expresses with flesh and blood; their bodies become the material of their art and expression. It is a visceral process that actors experience and embody every time they confront with their spiritual partner – the body. As Daniel Johnston (2007) argues, actors are manual philosophers; they practice and experience the phenomenal body in pragmatic ways. The actor is someone who experiences primordial ways of being in the world.

Method

In this thesis I suggest a phenomenological approach to explore the nature of bodymind experience. This phenomenological approach suggests an actor’s point of view to get a better understanding of how the actor experiences such phenomena. Phenomenology therefore offers a useful tool to unveil such personal experience of the individual. It is a personal
approach in the sense that the actor’s point of view may reveal the experiential aspects of his performance. Further, I argue that it is a pragmatic approach because it reveals the actor’s experience as a ‘doer’. In this thesis, therefore, I outline a first person narrative of the bodymind experience and how it reveals the experiencer’s voice in the discussion suggested. In this phenomenological description, I want to reveal the embodied learning of my apprenticeship and how I have cultivated bodymind consciousness through on-the-job training.

Phenomenological description
Phenomenological philosophy is developed in response to the existing rational model of knowledge acquisition that is exemplified through the certainty of the knowledge of the existing world (Barnacle et al. 2001, pp. 4-5). This suggests that the individual is capable of knowing the world through her rational mind. This stance therefore establishes human consciousness as a separate, disembodied entity from its irrational body. This disembodied mind believes itself to be operating as an all-knowing entity and lays the groundwork for empirical and scientific thought in the Western philosophical tradition (2001, p. 5).9

The term phenomenology is derived from Greek *phaenesthai*, which means, ‘to flare up, to show itself, to appear’ (Dowling 2007, p. 132). It combines the two words, *phenomenon* and *logos* to mean the ‘study of phenomena’ (Barnacle et al. 2001, p. vi). Phenomenology as a philosophy has been diversely enriched and developed by different traditions of phenomenological thought. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), as the founder of phenomenology, developed his philosophy known as transcendental phenomenology (Smith 2007).10 In this project, I am interested in existential phenomenology led by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-

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9 The division between the mind and matter begins with the Greeks, who conceived of a distinction between ‘form’ (*eidos*) and ‘matter’ (*hylé*) as separate entities (http://astro.temple.edu/~snagatom/). Rene Descartes (1596-1650), as the father of modern Western philosophy, postulated that the mind is the all-knowing entity and placed its position in the privileged domain against the marginalized body. Descartes’s famous dictum, “I think therefore I am” propagates the mind’s ability to think without the support of the body and its existence as a separate entity. It is Descartes’ mind that produces knowledge of the world without having any relation or dependence of the body (Cottingham 1992, p. 142).

10 Husserl’s development of phenomenological philosophy was heavily influenced by his mentor Franz Brentano (1838-1917) (Luft and Overgaard 2012, pp. 2, 17).
Among them, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and its implications for research methodology have influenced the method I have used to analyse my acting experience. In order to understand the development of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, it is necessary to make a brief reference to Edmund Husserl and how he has influenced Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body.

Franz Brentano (1838-1917), Husserl’s mentor, argued that human consciousness always consists of something attached, an imaginative or actual reference outside the world. He coined this relationship as intentionality (Luft and Overgaard 2012, pp. 21, 29). Within this idea are the seeds of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. Edmund Husserl first developed an alternative way of knowing the world by introducing a new method, ‘transcendental-phenomenological reduction’ (ibid 2012, p. 104). The mind as the all-knowing entity in Western philosophy was questioned and problematized by Husserl’s question of the irreducibility of object. Husserl radically shifted the notion that the ‘thinking mind can know the object fully’ and perceive all the aspects of it (Barnacle et al. 2001). In contrast with the rational model of knowledge seeking, phenomenology proposes a method that seeks a return to the essence of meanings or ‘essence of consciousness’ as they appear to an individual’s experience (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. vii). Husserl introduced phenomenological reduction (epoché) to bracket the theoretical and cultural presumptions in order to arrive at how the phenomena appear in the consciousness (Dowling 2007, p. 132). Based on his famous assertion that ‘all consciousness is conscious of something’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. xix), he introduces two aspects of the experience: one is the noema (Greek meaning ‘what is thought’) and other is the noesis. Noema is the content of the experience or what appears in the consciousness. Noesis is the object that is linked or represented in the consciousness (Moran and Cohen 2012, pp. 222-224). Husserl suggests going back to this essence of the noematic content to understand the meaning generated through the act of human intentionality and its relation with the world.

Among other philosophical traditions, Merleau-Ponty has been highly influenced by Edmund Husserl’s philosophy (Luft and Overgaard 2012, pp. 103-104). Husserl’s assertion of the intentionality and his interest towards the structure of the consciousness places his phenomenology as transcendental. Merleau-Ponty radicalises the Husserlian understanding of intentionality and proposes human intentionality (consciousness) as a bodily function. He transposes the mental aspects of the intentionality to motor aspects of the body. It means that,
as shown in the epigraph of this chapter, Merleau-Ponty suggests that ‘there is no inner man, man is in the word, and only in the world does he know himself’ (2002, p. xii). The inner consciousness is played out not as ‘I think of’ something but as ‘I can act’ of the body. This shift summarises his idea of how intentionality is embodied in human motor activity. Asserting that the first principle of phenomenology is to investigate the essence of consciousness, he writes:

But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’ (2002, p. vii).

Husserl’s philosophy focuses on the structure of human consciousness. Merleau-Ponty further extends Husserl’s assertion, arguing that consciousness incarnates through the intermesh between the body and the world. This clearly shows how Merleau-Ponty turns to the phenomenological enquiry of the body-world existence and his negation of the consciousness as an internal starting point for human understanding. His method is derived from this assumption of the ‘man in the world, and only in the world does he know himself’ (2002, p. xii). In his Phenomenology of Perception (2002), Merleau-Ponty describes how man [sic] creates his world and makes meaningful relations through being-in-the-world. But he assumes that these meanings do not always take human reason as their starting point. In contrast, these meanings emanate from bodily interactions with the world at a ‘preconscious, not-yet-free level’ (Kwant 1963, p. 21). Merleau-Ponty thus provides an extensive study into bodily-rooted meanings and human existence operating at preconscious levels. He does so by describing human bodily existence according to different ontological categories: for instance, orientated space, lived temporality, sexual meanings, sensitivities, and intersubjectivity are some of the few themes he explores (Kwant 1963, pp. 21-26). His method is to describe the primordial experience devoid from scientific and analytical presumptions. He explains: ‘to return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, pp. ix-x). It means that his method rejects other scientific methods and analytical tools arguing that they are ‘abstract and derivative sign-language’ (2002, p. x). In this sense, Merleau-Ponty’s methodology is a phenomenological reduction which Husserl coins as an epoché or ‘suspension of judgements’ (Roth 2012, p. 4). He brackets the scientific, inductive methodology in order to return to the

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11 The term epoché is derived from Greek and means ‘cessation’ or ‘suspension of judgements’ (Moran and Cohen 2012, p. 106). Husserl uses this term to denote his phenomenological method - bracketing, excluding or
first experience, the primordial meanings arrived at through body-world intercourse. He attempts to explain the ‘first experience’ of the human being by attending to this primordial awareness (Dowling 2007, p. 134). As Wolff-Michael Roth argues, the first person method is essential because the phenomena under scrutiny is immanent, or pre-reflective (Roth 2012, p. 5). The method I adapt to arrive at this goal is a first personal narrative, a personal description which narrates how I experience the bodymind consciousness in acting. Through these narratives, I trace how the bodymind learns and poeticises in the knowing process.

**Knower and Known**

Early anthropological studies sometimes assumed that the subject of the research interest exists outside the researcher in the world ‘out there’. Therefore, according to these studies, scientific knowledge cannot be gained simply through self retrospections (Davies 1999). The researcher’s task is to seek their findings from the outer world, interpret them and present them to the public. In the past few decades, particularly in the field of new anthropology, these older assumptions about research have paradigmatically shifted (Chang 2008). The radical changes that have taken place in the humanities and social sciences, particularly the emergence of postmodern thought, has resulted in bringing individual subjectivity into the centre of the meaning-making process (Roth 2012). This tendency has created a vast space for suppressed individualities to become more prominent and visible.

In the shadow of the Cartesian separation between mind and matter, natural sciences in the West have assumed that the researcher is capable of producing knowledge as an independent observer. As Michael Roth further suggests, this notion of the ‘independence of observer’ from what is observed is a long standing problem in social sciences and one that has been critically examined (2012, p. 7). Roth provides a comprehensive list of European existential and hermeneutic philosophical traditions that question such methodology. These philosophies are represented by leading philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Hans-George Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, and recent philosophers such as Alain Badiou. These philosophers critique the ‘observer-independent’ world and disembodied knowing of the subject (Roth 2012). Among these philosophers, Merleau-Ponty is crucial to this project suspending human presumptions and belief systems to arrive at a pure phenomenological reduction of experience; or return to the phenomena as they appear to human consciousness (ibid, p. 106).
as he is one of the few theorists who argues that one cannot separate the observer from the observed. As he famously claimed, my body is always in conjunction with the world and it is through my body that the perception is possible (Roth 2012, p. 8).

Without my material body, my perception of the world is impossible. My body is bound to the world and it is the world that allows my body to be in intercourse with the outer world. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone also argues that it is human motility (thinking movement) that provides the basis of knowing and apprenticeship learning (Sheets-Johnstone 1980; Sheets-Johnstone 2010, 2011). The transcendental phenomenology, as a branch of European philosophy, thus provides the framework for understanding the importance of the first-person methodological approach to knowledge acquisition, in contrast to the rationalist approach used in epistemology. Drawing on some ideas of neurophysiologist Francesco Valera, Michael Roth argues that one can bypass the long standing epistemological problem and body-mind dichotomies by introducing the ‘first-person methodologies’ (2012, p. 9).

Looking from this perspective, it is clear that the proposed phenomenological approach is another way of using auto/ethnographic methodology to unveil the lived experience of the actor. Auto/ethnography is, of course, one way of generating phenomenological descriptive data in human-centred research. Among other phenomenological approaches, including phenomenological reduction and investigation of essences (Diprose and Reynolds 2008), phenomenological description is very often identified with metaphors such as ‘going back to the phenomena’, ‘seeing and listening’, ‘keeping the eye open’ or ‘not thinking but seeing’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 53). Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of existential phenomenological reading clearly states that one should describe the phenomena or the lived experience as it appears rather than providing interpretative or analytical descriptions (2002, p. ix).

**Self and Other**

Considering the self as the building blocks of the other or, broadly, the culture (Roth 2012), this thesis further intends to incorporate experiences of some selected actors. As this research focuses on my phenomenological description, I select four actors who are currently working in the Sri Lankan theatre. In some instances I have had the experience of working with them in my acting career. Because the nature of this research is to uncover the experiential world
of the actor, I believe that these actors also provide credible experiential data not only as individuals but as actors who have been linked to my body, my theatre work and acting. This incorporation of the other actors’ experiences thus provides an ethnographical perspective to this study.

My acting self is cultivated within a particular cultural practice. Therefore my representation of the self can be considered as a representation of intersubjectivity or a representation of the other. As Roth argues ‘all our knowledge is singular and embodied but also representative of the collective in that it constitutes a concrete realization of cultural-historical and sociocultural possibilities’ (2012, p. 15). Therefore my own experiential data should not be considered as a representation of a mere inner subjectivity explored through a phenomenological description: this so-called subjective data could be interpreted as a larger representation of the subjectivities of the others.

Writing about the use of autobiography as a research tool, Charlotte Aull Davies (1999) speculates about two popular charges that scholars pose against heavily autobiographical research. One critique towards the autobiographical material is that these materials seem to be self-indulgent and narcissistic. Therefore, these self-centred materials focus on private, personal aspects of the subject but pay insufficient attention to social and cultural constructions of the subject. In addition to this, autobiography is a ‘Western literary narrative’ that glorifies the ‘Great Man Tradition’ that has been used to describe individual achievements based on a linear and goal-oriented interpretation of what constitutes a meaningful life (Cohen cited in Davies, p.179). Providing concrete examples of the successful auto/ethnographical studies, such as Grimshaw’s (1992) embodied experience of living with a Himalayan convent of Buddhist Nuns and Okely’s (1992) encounter with Gypsies and her embodied experience of altering her physical presentation, Davies argues that an autobiographical or auto-ethnographical approach to understand the other is an emergent inclusion of ethnographic research (1999 p. 178-81).

An exploration into the autobiographical and personal world of an actor cannot be regarded as a purely self-indulgent practice. The critics who raise these issues question the validity of the personal narratives because they presuppose that auto/biographies cannot be verified or should be verified by a third-person reflection. Phenomenological method is unsympathetic to this view as phenomenology develops on the very basis of the negation of
the scientific method of knowledge-seeking. On the other hand, phenomenology in general, and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in particular, demonstrate how human consciousness is embodied and is a product of its relationship with the other. The self or the consciousness, in that sense, is not a separate functionality or an existence but a product of human bodily networking with its surroundings. In other words, the self is reflected through the other. In a methodological sense, the self is already verified by the other. As Dowling argues, Merleau-Ponty’s consideration of the four ontological categories of human existence further demonstrates how the body is intertwined with its world of others. His phenomenological description of the lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived relations (communion) extensively explore how human experience is constructed through these dialogical relations (2007, p. 134). Therefore, it is evident that the exploration of an individual’s experience can further reveal its relation with the other.

**Data generation and analysis**

The main storyline of this thesis is narrated by me. I intend to narrate my bodymind experience and knowing process while selected actors’ cases are also analyzed in conjunction with my experience within the contemporary Sri Lankan theatre. As I intend to tell my story, my experiential data is generated in the following manner: one, I recollect my experiential data through scanning into the container of my memory and imagination. And two, I use my language as a second enactment to revitalise and describe the memory data that I recall. In this process of re-enacting a past experience within a performative language, I believe that I can reconstruct the experience of bodymind in my apprenticeship. But my phenomenological description is not merely a remembrance of memory data, widely known as episodic memory (John 2001). Building upon these episodic memories, my attempt is to describe the bodymind experience and knowing process of the actor. It involves my imagination, anticipation and creative energies of my reckoning. The description provided is not a mere reconstruction of past acting experiences, but an enactment of the lived experience of the actor. It is attempted to describe how and in what ways my bodymind experience may occur and accumulate knowledge pertaining to my self-taught acting practice.

Actor participants in this research project are taken as four case studies. Data generated through semi-structured interviews are closely analyzed. Semi-structured
interviewing is widely used in qualitative research practices and is also one of the best ways to explore the internalities of the subjects that I focus on in this research. Steinar Kvale (2009) gives a comprehensive analysis of the interview as a prime research method in his book InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Interviewing. Kvale identifies its functionality with two metaphorical terms: the interviewer as a miner or as a traveller (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The miner digs to uncover the wealth hidden underneath the earth and bring the valuables to the surface. The traveller goes on a journey where she meets different people. After this meeting, she tells the story of her journey.\(^\text{12}\)

It is my intention in this research is to collect and share these experiences and allow these experiences to be interwoven with my reflexive data. Heewon Chang argues that the self is the carrier of the wider structure known as culture. Culture thus consists of such selves and both are intimately connected (2008 p.125). As Chang argues, this self-reflexive material should be juxtaposed and confronted with the recurrent themes, issues and codes generated in the descriptive interview data and interpreted within the socio-cultural framework. Van Manen also argues that the purpose of phenomenological research is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences to be able to understand the shared meanings within the ‘context of the whole human experience’ (1990, p. 62).

Analysing and interpreting auto/ethnographical data involves the shifting of attention between self and other (Chang 2008, p. 125). In other words, the self-reflexive data that I intend to gather from my own experience should be juxtaposed with the experiential data material that I gather from semi-structured interviews and read within a wider socio-cultural context. Chang provides a list of ten strategies for data analysis and interpretation. Although all these applications are not directly applicable to my research work, I here highlight a few interpretative strategies that do support it:

(a) search for recurrent themes, topics and patterns;
(b) analyse relationship with the self and the others;
(c) theoretical framing of the data

\(^{12}\) In both cases, the miner and the traveller lead to new knowledge through their explorations. Max Van Manen provides two specific purposes for an interview: (1) ‘It may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. (2) The interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience’ (Van Manen 1990, p. 66).
My phenomenological descriptive data is examined to identify the recurrent themes, topics and patterns that I share with the actors interviewed. These themes are then juxtaposed with the interview data gathered from the case studies. This strategy is important to find the ‘others of similarity’ or ‘others of difference’ who share common or contradictory experiences (Chang 2008, p. 134) within a wider acting community. Further, these cultural themes, patterns or topics are contextualized within theories that are informed by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

**Structure of chapters**

From here onwards I will provide a brief description about how my chapters are structured to present the above arguments:

**Chapter two**

The second chapter comprises my journey into literature that I have gone through to discover the body-mind metaphysics of acting. Among these varied literary materials, I have selected Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* as my primary source of literature. This chapter introduces Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological analysis of the body. The notion of lived experience and his articulation of body-subject are explored in relation to the actor’s work.

This chapter thus divides into three sections: I.) The actor and bodymind, II.) Bodymind in (theatrical) space and time, and III.) Bodymind and otherness. I discuss how the bodymind consciousness operates within key ontological categories such as lived experience, lived space and time, and lived relationships. Based on Merleau-Ponty’s body-subject, this chapter further incorporates ideas related to phenomenological themes derived from Asian bodymind theories and the contemporary development of cognitive phenomenology to understand how the actor’s bodymind works within these ontological categories. Finally, this chapter sums up with how the actor’s bodymind works in the performance sphere as a pre-reflective knower.
Chapter three

This chapter provides an extension of the phenomenal body that is discussed in chapter two. I attempt to contextualise phenomenological themes developed in chapter two and utilise them within three acting regimes. I start with Stanislavski to discuss how his approach to actor training has been continuously informed by the bodymind issues of acting. I look at the notion of ‘experiencing’ (perezhivanie) as the locus of his analysis of bodymind and discuss how Stanislavski articulates the actor’s inner and outer integration through ‘experiencing’ a role. Secondly, I introduce Jerzy Grotowski’s analysis of the actor through his term via negativa. He suggests resolving the actor’s bodymind problem by introducing the idea of elimination. Elimination proposes two modes of practices: the distillation and seeking of contradictions. This allows the actor to return to his primordial experience by eliminating the duality of body-mind. Finally, I consider Eugenio Barba’s approach to bodymind in actor training. I present Barba’s key term ‘presence’ to discuss how the actor’s body-in-life, as he terms it, brings the body-mind duality into a unified experience of the actor. Barba discusses the actor’s cultivation of body-in-life as the actor’s being or ultimate existence in the theatre. Barba’s own research into the actor’s learning process further confirms that the autonomous actor also cultivates such body-in-life through her own way of learning and apprenticing the body. In essence, all of these three practitioners’ approaches to bodymind practice are phenomenological because they suggest some kind of bracketing off, or reduction of the mundane daily experience, in order to attain the essence of bodymind practice in acting.

Chapter four

This chapter provides my phenomenological description of bodymind experience. It comprises my acting experience articulated in reference to the play Kontharāththuwa (The Dumb Waiter by Harold Pinter). My experience of being in this theatre enactment is narrated through a first person singular perspective. It contains autobiographical and self-reflexive data generated mainly from my retrospections, imagination and the episodic memory data I have excavated from my theatrical apprenticeship. This chapter argues how my bodymind consciousness is cultivated through being-in-the-enactment. It further illustrates how the actor’s bodymind works as an embodied, aesthetic and epistemic site within the embodied learning process of acting.
My phenomenological description related to bodymind experience is introduced in five key headings: I.) Working with the text, II.) Working on the self, III.) Working on action, IV.) Working on the role, and finally V.) Working with ensemble. In the first section, I describe how the actor integrates into the reading process of the play as an embodied activity. The second section sets out to describe the relationship between my body and the ontology of self. It explores how the actor negotiates with his bodymind in the preliminary process of rehearsing the play. Section three explores the process of learning action and its implications for perceiving the bodymind in practice. Section four explores the ontology of the character through the process of embodiment. This section further describes how the actor relates to the construction of the role and how the bodymind operates as an enactment of imagination and bodily actions. The final section contains my bodily relationship with the ontology of the other (working with actors). This section also describes how the actor perceives the partner actor within the rehearsal sphere and how this process is an embodied experience for the learning actor. Providing bodymind experience within these five ontological categories, I describe how the bodymind learns, transforms and aestheticises in the actor’s process.

Chapter five

Chapter five provides the interview data I have gathered and analyzed during my field research work in Sri Lanka in September 2012. It presents a small sample of contemporary Sri Lankan actors’ interview data transcribed and translated into English for the purpose of analysis. Similar to my case presented in chapter four, these actors’ apprentices have been nurtured by on-the-job training. This chapter extends the ontological categories I employ in chapter four. In line with these categories, these actors offer their bodymind experiences in various categories such as text, self, world, character and their relationship with partner actors. In order to facilitate the discussion, this chapter is divided into two parts: I.) Actors’ experience, and II.) Departures and convergences. In the first section, I offer their descriptive data pertaining to bodymind practice in theatre. In the second section I offer a juxtaposition of their experiences with my phenomenological description. In doing so, this chapter provides the discussion of how these actors’ descriptions consolidate or contradict my phenomenological description of actor learning.
Chapter six

Chapter six concludes with evaluation, recommendations and identifying of further research possibilities in the field of embodied practices in acting, phenomenology and performance. This chapter first provides the evaluation of the research methods utilized in this research project. It starts with the validation of the phenomenological description of data generation and discusses the challenges and complexities experienced in devising such a method. I offer an evaluation of such a phenomenological framework in understanding the bodymind process of acting.

The section, ‘evaluation of the claim’ offers discussion of the key hypothesis that I have raised in the first chapter. This claim is discussed with the phenomenological conclusions that I have arrived at through my own description, phenomenological literature and actors’ descriptions provided through interview data. Finally, the chapter sums up with a few recommendations and indications of the future research on actor’s bodymind experience in acting.

Conclusion

I am a particular human being – a male, an Asian, who lives and works in Sri Lankan theatre in a particular time. My ways of seeing and perceiving may bring different biases to my reflective data and generally to this research work. Human experiences are structured and generated within specific discursive contexts. Hence, my perceptions, ideologies and philosophies have constantly been formed, rearranged and revised within the cultural, socio-political arena where my subjectivity is grounded.

Writing this thesis has been an exciting endeavour as well as a challenging task for me. It is exciting because I am writing about my own acting practice and I have a privilege to revisit the familiar world I have been living in. On the other hand, it is challenging and risky because I am the prime subject of this thesis and at the same time, I am the one who writes about it. Therefore, I have to play a dual character in this research project: first, being a subject of the research project, I tend to generate research data through my reflections and retrospections. Secondly, I have to write and evaluate these data as a researcher who should remain at a critical distance from the subject matter. Being a subject and the observer at the
same time in a project reminds me of the dual consciousness of the actor who tries to de-
familiarise and at the same time familiarise with the character she plays. What follows in
these chapters is this journey into bodymind metaphysics in my performance practice.
PART I

BODYMIND AND PHENOMENOLOGY
CHAPTER TWO

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenal body and the actor

The normal man and the actor do not mistake imaginary situations for reality, but extricate their real bodies from the living situation to make them breathe, speak and, if need be, weep in the realm of imagination.

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

Introduction

I turn to phenomenology in order to theorise and articulate my experience of bodymind consciousness and acting practice. I am aware that there are many phenomenologists and different versions of phenomenologies in current scholarship. Of these, I chiefly draw upon French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1908-1961) key ideas on the body as the most apposite and useful for understanding the actor’s experience of bodymind in acting practice.

Phenomenology is known as a philosophy of the body (Langer 1989). Performers are, or aim to become, body-experts. Acting, as any other performance practice, is both a mode of being and an expression of the body. Both phenomenology and acting explore human perception, habituation and action, space and time and inter-human connection between bodies within certain social-cultural contexts. One pertinent distinction is that phenomenology theorises human embodiment in a philosophical manner, whereas the actor experiences this embodiment pragmatically in theatre. Daniel Johnston argues that actors are the users of their bodies, not only as a tool but as a ‘whole of Being’ (Johnston 2007, p. 11). Following Johnston, the practice of acting might be described as a personal way of ‘doing phenomenology’ via which, in this case, I try to bring my experience to the centre of this epistemological enquiry. Theatre practices have a ‘deeply phenomenological concern’ because theatre and the actor’s craft are rooted in the ‘concrete practice of lived experience’ (Johnston, 2008).
There are other encounters that have enhanced my understanding of acting and its relationship to bodymind practice. Acting theorist Phillip B. Zarrilli’s works (Zarrilli 2002; Zarrilli 2012) have widened my understanding of body-mind experience and how one’s body-mind can be cultivated through an assiduous practice of somatic arts. Edward Shaner’s book *The bodymind experience in Japanese Buddhism: A phenomenological perspective of Kūkai and Dōgen* (1985) explores the different stages of bodymind experience in daily life. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1963) and Jaana Parviainen’s (1998) phenomenological descriptions of dance and Zarrilli’s ‘An Enactive Approach to Understanding Acting’ (2008) have also been important influences and each of these will be cited in support of my use of Merleau-Ponty and in the service of my articulation of bodymind consciousness. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenal body prompts me to understand bodymind consciousness in key ontological categories: the lived body, lived spatiotemporality, and lived communion. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter is divided into three main sections: one, the actor and bodymind, in which I survey phenomenological insights into the practice of acting; two, bodymind in (theatrical) time and space, which refines this discussion within spatio-temporal parameters; and three, bodymind and otherness, where I consider the inter-subjective significances of these accumulated ideas.

I. THE ACTOR AND BODYMIND

Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in 1945, is regarded as one of the most important works in phenomenological philosophy. In this seminal work, Merleau-Ponty presents a theory of perception influenced by German Philosopher Edmund Husserl and Gestalt psychology (Romdenh-Romluc 2010, pp. 4-5). As Romdehn-Romluc argues, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological project asks a key question: ‘how should we understand consciousness, the world and their relation’? His *Phenomenology of Perception* addresses

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13 Zarilli uses the hyphen in body-mind to draw attention to the issue of divided consciousness.

14 Gestalt theories were developed in Germany when Edmund Husserl was developing his phenomenological philosophy. Merleau-Ponty’s theory on perception was developed in line with these Gestalt psychologists’ works such as Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Köhler (Morris 2012, p. 21). Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of perception is characterised by Gestalt psychologists’ conceptualization of the figure/background structure of human experience (Landes 2013, p. 82).
these questions. He identifies the existing understanding as ‘objective thought’. The objective thought comes in two modes: Empiricism (Realism) and Intellectualism (Idealism) (Landes 2013, p. 69; Luft and Overgaard 2011, pp. 104-112). Merleau-Ponty criticises both empiricism and intellectualism on the ground that ‘empiricism conceives of consciousness as just one of many things in a world that exists independently of it, and intellectualism, which conceives of consciousness as constituting the world’ (Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 104; Merleau-Ponty 2002). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology proposes a new ontology, wherein consciousness and the world are ‘mutually dependent parts of one whole’ (Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 104). He provides an investigation into this mutuality and argues that consciousness is embodied via human enactments in the world. Primarily based on Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty critiques the traditional notion of consciousness and its relation to a disembodied psyche. In its place, he argues for the existence of consciousness in bodily ‘operative intentionality’ (Duffy 1992, p. 34). Merleau-Ponty writes that ‘a corporeal or postural schema gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them’ (1964, p. 5). Writing about this invisible relation of the body and the environment, he penetrates into an unknown region where the body is primordially connected to the world before the subject rationally perceives the world.

15 Merleau-Ponty, in his preface to Phenomenology of Perception (2002), indicates his major influences. He indicates how Husserl’s philosophy influences other key figures such as Heidegger, as well as describing his own debt to Husserl’s findings (2002, p. viii). Furthermore, he mentions other theorists and philosophers who have also been phenomenologically important and have practised phenomenological ways of thinking. He notes Hegel, Kierkegaard, and even Karl Marx, Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud (ibid, p. viii) as phenomenological thinkers who have been practising ‘a style of thinking’ which resonates with phenomenological approaches before the phenomenological tradition had formed into a comprehensive philosophy (ibid, p. viii).

16 Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and Japanese philosophers such as Yuasa Yasuo, Ichikawa Hiroshi and Dōjen share common themes in relation to analysis of the body-subject. They have all attempted to understand the human body as an integrated wholeness. Merleau-Ponty’s idea of body-subject as a pre-conscious existence has influenced Yuasa’s Yasuo’s analysis of the body-schema. For instance, Yuasa’s body scheme consists of four circuits. These four circuits are analysed as the experiential body or the subject-body (Nagatomo 1992, pp. 59-76). Moreover, these circuits are related to the physical aspects of body that is the object-body (body with senses).
Body-subject

Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of the body-subject to understand the primordial nature of bodily existence in the world. This notion of the body-subject helps the actor to think through how his bodymind works as a primordial self within his practice and how he perceives knowledge through the synthesis of the bodymind. Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is a form of consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 2002), an idea that illuminates how the bodymind plays a dominant role in the actor’s engagement with the enactment. Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body critiques traditional ontological understandings of the body and its function in the process of knowing. Traditionally, the body has been understood as a combination of subjective and objective elements, but Merleau-Ponty theorises the body as neither biological object consisting of internal organs, legs, arms and a trunk nor spiritual subject without any physical elements. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) provides two sets of words to denote the existential nature of the body. The German word *körper* connotes the physical body as object. The term *Leib* is used for the lived or living body: this is the body as subject. Generally, the phrase ‘lived body’ presents the body as a non-dualistic, sentient being in contrast to the Cartesian split of body as a machine and the mind as an extended rational soul. The main difference between the lived body and the physical body is that this lived or animated body is always given as *my own body* (Crisis §2) and I experience myself as ‘holding sway’ over this body. The lived body is not just a centre of experience, but a centre for action and self-directed movement (Moran and Cohen 2012, pp. 193-194). What, then, is the body? The body is nothing but me; the body I experience or, simply, ‘I am my body’. Merleau-Ponty calls this body the ‘I-body’ or the ‘natural I’ (Kwant 1963, p. 28). He introduces another word, ‘praktognosia’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 162), to denote that human understanding is ‘wholly submerged in action’ (1963b, p. 28) and, further, that:

Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a ‘praktognosia’, which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary (2002, p. 162).

The body-subject is the primordial knowing and meaning-making agent, which is tied simultaneously to the body itself and to the world. This knowing process occurs in between the body and the world within a pre-conscious realm: thus, the body-subject and the world are
mutually dependent. This level of the body does not generate meanings in the psychological realm but it ‘is born at an organic level that is pre-personal, which is thence modulated through one’s bodily engagement with the intersubjective world, engendering a complex personal relation to the world’ (Diprose and Reynolds 2008, p. 114).

The primary goal of the actor, whether she performs in Anton Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* or Sarah Kane’s *Psychosis 4:48*, is the need to find the ‘knowing how’ – how to enact the situations. Therefore, the actor is not a thinker at the primary level but a doer; a doer of actions in theatrical situations. However, the actor is a thinker too, but a ‘thinker in movement’ in a phenomenological sense (Sheets-Johnstone 1981). The actor’s actions always begin with the ‘I can’ of the body. Merleau-Ponty adapts the words ‘I can’ from Husserl. It is a way of describing how the body attunes *through* action to its environment. It implies that it is not because ‘I think’ that I therefore engage with the world; it is because my animated body can pre-reflectively engage and make meaningful relationships with the world (Landes 2013, p. 102). Actors move, think, talk, sing, act and interact with others. All these activities stem from the actor’s bodily urge of ‘I can’ (I can think, I can imagine, I can sing, I can jump, I can dance, I can touch). For Merleau-Ponty, this ‘I can’ functions as the primary knowing agent of the body. He argues that ‘[c]onsciousness is in the first place not a matter of “I think that” but “I can”’ (2002, p. 159). It is the body that functions as a consciousness to achieve the desired tasks. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of body-subject therefore incarnates as consciousness through the ‘movement intentionality’ (motor intentionality) of the body. Also in support of this notion, and offering a further rejection of Cartesian epistemology and ontology represented by ‘I think,’ Elizabeth Grosz asserts that ‘the body is my being-in-the-world and as such is the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated’ (1994, p. 86).

Merleau-Ponty identifies the body-subject with a particular metaphor, the *Nullpunkt*, which is a German word indicating the zero point (Priest 1998). As a measuring instrument cannot measure itself, the body-subject exists and functions as a zero point. As Stephen Priest points out, this body-subject does not, therefore, appear to itself as an object (Priest 1998, p.

17 Similar to Merleau-Ponty, the Asian philosopher Yuasa introduces the body that is psychophysical in content and is understood as a unified wholeness. Yuasa’s body scheme as a new ‘somatic self’ functions as an epistemological as well as actional centre embodied by a person. This ‘somatic self’, as per Merleau-Ponty’s lived body, ‘opens its windows both outward onto the external physical nature and inward into the internal region of the psyche’ (Shaner, 1989, p.141).
Being a perceiver, the body-subject cannot perceive itself: the body-subject can see, but it cannot see itself seeing or see its own seeing. This positioning of body-subject as a Nullpunkt has given the body-subject its inherent ontological being as a flesh in the world: ‘My body is made of the same flesh as the world because both body and the world are perceived’ (Priest 1998, pp. 73-74).

The body as a nullpunkt or zero point in the perceptual act has implications for the actor (Parviainen 1998). The actor is always engaged with his body. Nevertheless, he cannot say that ‘my body is my instrument,’ because if he understands his body as his tool, it imposes an unchanging stable entity of ‘I’ which exists and overrides his body as an object of his attention. He gradually learns that the actor’s body is a mode of living and the maker of meanings that works simultaneously as a perceiver and a perceived. This intersubjective negotiation between the actor’s body and how it is perceived is always a concern in an actor’s learning situations. When the actor prepares for a performance she is always confronted with an ‘abyss’ (écart) (Parviainen 1998) between her perceiving and how the other (role / director / actors / audience) perceives her body. As Jaana Parviainen argues, ‘[t]he sentient body is interwoven with perceivable, sensible objects, but the body and objects do not vanish into “sameness”’ (Parviainen 1998 p. 64). Thus, because the perceptual act always instigates a counter perception such as seeing and seen, touching and touched, this reciprocity creates a gap between the body and the object perceived (1998, p. 65).

As the layman cannot see his seeing, the actor cannot fully grasp the ways the body is presented and received on stage. There is always a gap between what the actor perceives of his body and how the audience perceive his body. As Merleau-Ponty states, ‘I am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me in one invariable perspective’ (Cited in Parviainen 1998, p. 88). The actor confronts a complex situation when she perceives her body, her art and craft as undivided and interdependent operations. She knows that she cannot step out from her body and say ‘I am presenting my art’, and neither can she assume that ‘I create my craft out of my body and offer my product to the onlookers’. Every time she tries to do so, she is simultaneously being bonded with her bodymind not allowing her to depart from its equilibrium. Her art is nothing but herself; her artistic product is herself, her bodymind. She cannot see her artwork unless via other duplications or representations in other forms or mediums, and even these entail inevitably distorting mediations. However, she possesses a privileged position of being the ‘zero point’ (écart) or abyss in her art. She can experience the
The privilege of living through it and part of her role as an actor is to reveal as much of that sense of privilege to the audience as she is able.

I can see other objects around me; I can handle them, use them and even walk around them. But as Merleau-Ponty asserts, it is my body that cannot be perceived similar to my other observations. He writes: ‘In order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be unobservable’ (2002, p. 104). Unlike other objects, he distinguishes bodily existence as a conscious subject via which the body is able to perceive, feel, touch, and see things. He further writes, ‘it is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches’ (2002, p. 105). The actor, however, uses something akin to a second body. That second body – most obviously, in the enactment of a dramatic character – is developed through the cultivation of a second nature, itself a result of the highly attuned body schema pertaining to a particular task or an action. It is where the actor’s sensory perception, imagination, thinking and bodily actions are integrated within the core of her habit body. Where body-subject refers to Merleau-Ponty’s description of the body as an undivided consciousness, the body schema is a development of this idea that specifically refers to the indivisibility of perception and motility. This is obviously a key idea for the articulation of my actor-learning which I will explore further in the following section.

**Body schema**

In Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the phenomenal body, one cannot find a distinction between perceptual experience and motor experience as two separate cognitive and actional domains. He discusses the notion of corporeal schema (*schema corporeal*) at length in his chapter ‘The Spatiality of One’s own Body and Motility’ (2002, pp. 112-170). This idea of corporeal schema or body schema works as a sum of perceptual and motor operation, ‘a power of grasping’ associated with the ‘feelable’ qualities of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 2002). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological analysis of bodily motor function and perceptual experience ‘are dialectically or reciprocally linked’ (Gallagher 2006, p. 67).

The application of these ideas to this thesis means that the actor’s bodymind opens up a perceptual grasp of her environment and captures what the bodymind wants to establish as its anchoring in such situations. The bodymind creates a field of consciousness around the body.
allowing it to grasp the particularities of its surroundings. This occurs most of the time through the visual consciousness of the actor, but this activity is not confined to the visual grasping of objects. While visual consciousness perceives and grasps specific objects in its environment, other senses also envelop together to complete the conscious experience for the actor. Merleau-Ponty does not favour the idea of inner consciousness. Instead he discusses the operative intentionality (a-tension) of the body and how it works within a figure-background paradigm in the process of perceptual synthesis (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 35). I shall explain the situational consciousness of the actor and how it works according to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of perceptual grasping.

The actor stands still in the rehearsal space. His perceptual consciousness works as an intentional arc supporting him to grasp the environment he inhabits. Even if he is standing still in this rehearsal space, his bodymind continuously provides information necessary to maintain his standing in this space. The bodymind attunes to the surroundings and provides the vital schematic information, the bodily gravitation, spatial-temporal relation, sensitivities and the information of the objects around. He experiences his bodymind inside and outside by perceiving his weight, balance and the way that his body is standing on the floor. At this moment, he might be particularly conscious about the way that his breathing occurs. He might feel that his breathing enters his nostril cavities and into the chest area and then expands the rib cage. He feels how the wooden floor touches his feet and provides a cold sensation. In the meantime he sees someone entering the rehearsal space. His consciousness begins to work as a focal point of attention towards the person entering the rehearsal room: here, his attention shifts from his body towards the outer object.

While his attention shifts towards the person entering the rehearsal space, the periphery of his consciousness is still functioning while holding the awareness of the bodymind in the background. At first his focal point of attention is towards his body. Then it changes due to

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19 Merleau-Ponty argues that the problem with attention is that it can be indifferently applicable to ‘any content of the consciousness’ (2002, p. 31). For instance, when the actor is in the rehearsal space, she senses the coldness of the rehearsal floor and the coolness of the breath going inside her nostrils. She sees a red flower in a vase. This intentional directedness brings the actor different sense experiences. But these sense experiences are not the property of the consciousness, but the properties of the objects themselves.
the person entering the rehearsal room. The first focal point of the attention (body) later becomes the periphery of his consciousness. When one object takes its position as a figure in the field of attention, the former steps back into the periphery, forming a background to appear for the new one. Merleau-Ponty identifies human attention as a way of shifting and presents the consciousness towards a new object. For him it is a ‘transformation of the mental field’ (Landes 2013, pp. 24-25). Merleau-Ponty argues that consciousness does not exist until it ‘sets limits to an object’. Furthermore, the ‘phantom of internal experience’ is possible because it is also attached to the external experiences (2002, p. 32).

According to Merleau-Ponty the bodymind does not exist as a split; it seeks equilibrium and symmetricality between the organism and the environment. If the bodymind finds asymmetry (imbalance) between the organism and the world, it finds solutions by attending to the cause of the problem and providing other alternatives to maintain the unification between the body and the world.

I will provide a further example. Let’s suppose that the actor is moving in the rehearsal space. Suddenly she encounters a crack on the wooden floor. Her flow of action is interrupted due to this sudden attention of seeing the crack. She still needs to continue her walking and she may step to avoid the crack or she may shift her usual routine to find another path. In this situation, the bodymind equilibrium may be distracted by her attention towards the crack on the floor. But the bodymind offers myriad opportunities for the actor to overcome such situations through networking with the environment, enabling her to continue an ongoing action. In this process, the actor learns how to maintain the bodymind equilibrium that is momentarily disrupted. This shift from the objective of walking to accommodating the crack in the floor is not a result of a conflict between consciousness and the body or a deficit of the bodymind: it is the way that the bodymind reaffirms its bodily inhabitation in a particular environment by allowing the bodymind to adjust to any imbalance occurring during the

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20 Merleau-Ponty’s idea about the body and its unity of the senses has been heavily influenced by the gestalt psychologists’ understanding of the body. However, as Morris suggests, while accepting the unity of the senses, Merleau-Ponty further maintains that it is needed to accept the ‘diversity of the senses’ as well (Morris 2012, p. 87). In our visual perception, for instance, we take some ‘analytical attitude’ when we see things. On the other hand, there are some instances where our visual field is engrossed in some objects and we tend to ‘live’ in the visual grasping. For Merleau-Ponty, the analytical attitude is problematic because it splits the ‘lived experience’ into separate sense data, whereas our sensory experience occurs as an inter-sensory networking with the outer objects (ibid, p. 88).
process of repetition through rehearsal (in phenomenological terms this is referred to as habituation, a concept I will discuss at length below).

Merleau-Ponty is unsympathetic to psychological models that conceive of proprioception (generally related to balance and position) and kinaesthesia (generally related to movement) as a representation of consciousness (Morris 2012). He writes: ‘When the term body image was first used, it was thought that nothing more was being introduced than a convenient name for a great many associations of images’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 113). Merleau-Ponty articulates the notion of the body schema, via Gestalt psychological analysis, as the ‘total awareness of my posture in the intersensory world’ (2002, p. 114). In line with this, Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of the body schema not as a representation of the image in the psyche but a ‘dynamic’ attitude of the body. This attitude of the body is a motor attitude formed towards certain actions. He argues that ‘my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existence or possible task.’ (2002, pp. 114-115).

Merleau-Ponty argues that traditional terminologies should be re-contextualized in order to arrive at a new phenomenological description of the body and its capacity to learn. He argues that the phenomenal experience of bodily habituation literally demands a new way of looking at the process of learning and human understanding. ‘To understand,’ he writes, ‘is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 167). Merleau-Ponty therefore suggests that the traditional notion of human ‘understanding’ as a mental representation needs to be shifted to a direct pre-thematic understanding of the body.21 It is the body that understands the world, not the cogito of ‘I think’ that comprehends the world.22 In Phenomenology of Perception (2002) he writes:

21 American pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey, radicalized the notion of perception by suggesting a revolutionary theory. In response to the established epistemology of a stimulus-response model, Dewey suggested that the perceptual apparatuses are ‘actional’ and ‘moving’ rather than being passive receptors to the stimulants (Dewey 1896 p. 358).

22 Richard Shusterman is unsympathetic to Merleau-Ponty’s articulation of un-thematic ‘silent-cogito’—the body. His key argument is that Merleau-Ponty has neglected the ‘explicit somatic conscious sensations’ or ‘somaesthetic reflections’, as he terms them, that are a part and parcel of human bodily conscious experience (Shustermann R 2008, p. 53). He argues that Merleau-Ponty forgets to accept the role of such conscious experiences as hunger, thirst, and pain, or proprioceptive sensations such as balance, body positioning and gravitation in the wider canvas of human perception. What Shusterman suggests is that ‘through a systematic
the normal subject has his body not only as a system of present positions, but besides, and thereby, as an open system of an infinite number of equivalent positions directed to other ends. What we have called the body image is precisely this system of equivalents, this immediately given invariant whereby the different motor tasks are instantaneously transferable. It follows that it is not only an experience of my body, but an experience of my body-in-the-world, and that this is what gives a motor meaning to verbal orders (2002 pp. 163-164).

When the actor sees a glass of water on stage, she presupposes that this glass is situated in a particular mise-en-scene, within a particular time and space and able to be grasped and manipulated. The glass is there as an instrument to be explored and handled. The bodymind extends its tentacles (perception consciousness) towards the glass and, in return, the glass enters into the lived experience through the potential act of drinking by the actor. The body enters into the object of the glass through a series of possibilities of inhabiting, seeing, touching and drinking, while the glass enters into the actor’s embodied experience by extending its instrumentality (Garner 1994, p. 89) towards the body.

This simple example of the actor drinking illustrates Merleau-Ponty’s argument that perceptual consciousness incarnates and lives through the actor’s body. This perceptual consciousness provides the actor with active ‘impulses’ for the performance environment. When the actor is asked to enact a particular act on the stage for the first time, how does she approach this task? How does she get the inspiration to transform her phonetic cognitive understanding of the text into an analogical function? The actor learner begins this process with the body’s inherent nature of ‘doing’ things. It is the ‘bodily urge’, the tension that binds him to the task environment. His bodymind looks for potential opportunities, or, as Merleau-Ponty says, ‘the world of feelable things’ (2002, p. 176), to act upon. In phenomenological terms, it is bodily intentionality that allows the actor to grasp the task that she intends: the bodymind ‘catches and comprehends’ (2002, p. 165) the actables in the performance space.

training’ one could develop a more attentive awareness or somaesthetic consciousnesses for a better function of the body.

It should be noted that Merleau-Ponty’s assertion of consciousness is radically different from others, even from his predecessor, Edmund Husserl. In articulating consciousness, Husserl saw that the bodily sensation plays a role. But Merleau-Ponty argued that the ‘lived body is itself the subject of perceptual experience’ (Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 152). There is no particular consciousness mediation in between. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is attached to motor intentionality. Perceiving is primarily a moving towards things that are appeared in certain ‘feelable’ ways. Thus the object has a ‘motor significance’ (ibid, p. 152).
Merleau-Ponty argues that it is this bodily ‘moving intentionality’\(^{24}\) that triggers the action already engaged with the target domain. He further argues:

In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world (2002, p. 277).

When the actor is asked to move across the stage, she finds ways of perceiving and moving through this spatio-temporality by inhabiting through the bodymind. Because the actor’s bodymind is already engaged with the spatio-temporal structure, the actor possesses the primary bodily understanding of the nature of being in such a situation. The actor may have one or more larger intentional goals to achieve in a rehearsal process. He may be concentrating on the text, dialogues, an action, other actors or a particular prop, or something else outside the context. But during these intentional actions he may be largely unaware of how and in what ways the body inhabits such situations. He may be primarily aware of his intentional targets and perhaps some marginal somatic awareness may emerge in conjunction with his intentional act. But most of the bodily inhabitation is occurring beyond conscious awareness, which allows the actor to proceed with what she wants to achieve. With this implicit bodily knowledge of moving through space, the actor begins to explore a ‘new culture’ of the body that is experienced as a way of responding to this new theatre space. This ‘new culture’ of the body informs a new spatio-temporality by assimilating the skills required to move and manipulate and act in the situation.

Carlin-Metz argues that the actor’s unique ability is to ‘orchestrate all the systems of the body and to maintain the homeostasis of the self, physical and conscious’ (McCutcheon and Sellers-Young 2013, p. 33). Applied to text-based acting, this means that reading the text allows the actor to cognitively grasp the symbolic meanings of the text. The task environment then motivates her to transform her cognitive grasping of the text into a series of analogical

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\(^{24}\) The term intentionality or motor intentionality plays an important role in Edmund Husserl (1856-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1908-1961) philosophies. Husserl found that the human consciousness is always conscious ‘about’ something. Merleau-Ponty later developed the idea of ‘Intentional arc’ or ‘motor intentionality’ which explains how the body is pre-reflectively intertwined with the world (Landes 2013). Our bodies are primarily intending bodies which make meanings within pre-reflective bodily domains. (See Langer, Monika M. 1989, Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception: A Guide and Commentary. London: Macmillan).
interpretations through the body.\textsuperscript{25} Given all of these complications, learning lines and transferring textual symbols into somatic expressions is a complex and transformational process of habit formation through bodymind experience.

As Carlin-Metz argues, the actor needs the ability to use and employ her ‘analogical’ capacities because the process is ‘dominantly associative and intuitive, utilizing physical and emotional knowing during the act of rehearsal and performance’ (McCutcheon and Sellers-Young 2013, p. 34). This identification of the cognitive function of reading and the analogical realization of actions through the body does not necessarily demarcate the bodymind function as a split in the actor’s experience.\textsuperscript{26} The actor’s cognitive process is formed as a result of the bodily organism and its coupling with the outer world. Johnson affirms that ‘there is no “inner idea” representing an “outer reality”, since the outer reality is the world as experienced’ (2008, p. 146).

The concept of the body-subject, a rejection of a body-mind split and an affirmation that consciousness is embodied, represents a starting point for understanding my journey of actor learning. The extended concept of body schema, that perception and motility are likewise undivided, refines this potential for understanding and analysis. The further extension of these ideas, that of habituation, to which I now turn, illustrates how embodied consciousness and perception, repeated in time and space, accrues habitually into learned behaviour.

\textbf{Habituating Bodymind}

New habits, either in acting practice or in daily life, are formed ‘on top’ of past habits and then become past habits themselves, the basis upon which new and future habits can be made.

\textsuperscript{25} Reading the text and transforming it into physical conditioning are not two separate functionalities. Reading a text may seem an intellectual, cognitive activity for the actor. Hence, contemporary cognitive science affirms that reading also can trigger the neural firing of the brain by simulating the actual act of doing described in the reading. Mark Johnston argues that when the humans are merely imagining the ‘bodily movements’ or ‘object manipulation’ we activate the ‘sensory-motor areas’ that are involved with the actual actions (Overton et al. 2012, p. 25).

\textsuperscript{26} Mark Johnson supposes that great care is needed to discuss cognitive influences on the brain neural mapping. Because when one defines the cognitive functioning as a ‘representation’ of the neural map in the brain, this may lead to a ‘full-blown mind/body dualism’ again (2008, p. 146).
Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Catherine J. Morris suggests that ‘habits are history turned into nature’ (2012, p. 69): in other words, the habits become second nature. And citing Merleau-Ponty, Morris argues that ‘[i]t is in virtue of the body’s capacity to acquire habits that the past has a weight (cf. pp 442/514), and the weight of the past, we might say, both enables us to go forward and hold us back, it creates both momentum and inertia’ (Morris 2012, p. 69). This dynamic describes the ongoing process – cyclical and somewhat paradoxical – of the formation of new habits.

Habit formation requires of the actor a deliberate attention towards her task environment. However, in order to master such a skill, the actor needs also to forget this attention, to un-attend to the new skill or habit, and here is something of the paradox. The actor does not learn actions through deliberation but learning occurs in and through the bodymind as he gradually immerses in the new culture of movements introduced through the opportunities offered in the task environment. The actor’s ability to perceive through bodymind allows him to find an appropriate structure for the action he explores in the theatre space. However, this exploration of bodily skills and actions further expands his ability to heighten his attentiveness towards the actions he creates. The actor repeats his findings through his bodymind allowing him to sediment them in his body. The following day when he comes to the rehearsal he needs to recreate what he has found through his bodymind. The actor may record various findings from the rehearsals in a journal (or, if the technology is available, via recordings), but the primary learning is recorded in and through his bodymind. His ability to inhabit in the task environment begins to sediment his interlocking of vocal and bodily actions together as a series of possible enactments. The more he repeats the task the more it becomes sedimented in his bodymind. This process cultivates a habit body for the actor allowing him to re-enact actions at will. Merleau-Ponty provides exciting examples of how the body cultivates the habit body through renewal and rearranging corporeal schemas:

As has often been said, it is the body which ‘catches’ (kapiert) and ‘comprehends’ movement. The acquisition of a habit is indeed the grasping of a significance, but it is the motor grasping of a motor significance (Merleau-Ponty 2002 p. 165).

Merleau-Ponty here argues that bodily comportment, attitudes and movements are not a result of intellectual synthesis of body movements but an immediate grasping of perceptual
synthesis with the environment. William James argues that in order to know where one’s arms are, one needs to have a ‘sensation’ or ‘kinetic impression’ prior to executing any physical movements (Morris 2012 p. 52). Merleau-Ponty, however, opposes this idea of ‘sensation’ and provides further examples of how the bodily schema operates as immediate knowledge embedded in the body. He discusses the habit of driving a car through a narrow gap without measuring the gap and knowing that ‘I can get through’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 165). Similarly, when one enters a doorway one does not need to measure the width of it. Talking about a blind man’s stick, Merleau-Ponty shows how this man’s stick could be an extension of his body (2002 p. 165). When the stick is embedded into the blind man’s experience, via extended habituation, it is no longer an object attached to his body but a part of his body schema: ‘The stick is no longer an object perceived by the blind man, but an instrument with which he perceives. It is a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis’ (ibid, p. 176). Merleau-Ponty uses these and other examples to argue that the habit body is a knowing body that acquires knowledge through bodily being-in-the-world.

In describing the ‘bodily power of motor habit’, Merleau-Ponty argues how the performer sediments a habit body by reworking and rearranging the motor habits for a new significance of the body. He writes:

The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habit such as dancing (2002 p. 169).

Merleau-Ponty here demonstrates an awareness of how the performer cultivates her expressive body through reworking and renewing daily habits. The performance process

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27 Heidegger’s notion of Dasein and Being-in-the-world suggests that ‘knowing’ and ‘acting’ is a single enactment. He does not distinguish subject from object, perception from action. He talks about ‘a self-less awareness’ (Dreyfus 1991).

28 Merleau-Ponty has adapted the term Being-in-the-world from Heidegger. Heidegger’s project is to overcome the Western metaphysics of body-mind by introducing a more fundamental, ‘basic form of intentionality’ functioned and directed towards the world. This basic form he termed ‘Dasein’ (Being there/Human being). He saw that human bodily existence and conscious experience cannot be captured within the subject-object dichotomy. Rather, he postulated that the body and consciousness function as non thematic ways of being-in-the-world (Dreyfus 1991, pp. 3-5). It is a way of bodily being and coping with the world that is the basis of all intelligence.
demands an extended body from which the actor starts to work beyond the biological habit body. Theatre demands inventive skills and imaginative actions from the actor. Although the actor’s body is already sedimented with learned skills and daily habituations, these skills and habits do not necessarily provide adequate creative habits that the actor needs to cultivate on stage. However, the actor’s creative habits that are projected on stage are an extension of such primary habits that the actor learns from his everyday existence. As Gabor Csepregi argues, acquired skills ‘sustain and increase’ the capacity for the new acquisition of habits. The body has a capacity to both relate to its past and ‘anticipate […] habitual or probing movements’ (2006, p. 115): thus, while the body encapsulates habits as history, at the same time it has a capacity to anticipate future actions.

In this respect, habit works for the actor as a two-way channel: first, the actor relies on the habits that have been sedimented through the body. Second, these habits work for her to anticipate the desired action needed to execute in the given situation (Csepregi 2006). The actor does not mechanically reproduce habits. The habits allow the actor to create and invent a new significance of the body that is incarnated through ever-changing situations on the stage. Merleau-Ponty suggests that bodily habits do not correspond with the thought process of the subject or manifest on the object targeted. Habit incarnates through the bodily networking with the outer world. Habit allows the actor to incorporate his environment by ‘appropriating fresh instruments’ into his body. Habit dilates his existence, being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 166).

**Power to reckon**

In the chapter ‘The Spatiality of One’s own Body and Motility’ in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002, p. 125), Merleau-Ponty introduces the body-subject’s capacity to think and imagine with the phrase ‘reckons with the possible’. He writes: ‘The normal person reckons

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29 Similar articulations of human imagination can be found in the work of many key phenomenological philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. Husserl identifies the imagination as a ‘vital element in phenomenology’. He defines it as ‘an act of intuitively experienced as something in the mode of inactuality or irreality’. For Heidegger, it is the ecstatic nature of Dasein. For Sartre, it is an essential and transcendental condition of human consciousness (Schmicking and Gallagher 2010, p. 142).
with the possible, which thus, without shifting from its position as a possibility, acquires a sort of actuality’ (2002, p. 125). The actor demonstrates this capacity through imagining the ways that she can act in the enactive situation (Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 107). For example, if the actor is asked to go to the stage and sit on a chair that is placed at the centre of the stage, how does she perceive this task in order to attend to this situation? Her perceptual synthesis of her surroundings and the object on the stage, as well as her sedimented knowledge of the chair, provide background information to perceive how to advance towards the centre of the stage and sit on the chair. Her perceptual capacities ignite the imagination, via this power of reckoning, in how to grasp the given act of sitting. She is able to project her enactment towards the desired task whilst anticipating its consequences and effects. The bodymind provides the actor with instant information that is streaming through her perception of the surroundings to formulate an enactment that is yet to be realised.

Actors, of course, work largely in imaginative situations. In such circumstances, the body-subject ‘mentally represents the requirement for action’ (Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 107). In the particular situation of sitting on the chair in the centre of the stage, the actor may want to change his action and find an alternative to the action of sitting. This may be suggested by the director or intuited by the actor. If the director calls for a change of the action, the actor then needs to alter the current task of sitting on the chair to a new suggested action by changing his bodily attitude towards the new task. If he wants to change the current action of sitting and find an alternative, then he looks for other possibilities given in the horizon of his current flow of actions. In order to do so, for instance, he may choose to sit on a table that is also placed near the chair. This switching from the current task to another is also already manifested in his bodymind synthesis of the current task as a horizon of possibilities given in the task environment. The bodymind thus continues with the newly suggested opportunity through the director’s involvement or from his own reckoning of the opportunities residing in the horizon. In both cases, the director’s need to change the situation or the actor’s urge to change the action are both achieved through the perceptual grasping of a particular alternative object or a situation which appears in the rehearsal environment.

This type of mediation is possible in the rehearsal situation where the actor might need to stop her flow of experience and attend to a particular action in switching off from the current grasping. This conscious attentiveness makes possible an adjustment and the proposal of alternative solutions to the action, and has been much discussed: is this conscious attention
a property and extension of simply the (disembodied) mind, or, as this thesis insists, the integrated bodymind. Phillip Zarrilli explores this dynamic in his description of learning in the lion pose in kalaripayattu martial arts, where one needs to have an unremittent ‘volitional shift of attention’ to perform the ‘correct’ way of executing the lion pose (2007, p. 53). This volitional shift is proposed either by the traditional master’s instruction or taking one’s own body into the objective attention. In both situations, by master’s instructions or one’s own attentiveness towards the body, one can adjust into the correct position of the lion pose. Zarrilli further claims that this situation is ‘extrinsic’ when and where the performer’s body is being objectified, such that the lion pose is insufficiently inhabited and executed, and the conscious attention is elevated from the body. But once the apprentice acquires the correct stance over time, the former situation of ‘extrinsic’ becomes ‘intrinsic and intuitive’ (2007, pp. 52-53).

It is true that when you experience the difficulty of opening a door knob, you need to pay deliberate attention towards the door knob as an object of consciousness in order to open the door. When I first tried to open my new apartment, I experienced difficulties opening the front door because it was malfunctioning (Conspicuousness) (Dreyfus 1991). My housemates in the apartment came to rescue me and instructed me in how to deal with this situation. It is a situation where the proper function of the door knob seemed to be not functioning with my bodily manipulation; the door knob as an ‘available equipment’ was in a certain ‘unavailableness’ to my body (Dreyfus 1991, pp. 70-71).

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30 An ongoing debate about how an individual shifts from one coping task to another without deliberation of a cogito intervention can be accessed in Thomas Baldwin’s Reading Merleau-Ponty: On Phenomenology of Perception (2007). In this book, Romdenh-Romluc and Hubert Dreyfus debate this complex argument at length (Baldwin 2007, pp. 44-69). As Hubert Dreyfus argues, there are some phenomenologists who are not in favour of the non-representational ways of knowledge acquisition (2002, pp. 372-373). For instance, he argues that Husserl relies on the ‘typical empiricism’ (ibid, p. 373) when he says that in order to understand, adjust, or explore a particular object, we tend to take for granted our past experience to fill the gap between our current perception and the past. For example, when one sees an object from one perspective, one assumes that there is a similar other side to it (ibid, p. 372). Similarly, when the dancer pays conscious attention to correctly placing her feet, she tries to adjust her feet according to the available psychical model, previous knowledge or visual content she bears in her internality. But Merleau-Ponty’s answer to this question is adamant as he questions the psychical representation of such learning occurrence. Merleau-Ponty’s appreciation of how a performer acquires a skill does not explain how those skills first ‘represent’ in the performer’s mind but ‘is presented to the learner as a more and more finely discriminated situation, which then solicits a more and more refined response’ (Dreyfus 2002, p. 373). Learning occurs between the body and the world like a ‘feed-back loop’ (ibid).
When these two situations are compared - my body dealing with the un-responding door knob and the martial artist’s failure to perform the correct posture of the lion pose – there appear numerous similarities. In the former, the performer’s body posture does not match with the way that it is to be performed according to the laws of the martial art. The latter shows that my learned skill of turning a door knob does not match with the new door knob I have encountered. I need to adjust my hand movements to enable me to learn new hand movements which would fit with the equipment I touch. On the other hand, the kalaripayattu martial art performer needs to learn, adjusting and manipulating his body movements to achieve the correct posture of the lion pose. Both efforts rely on the way that the target equipment, object or form needs us to find a new body schema which allows us to fit into the new habitual situation. When the tasks are completed, the performer should experience an uninterrupted flow of body actions and ease of performing the correct action without having any inhibition.

As discussed earlier, perceiving something for Merleau-Ponty is not a hidden conscious process. Perception occurs due to what Morris, after Merleau-Ponty, calls the essence of the object that invited the action (motives) of the body. If the perceptual action contradicts the object, ‘a new cluster of meanings is formed; our former movements are integrated into a fresh motor entity’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 177). Merleau-Ponty explains that it is not the subject’s mental content that decides and suggests the modification that is required for the movement targeted. There is no place for such content to play a significant role in such a situation. It is the object that is coupled with the body that calls the body to act upon it. He further argues:

A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its ‘world’, and to move one’s body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation. Motility, then, is not, as it were, a handmaid of consciousness, transporting the body to that point in space of which we have formed a representation beforehand (2002, pp. 160-161).

It is the body as a consciousness ‘anchorage’ in the world (ibid, p. 167) that plays the major role in resolving the problem. Dreyfus argues that if the individual shifts his current task to another, he does so by turning to a new task already ‘summoning up’ in the horizon of the current task or turning to a new situation that is not even given in the horizon of the task
absorbed (Baldwin 2007, p. 67). According to these formulations, executing an action or changing the current task in favour of shifting to another, the actor’s power to reckon and her relationship with the task environment is significant.

The actor’s power to reckon further helps her to develop the creative act of simulating a character and movements. Much of this creative character work is conspicuous, ostensible and perceptible via various acts: the actor learns lines, experiments with movements and gestures, and imagines different psychological states. But other dimensions of the character development are less apparent, perhaps even mysterious: the actor undergoes an almost invisible and inexplicable transformation into a new persona. Given that phenomenology conceives of the imagination as a mode of perception, the power to reckon enables the actor, via her bodymind, to transpose her biological body into a figurative state where her imagination becomes bodily actualisation. Here again is the figure-background structure whereby the actor materialises the character as an object of his attention in the background to his body and the text. This intentional capturing of the imagined, invisible character renders a simulation to his bodymind. It is an attempt to grasp an object imagined (ideal model) through perceptual and motor movements of the body. In return the bodymind begins to habituate through transposing images into a figurative reality. This convergence is verified once the actor experiences that his intentional object is no longer an object or an image in his attention. Gallagher and Schmicking refer to this process with the phrase absent-as-intentional-object (2010, p. 189), which means that the actor forgets her intentional habituation and shifts, almost imperceptibly, the character from body as object to body as

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31 Dreyfus provides further explanation of Heidegger’s position on conscious deliberation. Heidegger does not deny the necessity of deliberate attention when the ‘skill coping’ reaches a conflicting situation (Dreyfus 1991, p.174). The problem of the deliberation (conscious attention/body-mind contradiction) according to Heidegger should not be understood as a mental content of the beholder as the Cartesian tradition suggests. It should be understood within the ‘background of absorption’ in the world. In other words, as Merleau-Ponty also contends, this conscious attention should be understood not within the context of the subject but within the context of the object. The traditional understanding of the consciousness should be shifted from its prejudiced position to the other side of the axis – the world.

32 It should be noted that Husserl calls the phenomenology of imagination ‘inactuality’ or ‘irreality’ (Gallagher and Schmicking 2010, p. 142). He distinguishes the act of imagination from other mental phenomena such as perception, thinking, and remembering. When perceiving something, as Husserl argues, there is an object attached to the act of perceiving and it is visible and presenting to the perceiver. In the imaginative act, the object is represented as possible. He sees a similar figure-background structure in both perception and imagination, the relationship between the intentional act and the object targeted. However, the important point Husserl makes is that imagination brings forth what he calls a quasi-perception, which means, that it brings the subject a simulating experience (2010, pp. 143-146).
subject. This process is still a mystery to him because he is unaware that it is his bodymind that transcends and transforms him into the character.

**Style of bodymind**

In the discussion of the habit body, it is important to further note that Merleau-Ponty and later phenomenologists, such as Paul Ricoeur, also discuss the bodily style of performing tasks (Csepregi 2006, p. 96; Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 177). Having a habit body means demonstrating a bodily style of doing a particular task. These body schemata are recognized as certain styles of the body that are sedimented over time to perform certain actions efficiently. Merleau-Ponty recognises these bodily schemata as ‘style, rhythm, or simply body schema’ (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 136). Styling renders a particular aestheticising of bodily movements and gestures according to the ways that individuals inhabit in certain social and cultural contexts. In this sense, styles of the habit body render certain meanings to the actor and to the onlooker. First, the actor is aware of the melodic character (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 120) of the habit body because it provides an ease and suppleness of movement: she further senses that her perception is altered by the cultivation of a certain style of the body. Second, from the onlooker’s point of view, the melodic character of the habit body signifies the actor’s aesthetic efficiency of executing the action. The onlooker can recognise the actor’s body as a representation of a particular somatic culture in which the body has been habituated. Sheets-Johnstone provides further explanations of how humans are aware of their bodily movements. She introduces the notion of ‘kinesthetic melodies’ to discuss how individuals are pre-reflectively aware of their own movement patterns (Sheets-Johnstone 2011, p. 460). These kinesthetic melodies provide the individual with a consciousness of their own bodily comportments and their ‘qualitatively felt synergies’ to distinguish how they are different from others.33

Unlike daily activities, portraying a character in a play demands the actor to invent different gestural patterns, ways of speaking and behaving. The actor’s body schema that he uses to inhabit in daily life seems inadequate and sometimes inappropriate in the context of

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33 In the cognitive science, this felt qualities of the movements are known as the qualia (Gallagher 2006, pp. 60-61).
this extra-daily behaviour. Even if it is a realistic performance which replicates everyday natural habituations, theatrical behaviours are, in Richard Schechner’s formulation, “‘restored behaviours,’” “twice-behaved behaviours,” performed actions that people train for and rehearse’ (Schechner 2013, p. 28). Therefore, portraying a character is another way of saying that the actor cultivates a new style of habits: “‘me behaving as if I were someone else,” or “as I am told to do,” or “as I have learned’” (2013, p. 34). This new habit body transcends him to a new existence. Paul Ricouer argues:

This is familiar in the case of skaters, pianists, and even aspiring writers. Habit only grows through this type of germination and inventiveness concealed within it. To acquire a habit does not mean to repeat and consolidate but to invent and to progress (Cited in Csepregi 2006, p.123).

Csepregi further argues that in daily situations our bodies adapt to certain situations with maximum grip (2006, pp. 120-122), which means that the body has a capacity to grasp and adapt to certain situations. The actor has a similar grip between his body and the performance score he enacts. Further, the actor goes beyond such habitual limitations and elevates his grip into a new aesthetic zone. The body begins to aestheticise the habit body from which the body begins to transform from everyday behaviours to the extra-daily aesthetic and stylized behaviour.

This transformation of the aesthetic bodymind is, according to Zarrilli, experienced by the actor in two modes. First, the actor experiences “‘aesthetic” inner body-mind’ awareness (Banes and Lepecki 2012, p. 54). This inner bodymind is the result of the cultivation of a habit body. The inner awareness of integrated bodymind is achieved through certain bodily practices. Second, the actor cultivates an awareness of the ‘aesthetic outer body-mind’ towards the form/score (Zarrilli 2007, pp. 51-59). The outer form or score here refers to the actor’s relationship to her creation of the movement structure that is developed through bodily actions. When the actor embodies the score as an equilibrium of actions, the actor no longer inhabits the score, the score inhabits the actor as a virtual flow of experience. Zarrilli identifies these inner and outer bodymind aesthetics as aspects of the ‘extra-daily lived body’ (Banes and Lepecki 2012, p. 54).34 When the actor transcends the formal structure of the

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34 Zarrilli builds upon Leder’s conception of the absent body to articulate his version of the aesthetic aspects of the bodymind integration (Banes and Lepecki 2012, pp. 50-59). Leder provides two sets of bodily existences: The surface body and recessive body. The surface body is comprised of the sensory motor functions and their relation with the surroundings. It is called ‘exteroception’. We experience this body as ‘from the body’ towards
score, she is elevated into a higher level of performance and experiences the freedom and the enjoyment of playing.

In summary, in this section I have traced a phenomenological trajectory that flows thus: the body-subject represents an undivided consciousness; the body schema likewise describes embodied consciousness as a unity of perception and motility; the body schema is shaped by habituation, by the imaginative power of reckoning and by various bodily styles; applied to the actor these ideas mean that the creation of a dramatic character demands a process of approaching body-subjectivity for a second, imagined body. By habituating this second body imaginatively and aesthetically the actor plays a score and is scored by the movement. In the next two sections I will develop these arguments further by placing them within two extremely important contexts: one, the space and time in which these processes take place; and two, the various other beings, the intersubjectivities that the body-subject encounters. If the body is detached from these contexts, the knowledge acquisition I have described could not be formulated. Such is the relationship between the swimmer and the water: the act of swimming is possible only through its tactile engagement with the pool of water. The performer needs to continually engage not just with the task that she intends to embody in order to cultivate a new habit formation in the body, but also with her environment – material, ephemeral and inter-personal.

II. BODYMIND IN (THEATRICAL) SPACE AND TIME

The habit body is spatial and temporal in quality. When the actor begins to move in the space he perceives the external space and time as objective to his bodymind. In the meantime because there are certain possibilities and opportunities that invite his bodymind to move through the space, he begins to inhabit the lived space and time. Merleau-Ponty writes: ‘We grasp external space through our bodily situation’ (1964, p. 5 emphasis added). Merleau-Ponty here indicates two aspects of spatiality that the individual perceives. First, there is an external space, a space that is objectively identified as a geometrical existence: materials,
textures, sizes, shapes. Second, the body grasps this space through indwelling in situations. This means individuals act upon and embed within their surroundings, which alters their sense of spatiality. The spatiotemporal world is vital for the actor because skill acquisition occurs through inhabiting in a particular objective time and space and transposing into an imaginative spatiotemporality. The actor’s explorations of movement are not performed in an ‘empty’ space, but, as Merleau-Ponty argues, they are highly determined by the background in which the movements are embedded (2002, p. 159). Therefore, bodily habituation cannot be separated from its inherent connectedness with the space and time.  

**Objective space and time**

In everyday living, human beings tend to conceptualize time and space as objective, abstract notions. Similar to perceiving other objects, time is also conceived as a particular object of conscious attention. This ‘time-consciousness’ understands the time as past, present and future (Luft and Overgaard 2012, p. 191). When people ask questions such as “what time will you arrive?” or “where do you live?”, these questions objectify time and space as ‘things’ which exist outside bodies.

When the actor enters into the rehearsal space, she may find this particular space as objective to her bodily spatiality. It is objective to her because she is ‘inside’ the rehearsal space; it becomes something which is perceivable as an object to her consciousness. The bodymind begins to perceive and make certain meanings, judgements and calculations of how her body and the other objects in the space are arranged. The actor goes to the middle of the window.
the rehearsal space. She then feels that the array of the space is extending from her body towards the walls of the auditorium. The actor sees a chair in the middle of the rehearsal space; this chair appears as a figure against the objective background as well as a figure against the actor’s bodily spatiality. Merleau-Ponty argues that every object or figure ‘stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space’ (2002, p. 115). In other words, the chair is situated between the actor’s bodily spatiality and the external objective space. Thus, the actor’s body and the objective space provide a double horizon for the figure (chair) to appear within the actor’s perceptual grasp. The body stands out against the figure of the chair and the chair stands out against the background of the rehearsal space.

**Bodily spatiality**

In different situations and contexts, the human body opens up and interlaces with the life-world (*Lebenswelt*).\(^{37}\) This opening up or intertwining occurs through bodily orientation in space, through sexual and sensual intertwining with the world (Kwant 1963). The human body is, therefore, a meaning-giving existence. These meanings are generated prior to the intervention of symbolic language.\(^{38}\) This idea of meaning-giving existence provides further explanation of how the human body possesses and acts as a meaningful spatio-temporal existence through a preconscious realm (Kwant 1963, p. 21). As Merleau-Ponty argues, when a subject sees scissors and needles, he does not need to look at his hand as they are objects similar to other objects in the space. Perceiving the scissors and needles mobilises potentialities through the ‘intentional threads’ that link his body to the target object to execute the action (2002, p. 121). Thus, the individual cultivates bodily spatiality through enacting and embedding certain objects into her bodily spatiality.

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\(^{37}\) The term Life-world (*Lebenswelt*) is widely used in Husserl’s writings. However, prior to Husserl, this term has been used by poet Hugo Von Hoffmannsthai. Life-world means our daily experience of the natural attitude. In addition, ‘the world of living being’ could also be interchangeably used to denote the idea of life-world (Moran and Cohen 2012).

\(^{38}\) Philosopher Mark Johnson and cognitive linguist George Lakoff’s recent studies have suggested that the body makes meanings prior to conscious activity. Our understanding, thinking, propositions, even concepts are a result of our primary understanding acquired through the sensory motor activities of the body (Johnson 2008). The extensive discussion about bodily meanings and understanding can be found in their seminal works: *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999) and *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (2008).
The human body thus not only inhabits in space; the body is also moving through space and time. Moving through space and time, the actor begins to cultivate his motor habits towards his task. Merleau-Ponty suggests that ‘[t]o be a body, is to be tied to a certain world, as we have seen; our body is not primarily in space: it is of it’ (2002 p. 171). The attuning with a particular task and executing this task with a competence proves that the actor demonstrates a bodily spatiality that extends through his expansion of the perceptual synthesis in the task environment. Merleau-Ponty further argues:

the motor habit threw light on the particular nature of bodily space, so here habit in general enables us to understand the general synthesis of one’s own body (2002, p. 175).

What Merleau-Ponty denotes here is that cultivating a particular bodily habit means cultivating a bodily spatiality. The way that the actor experiences her bodily spatiality is different to how she perceives the other objects and their spatial relation in the objective space. When the actor moves and manipulates objects in the theatre space, she does not perceive her movements, bodily comportments or limbs adjustments as separate objects working in the space: they render a sense of a ‘general synthesis’ of the bodily spatiality (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 175).

When the actor raises his hand towards an object, this gesture contains ‘a reference to the object, not as an object represented, but as that highly specific thing towards which we project ourselves, near which we are, in anticipation, and which we haunt’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 159). Bodily habits thus encapsulate and expand the sense of developing bodily spatiality. The actor thus expands his bodymind horizon by knowing others, and the surrounding world through indwelling and extending bodymind synthesis within space and time. This renders the actor a heightened awareness of his bodily spatiality being altered and changed through assiduous practice of certain activities. Cultivating a bodily spatiality for the actor is the way that she finds her situatedness in the theatre space.

The orientation of the figure-background structure of perceiving objects in the rehearsal space begins to merge when the actor learns the scenic actions. For instance, when the actor is asked to explore the act of sitting on the chair, her bodymind first grasps the object (chair) as a figure in the background of the space. It stands off from the horizon of her bodily space because her gaze is directed towards it. Once she starts habituating the sitting action, the chair embeds as a part of her comportment, creating a sense of expanding the body schema. Thus,
when the actor is beginning to cultivate her body schema by rendering the act of sitting in time and space, the bodily spatiality and the figure (chair) are beginning to merge into sameness. Now the chair is no longer an object of her attention but a part of her own bodily spatiality. The actor’s perceptual and motor habits towards these objects in the rehearsal space thus synthesize as an extension of her body spatiality. The bodymind, therefore, does not perceive the chair, for instance, as an object of her attention any longer; the chair appears as a part of her dilated bodymind, a matrix of learned actions through which she inhabits in the rehearsal space. Merleau-Ponty writes: ‘I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them’ (2002, p. 162). The actor thus modifies the meaning of space ‘on the basis of given meaning’ by enlarging bodily ‘possibilities of moving’ (Kwant 1963, p. 23). The bodymind is not passive but embeds in the world. Therefore, the actor’s bodymind is spatial and temporal in quality when she inhabits the rehearsal space.

**Temporality**

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone asserts that human beings encompass two types of temporal worlds. Because we are *ekstatic*, or lived beings, we negate the past, present, and future temporal structure in lived experience (1963, p. 17). This occurs when time is no longer an object of the individual’s attention. On the other hand, they further apprehend this temporal totality in their daily circumstance to be able to embed with situations that occur according to ‘clocked’ time. Temporal events such as past, present, and future are ‘shapes cut out’ from the totality of the spatiotemporal world by a ‘finite observer’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, pp. 477-478). Merleau-Ponty here indicates how objective time becomes a particular ‘time-consciousness’ of the individual. The past, present and future exist because an observer has ‘cut out’ the temporal totality into segments. Without this observer and her conscious attention, the past, present, and future temporalities do not exist. Merleau-Ponty illustrates how this objective time is metaphorically conceived in our daily life:

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39 Merleau-Ponty uses the term dilation to denote bodily inhabitation in a particular environment. He argues that the habit body expresses this ‘power of dilating our being-in-the-world’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 166). In acting theory in general and Eugenio Barba’s articulation of the ‘presence’ of the body, the term dilated body is also widely used in relation to the actor’s second nature (Barba 1985).

40 The term *ekstatic* is introduced by Sheets-Johnstone in her seminal book *Phenomenology of Dance*. It refers to the totality of the dancer and her relationship to the form she performs.
If time is similar to a river, it flows from the past towards present and the future. The present is the consequence of the past, and the future of the present (2002, p. 477).

Being a bodymind for the actor means pre-reflectively comprehending the three dimensional past, present, and future as a unified totality. The actor’s bodymind has a pre-reflective awareness of time consciousness during practice. When she is engrossed in an activity, her sense of time as objective clocked time is altered into a sense of absorption of past-present-future (Krasner and Saltz 2006, pp. 135-136). When the actor is asked to go and sit on the chair, she does not prepare to depart from a particular temporal point called now that becomes a past as she walks, passing the present towards the future when she reaches the chair at the centre of the rehearsal space. Rather, she goes to the centre of the stage and sits on the chair with the intentional directedness of sitting on the chair. Crossing the stage and sitting on the chair is a total temporal act encircling the objective past, present and future as a totality.

In this act of sitting, for instance, terms such as going to, reaching or advancing towards the chair imply that the actor is preparing for a journey which extends from here to there. Further, her intentional act presupposes that she is not only advancing from here to there but that she engages in the “act of sitting”. It is a future-looking act that anticipates action from the present moment to the future. As Sheets-Johnstone argues, in this future act, the awareness of the temporality flows from ‘there’ to ‘here’ – backward: ‘Each step forward is temporally a step backward towards the past until the person reaches his future’ (1963, p. 19). As this example demonstrates, the actor’s implicit bodymind awareness of time stems from the temporal multiplicity (past, present, future) and the comprehension of a unity (the synthesis of these three stages). Sheets-Johnstone argues that ‘Temporality is diasporatic: while it is a single cohesive structure, it is a structure whose meaning derives only from the interrelationship of its units’ (1963, p. 18). This multiplicity (past, present, future) and the unity of the temporal awareness rest upon the foundation of the bodymind. The time consciousness exists because the bodymind exists.

When the actor performs a particular act, his bodymind engages a different mode of being, where he loses his abstract understanding of time and space that is normally experienced in everyday situations. Susan M. Jaeger argues that ‘[i]n the synthesis

41 This does not deny the fact that the individual can possibly experience the lived spatiotemporal flow in the daily activities ranging from sports, meditation and other household activities such as cooking. For instance, when an individual is fully engaged in an activity of reading a book, the time consciousness resides in the
constitutive of perception, for example, a visual perception of an object, time passes not only as a series of distinct, equivalent, clocked intervals, but also as a rhythm unfolding in or as the perception of the object’ (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 135). The idea of ‘rhythm’ here designates how the bodymind experiences the foundational structure of time and space as a unification of multiplicity (past, present, future). During this performance experience, the actor is not conscious of ‘how long’ she has performed or how long her body enlivens within that particular performance space. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Parviainen asserts that ‘true temporality is not something we conceive or observe; it is the process of living our lives’ (1998, p. 41).

The actor’s dilated body creates a new somatic relationship with time and space because the dilated body is a result of the bodily iteration. Habits accumulate within a particular place and time. The time allows the bodymind to indwell and sediment skills through iteration. Performing those cultivated motor habits renders a new sense of temporal and spatial quality to the actor’s bodymind. In summary, the actor’s bodymind relation is temporal and spatial in the sense that perceptual activities are structured through repetition and sedimentation. If I use Sheets-Johnstone’s term, the actor’s experience of being in a particular enactment is ‘ekstatic’ in nature, because the actor’s bodymind and the form she enacts do not necessarily exist as separate functionalities. Because the bodymind and the enactment is ekstatic as a totality, the spatial and temporal domains do not exist separately. In performing an activity, the spatiality is intact with the bodymind and the temporality flows in continuity with it.

III. BODYMIND AND OTHERNESS

So far I have argued that the actor’s bodymind comes alive through its perceptual synthesis with the outer world. Further, I have discussed how motor habits and perceptual habits are

horizon of the reader while he is engrossed in the reading activity as a totally immersed activity of “being” and “doing” in an un-thematic spatiotemporal terrain.

42 Writing about the experience of the dancer, Sheets-Johnstone argues that when the dancer is performing a series of movements, she is not explicitly aware of her unfolding movements ‘at any one point in space or at any single moment in time’ (1963, p. 37). Rather, the performer is implicitly aware of her unfolding movement as, Sheets-Johnstone suggests, ‘form-in-the-making’, as an ‘existing totality’ (ibid, p. 37).
spatial and temporal. This process therefore affirms that the actor’s process is embodied and intertwined with its theatre environment. In brief, cultivating a habit body for the actor is a way of finding equilibrium between the bodymind and its environment. Mark Johnson argues that human embodiment is characterized by the bodily relationship with ever-changing environmental phenomena. These environments, as he argues, are ‘not just physical – not just earth, air, fire and water – but are always social, economic, moral, and spiritual (Overton et al. 2012, p. 20). In the following section, I will elaborate how the actor’s bodymind process is further unified and enhanced by her relationship with the shared world of others.

The Cartesian tradition presupposes that I am a thinking substance and the other therefore is an inaccessible (limbo) object (Morris 2012, p. 99). Merleau-Ponty’s intervention in the discussion of the other is significant because he rejects this objectivist attitude of the other and attempts to understand the I and the other as a reciprocal relation (2012, p. 100). My relationship with the world, therefore, is accessible to me not because I think, but because ‘we perceive’ the world (2012, p. 99). This does not mean, of course, that actors working together in rehearsal and performance situations have an unproblematic access to each other’s bodymind consciousness. As I have already discussed, being a bodymind for the actor is to be able to find symmetry between the self and space, time and environment. In rehearsal situations I have argued that the actor experiences an abyss or a gap between himself and how he is perceived. In this situation, and being a zero point, the actor appears as ‘other’ to himself. He feels the gap between himself and how his body, his voice, his presence is being presented to others. This abyss creates a sense of alterity for him. In all of these circumstances, the actor-learner perceives himself with a degree of ‘otherness’ within his own body. However, as Parviainen suggests, the true nature of ‘otherness’ cannot be fully experienced or fulfilled until human beings extend their connections to other living beings (1998, p. 67).

When it comes into contact with the other actor’s presence in the same rehearsal space, this abyss of otherness continues, creating a gap between the actor and the partner. However, the actor’s primary need is to be able to become other, of finding ways to create symmetry between the self and the other. In other words, the actor is being persuaded to find the solution to her lack of unity, or asymmetry of being an individual, by exploring the ways of becoming other through emotional, actional and social ways. Parviainen argues that ‘[h]umans neither find a meaningful living in their “inner self”, nor can they find out who
they are without the other’ (1998, p. 71). In this formulation, we construct our selfhood through interacting with other humans. However, I become a self-governing subject because I begin to distinguish myself from the other. I experience that I have an agency, a self, who does things as a doer and ‘I am the author of my act’ (1998, p. 71).

**Sensing the other**

According to Merleau-Ponty, to be a body-subject is to be able to accept that there are other body-subjects similar to mine sharing the same world I share with them. As a body-subject, I see my surroundings as a space I share with many objects and animate subjects. One important argument that Merleau-Ponty provides is that once I see that there are other objects that share this same space I inhabit, these objects provide preliminary understanding of the animate subjects who could possibly share this world with me. These ‘cultural objects,’ as he argues, carry ‘behavioural sediment’ of others (2002, p. 405). This behavioural sedimentation turns these objects into ‘cultural artefacts’ that possess the existence of other subjectivities (Romdenh-Romluc 2010, p. 131). Merleau-Ponty writes:

Not only have I a physical world, not only do I live in the midst of earth, air and water, I have around me roads, plantations, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, a spoon, a pipe. Each of these objects is moulded to the human action which may be determinate in a low degree, in the case of a few foot marks in the sand, or on the other hand highly determinate, if I go into a every room from top to bottom of a house, recently evacuated (2002, p. 405).

First, cultural objects sediment human interactions. Second, this sedimentation informs about the ways other subjects have interacted with, and used, them. When the actor begins to inhabit and interact with the chair in the rehearsal space, he assumes that the chair is *feelable* and *usable* in the same ways that the others may have felt and used it. Assuming that the chair is a usable object and a perceptible artefact, absorbing its usability and emotionality towards him, he further reckons that there is a possibility of inserting into the world of the other by allowing the chair to absorb in his perceptual synthesis. In other words, he places himself within the realm of the other by positioning the bodymind in the perspective of the other. The actor’s bodymind recognises the sedimentation of the human emotional and social imprints on the object. She further recognises its ‘equipmentality’ of being used by other subjects in the spectrum of time and space. Moreover, not only does this chair hold such human sedimentation, the actor senses that all the objects in the rehearsal space, including the
space itself, signal the previous inhabitants and their acts and their histories coming into contact with her.

The actor thus senses that she not only has power to act upon her environment but others also act similarly to her and mark their imprints upon the space and objects. In this sense, the body-subject is ‘essentially an expressive space’ (2002, p. 169). The bodymind functions as a ‘power to perform’ upon the environment in which the bodymind is inhabited. As Romdenh-Romluc expresses this, ‘I perceive my surroundings as demanding of certain actions, and I experience my body as the power to perform the actions my environment requires’ (2010, p. 140). If my body has this ‘power to perform,’ I can similarly think that others also have the same power of performing in the same space I share with them. This assumption of how the other may behave in a similar manner to me triggers that there are other conscious subjects similar to me sharing this same spatial-temporal world. Therefore, in a similar way, I also can assume that other subjectivities have the same ‘embodied subjectivities’ as I possess. This symmetricality allows me to cope with the other subjects, reducing the inhibition between us, and the parallelism leads the actor's bodymind to be embodied with other bodies on stage.

**Other as mirror**

When the actor first encounters another body of an actor in the rehearsal space, her bodymind experiences this presence as a flux of ambiguities as well as opportunities offered to her. This confrontation is ambiguous in the first place because it suggests that there is another bodymind, an expressive being ready to perform in the way that the actor prepares to act. On the other hand, this confrontation is also full of opportunity because she further observes, learns and is affected through the other’s bodymind, which begins to operate as a mirror (image) placed in front of her. The other stands opposite and begins to function as a mirror through which the actor begins to see herself and the other in a single, yet overlapping transference. The learning actor’s bodymind grasps this transference as an expressive bodymind through the body of the partner. The bodymind pre-reflectively captures the other actor’s expressive body, his emotions, movements and the gestures, uncovering and converting them into meaningful significance. This meeting of bodyminds starts to generate meanings as an interlocking network of transferring bio-data between bodies of mirrors.
These corporeal meanings begin to operate at somatic levels before they are transferred into the symbolic order. Anne Hurt writes:

When two perceptive actors work together, they mutually take in each other and work as a multifaceted unit. The actor feels how she shares space with another as they navigate their surroundings. Her partner becomes an ever-changing phenomenon within her surroundings. She senses her voice and movement within and how her partner expresses herself in their shared environment. They perceive each other without judging what the other should do or say and function as a gestalt in which their relationship is larger than the two of them as individuals (2009, pp. 77-78 emphasis added).

The other’s intervention in the rehearsal space widens the actor’s experience of being in the enactment into a higher level of absorption and assimilation of his task environment. The actor begins to learn to share the space as a communal space, hopefully with a sense of gratitude and respect for the other. When Anne Hurt argues that the two actors’ ‘relationship is larger’ than their individualities, this affirms that this reciprocity potentially creates a bridge, a bond between them. The actors notice that their absorption of the activities in the scenic situation enhances and offers more vibrant opportunities through interaction with each other. The conversing with the other and moving with another body thus opens up a new world of perceptual synthesis to each individual bodymind. Parviainen further notes that ‘this interaction must find a delicate balance of recognising an other and being recognized as a self, which calls for “mutual recognition”’ (1998, p. 71). The achievement of this mutuality further confirms to the actor that his perceptual grasping of the activities in the scenic situation is being continually strengthened and enriched through the reciprocity of the respective bodies.

**Solitude and communion**

However, the situation is not that simple. The actor is a self-conscious being. He sees the other as a separate subjectivity. He implicitly knows that because there is an other, he is a self-conscious being. The self and the other thus paradoxically exist as connected yet alienated, interdependent yet discrete, phenomena. As Parviainen argues, the other is also

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43 Jean-Paul Sartre’s account of the gaze is important to understand how I am becoming an object of the other when I am being observed. Sartre claims that when I am aware of being gazed at, I feel embarrassment and shame. This embarrassment leads me to think that the other is a ‘subject’ that has feelings and emotions, and is a perceiver of a conscious experience. His gazing further carries a threat to myself as a ‘free agent.’ I am no longer a free subject that can freely inhabit in the world because I am being gazed at by the other (Romdenh-Romluc 2010, p. 146).
inherently an individual as well as unique in relation to me. As I have a context of personal histories, emotions and perceptual habits, the other has the same individuality, which is a mystery to me (1998, p. 71).

This has further implications in the intersubjective domain of the actor’s experience. First, it implies that existing as a self-conscious being means that the actor has a point of view of the world from where she situates her bodymind to see the world. Second, she sees her bodily actions as a result of her agency and subsequently supposes that she has a self-governing consciousness functioning in her body. Third, even though she experiences the emotional reactions of others as similar to her own, there is no guarantee that she could possibly experience the ways that the other experiences her emotions. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the primary question between the self and the other is how to transform the experience of the other as experienced by me (2002, p. 406).

The actor cannot ignore the fact that his bodymind is situated where the other bodyminds are inhabited. This awareness of being with others provides the opportunity to comprehend the other in his presence. This process, as I have argued, first operates within the perceptual synthesis of both bodies being mirrored to each other. Secondly, they both may invade the tactile kinetic level of interaction by touching each others’ bodies. In the first instance, when the actor confronts with the partner, he notices the partner’s emotional expressivity through the display of his moving body. This emotional expressivity simultaneously captures the actor’s bodymind by displaying his emotional reactions through his body. If the partner advances towards the actor and takes his hand, for instance, this encounter triggers intersensory feelings for both parties. If the actor withdraws from the intersubjective domain where he no longer shares the world of others, then he is no longer a perceiver of the other. In doing so the actor purposely delimits knowledge of his surroundings. The bodymind can withdraw from the ongoing engagement and reckon with another possibility that is offered in the horizon of her intentionality. However, this withdrawal is also a reaffirmation that she is already a communal being, among other similar

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44 Merleau-Ponty’s conclusion to this dialectical problem is that solitude and communication are the ‘two sides of the same phenomenon’ (Romdenh-Romluc 2010, p. 152). If I have a need to disconnect with the other self means that I am already aware that I am a part of the other self. I acknowledge that even if I want to withdraw from the communal interaction, I am already a communal being (Ibid 2010, p. 151). Being a body-subject means my body is already in the social interaction. I find my body-subject in conjunction with the other bodies; I share the world with other selves.
subjectivities. Although the actor may set back towards another possibility, her engagement of the other still resides in the horizon of her bodymind allowing her to be aware of the other.

As Merleau-Ponty asserts, ‘often the knowledge of other people lights up the way to self-knowledge’ (2002, p. 215). In order to acquire knowledge of the other, the actor may need continual attention towards the outer world and to keep perceiving other bodies. If the actor withdraws from the advancement of the other actor’s presence, he further reduces his bodymind with what I conceive of as a dual-otherness. First, he himself experiences his inherent abyss in the reversibility of the body, and second, he further experiences an abyss between himself and the other as a mystery who appears in front of him.

Theatre is about engagement. Learning for the actor is to be able to learn how to engage with her ambience. Engaging with the partner thus teaches the actor to engage with the other in dynamic and sustainable ways. Understanding the other’s bodymind for the actor is to be able to understand her bodymind closely and intimately. This attuning to the other through the actor’s perceptual grasping occurs almost unnoticed between bodies. The understanding of the other occurs through the reciprocity of bodies directed towards each other. Even if the actor assumes rationally that he is no longer engaged with the other, he cannot escape from the bodymind engagement with the other. Gallagher says that ‘[e]ven in my encounter with others, prenoetically,46 before I know it, I seem to have a sense of how it is with them’ (2006, p. 237). The actor’s bodymind is aware that his actions are the intentional extensions emerged from his body to grasp the outer environment. In the same way, he further understands that the partner’s bodily movements are her intentional extensions. In that way, the actor’s bodymind can comprehend the meaning of the other through the reciprocity of their bodies. The emotional significance and the perceptual drama are played in the array of the bodymind, not behind them.

45 Nagatomo Shigenori provides three modes of engagements between the body and the ambience. This may apply to understand how the bodymind attunes with a particular object, score or with another body. The first stage is characterised by the ‘tensionality’. The second stage is the de-tensionality and third, non-tensionality. These three passages encapsulate the bodymind experience of ‘coming-together’ with the other starting from provisional dualistic attitude to the non-dualistic stance (1992, pp. 223-256).

46 This term is synonymous with pre-reflective or simply unconscious.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated how Merleau-Ponty’s key assumption, the body-subject, can be adapted to understand the actor’s bodymind experience in performance situations. As a non-pedagogical actor, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy on the body has given me the opportunity to understand the actor’s body as a knowing subject and how the body as a consciousness functions in the actor’s learning process. I have elaborated a few key themes related to body-subject in order to facilitate my discussion in this chapter.

I have adapted Merleau-Ponty’s idea of body-subject to argue that the learning actor’s knowing process does not necessarily occur through simply the mind as a knowing agent in the body. In contrast, the actor’s learning process largely depends on the bodymind integration in the task environment. I have introduced and interlaced the notion of body-subject with the actor’s bodymind experience as a nexus of perception and action. In relation to body-subject, I have discussed Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body schema. Drawing upon this idea, I have demonstrated how the actor knows through the perceptual synthesis that occurs between his primordial bodymind and the task environment. Body schema encapsulates the actor’s perceptual and motor functions in order to master a particular skill. I have argued how this perceptual synthesis dilates the actor’s motor movements as well as his perceptual capacities through moving, imagining and working in the rehearsal space. This schematic body is a dilated body or simply a habit body. I further argued how this habit body is both a thinking body (power of reckoning) as well as an aesthetic body. Second, I have illustrated how this habit body encapsulates the lived time and space in the bodymind. Cultivating a habit body is, in another sense, cultivating and altering the actor’s mundane awareness of the time and space in order to attain a unified spatiotemporal awareness. Therefore, I have discussed how the actor is aware of this habit body as a spatial and temporal unity. Third, I have argued how the habit body is closely knitted with other subjects in space and time. Borrowing Merleau-Ponty’s ideas of inter-human relation, I have discussed how the actor should negotiate between her bodymind and the other in favour of enhancing the performance experience. I have argued that being a bodymind for the actor is being for others. In line with this I have concluded that without engaging with the other, the actor’s learning process cannot be accomplished. Because the actor’s bodymind is habitual,
spatiotemporal and inter-corporeal, the bodymind is undivided and embodied in the actor learning process.

In the next chapter I will further explore these phenomenological implications of the bodymind in relation to established acting pedagogies. I shall discuss three acting theorists’ approaches to bodymind practice and how they articulate the indivisibility and interdependent nature of the bodymind in the actor’s art.
CHAPTER THREE

Phenomenal body in pedagogy: Stanislavski, Grotowski and Barba

On the stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly
Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*

As Sartre has said: “Each technique leads to metaphysics.”
Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*

A Body-in-life is more than a body merely alive
Eugenio Barba, *The Dilated Body: On the energies of Acting*

Introduction

Unsurprisingly, acting pedagogies that have privileged a psychophysical or embodied approach share key assumptions that phenomenology articulates in relation to the phenomenal body. These assumptions include: the actor’s sensorial experience of bodymind perception; indivisible bodymind and its attunement with the environment; working on breath energy; and cultivating a habit body through assiduous practice (Hurt 2009, p. 7). This chapter thus explores such embodied acting practices via three key acting practitioners’ works. Starting with Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), this chapter then considers both Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) and Eugenio Barba’s (1936-) approaches to actor training. This chapter argues that the holistic approach to acting is central to their ideas pertaining to a bodymind practice of acting. The chapter does not, of course, provide a comprehensive examination of the three theorists / practitioners / pedagogues, but concentrates on how each articulates the bodymind experience of the actor, even if they do not represent this experience in precisely the same terms as the phenomenologists.

The psychophysical tradition of actor training has been passed down to generations of actor trainers from Stanislavski’s era to the present (Zarrilli 2012). There are many theorists and researchers who have been influenced by, and continue to influence, the psychophysical
tradition of acting. However, I have chosen these three practitioners because there is a clear genealogy of bodymind practice between Stanislavski, Grotowski and Barba. Further, they share key principles pertaining to embodied acting practice, which emphasises the bodymind integration that is exemplified by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenal body that I have explored in the previous chapter. My discussion of these practitioners’ approaches to bodymind experience can be considered as revisionist and retrospective because they illuminate my understanding of the bodymind experience that I tacitly experienced as a self-taught actor. Though I hadn’t read any of these theorists during my apprenticeship of acting, they explain me to myself, after the fact.

I. KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

Many theorists and researchers agree that Stanislavski did not attempt to develop a cohesive system of actor training. However, his exploration of how the actor minimizes the incompatibility between the inner world and outer action to be able to ‘experience’ the character she plays (Carnicke 1998, p. 108) has become the most influential theory of acting and actor training in the twentieth (and into the twenty-first) century. Though much of this legacy has been channelled into psychologically-based approaches to acting, Stanislavski’s ideas on systematic approaches to actor training have also been influential in later developments of embodied acting practice (Kemp 2012; Leach 2013). Olf suggests that

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47 Michael Chekhov, for instance, as a pupil of Stanislavski, later developed his own version of the ‘psychophysical gesture’ of the actor, based on the notion of ‘prana’ (breath) or the inner energy (Zarrilli 2012, p. 20). Bella Merlin has researched the psychophysical development of Stanislavski’s later teaching and has explored the possibilities of pragmatic, psychophysical approaches to acting (2001, 2007). In recent years, Phillip B. Zarrili’s works on actor training derived from Kararipayattu martial arts in Kerala, India, have been widely discussed as a psychophysical actor training through intercultural approaches to acting (Wallace 2012; Zarrilli 2012). Moreover, Grotowski’s psychophysical approach and his ethics of actor training have influenced the developments of actor training systems in many countries (Richard Schechner 1997, p. xxvii).

48 Stanislavski’s later research work pertaining to the psychophysical approach to the actor’s art was a continuous, yet hidden tradition in Moscow. Recent researchers have explored these aspects of his system in Moscow and how Stanislavski’s system could be re-read via his unpublished manuscripts. Researchers such as Sharon Carnicke (1998), Bella Merlin (2001, 2007), Sean Benedetti (1988, 1998, 2010), Rose Whyman (2011), and Jonathan Pitches (2006) have written much about Stanislavski’s acting practice and hidden legacy of the Method of Physical Action and Active Annalysis in actor training.
Stanislavski’s project is to develop a system where the actor’s body and the role could be seen as a ‘synonymous’ existential being (1981, p. 40).

Stanislavski’s solutions to the acting problems he perceived in the late nineteenth century fall within a modernist paradigm and manifest in his truth claim for the actor’s art. Rejecting melodrama’s excesses, he sought instead ‘the reality of the inner life of the human spirit’ for the actor’s craft (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 129).

Stanislavski’s truth claim for the actor’s art was influenced by, among others, nineteenth century Russian and French literature, particularly Emile Zola’s naturalism, Grigorevich Belkin’s literary criticism, and Tolstoy’s moral and spiritual arts practice (Whyman 2013, p. 5). These aesthetic trends prompted him to address the actor’s art as a means of finding a particular human truth, an essence of human nature through the theatre. Stanislavski urged his actors not to ‘act’ (igrat) but to ‘live through’ or ‘experience’ every moment on the stage truthfully (Carnicke 1998, pp. 147-148). He argues that to be able to ‘live through’ a given moment, the actor needs to be able to adapt to the ‘scenic truth’ on stage (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 129) and to explore the relationship between the actor’s self and its truthful relatedness with the role she plays. If the actor cannot embody the truthful nature of the character, then he is likely to be falling into a false interpretation of the reality. Daniel Johnston argues that Stanislavski’s project is of phenomenological significance because his intention is to bracket the ‘exterior representation’ of the reality by reaching an authentic understanding of the self (Johnston 2011, p. 72).

Stanislavski’s legacy of acting has been elaborated with two fundamental approaches to acting practice. First, and most famously, is his early version of the actor’s work, propagated through ‘psychological realism’ in the United States and particularly at The Actor’s Studio, led by Elia Kazan, Robert Lewis, and Cheryl Crawford (Carnicke 1998, pp. 46-47; Margolis and Renaud 2011, pp. 16-17). Later Lee Strasberg became the key proponent of the Method.

49 Most of my references I have taken for this section are from Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood’s The Actor Prepares (1967) and Building a Character (1968). Even these translations, as most critics suggest, carry misinterpretations and mistranslations of Stanislavski’s important concepts. Indeed, throughout this translation, one can clearly identify the weight of the mind over body through the terminology that Hapgood has employed.

50 Stanton Garner (1994) and Daniel Johnston (2007, 2008, 2011) discuss phenomenological implications on actors, objects, audience and their relationships in the theatre space. For instance, the actor’s need of isolating the self within a given theatrical space that allows her to interact with the highly phenomenal world of theatre space resonates with the Husserlian notion of ‘going back to the phenomena’ by looking at the structure of the consciousness (Johnston 2011).
adapted and taught at the Studio. This Method favoured the importance of the actor’s emotion memory (affective cognition) and its role in the execution of character (1998, p. 155). Second, Stanislavski’s later development of the Method of Physical Action and Active Analysis demonstrated the importance of understanding the actor’s work as a unified psychophysical process and the actor as a doer. This shift demarcates Stanislavski’s System from its earlier over-reliance on predominantly psychological processes to a much more profound approach to the embodiment of the actor and her relationship to the role. Stanislavski’s understanding of Ribot’s pragmatic psychology and his interest towards the Eastern psychophysical practices of Yoga, as Carnicke argues, prompted him to continue his truth claim in the art, albeit with an emphasis more relevant for this thesis, “the life of the human spirit of the role” through the “the life of the human body” on the stage’ (1998, p. 148).

Stanislavski’s former approaches to textual analysis and the ‘around the table’ discussion were replaced by the new approach of ‘active analysis’ (деиственный анализ) (1998, p. 155). Stanislavski understood that the text not only represents the actor through words but it triggers the actor to take up action; it is a source of materials that allow him to understand the role as a composite of actions (1998, p. 154). Stanislavski argued that these actions incarnate through the actor’s body and perhaps instigate the ‘experiencing of the play’ (1998, p. 154 emphysis added). The Method of Physical Action thus links the actor’s body and the text in a direct, pragmatic way by exploring the text through improvisation, taking actions and scoring the physical actions (1998, p. 156). As Benedetti argues, Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Action allows the actor to find her ‘own person’ through exploring the logical sequences of actions (Benedetti 1982, p. 68). This connection is set up by the actor asking the primary question, ‘what would I do if…’, which triggers the actor’s imaginative faculties within the given circumstance of the play (1982, p. 68). In the following discussion, I will explore Stanislavski’s later discovery of the Method of Physical Action through the notion of experiencing. I consider Stanislavski’s notion of experiencing in order to explicate how the actor’s bodymind is united in the process of experiencing a role.

For the purpose of analysing the craft of acting, Stanislavski divides his ‘system’ into two categories. The term ‘experiencing’ (психопе́вание) generally captures the mind-aspect of the actor, while the term ‘incarnation’ (воплоще́ние) encapsulates the body-aspect of the actor (Whyman 2008; Whyman 2013). This is not to say that Stanislavski divides his
understanding of the process of the actor into discrete body-mind binaries. Johnston further argues that Stanislavski proposes ‘different modes of experiencing the self’ while not being trapped into a metaphysics of duality (2011, p. 71). Stanislavski therefore proposes an approach via which the actor utilizes his bodymind agencies as interdependent phenomena in order to embody the truthful experience on stage. Sharon Carnicke also affirms that Stanislavski’s ‘holistic belief that mind and body represent a psychophysical continuum’ is manifested in his system of acting (Hodge 2000, p. 18).

**Experiencing**
As most researchers agree, ‘experiencing’ (*perezhivanie*) is the most elusive term that Stanislavski uses in his writings (Carnicke 1998; Whyman 2008). The term ‘experiencing’ has many nuances and meanings as it is used in many contexts. First, Stanislavski has adapted this term from the famous novelist and moralist Leo Tolstoy (Carnicke 1998, p. 110). In his book *What is Art?*, Tolstoy uses the term ‘experience’ to denote how artists share their felt experiences through their practice of art rather than accumulating knowledge (1998, p. 110). Stanislavski is also interested in what the actor offers through her inner content by using the artist’s self-expression, emotions and the body.

The Russian word for experiencing is *perezhivanie* (Carnicke 1998, p. 110). Carnicke notes that it implies both the ontological existence and the ‘repetitive mode’ of the actor’s task. The Russian prefix of ‘*pere*’ represents the ‘*re*’ or repetition. The infinitive of the Russian word *zhivanie* is the *zhit* (to live). Carnicke further suggests that this *perezhivanie* could be translated as ‘re-living’ or generally ‘experiencing’ (Carnicke 1998, p. 109). The ‘living the part’ and ‘re-living the part’ are two different ontological existences in Stanislavski’s lexicon.

The dispute between ‘living the part’ and ‘experiencing the role’ depends on whether the actor lives in a character that is fictional or the actor experiences the character with the actor's own affective and expressive modes (Carnicke 1998, p. 111). When emphasis is added

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51 Previous translators of Stanislavski’s texts, such as J.J. Robbins and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, have been targeted for incorrectly translating this important term into English as ‘living the part’ (Carnicke, 1998 pp.110-111). Instead, Carnicke and Whyman suggest a ‘re-living the part’ or just ‘experiencing’ the part for the substitution of the word *perezhivanie*.
to ‘living the part’, it suggests that the actor psychologically empathises with the role by leaving the self behind. Experiencing a role, however, depicts how the actor relates to the character dialogically. This relationship is dialogical rather than empathic because Stanislavski’s idea of ‘experiencing’ the role is different from the idea of ‘living the part’. He writes that ‘[t]he actor creates the life of the human spirit of the role from his own living soul […] and incarnates it in his own living body’ (Cited in Carnicke 1998, p. 111). This dialogic approach enables the actor to experience the role both as an observer and participant: the actor embodies the role and at the same time develops a sense of observing it as an outsider. This describes the difference between ‘living the part’ and ‘re-living the part’.

Stanislavski’s primary understanding of experiencing is described as ‘an actor’s deep concentration on stage and absorption in the events of the play during performance’ (Carnicke 1998, p. 110). Stanislavski observes that when the actor is ‘totally gripped by the play’ then the experiencing is ‘natural’ (estestvennoe) and ‘correct’ (pravilnoe) (ibid, p. 110): it is a particular “‘inspiration”, “creative moods”, the activation of the “subconscious”’ (Hodge 2000, p. 17). The subconscious is incarnated once the body is fully captured by the enactment. When Stanislavski argues that the actor’s body is ‘gripped by the play’, this signifies a particular engagement between the body and the physical score.52 This experience is accomplished once the actor’s body is fully attuned to the score: ‘experiencing resides within the tacit dimension; it can be known but not expressed’ (Carnicke 1998, p. 108).

In a phenomenological sense, Stanislavski’s formula for experiencing a role can be illustrated thus: the actor’s work is primarily based on breaking ‘the whole play, episode by episode, into physical actions’ (Cited in Carnicke 1998, p. 154). This process instigates the cultivation of habits. When Stanislavski says that the actor is ‘gripped by the play’ (Cited in Carnicke 1998, p. 110) this affirms that the actor’s perceptual and motor capacities (bodymind) work together to grasp the intended activity. The notion of experiencing (perezhivanie) also affirms the repetitive (pere-re) nature of the actor’s engagement with the play. Through a repetitive practice, this activity gradually becomes habitual in the actor’s body. When the actor’s body is fully attuned to the activity, the actor begins to experience the freedom of not being consciously attached to the activity in question. The actor demonstrates

52 Contemporary cognitive neuroscience and phenomenology argues that human consciousness is a result of the continuous networking of one’s sensorimotor activities with the world. Consciousness is defined as an embodied consciousness inseparable from the bodily functions (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991).
the ability to execute the activity without a particular conscious attention. Following this, Stanislavski’s hidden agent, the subconscious, begins to activate when the actor experiences the bodymind synthesis. Stanislavski explains how the actor's involvement with the physical score triggers the affective faculties of the actor’s own emotions. Stanislavski encourages his actors to experience the ease and naturalness when the actor’s body is liberated from the conscious attention towards the score. Stanislavski argues, anticipating Merleau-Ponty: ‘it makes what is difficult habitual, what is habitual easy, and what is easy beautiful’ (Cited in Roach 1985a, p. 213). When the actor is possessed by the score, he goes beyond the ‘mechanical execution’ to a deeper level of experience which ‘is rounded out with new feelings and ... become[s], one might say, psychophysical in quality’ (Zarrilli 2012, p. 14). Stanislavski here introduces the concept of dual-consciousness where the actor develops a capacity to observe her own actions. In *Building a Character*, the fictional actor Kostya gives an account of this dual consciousness having been fully immersed in the creative process of experiencing:

Actually I was my own observer at the same time that another part of me was being a fault-finding, critical creature. Yet can I really say that that creature is not a part of me? I derived him from my own nature. I divided myself, as it were, into two personalities. One continued as an actor, the other was an observer (1968, p. 21).

Stanislavski here refers to the French philosopher Denis Diderot’s conception of dual-consciousness (Diderot 1883). Diderot had been a long-standing proponent of the physiognomy of the actor and bodily autonomy. In his book *Eléments de Physiologie*, Diderot describes a musician who plays a concert on his harpsichord while conversing with

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53 Bella Merlin argues that Stanislavski’s turn towards the physical action and active analysis emphasises that he does not reject the affective life of the performer but shows how the affective life and the physicality of the actor are intertwined and embodied in the process of experiencing. For instance, the investigation into the root of the word ‘emotion’ demonstrates that the word emotion is etymologically related to the Latin word *motere*. This word *motere* means ‘to move’ and the prefix ‘e’ suggests ‘to move away’ (Merlin 2001b, p. 16). Merlin further suggests that emotion therefore invites the actor to ‘move’ and to ‘take action’ (ibid).

54 As Csikszentmihalyi describes, this state of consciousness is a ‘flow’ or an ‘optimal experience’ that the individual experiences when she is deeply engaged with body activities with highly ‘structured deep involvement, absorption and enjoyment’ (Fave, Massimini and Bassi 2011). When the performer is competent at performing the newly acquired habits then he is capable of performing the actions without having a particular attention to the target domain. Shaun Gallagher says that the ‘improved performance of the body schema, however, pushes the body into the recesses of awareness’ (Gallagher 2006, p. 34).
his neighbour (Roach 1985a, p. 149). This nature of dual consciousness, as Roach argues, provides the actor with the capacity to ‘liberate his critical faculties to observe, access, and correct his performance in accordance with the pre-established score’ (1985a, p. 214). Stanislavski’s notion of experience is thus a result of the habit body that is cultivated through the psychophysical involvement with the score that the actor attunes with. It is the actor’s bodymind that is fully engaged during this experience. This engagement attunes the habit body that incarnates the inaccessible subconscious of the actor.

**Subconscious**

Stanislavski uses his favourite terms such as ‘soul’, ‘consciousness’, ‘subconscious’, and ‘nature’ interchangeably to present his analysis of the conscious and unconscious processes of the actor. Although these terms are very important in the Stanislavskian lexicon, they do not necessarily overemphasize a particular mind-aspect of the body. As Stanislavski argues:

> There is no sharply drawn line between conscious and subconscious experience. Our consciousness often indicates the direction in which our subconscious continues to work. Therefore, the fundamental objective of our psycho-technique is to put us in a creative state in which our subconscious will function naturally (1967, p. 281).

Stanislavski places the subconscious at the centre of his theory of acting. Using a metaphor, as he often does, Stanislavski describes the relationship between the conscious and subconscious as similar to the relationship between grammar and poetry. In order to write good poetry, grammar is essential. If the ‘grammatical considerations overwhelm the poetic’ the poetry can be destroyed (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 281). For Stanislavski, without conscious direction and guidance, the subconscious may not be able to work as an independent faculty. But Stanislavski’s ultimate target is not to appreciate the role of the consciousness. He writes: ‘consciousness knows nothing of all this’ (1967, p. 282). During

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55 Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, provides a similar account. He writes how a musician cultivates a habit body that allows him to play the organ without having a particular conscious attention. He argues that the musician incorporates the instrument ‘within himself’ and he embeds with the instrument as ‘one settles into a house’ (2002, p. 168).

56 Nernard J. Baars argues that the ‘detailed workings of the brain are widely distributed’ in the body (1997, pp. viii-ix). Baars’s model of consciousness, as he argues, works similar to the metaphor of theatre. Our conscious activities trigger some unconscious activities and are shaped by unconscious contexts (ibid 1997, p. x). The learning process, as Baars argues, occurs in the region of the unconscious not knowing that one is actively learning things (ibid, p. 60).
the preliminary ‘conscious process’ of the actor, Stanislavski is aware of how the apprentice may experience dualities through the body. But once the actor surpasses the ‘threshold of the subconscious’, the ‘freedom is bold, wilful, active and always moving forward’ (ibid, p. 282). Stanislavski again uses his poetic language to articulate his notion of subconscious:

Sometimes the tide of the subconscious barely touches an actor, and then goes out. At other times it envelops his whole being, carrying him into its depths until, at length, it casts him up again on the shore of consciousness (1967, p. 282).

Embodied experience of being fully attuned to the role is a rare moment for the actor. Sometimes, as the ebb and flow metaphor suggests, the actor is able to access the subconscious level of embodiment in acting; at other times it ebbs away from the actor’s body. When the actor is fully possessed with the bodymind integration, then the actor experiences the ‘bold freedom’ that is limited by ‘reason’ in the conscious region (1967, p. 282). What he suggests is that this ‘bold freedom’ cannot fully be actualized unless the actor surpasses the daily dualistic attitude of body-mind. Tortsov, the fictitious teacher, never promises his students that he can teach a technique that provides tools to manipulate the subconscious region. He concedes that he can only provide an ‘indirect method’ to access the subconscious (ibid, p. 282). Tortsov’s indirect method is the ‘Method of Physical Action’. In order to reach the level of creative freedom, where the actor is ‘always moving forward’, the actor needs to go through a process of somatic incarnation (ibid, p. 282). This is a bodymind process that Stanislavski recommends for the actor. Therefore, this achievement of experiencing the role is not only an intellectual understanding (cognitive), but also a disciplining of the psychosomatic apparatuses (analogical) of the actor’s bodymind.

Stanislavski does not see a vast gap between the reflective and non-reflective activities of the body (1967, p. 282), but he advocates a limitation to the conscious activities of the artist to the point where the unconscious process can take hold of the rest. Stanislavski connects the conscious or the volitional activities to the cerebral cortex of the actor’s body. He also identifies the notion of prāna as a vital source of energy functioning in the body.

The Sanskrit word Prāna generally refers to the ‘breath energy’ that is vital for the living beings. The term prāna is first found in the Indian classical literature pertaining to Vedic literature. Later it appears in Tantric, as well as Yoga and Ayurvedic literature. The general meaning of the term refers to the ‘force that animates the human body, as well as the whole of creation’ (Johnson 2009). Phillip Zarrilli’s studies into martial arts in Kerala reveal how the Indian tradition of dance and other somatic arts are primarily based on the manipulation of the prāna or breath energy (Zarrilli 1984, 2002).
with which consciousness is constantly interacting (1967, p. 198). Tortsov says: ‘the radiating centre of this Prana is the solar plexus’.\footnote{This solar plexus in East-Asian medicinal and somatic arts is defined as Ki energy. Yuasa Yasuo’s study of the body explains how Eastern indigenous medicine and artistry utilize the vital energy called Ki energy in the human body. Ki energy (psycho-physiological energy) is also similar to \textit{prāna vāyu} referred to in Indian martial arts and artistry (Nagatomo 2002). In martial arts, Ki energy is manipulated through breathing practices.} The connection that he makes between the brain (consciousness) and the solar plexus (\textit{prāna}) is vital because he identifies that the intercourse between the consciousness and solar plexus can generate emotions (ibid, p. 198). His fictional director Tortsov passionately tells his students: ‘the sensation was that my brain held intercourse with my feelings’ (ibid, p. 198). Stanislavski’s argument is that consciousness shapes the subconscious to be able to control the body as an autonomous entity in the actor’s work. In other words, in order to be able to experience the flow of playing, the actor should be freed from the conscious interferences.

Stanislavski’s conception of the subconscious derives from contemporary (mid-to-late nineteenth century) psychology and his close encounter with Eastern somatic theories (Carnicke 1998). His later thoughts about the actor’s body and subconscious are similarly shaped through this mixture of the psychosomatic teaching of Yoga and nineteenth century objective psychology. In the early nineteenth century, the unconscious was largely understood, at least by Shelling, as a substance attached to nature (Olkowski and Morley 1999, pp. 47-48). Shelling categorises two sets of knowledge: subjective and objective knowledge. Subjective knowledge he refers to as the ‘ego’ or the intellect. Objective knowledge he refers to as nature (1999, p. 47). The unconscious is defined as a hidden creator and a reflection that is capable of doing things and able to ‘bring forth things’ that the consciousness cannot or does not agree to do (ibid, p. 48).\footnote{Freud, however, saw the unconscious as a submerging of the consciousness and defined it as a psychopathological representation. Freud placed the unconscious within the human psyche while Shelling placed it in the body or nature (Olkowski and Morley 1999, p. 48). As Edward S. Casey argues, although Shelling’s and Freud’s notions about the unconscious are different, there is a one agreeable point for both because Shelling and Freud believed that the unconscious can be brought to the conscious level (ibid). One significant aspect of the unconsciousness is that it works as a representational device that cannot emerge through the conscious mind. The unconsciousness operates with the absence of the consciousness. On the other hand unconsciousness as a ‘dynamic agency; operates outside the conscious sphere’ (ibid, p. 48). These behavioural patterns of the unconsciousness are well presented in Stanislavski’s analysis of the subconscious.}

The artist’s creativity and inspiration is often presented as an unconscious activity. First, the artist starts creative activity with conscious attention but gradually this conscious...
activity is transformed into an unconscious process. This idea can be further explained via Japanese aesthetic theory on somatic arts: in the cultivation process, the mind (the bright consciousness) deliberately places the body into a particular form of practice. Whether learning acting, swimming or meditation, the beginning phase can be unresponsive once the bright consciousness places its attention on the body in training. In the beginning, the body is uncooperative or inert and one feels the sense of self-consciousness. What occurs is that this bright consciousness tries to impose its form on the dark consciousness (subconscious), which is hidden underneath the body (Nagatomo 1992). Through an assiduous practice, the form becomes natural or second nature. It is second nature because the consciousness has entered into the subconscious and given it a new form (Yasuo 1987, pp. 5-6). In quite similar terms, Tortsov argues:

In the first period of conscious work on a role, an actor feels his way into the life of his part, without altogether understanding what is going on in it, in him, and around him. When he reaches the region of the subconscious the eyes of his soul are opened and he is aware of everything, even minute details, and it all acquires an entirely new significance (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, pp. 281-282).

The overall assumption of Stanislavski’s theory of the subconscious is that it is the actor’s active engagement that enables her to access the hidden creative forces of the subconscious. What he suggests is a form of self-cultivation – a cultivation of motor/perceptual habits that enables the actor to experience the bodymind integration of acting. In the preliminary knowing process, the actor’s perception towards the actions, he may experience the process as a ‘mind-aspect’ of the body. This mind-aspect is not a ‘cogito’ in the traditional sense, but it works as a ‘perceptual consciousness’ which functions in the horizon of the actor’s body.60 However, this perceptual consciousness begins to alter when the actor cultivates bodily habits that create the autonomy needed to execute the actions without the need for conscious control. Stanislavski writes:

He has given to his image his flesh and blood, his ability to move and speak, to feel, to wish, and now the image disappears from the mind’s eye and exists within him and acts upon his means of expression from inside him (cited in Carnicke 1998, p. 108).

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60 Japanese philosopher Hirishi Ichikawa explains that the ‘subject-body’ works as a horizon from which the cogito is possible as a perceptual consciousness (Nagatomo 1992, pp. 6-7).
For Stanislavski, this region is where the actor experiences the mind-aspect and the body-aspect as a unified entity. When Stanislavski says that the unconscious ‘envelops’ the actor’s ‘whole being’, he undoubtedly is aware of the power of the perception that ‘envelops’ the actor’s bodymind and the enactment together (1967, p. 282). Stanislavski’s term ‘incarnation’ broadly captures what the actor does; the term ‘experience’ captures the experiential world that is generated through the process of incarnation.

This is what contemporary cognitive science identifies as body image and body schema. Body image captures intentional (conscious) aspects of the body; body schema captures the motor capacities of the body (Gallagher 2006, p. 24-25). But these two aspects are apparently two sides of the same bodymind. These two aspects of the bodymind correspond with Merleau-Ponty’s body schema that I have explicated at length in the previous chapter. I illustrated how the body schema encapsulates the perceptual and motor habits. The epistemological problem that is involved with the actor’s knowing process generally presupposes that the actor’s perceptual (mind) aspects override the motile (body) aspects of knowing. Epistemology identifies these dual aspects as ‘knowing how’ (doing things) and ‘knowing that’ (propositional knowledge) (Johnston 2011). Daniel Johnston suggests that being able to do things (‘knowing how’) does not necessarily entail that the subject can acquire and accumulate ‘propositional knowledge’ (‘knowing that’) towards a particular task (Johnston 2011, p. 67). It is not my intention here to deny reflective, analytical approaches to acting. Instead, what I want to argue is that Stanislavski’s later discovery, the Method of Physical Action, explained through the notions of experiencing and incarnation, mark the epistemological shift from ‘knowing that’ to ‘knowing how’ in acting practice. In other words, the actor’s art as an embodied task is re-contextualized not within theory but practice.61 This shift also marks the radical change that Stanislavski attempts to implement in his new theatre – ‘the theatre of experiencing’ (Carnicke 1998, pp. 112-114)62 where the actor is not merely a thinker but primarily a doer.

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61 The theōria and prāxis are two different poles of epistemological enquiry that are presupposed in Western philosophy since Aristotle. As Nagatomo asserts, theoria is always privileged over praxis because human perception is recognised as disembodied functionality assigned to the psyche, and bodily activities and affecters are reduced to the soma (Nagatomo 1992, p. 181).

62 Stanislavski categorizes three forms of theatre. He coined these three terms on the basis of how the actor’s body is represented on stage. The first genre is the theatre of craftsmanship. Here he introduces clichéd acting or the ‘tricks-of—the-trade’ as a way of embodiment. Secondly, he discusses the ‘theatre of representation’, which
Stanislavski’s key ideas of ‘experiencing’ and ‘incarnation’ intertwine with the dialectical relationship of the actor and how the body grasps the theatrical environment in the process of knowledge acquisition. Stanislavski repeatedly insists on the value of the bodily actualization of the actor’s art by formulating his ideas towards a Method of Physical Action. On the other hand, his articulation of the experiencing of the actor germinates through the actor’s persistent interaction with the physical score. These two ideas link Stanislavski to the phenomenology of the body and Eastern bodymind theory. Eastern theories of self-cultivation suggest that one cannot master a particular somatic art only through intellectual understanding. In order to fully grasp the techniques, one needs to understand them in and through the body (Yasuo 1987, 1993). Phenomenology also explores this primordial relationship between the body and the world it inhabits. Phenomenology does not see that the subject perceives knowledge with a disembodied mind. In contrast, it suggests that perceiving and knowing is an actional way of being-in-the-world. As seen so far, Stanislavski’s notion of the subconscious is always a hidden and unknown agency working beyond the conscious experience of the human body. This is similar to what Merleau-Ponty calls the hidden ‘I can’ of the body, the body-subject. Merleau-Ponty does not accept the notion of the unconscious operating in or beyond the human body as a hidden cogito. He does not place this unconscious either in the human psyche, as Freud does, or, as Shelling does, in nature or the body. Instead, he says that the unconscious is an ‘illusion’ or a ‘myth’ (Olkowski and Morley 1999, p. 57).

The actor’s body as a sentient being in Stanislavski’s analysis challenges the understanding of the body as a subject (Lieb) and the body as an object (cöper) in acting. In the process of ‘experiencing’ the actor’s body is not a mere presentation to the audiences’ eyes as a body-object but a ‘living being’. The actor begins to ‘live through’ the phenomenal theatre because she has already bracketed the real world. Tortsov explains:

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was coined after Coquelin and Edler’s work. As Carnicke suggests, even though he was very sympathetic to this type of theatre because it represented ‘genuine feelings’ (Carnicke 1998, pp. 112-114), the ‘theatre of experiencing’ is where the actor genuinely experiences the ‘being’ on stage.

63 Remy C. Kwant argues that Freud’s articulation of the unconscious is somewhat similar to Merleau-Ponty’s idea of ‘I-body’ or the body-subject (Kwant 1963, pp. 28-29). In this sense, one can assume that Stanislavski’s idea of the subconscious operates similar to Merleau-Ponty’s description of the body-subject which is pre-personal and pre-conscious.
Make a note immediately of your mood; it is what we call Solitude in Public. You are in public because we are all here. It is solitude because you are divided from us by a small circle of attention. During a performance, before an audience of thousands, you can always enclose yourself in this circle like a snail in its shell (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 82).

In a phenomenological sense, Stanislavski’s main concern here is how to tackle the problem of attention in acting or how to eliminate the empirical consciousness of the actor in the acting process. Stanislavski identifies the value of the reduction of daily attitudes to be able to experience the inner attentiveness. In order to teach the difference between the phenomenal world of the actor and the life-world outside the stage, the Director in *An Actor Prepares* organizes a test in his laboratory theatre. It is a test about attention. He asks to switch off all the lamps in the theatre so that there is complete darkness. Then a little light appears in the area where the actors are sitting. All the actors’ attentions are consequently directed toward this light patch. The fictional director then explains:

> Intensive observation of an object naturally arouses a desire to do something with it. To do something with it in turn intensifies your observation of it. This mutual inter-reaction establishes a stronger contact with the object of your attention (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 76).

Stanislavski here discusses bodily intentionality that functions as a power of perception towards an object or objects and how the objects’ instrumentality heightens the actor’s grip towards them. This attentiveness, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not a passage to consciousness: it reveals the bodily sensory-motor attentiveness towards the objects and their mutual grasping in the act of perception (Merleau-Ponty 2002). The fictional director stresses the importance of being aware of the difference between the living world and the imagined world. In the imagined world, the actor needs a new approach to adapt and ‘look at and see things on the stage’ attentively (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 77). Stanislavski explains how the actor’s attention should be directed towards the score he enacts, how the conscious attention is directed towards different objects on the stage, and how the actor’s attention works as a multiple consciousness. As seen, Tortsov’s teaching intensifies the phenomenal nature of the actor’s approach to the theatre space and its objects. His experiments with actors provide evidence of how the primordial bodymind of the actor perceives and grasps her surroundings as a lived body. Stanislavski thus further extends his ideas towards the actor’s work and how the acting subject is motivated by her surroundings, fellow actors and the audience.
Communion

Stanislavski constantly encourages his students to interact with the theatre space. If the actor is to cultivate an expressive body then she must know her environment well and be ready to absorb the other objects and subjectivities around her. Tortsov speaks about the actor’s relationship to the space and the objects she interacts with:

You were trying to find out how and of what that object was made. You absorbed its form, its general aspect, and all sorts of details about it. You accepted these impressions, entered them in your memory, and proceeded to think about them. That means that you drew something from your object, and we actors look upon that as necessary. You are worried about the inanimate quality of your object. Any picture, statue, photograph of a friend, or object in a museum, is inanimate, yet it contains some part of the life of the artist who created it (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 195).

Recalling Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of cultural artefacts from the previous chapter, here Stanislavski proposes that the actors see theatrical objects as subjected to manipulation and as used by other subjectivities. Stanislavski understands that the theatrical objects appear as objects saturated with human imprints and that these human artefacts connote inter-corporeal relevance within the theatre space. He argues: ‘We are not concerned with the actual naturalistic existence of what surrounds us on stage, the reality of the material world!’ (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 129). Stanislavski notes the power of the grasping of the actor who directs her attention towards the theatrical objects and the ready-to-hand nature of the objects that are placed on the stage.

As well as this power of grasping, Stanislavski calls for a particular focus on ‘inner attention’ that is different from ‘external attention’. This inner attention is an important element for the actor because the actor works in imaginary circumstances. In these imagined situations, the actor needs special care and attention towards the objects they use and manipulate (1967, p. 89). Tortsov argues:

The simple looking at an object helps to fix it. But it cannot hold you for long. To grasp your object firmly when you are acting you need another type of attention, which causes an emotional reaction (1967, pp. 88-89).

Stanislavski argues that a particular object can trigger memory, history and stories embedded within it onto the beholder’s conscious experience. He takes an example of a chandelier
hanging in the rehearsal room and argues that this object could carry internal and emotional connection with it. But he invites students to go for a journey with this object and see how much human sedimentation it could contain: ‘this chandelier may have been in the house of some Field Martial when he received Napoleon. It may even have hung in the French Emperor’s own room when he signed the historic act, etc’ (ibid, p. 89). Stanislavski is more interested in knowing how the objects appear in the actor’s consciousness than how an object appears to a general eye. The object, as he writes, ‘does remain as it is’ (ibid, p. 89), but the impression it creates in the actor’s consciousness could heighten the emotional reaction towards it.

In a manner different to the relationship to inanimate objects, Stanislavski stresses the difficulty that an actor faces in the process of ‘communion’ with living human beings. Tortsov explains: ‘it is no easy thing to sense another’s inmost being, because people do not often open the doors of their souls and allow others to see them as they really are’ (1967, pp. 93-94). Once again, Stanislavski raises a phenomenological question: how does the actor understand the consciousness of the other actor? How does an actor penetrate into another actor’s mind? These questions are paramount because of his commitment to helping actors relate with each other in order to execute a successful performance on the stage. Stanislavski argues that this ‘living emotional material’ is the most important element via which the actor’s creative work can be completed: ‘This material is difficult to obtain because in large part it is intangible, indefinable, and only inwardly perceivable’ (1967, p. 93).

Stanislavski thus understands the actor’s work as a process of being-with-others, a communal process which transports the actor from the life-world to the world of performance. This turn also marks his attempt to override the subjective/objective dichotomy in acting. Stanislavski’s actor does not purely reside in his own inner world but, on the contrary, he believes that the actor’s inner and outer faculties are being constantly changed and transformed by the ways that they are connected to the phenomenal world of theatre. Stanislavski argues that because the actor is a ‘human being’ she could easily be drawn into the ‘humdrum life’ on stage if she brings her own personal life (reflections, thoughts and realities) onto the stage (1967, p. 196). It is not the actor’s task to bring her own personal life onto the stage as a continuation of her life-world. The actor’s work is a creative endeavour.

64 Stanislavski further explains how these thoughts, objects or related situations could carry the actor’s intention beyond the phenomenal space of the theatre. When the actor is possessed with these ‘personal feelings,
that draws materials from her own and others but recreates them in an imagined world (ibid, p. 129). If the actor is possessed with her own personal realities, her performance goes off beyond the footlight, crossing the borders of the theatre (ibid, p. 196). ‘When those lapses are frequent, and subject to interpolations from the actor’s personal life, they ruin the continuity of the role because they have no relation to it’ (ibid, p. 196). If the actor needs an uninterrupted line of action on stage, the actor needs to learn how to maintain sustainable, uninterrupted ‘feelings, thoughts and action’ between actors (ibid, p. 197). The important tool Stanislavski suggests to use for the actor is the ‘inter-communication of the *dramatis personae*’ (ibid, p. 196). If the actor needs to be experiencing the unbroken line of flow on stage, the key is to allow the other bodies to enter into the actor’s sensorial world.

Talking about the ‘mutual intercourse’ between actors, Tortsov provides an exciting metaphor to discuss how the actor can enter into the other’s experience. He introduces a metaphor of ‘emotional antennae’ (1967, p. 199) to explain the mutual intertwining of the bodies in the theatre. According to Stanislavski, inter-corporeal connection that needs to enhance the experience of the theatre operates not only at the verbal level but also in a pre-lingual level as well. When Grisha asks about the reciprocity of the communal integration, Tortsov explains how it occurs even between bodies through emotions, and feelings.

Obviously in communicating with one another the giving out and the taking in occur alternatively. But even while I am speaking and you were merely listening I was aware of your doubts. Your impatience, astonishment and excitement all carried over to me (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 201).

What is striking about this passage is that Stanislavski identifies the reciprocity between the actors’ bodies and how they interlock each other beyond the levels of a subject/object dichotomy. The ‘emotional antenna’ works similar to Merleau-Ponty’s ‘intentional arc’ connecting bodies together in the realm of emotions displayed in the array of the body. This mutual intertwining occurs when two bodies are open to giving out and absorbing in. This mutual intercourse in the theatre is important because it is the way that the actor can maintain the unbroken flow of the action (1967, p. 201). However, Stanislavski argues that this communion is not an easy task to achieve. Actors are more prone to taking a ‘least resistant’ reflections and realities’ the actor is not capable of producing a good performance. This situation only produces a ‘mechanical acting’ for him (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 196).
line than trying to intermingle with others (ibid, p. 205). Therefore, they try to use the tricks of imitation to disguise themselves as if they are really being with the other.

Being-for-itself (self-communion) and being-for-other (inter-communication) are two mutually connected phenomena for Stanislavski. If the actor cannot attune to self-communion, she is unable to expand the communion with the other. Here Stanislavski develops the idea of ‘self-awareness’, which is defined as the combination of interoception and exteroception of the actor’s body. Phillip Zarrilli argues that the actor’s important elements such as ‘sedimentation, assimilation and quickening’ are not only bodily cultivations of an ever deepening awareness of the ‘space outside oneself’, but inner cultivations of the deep awareness of the ‘inner space’ (Zarrilli 2001, p. 39). With this process, the actor’s body and its connection to the space is changed and begins to experience a ‘qualitative’ change of the bodymind (Zarrilli 2001, p. 39).

Talking about the importance of inter-communion in the theatre, Stanislavski further expands his explanation to include the role of the audience in the actor’s ‘experiencing’ (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 204). The actor should cultivate the truthful ‘inner-communion’ in order to commune with the public. The public and the personal are intersected at the crossroads of the lived body. Tortsov emphasises this to his students: ‘learn to prize that inner communion because it is one of the most important sources of action’ (ibid, p. 205). What Stanislavski postulates here is that once the actor is fully immersed in the state of ‘experiencing’ where the ‘subconscious’ takes hold of the act, the actor does not differentiate the existence of the self, body and the other as separate entities. In other words the actor does not experience the daily dualistic attitude of the body-mind dichotomy. The actor is fully attuned with the self, body and the other as a unified wholeness. Merleau-Ponty writes that ‘transcendental subjectivity is a revealed subjectivity, revealed to itself and to others, and is for that reason an intersubjectivity’ (2002, p. 421). In a similar manner, Stanislavski understands that the actor is not a mere thinking substance but a bodymind

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65 These two terms, interoception and exteroception are generally used to denote bodily forms of internal and external sensations. A Dictionary of Psychology (3rd ed.) provides the meanings of the interoception as ‘conveying information about the state of internal organs and tissue, blood pressure, and the fluid, salt, and the sugar level in the blood’. The term exteroception refers to any sensation generated by stimuli and detected by our five senses such as vision, hearing, touch, cold, heat and taste (Colman et al. 2009). In the context of acting, Zarrilli articulates how the actor cultivates the interoception through inner bodymind awareness. The exteroception for the actor is developed through the bodily relationship that the actor cultivates with the physical score, action or any form of body movements.
wholeness, which encapsulates the self, body and the other as a nutshell within the performance.

II. JERZY GROTOWSKI

Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) is regarded as one of the leading theatre directors and theorists of the post-Stanislavskian theatre world. He is post-Stanislavskian in two senses: first, he follows Stanislavski chronologically; and second, though Grotowski’s work clearly departs from Stanislavski’s, he is also very much indebted to the earlier master. Grotowski was a keen student at the Lunacharski Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow where he was much influenced by Stanislavski’s approach to actor training (Romanska 2012). In this section, I will discuss how Grotowski expands his ideas towards the bodymind techniques of the actor through his key notion – *via negativa*.

As discussed earlier, Stanislavski’s approach to the actor’s work seems almost a transcendental, phenomenological project. He extensively addresses the relationship between the conscious and the subconscious and how the subconscious works as a creative centre for the actor. Grotowski’s project is more existential because, building upon Stanislavski’s later ideas on psychophysicality, he sees the actor as an ‘existential being’. Grotowski’s actor rejects the traditional relationships between the actor, theatrical structure and the audience and suggests a new theatricality. In a broader sense, his intervention via poor theatre marks the departure of the theatre as a ‘representation’ and configures it instead as an arrival of the theatre of lived experience. Grotowski’s rejection of conventional text-based theatre and his counter-emphasis on putting the actor and the body in the centre of the theatre brought him fame in America and Europe. Grotowski once said that the ‘essence of the theatrical work lies outside the text’ (Romanska 2012, p. 50).

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66 Grotowski’s ideas towards the poor theatre have been influenced by various sources. As he states, Dullin’s rhythm exercises, Stanislavski’s physical actions, Meyerhold’s bio-mechanics, Artuad, and Eastern somatic arts such as Peking Opera, Indian Kathakali, and Balinese dance have heavily influenced his own conception of the theatre. Grotowski’s whole conception is developed through the rejection of all the theatrical metaphysics proposed by his contemporaries.

67 From his early period of apprenticeship, Grotowski was rebellious in choosing, adapting and re-constructing his theatre texts from classical texts to contemporary theatre. For instance, even in his last theatre production,
Peter Brook argues that ‘no-one since Stanislavski, has investigated the nature of acting, its phenomenon, its meanings, the nature and science of its mental-physical emotional processes as deeply and completely as Grotowski’ (Grotowski 2002, p. 11). In his early works on actor training at the Theatre Laboratory, the exploration of intercultural performance principles in the ‘Objective Drama Project’ at the University of California, Irvine in the 1980s, and his later research work towards the project titled ‘Art as vehicle’, Grotowski continued to explore the search for the holy actor who could experience the primordial nature of the body.

**Poverty in the theatre**

Grotowski conceives modern life as in crisis. Furthermore, in theatre, he argues that the actor’s life is also represented in a troublesome manner. He argues that modern individuals live in a duality of conflict between ‘intellect’ and the ‘emotions’ or simply between mind and matter (Grotowski 2002, p. 255). The modern subject is a person whose emotions, living impulses, and expressions are limited and subjugated by ‘tension’ and ‘blocks’ due to the changing, modernist life style (2002, p. 255). As a whole, contemporary lives are masked with social and professional masquerades. The actor’s challenge is to eliminate these masquerades and find the truthful nature of the human being by using the self-revelatory process.

Grotowski categorizes his theatre as ‘poor theatre’ because he rejects the notion of spectacle and the technical advancement of the theatre he witnessed at the time. He expresses a belief that theatre has a specific organic nature that cannot be realized in other performing arts, including television and film. He rejects such technological advancements, sets and décor, music and lighting of the theatre as banal ‘synthetics’ of the art (Grotowski 2002, p. 255).

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68 Grotowski provides two terms to denote his artistic approach to the theatre. Apart from the term ‘poor’ he proposes the term ‘poverty’ in contrast to the ‘Rich theatre’ from which he departs, claiming that Rich Theatre is a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines – literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting’. For him this is ‘synthetic theatre’ (Grotowski 2012, p. 19).
19). He argues that this organic nature is revitalized through the actor and her connection to the audience member who is empowered to share the same values and ethics in a shared performance space. Grotowski argues that the sincerity of the actor’s approach to the part potentially renders a primordial theatrical experience. He seeks a particular ‘essence’ of the theatre that he believes to be embedded in the lived body of the actor and his relationship to the audience.

In order to go back to the actor’s primordiality, Grotowski proposes two techniques: one is ‘distillation’. Distillation encourages the actor to ‘abstract’ and ‘eliminate’ social signs embedded in their daily habituation; next, he seeks ‘contradiction’69 (Hodge 2000, p. 204). The process of distillation illuminates the ‘hidden structure of signs’ to cast off the contradictions between the ‘will and the action’ (Grotowski 2002, p. 18). In doing so, Grotowski proposes a radical turn for the actor’s role in the theatre while asking the same turn from the audience. Grotowski’s whole intention is to tap into the lived experience of the actor and the audience alike. His actor is a person who sacrifices herself totally in the experience of a theatrical act and immerses with the audience member who also goes through a similar sacrificial process in the given theatrical space.

For Grotowski, the theatre is an important, explicit meeting point for individuals who can share and experience emotions, desires and events among subjectivities within an agreeable setting. Yet the question remains: is the theatre capable of providing such intimacy as Grotowski proposes? Grotowski’s proposal of the ‘total act’ sets to challenge this metaphysic of “betweenness”: the actor/character, actor/score, and actor/audience encounter.

As seen, Stanislavski proposes an inner-communion in order to achieve solitude. Grotowski rejects this notion of solitude because he argues that the theatre experience cannot be actualized by creating a gap between the actor and the audience. Stanislavski favours communion through suggesting solitude for the actor. Grotowski rejects the notion of solitude because he proposes a much more straightforward connection between the actor and the audience. Stanislavski’s aesthetics is related to text-based, modernist approaches to theatre and character portrayal (role as a progression). Grotowski, by contrast, worked in an unconventional theatre space where he changed the theatre structure, audience and largely

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69 Grotowski coins it as ‘conjunction of opposites’ or the *conjunctio oppositorum* (Hodge 2000, p. 204).
worked with devised texts. Even though both need a communal encounter between the actor and the audience, their ways of achieving this are different.

Grotowski’s statement that ‘I am interested in the actor because he is a human being’ (Grotowski 2002, p. 130) designates how he conceives of the actor as a lived being which cannot be understood as dual substance. He makes two points to justify this statement. First, because the actor is a human being, the actor’s body requires ‘the contact, the mutual feeling of comprehension and the impression created by the fact that we open ourselves to another being’ (ibid, p. 130). This mutual contact of bodies affirms Grotowski’s rejection of the actor as a solitary being. Second, this mutual intertwining allows the actor to understand others ‘through the behaviour of another man, finding oneself in him’ (ibid, p. 130).

Merleau-Ponty argues that the gesture of the other needs to be understood as a ‘question’ bringing some ‘perceptible bits’ from the world to my attention asking for a similar ‘concurrence in them’ (2002, p. 215). He further suggests that ‘it is as if the other person’s intention inhabited my body and mine his’ (ibid, p. 215). Thus, consciousness is demonstrated by the display of bodily actions. Observing others’ gestures, Grotowski proposes to find oneself in another body. Even though the subjects are believed to be self-conscious beings, Grotowski argues that the actor can understand the self by understanding the other. Consciousness is not separated from the body but is embedded and displayed as a bodily attitude towards the world. Grotowski’s articulation of the actor, her body and her relationship to the theatre explores the need of going back to the primordial “givenness” of the world. Grotowski sees the theatre not as a representational device that renders daily habituations garnished with aesthetic excitements. Instead, he suggests a primordial reciprocity of bodies via which the actor is able to see her own life through a theatrical explicitness.

Grotowski wants to see the actor not as one who ‘represents’ a character, nor as someone who empathises with the role, or, indeed, who makes a distance from the role as epic theatre requires (2002, p. 37). He proposes a particular actor-being, a holy actor who casts away the acting-self in the theatre. This actor-being does not hide behind the character nor simply empathises with the audience member. His actor-being situates in between the

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70 Merleau-Ponty argues that ‘[t]he sense of the gesture is not given, but understood, that is, recaptured by an act on the spectator’s part’ (2002, p. 215).
self, character and the other. Therefore, this actor-being is not an ‘inner man’ as Merleau-
Ponty says, nor an outer-man (ibid, p. xii). His holy actor is a particular being incarnated
through the actor’s full immersion in the enactment. Therefore, finding a theatrical truth of
the actor for Grotowski does not rely on the soul of the actor or in the consciousness, but is
incarnated through the reciprocity of the self and the other.

Grotowski’s assertion of the actor’s ability to understand the other through his
behaviours and gestures affirms his belief of the actor’s body operating as a consciousness.
He does not state that it is the actor’s psychical content via which they relate to each other,
understand each other and comprehend each others’ bodies; instead, it is the actor’s body at
the centre of understanding. Grotowski emphasises the importance of comprehending the
other through the display of movements, gestures and emotions (2002, p. 130). He provides
two points:

  Firstly, my meeting with another person, the contact, the mutual feeling of
  comprehension and the impression created by the fact that we open ourselves to another
  being, that we try to understand him. […] Secondly, the attempt to understand oneself
  through the behaviour of another man, finding oneself in him (2002, p. 130).

The perception of the other’s body, as Merleau-Ponty argues, is ‘anterior’ and is a condition
of such ‘observation’ (2002, p. 410). Once the actor finds her primordial gesture through the
‘biological-instinctive source via the channel of consciousness’ the actor begins to reveal the
‘different layers of his personality’ (2002, p. 131). This unification is, as Grotowski calls it,
‘the summit’ via which the actor’s experiences ‘all becomes unity’ (ibid, p. 131). This is the
‘unveiling’ that leads the actor to the ‘total act’ from which she begins to work for the
provocation of the other, the audience (ibid, p. 131). This ‘unveiling of being,’ as Grotowski
further argues, is a revealing of the actor’s self and opens a space for the actor to find
sincerity and to transcend daily dualities: ‘internal conflict between body and soul, intellect
and feelings, physiological pleasures and spiritual aspiration’ (ibid, p. 131). This
transgression is similarly applied to the audience as like-minded human beings. Grotowski
even resists labelling the actor the most important protagonist in his theatre; the relationship
between the actor and the audience is not ‘for the spectator’ but ‘in relation to’ the spectator
(ibid, p. 131). This emphasis further implies that the actor is neither a giver in the process of
performance, and neither is the audience a passive receiver. The relationship is reciprocal
between bodies and the physiognomy that they share between each other. This reciprocal
relationship is to be realized through the deep understanding and awareness cultivated beyond reflection. The understanding between bodies primarily does not take place within the conscious subjectivities, on social signs or representational values, but through the very nature of bodily beings.

**via negativa**

Grotowski identifies two genres of actors: courtesans and holy actors. For the courtesan actor, it is a question of the ‘existence of the body’; for the holy actor, it is rather a ‘non-existence’ (Grotowski 2002, p. 35). Grotowski radically sees how the holy actor can step into a non-existence realm, where the actor’s body ‘burns’ and ‘vanishes’ (ibid, p. 16). He advocates this non-existence through constructing a particular existence of the actor's body on the stage. It is evident that the actor’s consciousness (ego-consciousness) that is overriding the body of the actor continually informs her conscious presence on the stage. The actor’s ego-conscious awareness of her several everyday roles – mother, sister, teacher, friend, granddaughter – informs how the actor is able to negotiate the act on stage. In these instances, the actor’s sincerity is at stake because her mind-aspect and body-aspect seem to be clashing with each other. Grotowski calls for the actor to be able to come to a non-existence where the actor’s psycho-somatic apparatuses are synchronized within a creative equilibrium of the bodymind. When the actor elevates into the ‘non-existence’ of the body, the bodymind seems integrated and vanishes in the action of the body. Grotowski calls this state ‘body-life’ (Hodge 2000, pp. 203-204). The body vanishes; the action remains. The body, action, space and the other intermingle as a unified wholeness.

At the conclusion of a theatre workshop conducted at the Skara Drama School in Sweden, Grotowski delivered a statement about his conception of how the actor should use her inner and outer apparatuses as a unified wholeness and how those faculties are intertwined through the practice of *via-negativa*:

> Only act with your whole self. [...] That is enough. You need not come with all this right from the beginning. Proceed step by step, but without falseness, without imitating actions, always with all your personality, all your body. As a result, you will find some day that your body has started to react totally, that is to say it is almost annihilated, it no longer exists. It offers no further resistance. Your impulses are free (Grotowski 2002, p. 238).
Here Grotowski advises students at the conference how they could achieve the sincerity and ethical commitment to the actor’s task. He notes that the full immersion and embodiment of the actor’s work involves a long process for the apprentice. But if the actor gradually cultivates the sincerity of what she does and eliminates banalities, then she will be able to experience the ultimate goal that is the resistance-free bodymind integration. As Grotowski sees, the problem of the bodymind is that the inner “impulses” resist the outer bodily actions. If the actor needs to get rid of such resistance, he further needs to unite the inner and outer faculties in order to experience the resistance-free flow of action.

Elimination is again a particular reduction that Grotowski suggests to apply to the actor’s work to be able to achieve resistance-free bodymind (Johnston 2011). He wants his actors to eliminate social constructions, signs and meanings that they carry as a burden of the body because, as Grotowski argues, ‘our daily efforts intend to hide the truth about ourselves not only from the world but also from ourselves’ (Grotowski 2002, p. 37). Grotowski here suggests eliminating the difference between the actor’s self and the other. For Grotowski, elimination allows the actor to experience the primordial ‘trance’ which is not heavily charged with the mundane dualistic attitude of the body and mind. Elimination works in two ways for the actor: first, the process allows the actor to get rid of the presence of the consciousness towards the body. Consequently, the “impulses” and the action begin to work together. And second, the elimination eradicates contradictions between bodies – between the actor and the other. Grotowski proposes this elimination not to impose another set of body practices. His suggestion is to find the actor’s sincerity, her own personal limitations and obstacles. These revelations, as Grotowski argues, may open up avenues for the actor to work ‘whole-heartedly’ (2002, p. 225). The actor’s sincerity of inner ‘impulses’ and his reactions toward outer stimulants may unite as a spontaneous action.

Grotowski states that actors’ key elements are ‘stimulations, impulses and reactions’ (2002, p. 225). These three key terms encapsulate Grotowski’s whole conception of acting as a meeting place for the actor’s inner and outer worlds. Grotowski sees these elements as interconnected phenomena in the actor’s body. He identifies that in the amateur actor, the gap between the ‘impulses’ and the ‘action’ is wide. That is why he advises young actors to continue their practice until the psycho-somatic apparatuses are mingled. He argues:

The education of an actor in our theatre is not a matter of teaching him something; we attempt to eliminate his organism’s resistance to his psychic process. The result is the
freedom from the time-lapse between inner-impulses and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses (2002, p. 16).

Similar to what the phenomenological tradition explains about the body and its perception, Grotowski also sees the fundamental problem of the human ‘impulses’ (perception) and outer reaction (action) as a contradiction between the mind and the body. Grotowski’s approach is also closer to Asian bodymind philosophy. In Yuasa’s analysis of the body, the performer achieves bodymind oneness once her body-mind is cultivated; once the ‘impulses’ of the performer’s inner self and the outer actions are intertwined (Yasuo 1987). In Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, this idea of the absent body resides in the background during the optimal experience of an activity. This is essential for the proper functioning of the body (Shusterman 2012, p. 48). Merleau-Ponty further claims that the body should not be preoccupied with our rational interference to observe the bodily pre-reflectivity because it interrupts the un-reflective bodily perception and action (ibid 2012). Grotowski’s terms impulses and action need a further clarification to understand his intention of applying them to his theory of acting and how they are related to the process of elimination (via negativa).

**Impulses and Action**

Lisa Wolford argues that Grotowski’s term impulse refers to the ‘living action’ that is born inside the actor’s body (Hodge 2000, p. 199). Grotowski identifies the actor’s bodily agency as an ‘action’ erupting within the actor’s body and coming to the periphery of the body. Thomas Richards also argues that Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Action and Grotowski’s approach to ‘physical action’ utilise the idea of ‘impulses’ (Richards and Grotowski 1995). Yet Stanislavski’s interpretation of impulses is significantly different from Grotowski’s analysis. Stanislavski, for instance, writes that ‘impulses’ germinate and work through natural laws, yet the ‘impulses’ that are generated with the support of nature thus manifest in the eyes and the facial muscles of the actor (ibid, pp. 93-94). Grotowski, by contrast, talks about the actor’s ‘impulses’ as minute ‘inner actions’ germinated in the body and manifested as bodily action.
And now, what is the impulse? ‘In/pulse’ – Push from inside. Impulses precede physical actions, always. The impulses: it is as if the physical action, still almost invisible, was already born in the body. It is this, the impulse. If you know this, in preparing a role, you can work alone on the physical actions (cited in Richards and Grotowski 1995, p. 94).

For Grotowski, the body pushes from inside as anonymous ‘impulses’ make the body expressive in the wake of actions. He sees the actor’s body as an actional being which governs through the process of stimulation, impulse and action. Grotowski sees this inner impulse as an action on which the actor should find her somatic expressivity through moving and connecting with the outer world. ‘Impulses’ are generated not because it is up to the nature mechanism, as Stanislavski speculates, but as a result of bodily empathy with others. He argues that there is no impulse or action without an ‘intention’. Grotowski defines the actor’s inner-self as a connecting arc, a perceptual action directed towards the outer world. As seen earlier, what is born in the actor is engendered in the reciprocity of the other. This idea is important to understand how Grotowski’s key concept of via negativa is achieved not through the isolation of body but by the interaction between bodies. He describes ‘impulses’ as the fundamental building block of the actor’s art and the ‘morpheme of acting’ (Richards and Grotowski 1995, p. 95).

Grotowski suggests that various kinds of physical training are not the most important factor in the actor’s art, being the ‘line of living impulses’ in the actor’s body (Richards and Grotowski 1995, p. 199). While such physical training develops the actor’s body in terms of ‘agility’, ‘strength’ or ‘stamina’ (1995, pp. 199-200), he argues that it does not provide the imaginative and affective capacities for the actor. Grotowski sees that the actor’s inner ‘impulses’ are the consequences of the outer world. Therefore he emphasises the importance of actor training with the partner. Physical action or the ‘impulses’ thus generate through association with inner and outer objects. Grotowski talks about bodily ‘impulses’ which function as internal ‘tension’ (ibid, p. 96). He argues that there is a link between the inner tension of the body and the ‘impulses’. Tension, as he explains, is an internal bodily impulse that is directed towards an outer reaction. Grotowski argues,

In/tension – intention. There is no intention, if there is not a proper muscular mobilization. This is also a part of the intention. The intention exists even at a muscular
level in the body, and is linked to some objective outside you (cited in Richards and Grotowski 1995, p. 96).

Grotowski argues that it is difficult for an amateur actor to intellectually understand the relationship between ‘impulses’ and its external relation to the associations. For Grotowski, these associations are not psychological memories or remembrances, they are the ‘contacts’ (Grotowski 2002, p. 226), the mutual inter-human associations occurring between bodies, perhaps operating largely unnoticed in the actors’ conscious awareness. In his famous Skara speech, he instructs theatre students: ‘Speaking of the problem of impulses and reactions, I have underlined through this conference that there are no impulses and reactions without contact’ (Grotowski and Barba 1991, p. 226). Grotowski therefore wants his holy actor to experience the un-interrupted flow of impulse through the actor’s body in order to experience the fullness of the bodymind experience.

Grotowski’s whole intention is to allow the actor to experience the free flow of the inner and outer reactions in such a way that the actor cultivates a unified experience of being in the enactment. In another sense, this is the body empathy that governs the actor’s inner ‘impulses’ which connects the actor’s interiority to her exteriority. Grotowski advocates the actor to go beyond the limit of the text and portray an inner-self that is hidden under the skin of the daily mask. Grotowski’s whole project is to confront with theatre metaphysics that restrict our direct access to what he calls pure human nature. He understands that theatre, as well as life, is filled with such dualities, as well as banalities which prevent us going back to the essences that he intends to achieve in his theatre.71

III. EUGENIO BARBA

Eugenio Barba (1936- ) is the founding director of the Odin Teatret in Holstebro, Denmark, and the founder of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) where he regularly experiments and presents his research findings with intercultural collaborations.

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71 Grotowski’s most beloved actor, Ryszard Cieslak, once said that ‘[w]e think we can run towards the horizon and touch it, but in reality the distance never alters. You never can touch the horizon, and perhaps that is why it is so fascinating’ (Torzecka and Bassnett 1992, p. 263).
Barba first worked as an assistant to Grotowski at the Theatre Laboratory and edited Grotowski’s key text *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Allain and Harvie 2012).

Over the past five decades, Barba’s key interest has centred around the actor’s stage presence (Barba 1989). He explores the actor’s daily and extra-daily behaviours in order to investigate how the performer’s energies and techniques are applied and functioned within performance situations (Krasner and Saltz 2006, pp. 173-174). The ‘body-in-life’ is the term he uses to understand the amalgamation of the actor’s inner and outer dimensions and how those faculties are integrated and expressed through the actor’s stage ‘presence’ (Barba 1988).

**Presence**

Barba’s notion of presence has been developed via an encounter with Eastern as well as Western classical theatre and practices. His close observation and critical analysis have allowed him to absorb primary performance principles that those master performers have embodied. Barba’s notion of presence is the most contested concept he has developed in his pedagogy of acting (Auslander 2008; Phelan 1988; Zarrilli and Barba 1988). The term presence, of course, carries many meanings and nuances, and has been highly controversial in Barba’s analyses.

The idea of presence generally refers to the performer’s power of expression or pre-expressivity that radiates on the stage (Barba and Fowler 1982). It is also known as a particular energy level that the performer demonstrates during performance situations. However, this power of presence is not only confined to theatrical performance situations. As social scientists suggest, human bodily presence functions and can be recognized in other social situations as well. In these social situations, the notion of presence has been alternatively referred to with various terms such as grace, charisma, aura, persona, power and personality. Writers such as Susan M. Jaeger and Jon Erickson have extensively discussed the perceptual and sociological implications of human presence (Krasner and Saltz 2006). Further, it is evident that actors and directors are well aware that a good performer radiates charismatic power that has the capacity to demonstrate the actor’s self on the stage and capture the audience’s perception alike (Barba 1985, p. 369). Jaeger writes that ‘this sense
involves both for the performer and for the audience an awareness of things uniquely coming together’ (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 123).

The notion of presence is particularly brought to attention because of some of the oriental performers’ approaches to performance. Barba proposes a ‘particular quality of presence’ (Barba and Fowler 1982, p. 9) of the actor he sees in many Eastern performances and the power of the body that those performers demonstrate on such occasions. In ‘The Theatre Anthropology’ he describes being captured by the presence of the performer:

Oriental actors, even when they give a cold, technical demonstration, possess a quality of presence which immediately strikes the spectator and engages his attention (Barba and Fowler 1982, p. 7).

It is widely known that Brecht’s encounter with Mei Lan-Fang and Chinese opera in Moscow influenced the development of his ‘estrangement theory’ (verfremdung) of acting (Liu 2011, p. 70). Stark Young writes about Fang, stating ‘his gesture and movement pivot, is supple, well-knit and thoroughly disciplined’ (Senelick 2013, p. 175). Young writes about a particular ‘magnetism’ of Fang that captures the audience attention ‘supernaturally’. He argues that the power of Fang’s presence is a result of his ability to respond to the immediate action around him through his ‘nervous co-ordination’ on the stage (2013, p. 175).

Once the actor immigrates from her usual body-culture to a new ‘country of hope’, as Barba says, then the actor’s bodily presence begins to provide a new somatic awareness for the actor. As Crease and Lutterbie suggest, this process entails the actor’s ability to change her body image via which she begins to present a new identity (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 173). This transformation not only affects the self-awareness of the actor but it reflects the ideological stances of such a performer as well (ibid, p. 173). In this sense, Barba’s articulation of the presence of the actor is not a passive manifestation of bodily signs of the performer, but also embeds socio-cultural meanings and ideological connotations.

As with most writing by theatre visionaries, Barba’s articulation of presence is elaborated with many metaphors and a specialist terminology. For instance, ‘body-in-life’ and ‘dilated body’ are generally used to denote and describe the stage presence of the actor. In addition, terms and phrases such as the invisible, transparency, luminosity, organicity, quality of energy, or the network of tensions are used to talk about the presence of the actor (Barba 1972, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1994). However, in most of his writings, Barba is very
cautious about the way he articulates the living nature of the body and its capacities in acting practice. He rejects the phrase ‘body as an instrument’ commonly used in performance practices by saying that ‘when one says that the actor “uses his body”, one should ask oneself “who is using what?” and will then realize that the words imply a false version of reality’ (Barba 1989, p. 311). This clearly indicates how Barba’s concern for the body is well informed by his broad understanding of the human bodily existence as a lived entity. In ‘The Fiction of Duality’, Barba explains how the actor should relate to his body by not dividing it into a conscious subject or a body-instrument (Barba 1989). Barba posits the problem of the body and its subjective and objective duality thus:

When the actor asks himself how he can refine his instrument – ‘use his body’ – he knows very well that ‘his body’ is not ‘his’ at all but is himself (1989, p. 311).

Barba describes two opposing bodily existences that the actor experiences when she begins to start a transformation from everyday, dualistic practices to a non-dualistic stance. He defines the problem of the actor’s perception of the body as a contradiction between the body-object and the body-subject. In the empirical world, the actor’s body is always defined as a body that belongs to the self or the ‘I’. Cogito ‘I’ operates as the manipulator of the body-object that ‘I have’. It is to say that I am ‘having my body’ by dividing myself and the body as separate opposites. Barba acknowledges that the actor’s wanting to be a fully embodied subject marks his ‘sensible desire’ to depart the ‘experience of separation’ (1989, p. 311). But similar to the Asian theory of cultivation, Barba assumes that an actor’s wanting to get rid of this duality is not a desire for having an ideal vision. In other words, the actor’s departure cannot be fulfilled through acquiring an intellectual understanding of such a unification of the body. It is, of course, a matter of practice, training and iteration of the body that would provide the desired target the actor wishes to achieve. In Barba’s terms, it is a ‘program of work’ (ibid, p. 311) through which the actor needs to succumb to her bodymind.

As I stated, it is difficult to pin down Barba’s terminology because his ideas about the body and its perceptual energies are written in a lyrical and metaphorical language. While explaining the actor’s ‘body-in-life’ as the culmination of inner and outer faculties, Barba further introduces the phrase ‘mind-in-life’ to discuss how consciousness works for the actor (1985, p. 374). The body-in-life is also incarnated once the actor’s dualities are ceased in extra-daily practices. Then the question is what does Barba mean by this mind-in-life?
Because once the duality is intact there should not be a separate consciousness functioning again over the body: bodymind seems to be integrated. In my view, Barba’s elaboration of mind-in-life designates the function of the perceptual aspects of the body, the ‘subconscious’ that Stanislavski and Grotowski also saw as the source of creativity and inspiration for the actor. In phenomenological terms, this mind-in-life can be seen as the ‘creative mover’ of the process of the actor’s work.

As I have stated earlier, Merleau-Ponty does not believe in such an existence as a hidden source of energy operating beneath our bodies. Instead, he argues that ‘my perception does not bear upon a content of consciousness’, it bears upon the object we perceive (2002, p. 303). In other words, our consciousness is always conscious about something. Barba uses three figurative terms to talk about the idea of conscious operation in the actor’s enactment: the ‘ecstasy of montage’, ‘to think the thought’ and the ‘mind-in-life’ (Barba 1985, p. 374). These phrases are interchangeably used to discuss the inner activities of the actor. It is difficult to define whether Barba’s notion of mind-in-life is actually an ‘inner activity’ of the actor because he does not directly indicate what he really means by the notion of mind-in-life, but it is clear that, as he has stated in ‘The Dilated body on the Energies of Acting’, it is not a ‘paranormal’ or an ‘altered state of conscious’ (1985, p. 370). He elsewhere writes that the ‘dilated body’ evokes the ‘dilated-mind’ (ibid, p. 370). These statements affirm that this ‘dilated mind’ may be the conscious state he discusses as mind-in-life or the ‘to think the thought’ state of the actor. He further notes that this state is also directly related to the ‘level of craftsmanship’ of the actor (ibid, p. 370).

In order to (try to) be clear, he provides a metaphor of a pack of greyhounds running behind a prey (Barba 1985, p. 374). They run together towards a target, they flock around, miss the tracks, lose the target, proceed backward, spread around, and then one finds a new trail, others follow and then they suddenly find the prey and finally accomplish the ‘idea’ (ibid, p. 374). The actor’s ‘mind-in-life’, as Barba argues, works in such a dynamic way and collaborates with the dilated body to achieve the creative target. As Barba argues, the actor’s creative state (mind-in-life) is such that one cannot predict how the creative inspirations will develop. Like the greyhound, the mind-in-life makes sudden direction changes and makes unexpected discoveries. Barba writes:
To think a thought implies waste, changes of direction, sudden transitions, unexpected connections between levels and contexts previously not in communication, routes which intersect and are lost (1985, p. 374).

All these stages of the actor’s creative state, as Barba indicates, are directly related to the actor’s bodymind and how the bodymind inhabits within a particular space and time. To think the thought, the mind-in-life, and ecstasy of montage, all these terms capture a similar meaning in Barba’s articulation of the mind aspects of the performer (Barba 1985, p. 374). They represent ‘various fragments, various images, various thoughts’ but are not clearly directed towards a particular end point or target. Yet they operate according to the laws of spontaneity (ibid, pp. 374-375). The dilated body as well as the dilated mind, as Barba suggests, is a dynamic equilibrium of the lived body. These two aspects of the lived body again resonate with phenomenological descriptions of the perceptual and motile functions of the body. Barba states that the actor can start either from the mental or physical. But the important thing is whether the actor is capable of migrating from ‘one to the other’ for a reconstruction of the unity (ibid, p. 370). The actor’s movements, sudden changes of the body, unexpected connections, changing direction imply that his analysis of the dilated mind (to think the thought) works and behaves in bodily terms. These ‘leaps of thought’ of the dilated body may change and create unexpected creative developments and transformations to the actor’s work. Barba calls them ‘peripeteias’ (ibid, p. 370) Peripeteias thus work through the ‘act of negation’. In the creative process of the actor, ‘behaviour of thoughts’, as Barba terms it, acts as the actions of the body and works to create opposite, unexpected twists. This unison of opposites works not as a solitary act of negation in the actor’s work but always a ‘point of departure’ for other individuals similarly being affected by it (Barba 1985, p. 370).

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s articulation of the notion of ‘thinking in movement’ (Schmicking and Gallagher 2010; Sheets-Johnstone 1981) could help to understand Barba’s idea of ‘to think the thought’ in the actor’s lived body. As I argued, Barba’s notion of ‘to think the thought’ cannot be seen merely as a thinking substance or a consciousness that

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72 Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has extensively explored the primacy of movement in cognitive and perceptual life. Her articulation of the idea ‘Thinking in Movement’ suggests that from infancy to adult life our motility functions as the primitive thinking agent in the human body. She argues that our capacity to think or conceptualize is rooted in time, space and handling the force or bodily energy. These fundamentals are linked to human movements and it is the ‘kinesthesia’ of the body (Schmicking and Gallagher 2010, p. 222).
overrides the actor’s body during an enactment. As Sheets-Johnstone suggests, when the
dancer is creating a form or a movement, the dancer is ‘implicitly aware of herself when the
movement is created’ (1963, p. 35). In the pre-reflective level of such a situation, the dancer
is not capable of ‘being self-conscious’ about the movement she creates. In other words, the
dancer cannot be self-conscious and at the same time be conscious about how the movement
is created. However, the consciousness could possibly exist in the movement of the dance as
a ‘form being made’, or, in other words, as a ‘form-in-the-making’ (ibid, p. 36). Along with
this I argue that Barba’s notion of ‘to think the thought’ is the appearance of the
consciousness as a form of vivid movements that have not yet been fully formed, as a ‘form-
in-the-making’ of the actor’s act. However, Barba’s overall argument is that the actor’s stage
presence appears as the equilibrium of the dilated body and the dilated mind. As Brook
suggests, the actor is a ‘volcano’ (1996, p. 51) that vehemently activates as an unpredictable
yet predictable source of inner/outer energies embedded in the bodymind.

Phenomenal presence

In phenomenological analysis, the notion of body schema is broadly defined within the notion
of presence, which is developed through human habituation in social and non-daily situations
(Krasner and Saltz 2006, pp. 122-141). Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the body schema is
therefore useful to explicate how the actor’s presence is a result of the cultivation of the
perceptual synthesis of the body. As discussed earlier, the body image or schema, according
to him, is ‘total awareness’ of bodily postures and movements targeted towards an activity
(Merleau-Ponty 2002, pp. 113-114). This motile embeddedness in the space and time further
instigates the sense of being-in-the-world (2002, p. 115). For the performer, this ‘being in the
moment’ or ‘on performance’ (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 123) is not a passive but is an
organic engagement with the other. Similar to this account, Barba writes of how the actor’s
presence consists of perceptual and motor powers grasping his counterpart:

It is a dilated body, not only because it dilates its energies, but because it dilates the
spectator’s synesthetic perception, composing a new architecture of muscular tones
which do not respect the economy and functionality of daily behaviour (Barba 1989, p.
312).
This affirms that the actor’s presence is not merely a bodily presentation of mannerism or a style, but an energy that links the actor and the onlooker. Barba here extends his analysis of presence to the idea of empathy, a power of connecting people in the theatre. This is a very important argument that Barba makes on the actor’s stage presence. Barba clearly identifies how the actor’s perceptual energies work as a compendium of powers similar to the audience’s synesthetic perception.

When an actor demonstrates a particular pose or movement, it should not be understood as an isolated body posture following a particular psychical representation. In contrast, it should be understood as a grasping of the power of the actor’s perceptual synthesis (sensory-motor function) towards that particular form waiting to be actualized. In this sense, the actor’s presence is a signature of the actor’s specific way of moving towards a particular somatic form that synthesises her perceptual activities as a power of grasping (or in Merleau-Ponty’s terminology, anchoring in the world). As Jaeger suggests, this specific way of moving in the world not only reflects our internal values but is conditioned by the external features of the world (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 132). Therefore, the actor’s presence can be seen as a nexus where the presence and the onlooker’s perceptual synthesis are intertwining. Thus, presence is almost akin to an agreement on behalf of both the performer and the onlooker in a particular enactive situation. The performer’s dilated body, its power of projection, radiates into the spectator’s perception. In return, the spectator’s perception dilates in order to capture the performer’s body.

This notion of presence and its function could also be further elaborated in relation to time and space. One key phenomenological implication for the actor’s capacity to evoke presence is his inhabitation in a particular spatio-temporal world. Once the audience member is captured by the presence of the actor, the audience member’s perceptual synthesis, as Barba notes, begins to develop as a dilated mind, and when the actor’s presence is gripped by the audience the uniformity of the power of perceptual synthesis operates within a phenomenal field. This dilated mind is not directly related to the daily conscious experience of time and space that the audience members empirically actualize: it is an embodied time and space. When the onlooker’s attention is grasped by the presence of the actor, the rhythmic phenomenal temporality begins to enliven between the observer and the body of the actor.
The actor who is possessed by the power of presence also experiences her own perceptual synthesis as an expression of a particular spatial-temporal quality. When the actor comes into a particular stance, gesture or movement, first the performer begins to experience a flow of bodily movements that is highly focused towards the immediate grasping of a particular style. In this level of attunement, the empirical temporal and spatial awareness begins to change and the awareness of time-space is reduced to the flow of the movements or the rhythmic temporality of the body. The formation of such bodily posture within a particular time and space means that the performer is no longer able to distinguish her rational understanding of time and space because there is no such conscious attention operating within the phenomenal field of the actor’s presence. The consciousness at this level is the consciousness of forming this specific bodily posture which is yet to be unfolding through the flow of body movements. The spatio-temporality for the performer at this moment is nothing but the bodily spatial relation created through his connection with the desired score or gesture. When the target domain of style is achieved, the body presence that is created through specific bodily movements informs the unification of the bodymind and the ‘form’ as a wholesome experience.

This achievement of bodily presence is a result of a ‘repetitive’ and ‘habitual’ perceptual grasping that sediments in the body of the actor for a certain period of time (Krasner and Saltz 2006, p. 136). This habit formation is a result of repetition and restructuring of the perceptual synthesis of one’s own bodymind. This notion recalls the discussion from the previous chapter on Merleau-Ponty’s formulation of the habit body as a particular bodily style that sediments the perceptual synthesis towards a particular style of behaving towards the world (2002, pp. 166-170). As far as stage presence is concerned, the presence of the actor is a way of being in a particular ‘style’ on the stage. The body cultivates its perceptual capacities by taking the maximum hold on a specific task in which the body is involved. As Jaeger argues, Derrida’s notion of ‘iteration’ can also be employed here to understand how the maximum grip of the perceptual action occurs in the body. When Barba says that the actor’s body and mind are dilated, he implies that the bodily perceptual activities find maximum grip as an insertion into the target activity (1985, p. 370). This process cultivates a new habit body by embedding, expanding and adjusting the existing perceptual
grasping of the body to a new domain of perceptual activity. This ontology of the actor’s presence is ‘visible’ for the spectator, whose attention is grasped by the actor’s bodily presence. The presence comes into play and is made meaningful because of its counterpart, the absence of difference (Krasner and Saltz 2006, pp. 126-129).

Communal presence

Barba identifies the human body as a unified wholeness consisting of ‘five senses’ (Barba 1988). This idea is similar to how Buddhist philosophy defines the human body as a ‘cluster of experience’ (Harvey 1993). Barba further defines the soul as the result of those five senses’ interaction with the world. He rejects the idea of the ‘body as instrument’ and argues that the body should not be forcefully trained or disciplined in order to achieve an expressive body. He writes of the body not as an instrument, something which one must train, or must force to make expressive (Barba 1988, p. 293). Similar to his predecessors, Barba also advocates the need for a more subtle approach to the actor’s training. As in phenomenology, the body is seen not as a huddle of organs attached to the mechanistic body but an integrated wholeness which functions as a lived body. Barba argues:

I say ‘body’: that part of the soul which our five senses can perceive, that part of the vital breath, the pneuma, the ruach, of the total me, of the mystery of the potentialities of the life which I incarnate (Barba 1988, p. 293).

As Barba suggests, the human body incarnates as a total being through the vital energy of breath. He uses the term pneuma (ibid, p. 293) derived from the Greek etymology of ‘breath’ or the living energy of the human body to indicate the overall unification of the body

73 I will provide a metaphor to explain this: It is similar to an octopus capturing a pray. The octopus’s various tentacles extend from its body allow it to determine the ways that the target prey needs to be gripped and swallowed. The moment of capturing the prey and grasping and swallowing it into the octopus’s mouth parallels the ways that the actor’s perceptual synthesis works for her to grasp the target domain of activity. Thus, the performer’s presence is a habit formation that is cultivated through a combination of iteration and habituation of the performer’s body into a style of action that culminates at a particular spatial-temporality.

74 In Buddhist phenomenology the ‘consciousness’ of the human being is incarnated from the two categories of rūpa (physical) and nāma (perceptual) skhandhas and is unified as a cluster of experience (Hamilton 1996a; Harvey 1993).

75 The term pneuma refers to the ‘vital spirit, soul, or creative force of a person’ (Stevenson 2010).
and the mind. The term *pneuma* further carries the meaning of the ‘creative energy of the person’ (Stevenson 2010).

Barba’s assertion of the actor’s primordial need of being-in-the-enactment echoes his collaborator Grotowski’s and Stanislavski’s articulations of how and in what ways the actor finds her motivation ‘to be’ on stage. Barba talks about a ritualistic need that leads the actor, as well as her aspiration to dedicate her life to the art. This ritual is not a ritual in the religious sense but an ‘empty ritual’ which needs to be verified within the performance context (Barba 1989, p. 313). His argument is that if the actor lacks such an inner meaningful justification towards his art, then his dedication to eradicate social significants and developing a body presence will be betrayed by the ‘false prey of the spectator’ (ibid, p. 313). The transformation of the actor from his daily dualistic inculturation to a non-dualistic presence needs a ritualistic motivation that is devoid of its original mythical and religious significations. The actor’s ritualistic motivation, as Barba sees it, incarnates from her animalistic nature of wanting to be connected and bonded with others (ibid, p. 313). The importance of cultivating such ‘body-in-life’, or the power of presence, is an attempt to heal the duality between interior and exterior, ‘the lack of participatory meaning’ in the human life (ibid, p. 314). Summarising Stanislavski’s assertions, Barba argues: ‘Here is the key word: to be, to become unity, individual, *in-dividus*, non-divided’ (1988, p. 292). The necessity of reaffirming the actor as an ‘undivided’ being is a way of establishing the actor as a being-in-the-world. In doing so, Barba tries to establish the importance of understanding the actor’s inner and outer dimensions as an interdependent unification.

Grotowski saw the theatre as an ‘encounter’ between the actor and the audience. But his encounter rejects the traditional trajectory of passive onlooker. Similarly, Barba also argues that the theatre enlivens through this interaction between the actor and the audience through the actor’s presence. This communion between the actor and the audience further takes place not only within conventional theatre structures but in community and social situations outside the theatre. He insists that theatre is where ‘human beings who have joined together’ to experience the theatrical event (Barba 1988, p. 292). For Barba, it is a moment of truth where all the theories, aesthetics, techniques and ideologies are disappearing (1988, p. 292).

This joining together is the moment when the truthful theatrical experience occurs between the actor and the audience. He writes: ‘when the actor confronts the public, only his presence seizes us, and hurls us into lucid reflection […] only then does *the theatre exist*
because the actor exists’ (Barba 1988, p. 292). This existence is not a mere actor-audience existence; the actor exists because her bodymind is dilated, and so do the audience member’s perceptions. Barba’s argument that ‘the theatre exists because the actor exists’ affirms that the most important person in the theatre is the actor (Barba 1988). In this statement, he insists on a particular ontological presence of the actor’s bodymind and its relatedness to the audience. When the actor has fully accomplished her performance and the craft of acting, then the actor is capable of being-in-the-theatre with a full presence of the body. Barba identifies this radiation as the ‘scenic-bio’ or the pre-expressivity of the actor’s body (Barba 1988, p. 292). Barba indicates that the sublime theatrical experience for both the actor and the audience is where the actor’s presence is fully grasped by the audience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three theatre practitioners and their approach to bodymind techniques in actor training. Starting from Stanislavski, I have discussed the notion of ‘experiencing’ to understand how Stanislavski elaborates the bodymind relation in the actor’s art. Stanislavski sees the actor’s body and mind as an indivisible entity via which the actor is experiencing the role she enacts. He proposes the Method of Physical Action that demands that the actor think and act as an embodied subject that enlivens the theatrical truth on the stage. As a follower of Stanislavski, Grotowski is primarily interested in how this Method of Physical Action explores the actor’s inner dynamics and its relationship with the bodily actions in performance. He proposes a process of ‘elimination’ in which the actor’s body and mind (impulses and action) unifies as a single entity. Having worked with Grotowski, Barba emphasises the importance of the actor’s presence as the unification of dilated mind and body. For him, the secret of the actor’s presence lies in the body-in-life (live body) that combines the actor’s body, mind, and spirit together. In Stanislavski’s analysis, it is the consciousness that unites with the vital force of prāna to activate the creative force of the subconscious. For Grotowski, it is the ‘impulses’ or the inner tension and action that incarnate the body-life. In Barba’s articulation, it is the pneuma, the living energy and the perception of five senses, that unite in the body-in-life.

In the next chapter I will offer my phenomenological description of being a non-pedagogical actor working in contemporary Sri Lankan theatre. The discussion I have carried
out in the previous two chapters informs, in two ways, my embodied understanding of acting practice. First, phenomenology has provided a foundation for the theoretical understanding of the interdependency of the bodymind operation in everyday and imagined situations. Second, the pedagogical approaches have offered a better understanding of how the phenomenal body functions in a pragmatic way within the actor’s perceptual and motor activities in enactive situations. These ideas again echo though the phenomenological description of bodymind consciousness that I intend to offer in the next chapter.
PART II

BODYMIND AND PRACTICE
CHAPTER FOUR

Phenomenological description of bodymind experience: an actor’s overview

Introduction

In 1995, Gaya Nagahawatte translated the British play *The Dumb Waiter* by Harold Pinter into the Sinhala Language. The Sinhala translation was titled *Konharāththuwa* and directed by Piyal Kariyawasam. As an undergraduate at the University of Kelaniya, I auditioned and was chosen for the role of Gus. The play was scheduled to be staged at the annual Youth Theatre Festival organized by the National Youth Council of Sri Lanka. Actor Gihan Fernando was selected for the role of Ben. In my acting career, I have acted in many exciting theatre projects; however, *Konharāththuwa* left a strong imprint on me because it was my first major public appearance as an actor. This project gave me a myriad of opportunities and challenges as a young actor to re-think and learn about my body, mind and performance.

What follows here are some fragments of the rehearsal process of the play *Konharāththuwa* (*The Dumb Waiter*) that I have reconstructed. They are selected scenarios that I have recalled and articulated through my remembrances of how my naïve self embedded with the play in my early acting career. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology proposes a methodology via which I have attempted to flesh out my gestalt experience of bodymind in acting practice. What this method advocates is to eschew traditional reflective methods by deploying a first-person perspective that generates experiential data in the enactive situation. One fundamental premise of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is that it rejects the traditional inductive method to approach bodymind experience (Barnacle et al. 2001, pp. 32-33). Because bodymind works beyond conscious experience of the individual, the primordial level that the bodymind attunes to its surrounding is hard to pin down. Understanding meanings generated in the pre-reflective domain requires a reflective method to flesh them out. My intention is to tap into this preconscious level and bring out the meanings that are emanating between the bodymind and its surroundings. I seek to do this in a phenomenological way by bracketing off my presumptions of body-mind dualities pertaining to my acting practice.

This description that follows, therefore, is an enactive approach to understand the acting practice and knowing process that I underwent during the three months of
rehearsals. I offer a segment of my experience through a first-person narrative and juxtapose these segments with a revisionist interpretation through phenomenology and acting pedagogy. The writing is also performative in its attempt to invite the reader into the world being evoked (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 225). The specific techniques of this performative utterance are a mixture of tenses and typographies. Text which is present tense and regular font indicates my reconstructed thoughts and reflections from the past: text which is present tense and in italic font indicates my body in action (I concede this typographical indication might be suggestive of a duality but it is necessary for narrative clarity): text which is past tense, regular font and usually supported by external references represents my present, post-theoretical self reflecting on the past. I have attempted to recreate a naïve, pre-theoretical self for the former two voices but this is a very difficult task and there are inevitable slippages between the voices.

In order to further facilitate these voices and arguments, this chapter divides into five sections. First, I describe how the preliminary reading process of the play is carried out. This section further reveals my relationship with the text and how the text is embedded in the process of knowing in the theatre. The second section explicates the actor’s (the actor being me) experience of the body and the self, and how the actor negotiates between consciousness and the body in enactive situations. The third section explores how I transformed the written text into action by exploring the bodily possibilities and the bodymind relation within that process. The fourth section offers my experience of developing a habit body through character construction and the bodymind relation within this engagement. It further describes how the actor’s process of constructing a habit body is aesthetic in nature. In the final section, I describe the role of the bodymind and its relation with the acting partner and performing for others. This narration should not be regarded as a full description of the rehearsal process of the play. Rather, I attempt to provide, as best as I can, a phenomenological description of how bodymind practice has been an integral part of the knowing process of my self-taught acting career.

The act of writing evokes phonetic structures for both the performer and the listener. These phonetic ‘gestures’ bring about a shared experience similar to my bodily behaviours endow ‘the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 225).
Autodidact

The beginning was empty. We were a bunch of theatre enthusiasts while studying at university wanting to do theatre. We were young and energetic and were full of aspirations about the future of Sri Lankan theatre. Parviainen argues that an artist creates their own ‘path’ through a particular practice in a certain ‘direction’. This term ‘path’ characterises this artistic work as a process in which the artwork and the artist intermingle (Parviainen 1998, p. 124). We were watching contemporary theatre and were very unhappy and dissatisfied with the way that actors were behaving on the stage. We needed to create our own ‘path’, a mode of being in the theatre which would render our way of seeing and being in the world with others. As Parviainen further observes, the ‘path’ does not exist by itself; it should be created by us (ibid, p. 124). This exploration of the new ‘path’, a mode of practice and techniques, needed to be explored and re-established.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, Sri Lankan society knew considerable despair. The second insurgency77 and protests against injustice and social inequality were brutally subjugated by the government. Thousands of anti-government students and activists were abducted and massacred. The theatre artists’ activities were censored and their freedom of expression was silenced. As Fernando argues, the genre of ‘social drama’ was heavily restricted (Fernando 1999, pp. 71-72). However, the young artists and writers were also directly addressing the social issues raised in the students’ appraisals and they started questioning and analysing those social issues in highly politicized theatre (Obeysekara, 1994).

As university students, we wanted to make a theatre which did not directly deliver political slogans to the spectators; we wanted to respond to the current social political discussion in a subtler way. On the other hand, we wanted to bring this subtle political discussion through restoring a particular ‘acting style’ which did not make actors behave like ‘marionettes’ in the theatre. The European-influenced theatre has continuously been adapted to the Sinhala stage with more elaborate sets, costumes and stylistic ‘colonial mimicking’

77 In 1971, the first Sri Lanka insurgency took place and it was mainly led by a Sinhalese leftist movement formed under the name of Janatha Vimuththi Peramuna (JVP). Within a few week’s time this social uprising was suppressed by the ruling government led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (Rogers 1987, p. 583).
We were in the midst of this calamity not knowing how to create a new ‘path’, a fresh theatrical experience for an emerging audience, recovering after a deep social trauma. However, we had a sense of what was happening around us, particularly in acting, and wanted to restore what we believed at the time was ‘good acting’ for the Sinhala theatre. Pinter’s *The Dumb Waiter* was an ideal text for us in terms of its political undertones and its style of presenting the bio-politics of individuals. Pinter’s play further provided a sense of a new theatricality for us in the way that Pinter used silence, embodiment, space and time, and stage objects. Pinter’s theatrical silence motivated us to find a new voice to break the theatrical silence of the Sinhala theatre.

Pinter’s play itself started to talk to us in a different but intimate way. Pinter’s text forced us to re-invent our voice. We knew that we could not deliver dialogue the way that the Sinhala conventional theatre used to offer. Pinter’s limited dialogues and short expressions challenged us to invent ways by which we could effectively communicate our lines to the spectators. The silence of the play, the objects and their functionalities, the way they interact with the actors’ bodies in the theatre, made us think about different ways of behaving on the stage. The constriction of the limited spatial environment and its effect upon the two characters gave us a new way of looking at our theatre.

*The Dumb Waiter* is about two working class hit men, Ben and Gus, waiting in a basement room to be called for their next job. The play unfolds with these two characters’ interactions and dialogue as they wait to be called for their next assignment. The play ends leaving the question of whether one of these men (Gus) may be the next victim. Some critics compare *The Dumb Waiter* to *Waiting for Godot* because, as they claim, it’s a play of ‘existential absurdity’ (Carpenter 1973, p. 281). We see two characters in a basement room, enclosed, while confronting each other, and arguing about what is happening around them. From the beginning to the end the dissolution between the two characters suspends between two poles. The inside, the outside, space, time and anonymity play a major part in the play. Critics have used the term ‘dread’ (Carpenter 1973) or ‘dreadful’ (Esslin 1982, pp. 60-62) to discuss the nature of the play and its relation to the absurdist tradition. It is a play about the visible as well as the invisible for the spectator. We see two characters and their spatiality on

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78 A. J. Gunawardana has written about contemporary Asian theatre as a way of adapting and translating Western theatre and at the same time mixing and transforming traditional theatrical elements to create a new form of theatre in Asian countries (1971, p. 50).
the stage but there are many unseen forces functioning behind the walls of the basement room.

I first met Piyal, the director of the play, a few months back when I first performed a play produced by the Department of English, at the University of Kelaniya. On the final performance day, after the show performed at the Lenin theatre at the University of Kelaniya, Piyal invited me to join his new theatre production. The first rehearsal dates were discussed and we planned to do a three month rehearsal before performing the play for the public. Piyal gave me the script of *The Dumb Waiter* and I went through the text a few times before I attended the first rehearsal. At the time I had never heard about the British playwright Harold Pinter and his theatre practice. I began to learn about his work once I received this text. But I decided not to accumulate more details about the play before I met the director and the translator.

### I. WORKING WITH THE TEXT

Today I meet the director and the translator of the play *The Dumb Waiter* at the small rehearsal room at the faculty of Law of the University of Colombo. I come to the room around three o’clock in the afternoon. Director Piyal Kariyawasam, translator Gaya Nagahawatte, set designers Pushpe and Predee, stage managers Sunil and the actor Gihan Fernando are in the room. Except Gihan, we all study different disciplines at the university of Kelaniya and Colombo. Gihan has done some theatre prior to this production. He recently acted in *Endgame* (*adipathiya ge marana manchakaya*) directed by Buddhika Dhamayantha. Piyal studies undergraduate law at the University of Colombo. Gaya studies English and Translation Methods at the English department of the University of Kelaniya, where I am also doing my Bachelor degree in Arts. The stage designers are from the department of painting, University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo.

We introduce ourselves. All the other members of the team are new to me except Piyal and Gaya. There are some other backstage helpers from the Colombo University gathered in the room. Ionesco (we call him Ionesco because he translated *The Lesson* by Eugene Ionesco recently), is taking care of the sound design of the play. Sunil, the stage manager, is unemployed, but passionate about theatre. Sira, another colleague from the
Law faculty, works as a prompter and the stage hand. In the next few weeks we decide to get together and embark on a theatrical journey towards a new production that is scheduled to be staged for the upcoming National Youth Theatre Festival. We all are ambitious about our target and are enthusiastically engaged with the new productions that will showcase our abilities for the first time in the public arena.

After having discussed the preliminary rehearsal schedule, Piyal starts discussing the play. Gaya, the translator, first introduces the background of the playwright and her translations of the play. Piyal starts discussing about how he understands the text and what he wants to develop on the stage. Piyal discusses Pinter’s approach to theatre and particularly his use of silence. One significant aspect of the text that he emphasises is that Pinter uses two terms such as ‘silence’ and ‘pause’ very often in the play. How do I understand the difference between these two? The pauses and silences in the text make us anxious in the process of reading. We are told that pauses and silences are integral to Pinter’s plays. Piyal provides us some evidence of showing other theatre texts written by Pinter. We try to understand how important the silence is for his plays and how those silences can be actualized on the stage.

Pinter’s text is beginning to grow within me day by day. But one thing is certain, I don’t have a training; a particular training to form my body to render the role on stage. Although Gihan has some previous experience of acting, he also doesn’t have formal training for the theatre. Therefore, we begin to explore our own training methods with simple warm-up sessions. It starts with running in the nearby oval by the New Arts Theatre building. We gather and start running around the oval until we get warmed up. After this session, we get together and start doing breathing exercises. I have a sense of how the breathing occurs in meditation because in our school days we were taught about Buddhist meditations and breathing techniques. We try to adapt them in order to facilitate our training session. It starts with a simple inhalation and exhalation breathing pattern. Even if it is a simple breathing exercise, I begin to understand the importance of it. It helps me to expand my breathing capacity through taking breath in through my nostrils and letting it out through the mouth. After these warm up sessions we start reading the text. Our reading session then ends with having some tea. We eat some hoppers and drink tea while talking about the reading session and our future plans. Sometimes these conversations extend into the night with drinking,
eating, talking, and singing. These conversations and celebrations go until midnight. At the end, Piyal and I walk into the deserted road heading towards his hostel room.

**Rehearsal description 1**

We sit around facing each other. A moment of silence… Reading session starts. The director first starts reading the stage directions of the play. Then the actors, Gihan and myself, begin to read our lines. When it comes to the stage directions, we stop and then the director reads the stage directions again. When he finishes, we continue our reading. The reading process goes for hours. We take a rest, have a cup of tea and start again. This time, the director stops at some sections of the play and tries to explain some situations, the nature of the characters and their behaviours. I try to keep some notes in my script. While we are reading, we come across some sentences that are difficult to read. Gaya explains them by comparing the original English text and the Sinhala translation. There are many unfamiliar contexts, ideas and metaphors in the text. Gaya explains how the dumb waiter works in the hotel room. She shows us some old photographs. I make sense of the dumb waiter and how it works in the basement room where Gus and Ben are waiting.

I don’t have a clear idea about how I should read the text. It is my first serious approach to theatre. I am ready to learn and absorb what I can grasp from this rehearsal process and the others. Gihan has more experience than me. I try to observe his reading and how he breaks the sentences, how he articulates certain words and how he tries to project his voice. The director advises us to read the text without putting in any excess effort. So I start to read the text as naturally as possible. I feel that this reading is flat because I don’t make any specific meanings on my lines. Rather I read it like a person who does not know the meanings of words. It is mechanical and tasteless. But one thing attracts me. I begin to develop a sense of how the text is structured. What I begin to understand is the sensation of how each and every segment of the text has a specific rhythm, phase and a tempo. These segments begin to build up certain structures. Because I am reading the text, the text itself forms into a certain sound pattern, consisting of rhythms and beats that affect my breathing and resonate in and through my body. I feel that they begin to mark certain patterns within my body and retain as templates attached to the text. I feel that the text and my body are beginning to be interlaced.

For the first time, when I read the text, I begin to hear my own voice. I begin to hear it attentively and consciously, as I have never been able to hear it before. It is an enjoyable thing to hear how the voice is resonating in the room. Hearing my voice resonating in the room gives me a pleasurable feeling. I begin to hear a vocal symphony which is building up into a particular rhythm. These resonances motivate me to modulate my voice. I try to explore different ways of modulating the lines. Putting these
words into my mouth in the first place seems putting an unfamiliar object in to my mouth. First these words restrict what I want to say. Therefore, I try to articulate them through over-emphasising and exaggerating them. Doing this over-articulating of the dialogue, it seems that my lines are becoming smoother and easy to pronounce. After reading the script a few times, I begin to feel more comfortable with the words. The director then asks us to overlap some of the dialogues we read. This is a tricky job for both of us. I realise that it requires careful listening to what Gihan says, his lines, phrases and modulations. I make notes where the director wants us to overlap our lines. It requires more practice and memorising our lines to be able to achieve what the director wants us to do.

After a few days of reading the text, the reading process develops into another phase. I want to stand up and feel the movement of the body while reading the dialogue. I feel that the posture of sitting blocks some of my vocal expressions. So I decide to stand up and move while reading the text. After a while I realize that this method seems effective for the breathing and projecting the dialogues. Now I have to coordinate my bodily movements, walking while breathing and delivery of the dialogues. I am still not very familiar with the dialogues so I still hold my script with one hand and deliver the dialogues while walking. This behaviour seems to generate my fellow actor’s enthusiasm and he also begins to stand up and move around the room. The moving activity of my body makes more opportunities and options for further development of my reading process. I realize that the movement of the body creates different sounds and meanings in my dialogue delivery.

Reading the play is an enjoyable but tiring task for me. When I read the play continuously for one and a half hours, my aural, auditory, and respiratory apparatuses seem to continually work hard to articulate the words. In this reading process, I realize that breathing is fundamental for good delivery. I begin to sense that breathing allows me to articulate my lines and develop the capacity to deliver my dialogue. I gradually begin to experience that the more I gain breath into my lungs, the more I am able to retain and deliver longer lines. I realize that my phrasing of the delivery, tone of voice and pitch can also be changed and enhanced by the way that I manipulate my breathing. I begin to understand the importance of breathing and its role in my preliminary reading process.

During my travel time, I try to find a corner seat in the bus in order to read my script. Because of this continuous reading, I have been able to memorise these lines easily. Now when I see the first word of the line, I can repeat it without looking at it. I don’t, however, remember all the text from the beginning to the end yet. I have to read more and more to
remember all the lines. When I was in school, I remember that there were young monks who were learning Sanskrit text (*Sanskrit sutta*) in the afternoon classes. I have heard many times how they recite those texts written in an old language. This language in the first place is an unknown language for them. But they chant them continuously without looking at the texts. They have memorized almost all the text so they can recite them without looking at it. In a similar way, I also try to remember my text, reading and repeating it many times.

I feel that I am gradually beginning to connect with my text. I am beginning to sense that the breathing allows me to create a path to insert into the text. When I first started reading, I realized that without having enough breath, I could not read some long sections of my dialogue. My vocal sound was beginning to weaken. But once I started practicing reading the text very often, I realized that the strength of breath was developing. My breathing almost appears to me as a connecting tool to the text. The text seems full of sounds and words. I connect with these sounds through my breathing. I take breath in order to grasp the lines and reading these lines allows me to take them into my body and throw them out again through exhalation.

During our reading sessions the director instructs us to avoid the forceful “stage delivery” that we very often see in the Sri Lankan theatre. In order to avoid this conventional practice, we start experimenting with different ways of projecting our voices without throwing them artificially to the listener. We decide to adapt a method to achieve this target. The director suggests to go out of the rehearsal room to the nearby oval and start reading the text. This change first gives me a sense of losing my voice in the vast space of the oval. My voice almost becomes flat. I don’t hear the resonance that I hear when I deliver my lines in the room. I begin to sense that it lacks the beauty I experience when I deliver my lines in the room. But the primary target is how to project the voice without forcefully pushing it and to avoid melodramatic articulation. In order to achieve this target, we try to deliver our lines as naturally as possible with a gap between myself and Gihan. The more the space between me and my co-actor, the more I have to push myself to speak my lines in order to deliver them to the other side. We try to create a vast gap between us and deliver the lines as naturally as possible. But when this connection is established, we start articulating our lines beyond the natural delivery in order to distort their meaning. It allows us to explore different ways of articulating our lines and the capacities of our voices. We purposely try to distort the lines and use vocal modulations in order to create a ‘vocal mess’. This excessive articulation of the
lines allows me to understand the capacity of my voice and how far my dialogue can be projected. In doing so, we try to understand whether we could deliver our lines to a distant audience member without forcefully and artificially throwing them to the listener.

**Reading and Knowing**

My reading process of the play resonates with Stanislavski’s early approaches to text. (Carnicke 1998). It is obvious that my initial starting point of learning was based on the text because I started working primarily with a text-based theatre. Generally, the reading sessions were conceived as a way of finding the socio-political setting, the histories of the characters and other biographical details. However, this reading process was also a somatic exploration for me. Phenomenology asserts that reading and knowing are not two separate cognitive functions (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 209). When I started working with the text, what I was really interested to explore was how to deliver lines; how to actualize phonetic constructions through vocal apparatus that stimulate bodily expressions. This ongoing quest triggered me to awaken my bodily ‘impulses’ which guided my ‘enactment’ of the body towards the text. This enactment generated the bodily movements and activities that would invite me to react with others. It was a somatic orientation for me to explore the possibilities of my breathing, voice and bodily action. Once I found the ways to embody the correct approach of the delivery through breathing, then I was capable of integrating the correct bodily movements corresponding with the vocal articulation.

Once the reading process had developed into a higher level of competence, I no longer simply read the text. My body urged me to stand and walk, use my hands, different body movements and postures. These movements began to blend with the lines I delivered, expressing and adding new tones and meanings to what I expressed. I began to connect with other bodies, experimenting with different postures. Most of these explorations started with mimicking each other’s bodies. When I saw that Gihan stood up and walked away while saying a line, my body urged me to stand and walk towards him. Once he sped up his walk, my body gradually started to speed up. I lifted my voice and tried to intensify the delivery of my line. Simultaneously, I heard his voice intensify accordingly. I began to realize that he started to deliver some lines emotionally. This affected my own delivery of lines. I felt how he said that line and in response, I replied to his line with more emotional investment. I felt
that we no longer read the text but the text began to read us. My bodymind sensed that I was no longer reading a text because when I replied to Gihan’s lines, I realized that the reply did not come out as a mechanical modulation but as direct response to what he said.

Once I learnt the competence of delivering my lines, it began to appear as a conversation with others. It began to appear as a spontaneous conversation because we both tapped into the thought processes that were being created by the act of “conversation”. It felt that I was not uttering someone else’s words but that they came through the process of listening to the other actor. Listening created a thought process that created the appropriate pitch, tone and pace of the dialogue to be delivered. Even though I am aware that the lines that we spoke did not spontaneously come out, they appeared spontaneous because I experienced a flow of thoughts generated during their delivery. I know that it was not just a result of my own ‘thought process’, which came from nowhere, but a dynamic and pragmatic coping with the other actor’s body and listening to what he said actively. He was partially responsible for my emotions and thought processes as I was responsible for affecting his own emotional experience in the rehearsal process. This convergence of bodies, language and the thought processes of each other affirm how the body-subject works in a conversational situation. As phenomenology argues, the spontaneity of the conversation emerges not because I think and therefore I speak, but because I am listening and responding to what the other actor says. This creates a cycle of conversation based on the text that has been memorized and sedimented as a template of conversation. This further affirms how the actor, the body-subject, is already attuned to his counterpart through the not-yet free level (Kwant 1963).

II. WORKING ON THE SELF

Since I started working on this theatre production, the process has prompted me to considerable self-reflection. In my reading sessions, I begin to be aware of how I think about my voice, my vocal sound and my delivery. In my daily life, I don’t particularly think about the ways I speak, what is my pitch, tone, the ways that I make meanings through my language. It happens as I am engaged with the activity. But being an actor, for the first time, I
have an opportunity to think about my voice, delivery and the sound it makes. In a similar way, once our reading session starts to develop as a dynamic process, I am conscious of my body, my way of moving, my hands, and my appearance on the stage. I am beginning to be more conscious about the ways my body and actions are presented to others. At the same time, I am conscious about the ways that I present myself as Gus, moving, talking and acting in this fictitious theatre space.

I begin to realise that I have been thinking about my body, my appearance, my voice and my movement as never before. During my travels to rehearsals, during reading sessions, after finishing rehearsals and going back to my room, I think, and reflect about my body, my movements and my voice and how they are connected with others with whom I interact. I begin to ask, who am I? How do I move on the stage? How do I walk? How do my arms work? What do others think about my body and my appearance? Why I am so conscious about myself, my body and my conduct? When I come to the rehearsal and start reading the text, I begin to think about how to read this text, how to articulate this line, what is my voice, how is it heard? In this way, I start thinking about me, my body, my voice, my movements and my postures and gestures again and again.

In the New Arts Theatre building, our stage managers are busy with setting up a temporary structure for us. Two beds, a chair and the dumb waiter are placed on the stage. Because we have started reading the text while moving and exploring different expressions and bodily movements, the director has decided to shift our rehearsal to a new larger theatre space with more props and sets. Today we begin with the preliminary reading of act one of the play. The reading goes well with some subtle changes proposed by the director. I can’t wait to get up and move as this space is so inviting for me to express myself in.

**Rehearsal description 2**

The large halogen lamps provide a warm tungsten yellow light to the stage. This yellow light illuminates the acting area of the proscenium stage and the rest is engulfed in the semi darkness. We are sitting in the dark side of the audience chattering and murmuring our lines. The stage manager gives us a sign to start the rehearsals. We get onto the stage. Our bodies are warmed by the powerful lights. I feel a warm sensation through my skin, facial muscles and body. The empty audience is engulfed in the dark but I know my director, translator and other backstage supporters are sitting and watching us to see what will happen on the stage in the next minutes. It is the moment of waiting for all
of us. Something needs to be done... something needs to be done on the empty stage...
The director is waiting, and we start moving.

We start moving through the stage set... move around the beds and the chair. I pass them while I walk around. I go around the beds and touch them in order to get the sensation of them. Some lines come into my attention; I begin to utter them... I try to touch all the props given on the floor and inspect all the details of them, their surface textures and weights. I start using some of the props and carry them with me while I walk around the set. I take a revolver in my hand and begin to walk. There is a matchbox on the bed. I grab it and try to light a match. At the back of the stage, I can see a box hanging from a rope. This box is fixed in the wooden tunnel frame. The wooden box is going up and down when the rope is pulled and loosened. It is the dumb waiter. I go to the dumb waiter and start to explore its function. There is an old photo hanging on the wall. I step onto the bed and try to look at it. I put my revolver in my trouser pocket and lie on the bed for a moment. I see an old lamp hanging on the ceiling. It is covered with dust and cobwebs. I sense Ben sitting next to my bed, reading a newspaper. He turns a page and I hear the rustle of the paper. I spot a cigarette pack on the bed and light a cigarette from it. I see the smoke come through my nostrils and evaporate in the air.

When I am in my hostel, there is no particular excitement about how I live in this room. It is my home and my world. I don’t particularly think about the ways I live in the room or I do not think about how to use my objects and utensils. I know where my clothes are, where my toothbrush is and where my toiletries are. I know where I have kept my cooking utensils, where my study materials are and where my bed is. When I am in my room, I feel comfortable about being in the room and I know how to use these utensils and objects in order to run my daily life in the room. But being in this rehearsal space, I feel that this theatre and the objects and props I see on the stage are strange. I have seen them in my daily life and have used them. But now they appear as strange objects and props to me. Why can’t I make this theatre space and its objects as familiar as my room and its belongings? I know that when I first came to my hostel room, I was more anxious about it, its belongings and its connection to the other rooms in the hall. I almost felt like an alien being coming into this room, not knowing how to move and where to go and what to do. It took me a few weeks to get used to my room, its space, chairs, bed, cupboards, and utensils. Without even seeing, I can now locate my things in the room. I know where I have kept my cutlery. I sense where my shoes are. I know where the door is and where the
toilet is. These things in my room are always communicating with me silently and secretly while I am living in it.

**Bodymind and surrounding**

The world surrounding me appears in a way that always creates opportunities to be manipulated by my body. The world appears as full of questions to be answered. The bodymind in return, tries to answer these questions by enacting upon them (Kwant 1963). In the same way, when I started moving in the rehearsal space, this space provided myriad opportunities and avenues to be explored for my body: this bed is good to lie on; this chair in the corner is to be sat on; this pair of shoes is to be put on.

When I was in my hostel room, it was a comfortable space for me as I knew how to use all the objects in the room and their functionalities. In a similar way, during this preliminary rehearsal process, I wanted to better know all the props and objects I was using on the stage. In the first place my body began to resist the newly introduced space as alien. Because of this unfamiliarity of the space and its objects, my bodymind was trying to interact with them in order to embed and attune to my environment. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the intentional arc was operating beneath my consciousness (Diprose and Reynolds 2008). When my naïve bodymind was confronted with this new spatial and temporal domain, it began to transform by elevating my conscious attention towards the objects and the space in order to grasp and explore them. Without this conscious attention, I could not cultivate a familiar habituation with those theatrical objects and space.

Once the body began to orientate within the surroundings, it simultaneously came into the foreground of my attention (consciousness). First, my intention at this juncture was to learn to inhabit and manipulate objects and their instrumentality scattered in the space. I did it through letting myself move in the space, placing my bodymind in confrontation with the objects and other subjects. Moving through this space, I absorbed and learnt to inhabit in the theatrical time and space. The way I needed to move, the ways that my body was required to manipulate the objects and others in this particular theatrical context was becoming a new habit formation for my body. Bodies and objects were thus beginning to inhabit and live through my body. In the first place these objects – a matchbox, pack of cigarettes, two beds and a chair – created the sense of a gap between me and them. Gihan’s
appearance instigated within me a sense of my vulnerability to his gaze, not as an actor but as another human being. But embedding and playing with the theatre objects and interacting with Gihan began to cultivate a sense of ‘homeliness’ in my inhabitation.

As an actor, I have the privilege of moving between two worlds. In my daily life, drinking a cup of coffee, walking down the street, talking to people, or lighting a cigarette seem simple and effortless actions for me. However, the situation is somewhat paradoxical if I am, as Gus, asked to move on the stage, talk to others, and light a cigarette, when they are happening on the centre of the stage in an imagined situation. All these series of bodily actions seemed new to my body when I was in this enactive situation because this series of physical actions needed to be enacted with the absence of the real ‘intent’ of the bodymind. If I put it in another way, my bodymind was constantly switching between the enactive situation and the real-life situation because there was a gap or an absence created between these two worlds. My daily consciousness was pulling me backward and restraining me from enacting in the imagined situation.

What does it mean for the bodymind to be in such an imaginative situation? In daily circumstances, my intentional directedness was always attached to something else during my wakefulness. It can be something that I see, hear, touch or taste. It can be something that I think about, anticipate or remember. There are many perceptual activities occurring every second I live in daily situations. But in the imaginative situation I learnt how to extricate my intentional directedness. I extricated my intentional directedness from the daily reality and my consciousness was attached to a particular ire-reality (Moran and Cohen 2012). This ire-reality was the fictitious situation that I enacted without having a particular real intent. In order to do so, the bodymind learnt to enliven in this ire-reality through cultivating intentional forgetfulness (Gallagher and Schmicking 2010). Grotowski articulated this intentional forgetfulness as a connection between the actor’s ‘impulses’ and their free-flowing inner and outer interactions. It is a way of existing with ‘no mind’ rather than living with the mind (Grotowski 2002; Yasuo 1987).

The body mind activated this intentional forgetfulness through the phenomenal ‘if’, as Stanislavski argues (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967), or rather, as Merleau-Ponty articulates, a power of reckoning to imagine the ways that one can enact on stage (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Although I obviously had previous knowledge of moving, talking and handling objects in daily circumstances, in this theatrical context, I needed to learn again how to move, how to
talk, how to approach the cigarette pack, how to open it, how to place it in between the lips, how to engage emotionally with the process without having contradictions between my intentions and the actions. But in this theatre space, these repetitions of daily activities had to be enacted not as ‘I do’ things, but rather as if another self (second self) did them through me. Though I did not have conscious access to the technique at the time, Stanislavski’s magic if thus allowed me to shift my ego-consciousness to the activation of a second self.

Since I started my day, I felt that I was engulfed in a spatiotemporal stream through the activities, situations and interactions with the others in the rehearsal room. At the same time, there was another space and time about to be operating in the rehearsal space. First I saw objects and others from my perspective which gave me a sense of self-governing in this space. On the other hand, I knew that others were seeing me in the same way by objectifying me as another self. As I began to inhabit this rehearsal space, the objectification of my body was apparent to my consciousness as I began to feel that I was placed against this vast space and other bodies. The space was not responding to my body as it stayed outside my body, being a thick layer of spatial resistance. Thus, objectifying the space and time in that way, I subsequently assumed my body as an object in relation to my reflective understanding of time and space.

Although I had a rational understanding of the space and time existing outside my body, measuring my behaviours and movements in daily life, I also had an implicit understanding that space and time can only be realized through my lived body. This space and time was always embedded in my body, in my activities. In other words, without my body, there was no such thing called space and time for me (Merleau-Ponty 2002). It was a lived space and time that was inherently embedded with what I did, how I moved, and how I related to others. Once I began to search for my actions and integrated my behaviours with the objects on the stage, I was simultaneously beginning to sense that the objective spatiotemporal existence was going to be altered. Once I cultivated a sense of belonging to the stage and the objects that I manipulated, I acquired an ease of moving and dealing with those objects given. In this lived space, I did not see a distance between my body and other objects, but they were becoming a part of my living ambience. Inhabiting this rehearsal space, I began to understand how to move, how to manipulate things, how to relate with others. This interaction began to generate a new spatiotemporal relation to my bodymind. When this habituation was occurring, I was not objectifying my body similar to those objects
scattered in the space. My body was the spatiotemporal structure through which I was experiencing my existence in the enactment. My body did not inhabit in a particular space-time; my body became my spacetime (Merleau-Ponty 2002).

III. WORKING ON ACTION

Today we explore actions on the stage. After reading the text and familiarising with the rehearsal space and objects around, the director has decided to start ‘blocking’ the scenes with scenic actions. We call this process ‘nattiya elanawa’ or laying the play. This metaphor signifies the act of a brick or tile layer. The director identifies a fragment of the play, a scene or a certain act and invites actors to improvise and find appropriate actions pertaining to each act. Then the director and the actors work together to lay the play bit by bit through information gathered from the text and trying to improvise it through trial and error. Piyal usually comes up with his own ideas about how to structure the scene. Then he asks us to play and see what we offer him. Then the process of negotiation and exploration begins until we are satisfied with the outcome. Then the findings are concretized (we use the word concrete to signify the sedimentation process). We start reading the segment of the text a few times. It affords the opportunity to grasp the overall action of the situation. During this reading session, I try to grasp the key action and the motive of the character in the situation. In doing so, I begin to make sense of how the situation needs to unfold.

Rehearsal description 3

I am sitting on the bed. Inhale... and exhale... I am thinking about my body. I am conscious of how my body is presented to the director who must be sitting in the audience. How does he see me? Is he seeing me as Gus or someone else? Will I be able to match with what he thinks of Gus? What is Gihan thinking about Ben? If he is able to become Ben, will it be easier for me to be Gus? Gihan is lying on the bed next to me. Will he be able to see what I am supposed to do? I am still sitting on the bed. How should I place my hands while sitting on the bed? There are many ways I can use my hands: I can place them on my legs or I can lean myself backwards placing the weight on my elbows. Or I can place my hands simply on the bed. What is the most comfortable and appropriate way? What will be the most effective way of sitting on the bed? I start exploring different sitting postures. I try to put my hands on my knees while sitting. How
do I feel it? Let's try another way... I will place my hands on my sides. Do I look authoritative? No, this is not good. I put my hands on my thighs. I have a choice to make ahead of me. I decide to place my hands on my thighs.

Gihan is lying on the opposite bed, reading a paper. I see that there is a toothpick in his mouth. I am looking at my shoelace; and it should be tied before I stand up. That is what the text says. I bend down and start tying up the lace. I do it a few times to get it correct. After a while I have to stand up, I inhale... and exhale... I hear that Gihan’s paper rustles. He must be turning his paper. Does he actually read it? I don’t know because the paper covers his face. I am looking at him. Inhale... Then I slowly stand up... Exhale... I see that Gihan is still lying on the bed, reading the paper, I hardly see his face, I am still on my feet, standing still looking at Gihan. I feel that my legs are slightly bent. My hands are hanging by my side. Head slightly bent down. Beyond Gihan’s bed, the wall of the room and the door in the left corner appears as a faded background. Yet I still can see them. In another minute, I have to walk towards the door and I should stop halfway through and need to check my shoe.

Inhale... and I yawn and exhale... was it a real yawn? No, it was not. How do I do it in an honest way? I feel that my shoulders are moving up and down while I breathe. Now I start to walk towards the left door. It feels difficult to walk slowly as the weight of my body begins to change from side to side. I try to keep balance while walking towards the door. I experience that my knees are slightly bent and walking does not affect my hands still hanging by my side. I walk towards the door. In a moment, I feel that something is in my right shoe. I stop and wait for a moment. I look down and wait for another second. I kneel down and untie the shoe. I know that there is a matchbox flattened inside my shoe because I put it inside my shoe before I started this act. It is not an unexpected occurrence; it is there for me. I have to take it out and examine it carefully.

Inhale... and exhale... inhale again... and I stand up, holding the matchbox in my right hand. I am close to the left door. Gihan is still on the bed reading his paper. I cannot see him at this point because I turn my back to him while standing against the side wall on the left. I take a moment and shake the matchbox, open it and see some matches in it. I hear again that Gihan rustles the paper. I know that he turns over his paper. I turn my head halfway to my left side. Are there any other ways to look at him? My body offers another direction. I turn from the right hand side of my body. Can I try the other way around because if I turn from the right side, my body movements will not be properly seen by the audience. This awareness triggers like a flash. As soon as I turn, I realize that it is not appropriate. I turn again from the left. Then I meet Gihan’s eyes. He may have been observing my moves from time to time. A tension arises. I inhale a long breath. I start to slowly walk towards my bed facing downwards.

We start working on the first scene and once the first scene is laid down then we move on to the next scene. In this fashion, we lay down the text scene by scene. Every day becomes a repetitive day in the beginning. Once we finalise what we have explored in a particular scene,
I start drawing a sketch in which I try to outline what I have explored. This sketch indicates a rough detail of how I start a particular scene and where I go and how I end the scene. It is a particular road map I keep for future reference. When I start the next rehearsal day, before I go to explore the next scene, I look at what I have drawn the previous day and get a preliminary idea about the scene before I perform it.

Finding a proper action for each and every scene seems a challenging task. It is sometimes confusing and frustrating. Sometimes I want to get rid of this pressure and sit and relax in the auditorium. Although I know that I have an understanding of what is happening in each situation described in the text, it does not come through my body as it is happening without effort. Every time I try to do something, there are many thoughts coming into my mind, blocking my action and movements. I first try to imagine how Gus moves when I read the text. Gus starts his action on the bed and walks towards the left door. This is the preliminary action that is described in the play. While this larger action is happening, there are some minor actions taking place in between the bed and the left door. In the meantime there are some instances where Gus’s eyes meet Ben’s. This interaction also creates a tension between us. I realise that despite the larger action taking place on the stage, these “in-between” actions, such as shaking legs, exploring the cigarette pack, match box, kneeling, tying the lace, and meeting Ben’s eyes, provide vital information about how Gus behaves and his attitudes towards his partner in the room. I try to memorise these subtle actions one by one while repeating them with my partner many times. In some instances, the director comes to the stage and suggests something that I do not quite comprehend. Then I have another difficulty of integrating them into my situation.

For the last few weeks we have been exploring and becoming familiar with the actions we have found and concretized. It is a process where I try to learn bodily actions and integrate other objects and props given for the rehearsal process. During our rehearsals, we discuss having some costumes and particular shoes for the rehearsals. I have been using my own shoes during rehearsals and I am beginning to feel that they do not enable the kind of walk I want to develop. I realize that without proper shoes I cannot really feel my posture, movement and stability on the stage.

Having my costume, a pair of brown trousers, a long sleeve corduroy shirt and a dark brown jacket, initially provides a sense of having another burden on my body. I feel that I have something alien on my body. All these costumes, shoes and objects appear to me as
having body armour attached to my torso, arms and legs. I feel that they restrict my freedom of movement on the stage. I am beginning to be aware of my shoes, my steps and my costumes. It is not an easy task in the first place to accept them as I am beginning to feel how they fit onto my body, my movements and my actions. I start moving with my new shoes on. In the beginning, it is not an easy task. My walking begins to change according to the new shoes. My costumes start to alter my movements and postures. My challenge is to integrate these costumes and props without having any uncomfortable feelings.

I notice that Gihan has a similar outfit but its colors are darker than mine. His trousers are black. His shoes are black and shiny and he has a formal blazer. I also notice that Gihan is playing with a toothpick and black, framed spectacles while he is in the rehearsals. It seems that he is exploring how he needs to use them in his performance. I try to play with my matchbox, my cigarette pack, and my revolver. Having these items and playing with them in the rehearsal, I am beginning to understand that they are no longer strange objects to my body. They begin to incorporate with my body and the movements that I perform on the stage. In the beginning, I feel that my body, my arms, my legs, and my torso are not mine. They are frozen, not succumbing to my orders, behaving like they are someone else’s body. But gradually, my arms, legs and torso begin to flow with blood. I begin to feel that they are mine, not behaving like objects separate from my body. I notice that my body is extending its organs, its arms, its legs and its torso, lungs and heart. My body, its inner and outer organs, is beginning to expand and enlarge its capacities, extending tentacles towards the outer space. My shoes, my trousers, matchbox, my revolver, and cigarette pack are beginning to merge into my hands, my legs, and my body. I feel that I am going to be a giant, a cyborg who expands his body, day by day. This cyborg is not only having a living body, but is beginning to incorporate other objects attached to his body. These objects become animate, living creatures expanding my bodily capacities and abilities. I begin to see how I can animate those objects on the stage. My costume, shoes, matchbox, cigarette pack, chair, and bed – all these objects seem to be enveloping my body. They are beginning to transform into animate objects or living creatures. They animate when I move. When I grab the matchbox, the matchbox opens itself and offers me match sticks. I lie on the bed and it envelops me. The chair embraces me with its arms. My costumes, my shoes become my skin. I swim in the space and time without knowing that I am in it.
Perceiving and acting

I first saw a fragmented series of actions described in the text, seemingly unrelated and unconvincing. I could not see the motive behind these actions as they were abstracted from my daily understanding of human actions. However, these actions provided me a gateway to enter into Gus’s world. First, Gus invited me to understand him through what he did, not what he thought. This ‘enactive invitation’ of Gus’s persuaded me to replicate him, first as a series of physical embodiments of actions: sitting, walking, yawning, moving, shaking, turning, looking, talking and so on. First and foremost, my body instinctively knew how to execute such movements. I first began to mimic all the actions described in the text. It was a mechanical mimicry of how to recreate the actions illustrated in the scene. If I use a metaphor, it was similar to a child who is stepping on his father’s footprints on the beach. I tried to follow the footprints, following his actions, and recreating them through my body. This seems mechanical to anyone who understands the actor’s work as an organic process. But in the preliminary stage of the knowing process, I was experiencing this mechanical mode of action as an enactive way of knowing and learning. All the physical actions were mechanical and were not flowing spontaneously. Each and every action needed to be learnt with conscious attention. No particular relationship and justification between the actions and my conscious attention were made at this stage. These actions were done in search of cultivating a habit body (Yasuo 1993). It was a process where I tried to connect my body and intention in order to justify what I had done on the stage. The body began to appear in my intentional field as an object because it was the centre of my attention.

During this process, I experienced a saturation of conscious awareness towards my body and my relationship to the other objects. I spent my time learning every single movement, one by one as a series of actions in the given situation, to be able to memorize them as a combined series of actions. Even the simple act of tying a shoelace seemed a difficult and conscious action to be performed during this phase. This disjuncture between the action and the conscious mind was created through my body because my bodymind wanted to know how this action needed to be learnt and what circumstances were given in the situation. In response to this situation, the bodymind came into play and began to appear in the foreground of my experience. In this enactive situation, the bodymind appeared in my conscious experience and rebelled against my body. The bodily actions interrupted my
agency and the action. It was the process where my body tried to unlearn the learning. Barba calls this a migration of an actor from her existing body-culture to a new ‘country of hope’. In this process of ‘foregrounding’, my body appeared to me as a *body-object* because the body was in a new knowing situation where the consciousness was directed towards the body (Barba 1989). For Stanislavski, this moment is a contradiction between consciousness and the subconscious (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967). Grotowski articulated it as a duality between the ‘impulses’ and action (Grotowski 2002).

As far as I was conscious of my body and actions, I was more conscious about the ways my body was presented to others. I was anxious about how my body was being presented to the spectator because while on the stage, I could not see myself. I could only partially judge how my body was presented to others’ eyes. My body always occupied a blindspot existing between my body and how I was presented to others’ eyes. I could not go outside my body and observe myself from the outside as others could observe me from their perspectives. I was able to experience my body within myself and I was hearing my voice inside.

Even though it was an impossible task to step out from my own body, during the actions I described, I felt that I could develop a ‘body-map’ of how my body was working and how it was positioned in the rehearsal space against others. During my activities on the stage, I mapped and developed a bodily sensitivity to how my body appeared to the spectator. From the starting point of ‘sitting on the bed’ to the point where my eyes ‘meet with Ben’s eyes’, I could sense that my body developed a second self via which I implicitly sensed how my body could be observed from the outside and presented to the spectator. Merleau-Ponty (2002) explicated this juncture of habit formation through the body schema. As seen, the body schema encapsulates and expands the bodily capacities by integrating objects and inhabiting in the space and time.

When it came to the vocal work in the theatre, the same problem described above occurred. When I was delivering dialogue, the words first resonated as internal auditory (aural) action and came through my vocal apparatuses (Parviainen 1998). When I said, for instance, “I am hungry”, the sound of that utterance resonated in my body and came out as meaningful utterance to the people who listened to it. I could hear it internally as well as externally when my dialogue came out into the acoustic space of the rehearsal room. But the problem seemed to be that I was not convinced that the voice I uttered and heard was the same voice that others heard. I had a limited access to how others heard my utterances.
Indeed, I assumed the ways that the other heard my voice. When I heard my voice echoed in the acoustic space of the rehearsal room, it gave me an assurance of how the other experienced my voice, as I experienced it through my own resonance. In this way, I had a privilege, to some degree, of accessing how the others experienced my body, voice and movements.

IV. WORKING ON THE ROLE

Our rehearsal day begins with the repetition of what we have explored the previous day, and remembering, refining, adjusting, and adding new things to the enactment we have invented. After re-reading the scene twice, the next scene is introduced and we start to lay the new scene by similar explorations and improvisations. Then the first scene is combined with the newly invented scene and the whole sequence is repeated in order to concretize them. This process is highly conscious, as the director’s intervention is explicit and constant. He sometimes interrupts our improvisation mid-way through the process. Piyal proposes different actions, movements or rhythms to the situation we improvise and we try to integrate his ideas in order to illustrate the situation. I am beginning to realise that the character I am searching for throughout this rehearsal process cannot be found outside the text. Gus is embedded in the text and gradually incarnates through the actions that I explore in the scenic situations. Because we have concretized all the scenic situations into a series of physical actions, this exploration of actions is integrated with the character that I have been searching for. When the reading process is underway, the character Gus seems embedded in the text waiting to be enlivened through the actions of my body. Once the actions are explored and concretized, Gus no longer exists in the text but in my bodily actions. The question persists, however: how do I know that Gus begins to live through my actions and my expressions?

Rehearsal description 4

The director Piyal talks about Gus and Ben, their relationship, attitudes, ambitions and aspirations. Every day he adds a new detail, a new idea, and a new temperament to the characters. I try to absorb what he says, and merge with how I imagine Gus. Sometimes his information contradicts how I have already visualised Gus. But I try to consolidate his ideas with mine in order to develop my role. It seems a silent argument between the
director and me. My ideal model of Gus resides between myself and the director, waiting to live through my body. But what I know is that the director cannot impose Gus on me. Whatever he suggests and adds to my enactment, he needs to wait until I embody his ideas and recreate them through me. The only thing he can do is describe how he sees these two men, Gus and Ben and how they behave and think while waiting in this basement room. He suggests to me how he sees Gus and what he expects him to be on the stage. But, ironically, there is a limitation to what he can do to help me bring this man alive on the stage. During these conversations, I feel that I have some strings attached to the director’s body. He pulls these strings in order to manipulate Gus through me. But in the meantime, I am trying to be free from these attachments while absorbing and recreating what he wants to see on the stage. He pulls these strings while sitting in the auditorium. But I am the one who is on the stage, moving and with direct access to Gus’s behaviours. I know, however, that I have a responsibility to offer what he expects from me.

During the process of blocking the scenes, I begin to realise that the director tries to communicate to me the Gus he imagines. When he asks me to walk slightly bent down, when he comes up and adjusts my positions or suggests a movement, when he asks me to heighten my voice, or use a lower pitch, I begin to sense that the director is simultaneously conversing with Gus as well as with me. He communicates with his imaginative Gus and brings Gus’s attitudes, behaviours and even vocal tones through me. In doing so, the director tries to build a bridge between Gus and me. I further develop the sense of this communion within myself and the director and at the same time with my imaginative Gus. The process is beginning to be more complicated as I am trying to negotiate between myself and the director as well as the Gus I imagine and the Gus that the director imagines. I need to find a common ground where different interpretations of Gus intermingle into a single fabric of my body.

I cannot fully grasp Gus because Gus does not represent himself in a material form; he cannot be touched, seen or grasped by my perceptual organs. But my task is to empathize with him and behave, talk and act like Gus. I implicitly know that the only possible way for me to become him is by projecting myself fully into the given enactment. I know that I can portray Gus via my own flesh and blood. Gus can be a human being like me, talking, moving and interacting with other people. I can imagine what Gus looks like. How he behaves. But the Gus I see in the text still appears as a one-dimensional figure. I cannot see, hear, or touch him. But I sense that Gus is like me. He has the same body as mine; he walks like me and talks similarly to me. Because I try to understand Gus through me, I still see him in my imagination as similar to my own human image. Because I have a body and I experience that I am not just a physicality but a ‘conscious’ body, I begin to realise that Gus should be having the same inner and outer dimensions. I further assume that Gus has an inner world, feelings and perception of the world as I do, and that Gus has an outer structure, a skeleton, muscle and limbs similar to mine.
For the past few weeks, the process of exploring actions and playing them, refining them and integrating dialogues has given me the opportunity to learn how Gus appears through me. Reading the text every day and finding actions pertaining to each situation have given me a sense of how Gus behaves and interacts with Ben in this basement room. In the early reading process, I have been an outsider or observer of Gus, who appeared through the written text. When I start exploring the actions on stage, I begin to experience that Gus is beginning to actualize through my voice, action and movements. The director’s ideas about Gus, my imagining of Gus and my interactions with Gihan in the rehearsal space have heightened my understanding of his character. Piyal never asks me to articulate my version of Gus during our conversations. Rather, he observes what I do on the stage. I don’t know how to talk about Gus, but I feel that unknown sensations about Gus begin to exist in me. I am not sure whether these sensations and ‘impulses’ I experience are similar to the director’s interpretation of Gus, but I try to follow my instinct and enact how I feel and sense Gus through my actions.

I cannot stop thinking about Gus, even if I am not in the rehearsal venue. Every day is a day that I live with this man. I begin to see how he moves and how he behaves. I see how he talks to Ben, how he argues with Ben. Through these conversations occurring between Gus and me, I begin to sense that Gus is more mobile, anxious and agitated than Ben. Things inside the room and the things happening outside the room raise many questions for Gus. Ben is more vigilant, sharp and heavy. He does not move much; he does not question what is happening in the room and does not grow concerned about what is going on outside the room. He accepts what it is and waits to do the next assignment. Gus moves, and explores the objects in the room, toilet, and elsewhere because he seems more anxious about what is happening in every moment of their lives. Ben, however, does not worry about the present moment because he has an ultimate goal to be accomplished. Therefore, Ben seems heavy, stable and authoritative, while Gus seems unstable and agitated. I know that when something is heavy, it is hard to move. It sinks like an iron into the bottom of the water. But light things do not sink like this, they float. With these instinctual understandings, I identify Gus and Ben as two identities. When the situations in the text unfold, I begin to see that this difference between these two people is beginning to accelerate. I am beginning to sense that Gus is more vulnerable to all the situations he confronts with Ben because he is being manipulated by Ben’s authoritative behaviours.
Imagining and enacting

Gus appeared to me as similar to an object I perceived in the rehearsal space when I first confronted him. He opened some aspects of his profile to me while hiding other sides in his shadow. I tried to open up those hidden aspects by imagining and projecting as many images and references that I could possibly accumulate through my reading of the text, my life experience and my surroundings. When I see an object, for instance, a chair on the stage, I cannot perceive its every aspect from the current perspective that offers from my body because I have an unchanging perspective. If I want to observe it further, I can go around it in order to grasp the other profiles that it hides from my single perspective. When I see the other parts of it, I retain the previous perspective and project my retention forward in order to get an overall picture of it. Similarly, Gus is retained as a one-sided object to my consciousness, but I was able to project his other profiles, three-dimensional sides, and inner and outer qualities, by projecting my perceptual powers in the imaginative infinity (Landes 2013, pp. 95-96; Moran and Cohen 2012, pp. 265-266). In the beginning, Gus was an imaginative object in my consciousness. I did not perceive him as a fully-fledged human being. He was a caricature or a marionette appearing through The Dumb Waiter text. Consequently, my relationship with this Gus was developing once I began to project my imagination of Gus with what I gathered of him from the text.

I tried to materialise Gus as a tangible object inherently attached to the text. If tangible, or material, I should be capable of seeing, touching, smelling and hearing Gus. In fact, this intentional projection of Gus was not a materialisation of Gus as an actual existence. Gus was an imaginative construct. But the bodymind transposes the textual Gus into bodily rooted meanings of Gus. In trying to understand virtual Gus, the bodymind was transposing my bodily relationship with its virtuality to a relationship between the body and an object. When I confront an object in space, I perceive the object through my perceptual grasping and I further can manipulate the object with my body. In my imagination, Gus needed to be transformed into a perceptually tangible or feelable object. My bodymind then simulated Gus as a thing available to my perceptual grasping (Moran and Cohen 2012, p. 158). This relationship simulated and provided a direct bodily link to the Gus I imagined. Because the character Gus was an imaginative construct, the bodymind could not directly relate with it as if it were one of the objects in the rehearsal environment. What the bodymind consciousness
does in this situation is replicate the virtual Gus in an animated object in the imagination allowing me to grasp Gus. Gus therefore was beginning to be enlivened as a figure against the textual background.

My reading of The Dumb Waiter text first appears to me as a perceptual act of reading letters, syntax, and symbols printed on white paper in a way to depict certain meanings. This act of reading embeds in me first as visual perception and secondly as auditory act. This perceptual process simultaneously generates an imagination of certain situations and character qualities I grasp from the reading. Gus begins to appear as a hazy figure through the textual background. This figure I construct through reading is not a part of the text or the white paper but it appears as a part of my consciousness (Moran and Cohen 2012, p. 159). Merleau-Ponty understands the relationship between the consciousness and the object of perception within the figure-background structure (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Whether Gus is an actual person or an imaginative construct, my perceptual consciousness is related to him: this imaginative character as a figure is perceivable to my sensory motor faculties. This figure is not a passive existence in my psyche but one which operates similar to other objects I encounter in my environment, persuading me to act upon it through its feelable qualities (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 176). My bodymind simulates the figure and then transforms this perceptual image into figurative meanings. Stanislavski states that the actor’s imagination and thoughts are not passive: ‘Activity in imagination is of utmost importance’ (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, p. 58).

A problem remained: was Gus still an object to my perceptual grasping similar to other objects that I perceived in the rehearsal space? Other objects can be seen, heard or touched by my perception. But Gus was different. I intended to see, hear and touch him by reaching through the projection of my imagination. However, even if I grasped him through my imagination, I was not able to see him because he was no longer an existence as Gus; he was me. Gus was entrapped in my body and I was not able to perceive him as I could perceive things in the rehearsal space. The moment he attuned to my bodily comportment, he took a position of my perspective. I was no longer able to objectify Gus as my object of attention because he was not available in the edge of my connecting arc. Gus and I attuned into a single bodily existence.

Because Gus and myself enveloped into a single body, he could not depart as another being. He became me; I became him. His subjectivity was possibly hidden behind these
actions described in the text. I started performing these actions through my body. Through these actions, he began to enliven within me. Because I had an implicit understanding about my own body and its perceptual powers, whatever the inner experience that Gus was having, I was gradually beginning to understand that his ‘conscious life’ was the result of my bodily actions. Gus’s consciousness was beginning to manifest through my action. I could perhaps sense Gus through habituating his body demeanours (Landes 2013, pp. 90-91). My action always depends on my perceptual understanding and how I grasp my surroundings. This perceptual grasping is also ‘movement grasping’ that constructs my conscious awareness towards my environment. Along with my implicit understanding of my own body motility, I began to realize that the consciousness of Gus (agency, desires, and emotions, et cetera) did not incarnate in a vacuum but was only achievable through the actions defined in the text. His consciousness could only be explored and played on the stage by understanding his actions through my body. This understanding about how Gus’s consciousness worked did not come from Gus’s inaccessible psyche; rather this implicit understanding emerged from my own understanding of my body and its agency.

V. WORKING WITH ENSEMBLE

Working in this rehearsal process for the last two months, I realize that I have been developing a series of new habits that are required for me to act on the stage. These habits are developed through my new ways of moving, talking and interacting with the objects and with the co-actor during rehearsals. For me, this interaction gives me a sense of transformation, a new way of doing things and expanding my bodily capacities and way of thinking in this theatre production. If I have been able to succeed in the process of rehearsal, it is due to the fact that I have been constantly interacting with and observing my surroundings and my close connections with the partner actor with whom I have been sharing this theatre space.

Rehearsal description 5

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Every day, our rehearsal starts with a full reading of the text. Now we know our lines and have no need to concentrate on the text further. This reading process is not a solitary work anymore. It is a matter of reading the text with the partner actor and being inspired and motivated by his delivery of the lines and his movements. Today I am on the stage again, ready to start the reading session. Lights on... a long silence... We start delivering lines while moving around the rehearsal space. I see Gihan in the auditorium. He starts replying to my lines while moving in the far corner of the auditorium. This distance gives us a sense of tone and the pitch of the vocal delivery. How far can I project my voice? I notice that Gihan is advancing towards the stage. As my delivery is beginning to increase, I notice that Gihan’s delivery is also beginning to accelerate. I am more aware of how I hear his voice, his tones, his pitch and the emotional engagement of the delivery. This attentiveness changes my reaction to him, the way I deliver my lines, my pitch, tone and emotions.

From time to time, I look at him. He also moves around, sometimes in opposite directions. We connect with each other’s eyes and disconnect. We try to communicate with our bodies and disconnect again. This activity is going on for a couple of minutes. I feel that my body is developing a tension towards Gihan’s body. I try to keep a distance between us while walking. Suddenly I stop. Gihan looks at me and stops. Again I start to walk. My walking now is beginning to accelerate. I walk fast, accelerating more and more. In the meantime, the delivery of the dialogue also begins to incorporate the fast pace of the bodily movements. Rigorous movements begin to affect the delivery, its tone and the emotional undertone. I observe that Gihan follows the same process. It seems that his body is mimicking what my body does; I follow what he does. As our bodily movements accelerate into a higher level of intensity, our breathing is beginning to accelerate too. This fast breathing begins to provide a higher tone and emotional intensity to our lines.

I am walking quickly, in between the stage objects. Now this walking movement is beginning to change into jogging. Then it is accelerating into a stomping on the stage. Gihan is following me. We stomp around the stage together. The rehearsal space is beginning to fill with the sound we create from our feet. It accelerates like a musical beat. Gihan and I try to synchronize the foot beat we create. We both find different variations of the beat, different tempos and rhythms by changing the way we hit the wooden floor of the stage. It is a joyful feeling. Synchronizing our body movements and footsteps to create a sound pattern, we both reach a point where we feel that our bodies become unified. After moving, stomping and jumping around the stage, we feel exhausted. Panting...We take a break. Someone in the auditorium yells, “Have some tea; it is ready!” We get off the stage, wanting to have a warm cup of tea.

The rehearsal space has become an enjoyable place for us. Every day, before we start the formal rehearsal, the reading session begins while moving in the space and we start
improvising different activities incorporated with our vocal delivery. These activities emerge while we are interacting with each other and trying to copy what the other does during this process. When we start repeating the same process each day, I begin to realize that these activities have become our warm up sessions. Reading the text, moving around the space, using different objects and interacting with each other begin to provide good physical and vocal exercise for us. We do this until we get tired. These activities provide a sense of unity and coordination between Gihan and me. These interactions and the mimicking of each other have given me a chance to broaden my understanding of my fellow actor and how his body works, how his emotions are displayed through his face and bodily expressions. During these play activities I see emotional changes occur in Gihan’s face. In return, I also begin to sense that my emotional states are visible to him. When I start attentively observing Gihan’s emotional states and bodily presence, this begins to generate my own emotional reactions towards him. I begin to realize that we have learnt to observe each other’s bodily changes happening in the rehearsal process without knowing that we are being observed and motivated by each other’s presence.

If I go back to the beginning of the rehearsal process, I can recall how I feel about my partner actor. When I first see him, he is an unknown person to me. His face is not familiar, his bodily gestures and postures are not familiar and hard to make sense of. Similarly, he experiences the same unfamiliarity towards me, my presence, my voice and my gestures. In order to be successful in this rehearsal situation, I realise that no one can remain as a passive body. When I observe his bodily movements and emotions, simultaneously I feel that he is also observing me and my comportments. It seems to me that this mutual relationship works like a mirror because when I stand in front of the mirror, I cannot avoid the fact that I am reflected by the mirror in front of me. When I am looking at my mirror image, the image, in return, is also looking at me. I see a similar image to me appearing in the mirror as an image. Although I see that it is me appearing in the mirror, I know that it is not really me.

**Engaging and learning**

The actor accomplishes his tasks being with others. My body cannot be isolated ‘[b]ecause being is always being-with-others’ (Parviainen 1998, p. 124). For instance, I cultivated a habit body by coupling with other objects and human bodies in the space. Habits reflect how
the actor’s body has attuned to its performance environment, its capacities and potentials. Therefore, having a habit body is another way of saying that I am being with others. I was not an object of his attention or his body was not my object of attention. The subject and object duality was disappearing in order to form a shared space for both of us to work within. Bodymind consciousness is therefore not a self-governing, authoritative self. It is an unconscious domain where the actor loses her control of being a ‘conscious subject’. In other words, bodymind consciousness is a place where I fully intermingle myself with the other.

As an actor I exceeded my comfort zones and began to touch the other’s body. But these physical connections were occurring with a mutual respect and protecting each other’s wellbeing on the stage. The scenic situations allowed us to feel the sensation and the temperatures of our own bodies and skins. This demystification of our flesh opened up our bodies to each other. In this process, I explored my body, and its relationship with the other body that presented in the theatre space. This mutual connection between Gihan and me revealed that we were no longer sharing two bodies. Our bodies were becoming a single fabric from which we were creating the tapestry of the score, and from where we could see and be seen, touch and be touched, hear and be heard as a single flesh. Even if we assumed that we were self-governing authorities, dividing ourselves as separate beings, our bodyminds were attuning to each other beyond our conscious minds. Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility thesis was in action within our rehearsal space, allowing our bodyminds to interact with each other (Merleau-Ponty 2002).

Acting, quite obviously, is not a solitary art. Actors constantly require interaction with their environment, objects and bodies to create their art. I realized that bodies I shared this rehearsal space with were not mere objects but possessed conscious aspects too; they breathed, felt, thought and acted like me. I saw others move, use objects and manipulate them, and they talked to me. On the other hand, I always took the privileged position of being for myself. I perceived myself as a conscious being with a strong sense of self. Being a conscious subject and at the same time being with other actors created a paradox. It is this paradox via which my bodymind developed a bridge between the other and me.

79 One may argue that some aspects of acting can be done in isolation without contacting with other bodies. This may be true to some extent when you consider the contemporary development of dance, performance art or other body practices such as Bhuto. But my concern here is the text-based conventional acting and how the actor’s work is inherently tied up with the other actors’ bodies. Even if the actor is not directly in contact with a human body, she always relates to an Other, whether it is animate or inanimate.
My perceptual consciousness generally favours my existence as a perceiver (subject) overpowering the other perceivers’ existence. Phenomenological enquiry insists, however, that even this prioritising of the consciousness of the self is inevitably predicated upon the sense that other consciousnesses also prioritise their own selves. Because I am a self-conscious being, I sense that others also act and perceive things similarly to me. However, when I act in the environment, my perceptual actions predominantly inform my authority. I have become a self-conscious being because there are other objects, animal and human beings to be perceived in the world as other, but can I forget the fact that my perceptual consciousness is consciousness of others? I perceive the world, animate and inanimate objects surrounding me, not only because I am a superior conscious being, but also because others, these objects and people, have a capacity to live through me. I assume that others have the same perceptual consciousness as me, perceiving the same world that I do.

Notwithstanding my dualistic understanding of myself and the other actor, I could not avoid that in my very first encounter with him, my bodymind was bound, or at least began to be bound, to his bodymind. Even on a visual level, he entered into my perception, my thought process and changed my attitudes and emotional expression of him through my body. I heard his voice talking to me and to others and I could not avoid listening to him. My intersensory experience already began to attune to him. This communion shared intersensory information between our bodies. This mirroring of the other’s body further exemplified that behind our conscious experiences, our bodies were coupling with each other. It was my bodymind that attempted to integrate with the other person’s bodily territory, which I had presupposed was a dark territory. This urge of imitation was an attempt to infiltrate into the other person’s subjectivity and understand the other actor’s world as a lived body similar to mine.

When I looked at Gihan’s body and his emotional display, I first objectified his body as an object for my gaze. I assumed that Gihan was also looking at me, and my emotional display, while making my body an object of his gaze. In this intertwining, our conscious experience worked in a mutual, symmetrical way. First, it appeared asymmetrical when he gazed at me. On the other hand, he could not escape from being gazed at by me. In this reversibility, we perceived each other as subjectivities and at the same time also as objectivities. We were both being enclosed by our own gazes and challenged as free agents. We were ready to shed our ego consciousnesses in order to embrace each other’s bodies. As Stanislavski affirms, the actor’s self-communion is the gateway to the inter-communion. In
other words, this self-communion cannot be achieved without having union between the duality of body and mind. Actors engage with each others’ bodies and connect through the emotional antennae (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967). Grotowski also similarly argued that the actor enters into the others’ world by observing and enacting another person’s body movements (Grotowski 2002). When the actor cultivates her habit body, it is a power of presence, a body-in-life, as Barba suggests, which demonstrates the unison between self and the other (Barba 1985).

**Rehearsal description 6**

Today we are waiting for a very important moment. It is the moment that we both, myself and Gihan, have been waiting for. We are going to lay one of the important scenes in the text. It is the culminating scene for both characters, Gus and Ben. It is the moment that Gus breaks his silence and starts questioning Ben about what is happening in the basement room. His curiosity is accelerated because of the mysterious incidents taking place in the room and outside the room. He hears the toilet flush. They receive anonymous notices underneath the door. They receive some food via the dumb waiter. Gus is beginning to be aware they are not alone in this basement room but they are being constantly observed. This curiosity begins to accelerate into a violent action once Gus begins to question Ben and Ben starts reacting to Gus.

I am on the stage waiting to be inspired to explore the actions necessary for the scene. Gihan is also moving around. As usual we start moving while delivering our dialogues, without any plans, without any emotional involvement, without any specific targets. I see the only metal chair provided on the stage. While delivering my lines, I move towards it, grab it and begin to play with it. I climb onto it while delivering my lines: “Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?” I jump from the chair and move towards the bed. I ask again... “Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?” I sit on the bed. I see Gihan moving toward me. I raise my voice. “Why did he do that?” I raise my voice again, while looking at Gihan. Gihan is in front of me, looking at me silently. “Who?” he asks. He takes his toothpick from his lips. I think he will say something... there is a silence... I ask him again. “Who sent us those matches?” I stress. He takes his eyes away from me. He goes to his bed, sits and starts flipping his cards. I open my voice again and question. “Who sent us those matches? Who is it upstairs?... I continue... a silence... “What’s one thing to do with another?” He replies with no attention. I can’t bare this monotony; I push my voice further: “I asked you a question!” He throws his cards on the bed and stands right in front of me. He is looking at my face. As soon as I finish, he grunts with more power. “Shut up!” I stand still yet my body is tensed. I point my finger towards him and say, “I told you, didn’t I?”... “Shut up!” he warns me. His eyes are shining and I can clearly see he looks at me. I
burst out: “I told you before who owned this place, didn’t I? I told you.” He grabs my neck and hits me on my right chest. With the sudden attack, I am furious and throw myself onto the bed. I cry with my highest voice again and come up very quickly towards Ben. “I told you who ran this place, didn’t I.”

I hear a voice from the audience. “Stop there mates!” It is the director. Piyal is coming to instruct us. We stop the sequence. We have invented something, something that we want to illustrate in this situation. The intense conversation has lifted both of us into a mood where our emotions and bodies spontaneously react to the moment. Gihan’s reaction of hitting my right breast has given me a physical push to flip myself onto the bed. Piyal suggests exploring this action further and refining it through repetition. We begin to reflect on what has happened during the action. We start replicating what our bodies have offered in that moment and recreate the action again. We both begin to pay our conscious attention to the actions. Gihan starts hitting me on my right breast and left breast without putting much weight into the hits. I in return try to absorb his reaction into my body and flip my body onto the bed behind me. We start exploring different ways of touching our bodies. This mutual play turns into a friendly fight. He is hitting first with his right hand towards my right breast. I flip my chest backward absorbing his action and fall on the bed. Again I come up and then he hits my left breast with his left hand. I flip myself and fall on the bed again. While this activity is going on, Gihan realizes that closing his palm while hitting my chest generates a sound. This sound begins to incorporate our mutual action providing a musicality to it. I try to calculate how my body moves and how my arms fly in the air when I am absorbing his hit. My body is going to be aware of how this shock needs to be absorbed through my shoulder area by avoiding its impact on the middle of the chest. While practising these actions repetitively, we start to incorporate our lines with the action we are rehearsing. It is a complex situation as the dialogues and the rapid bodily actions need to be blended. We try to synchronize Gihan’s hitting action and my bodily reaction, my flip and falling onto the bed with our lines. We begin to practise in different motions. First we begin with slow motion action like a slow-motion film reel. Slow-motion movements begin to provide a clear sense of where Gihan’s hands hit my body, and how my body needs to be reacting to the opposite action. More attentiveness and awareness towards our bodies is beginning to cultivate. Later we start accelerating the action providing it with what approximates spontaneity. The former slow-motion actions are beginning to accelerate in the actual motion of the action.

I move to the dumb waiter and grab the speaker. I yell into the mouthpiece. “WE’VE GOT NOTHING LEFT! NOTHING! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?” I sense Gihan advancing behind me. He pushes me backwards away from the dumb waiter and turns me around and hits me again on my left breast (now I am standing just in front of him. I face my back to the audience). I throw myself backwards with a cry and land on a chair near the footlight and the chair again flips over with the weight of my body onto the floor. A deep silence… … I hear that Director Piyal, Gaya and the stage managers are running towards the stage. It is a mistake, an unexpected twist, possibly an accident of
falling onto the chair and flipping over backward that we have not planned. We stop the rehearsal. We try to reflect on what has just happened. We all agree that this mishap gives another dimension to our scene. We decide to incorporate this difficult action into our scene in order to give it an edge.

I begin to think about what has happened to me today. Something went wrong between Gihan’s action and my bodily reactions. I only remember that I suddenly shift my attention to his hand coming towards me. Then I am thrown towards the footlight and fall onto the chair and the chair flips over with me onto the floor. There are two things that I learn from this incident. First, I understand that things can go wrong if my autonomous activity on the stage is disrupted with the conscious attention interrupting the flow of the action. It seems that someone in my body has tried to protect me from the threat coming towards me. Someone who is hiding in my body has made a decision to protect me and my wellbeing while not knowing that I am fighting with Ben in an imaginative situation. Secondly, this mishap gives me the opportunity to enhance my act by incorporating this mistake. Director Piyal decides to use this action in the scene. Now I am thinking of how this accident can be recreated as if it is happening for the first time on the stage.

I start working with Gihan to recreate the situation again. But I realize that we are far away from what we have experienced before. When it is recreate for the first time, we realize that it is not happening spontaneously. Gihan fails to hit me onto the correct position. When it happens my body throws towards a different direction. We both need to coordinate our bodies and energies towards a single target. Gihan should be aware of how much he needs to put pressure on my chest enabling me to push backwards. In the meantime, I should be aware of how I absorb his push into my body and generate more energy and twist my body enabling me to push backward until I reach the metal chair placed on the middle of the stage. But we realise that we both have to practice the same action many times to get the correct physical phrase and precision of the action. We make many mistakes. One time when Gihan fails to hit the correct spot on my chest, I am thrown onto the floor without falling onto the chair. At another time, I land on the auditorium missing the correct position of the chair. But after many painstaking rehearsal nights, mistakes, incidental injuries and repetitions, we begin to reconstruct the same situations with the correct spontaneity and precision.
Attuning and freeing

My bodymind offered different avenues and opportunities, sometimes unexpected situations. These avenues were opened through working with other bodies and objects in the rehearsal space. Some opportunities occurred when I tried to push my bodymind to extremes. By putting the bodymind into these situations, it offered alternative opportunities to overcome such extreme situations. In the first place, these actions were occurring as spontaneous reactions to the situations. Once they were identified as valuable elements for the scene, then I needed conscious attention to be able to recreate them through my body again. I needed to iterate them in and through my body until I acquired the spontaneity to execute the actions as they were happening without my conscious attention.

Once this whole scene was learned and spontaneity developed from the repetitions that constituted that learning, I began to experience that the objectification of time and space was gradually declining. There was no such objective spatio-temporal awareness occurring in the process of performing this sequence. My bodymind consciousness was only aware of the ‘present moment’, of what was happening in the here and now and how to be in that moment. There was no past, present or future domains which could be perceived or predicted in the process. My bodymind was only conscious about the present moment of being-in-the-enactment. In other words, bodymind consciousness was operating without a rational timeline of past, present and future (Sheets-Johnstone 1963).

Once I immersed myself into the performance score, the bodymind consciousness knew that there was no abstract time or space existing as it does in daily life. When I became immersed in the enactment, I was not able to “objectively calculate” a spatiotemporal flow of that particular moment. ‘One cannot speak of being at a temporal moment without speaking at the same time of being at a particular place at that moment’ (Sheets-Johnstone 1963, pp. 26-27). I lived through the score; and the score lived through me. I could not foresee any actions, situations, or any specific junctures ahead of me. Instead, I comfortably enacted in the lived moment. Every subtle moment of the score was unfolding one after another as a psychophysical spontaneity allowing my bodymind to be enlivened in the present moment. I didn’t rationally calculate where I should place myself in the situation. I didn’t purposely think how and where I should steer the situation. The score showed me the path where it needed to go. Bodymind consciousness carried me to the end.
The skills and knowledge that pertain to acting thus grasped through the engagement of playing and moving within the score. The score incarnated through my body, itself developed through my bodily rootedness. Therefore, this bilateral engagement of my bodily connection with the ‘living score’ provided the first hand knowledge of how to perform such a score. ‘Being’ and ‘doing’ were the only ways to experience and grasp the nature of the scoring process. After I cultivated the proper awareness of the score, it started to exist as solid form, embedded in my moving body. During the course of this process, there was a point where the score began to guide me through. Once the score began to live through my body, I was no longer playing the score; the score created a dynamic space in which my body began to experience freedom and innovation. This bodymind experience started to guide me to explore more bodymind subtleties, nuances and affective engagements with the role I played.

I enjoyed the freedom of not being physically or consciously attached to the score. I call it ‘selfless’ because I experienced that my perceptual consciousness didn’t attach to any particular inner or outer object. But this freedom was a freedom of how and in what ways I could enhance and heighten such a bodymind experience to a higher level of creativity and sincerity within the performance score. It was not that I could shift my bodymind consciousnesses away from the main task and run around with my thoughts about “what that audience member is eating?” “Oh! There is a beautiful girl sitting in the front row or what the director might be thinking about my acting”. Every moment of my bodymind consciousness was a moment of knowing and expanding the growing attentiveness towards the score.

Bodymind melodies

I have a privileged position as an actor, perhaps moreso than other kinds of artists. Others need extra tools and equipment to render their artwork to perceivers. Painters need canvas and paint; sculptors need marble, clay or other materials. Instrumentalists need their extrinsic instruments to express themselves. Nevertheless, to me, it is me, my body, that creates my art. The bodymind is my expression of the artwork I create. The creator and the created are one and the same in the single enactment. In other words, the performer and the performed are intermingled and interlocked in a single flesh. I am the one who creates and perceives my art prior to any ontological reductions made. It is the proto-aesthetic that I experience through my own creation within. Other artists cannot merge into their work of art as much as I do.
unless they are a part of that work of art. I am in that sense more privileged because I am my
art. It is the same as to say that I am my body. My body aesthetics do not necessarily
represent any symbolic identification in order to be meaningful in the performance. The actor
as a living being, and being a work of art in her own right, perceives and makes aesthetic
body poeticizing and meanings in the process of acting.

My bodily aesthetics that I describe here should not be misunderstood with the
commonsensical usage of stage techniques, clichés, gestures or other melodramatic
representations that actors use on stage. For example, in order to convey a relaxed manner,
actors very often put their hands in their pockets. When asked to stand in front of the
audience, some don’t directly stand but make ‘profile standing’ to be able to project their
profile views to the audience. This is not what I mean by the aesthetic of the flesh. I am
talking about a particular awareness, an impulse of my body that offers me opportunities to
anticipate, create, and enhance the bodily activities arriving at an appropriate aesthetic
sentiment to be able to experience it in non-thetic, or pre-rational, ways.

As seen in rehearsal description 6, the intensity of the scene was raised when Ben
attacked Gus. As actors, we needed to explore, invent, negotiate, select and refine the ways to
perform this scene. In this case, Gihan and myself, as best we were able, explored the precise,
and most appropriate, truthful and aesthetically viable way to portray this situation. In this
process, the exploration of the body aesthetics was not a conscious process but they were
beginning to emerge when the two bodies confronted and began to poeticize through moving
and touching. When Ben first hit me, he used his right arm and his palm touched the right
side of the chest. It created a sound as well as the impact for me to fall down on the bed.
When his palm hit my right chest, in order to absorb the blow, I moved my chest backward.
In the meantime, my body flipped to the right side and fell onto the bed. Then the second
time, when Ben hit me with his left arm, I threw myself on to the bed with another body flip.
In the final attack, when Ben quickly advanced, I turned to face him. Then he hit me and I
threw myself backward without seeing the back side towards the footlight and fell on the
chair placed near the footlight. As soon as I landed on the chair, I fell again backward with
the chair. This sequence was very challenging because I had to develop a kinetic sense of
how to fall backward without watching the distance between myself and the chair. On the
other hand, my co-actor needed to maintain the precision of his hitting because if he released
excess energy, I might end up falling down on the audience and may be injured as a result of it.

I was aware that this act was determined by the given circumstance (in this case the nature of architecture and the other actor’s body) and the emotional development that I processed at this given moment. These aesthetic choices ignited through the bodymind consciousness, prior to my calculative understanding of the situation. I anticipated and projected my bodily movements towards the chair I intended to fall on in the immediate future by animating my movements as an intentional act. It was an aesthetic intention that was occurring between my intending body and the target object. It was not that I was simply falling backwards on a chair but was a way of poeticizing how to move and fall on it, to accept the opportunities this chair offered me to be embedded in it with its physical solidity. What circumstances were given to me? How could I maintain the melodic quality of falling backward? How could I maintain the intensity and rigour while avoiding any harm to my body? In this manner, my bodymind began to poeticize different ways of moving to find the appropriate manner to fall on the chair. I simply could not predict what choices my bodymind would offer. Bodymind generated many variations, some were conventional, and some were abstract. This poeticizing was possible because I directly dealt with the co-actor, chair and the environment where my bodymind was embedded.

As the previous example shows, I had two target objects: the co-actor’s body and the chair. I achieved the comprehension of attuning to the co-actor’s body and moving away from him to the equipmentality of the chair by merging my body with it. I found a series of actions that rendered my co-existence with both the partner actor’s body and the chair. My bodymind consciousness allowed me to make few adjustments to the final completion of the task. These fine adjustments and detailing of the action rendered an aesthetic quality to my awareness. I began to iterate my body in order for my bodymind to learn the appropriate movements of falling. The bodymind began to discover a level where it did not need further awareness to guide the overall action. This moment marked the ‘letting go’ of the aesthetic intentionality directed towards the target domain. My bodymind began to shift from its noetic aesthetic attention towards the non-thetic awareness where the whole action became the bodymind. This mutual engagement rendered a melodic quality to my actions because my bodily comportments and the objects were intermingled.
Rehearsal description 7

After three months of rehearsals we have come to an end. Although it is an end to a process of exploring and learning, there is another process of learning about to begin. The final run-through is scheduled at the same theatre we have been rehearsing the play. Today, for the first time, we start performing the play with all the costumes, make-up, lighting and sounds. The play is scheduled to be staged at the New Arts Theatre, University of Colombo. It is going to be performed for a selected audience, friends and theatre enthusiasts, to test before we stage the play for the upcoming National Youth Drama Festival.

I come to the theatre around 10.00am. The stage managers are already here and constructing the basement room. The lighting technicians are busy with fixing and testing their lights. There are helpers, backstage workers and friends hanging around the auditorium. All seem to be busy with their own work. Ionesco is testing sound at the back of the stage. Stage manager Sunil comes to me and informs me of today’s schedule. The director wants us to start a full reading of the text. Then we can have our lunch and need to prepare for the costumes and make-up.

We start our reading session, while sitting in a far corner of the dark auditorium. Today, our reading is calm and peaceful. We read our dialogues, loud enough to hear ourselves while watching others who are working on the stage, constructing the set,
fixing the lights and testing the sounds. We see that the stage managers and the set designers are finishing off their work. We begin to see the whole basement room with two beds, a metal chair and other props and objects on the stage. We decide to go to the stage and continue our reading. We begin the reading while moving to the positions and actions that we have been learning. From the beginning to the end, we recall every position, movement and situation without putting any emotional engagement to it. The body begins to memorize them and connect each action one-by-one while pushing the situation forward.

I brush my teeth and have a shower. I am ready to put on my costume and make-up. I come to the dressing room. I smell the new costumes hung on the wall. I put them on carefully and walk around. I look at myself in the mirror. I sit for the make-up. Make-up artist Priyantha starts touching my face and applying a base. I see my face beginning to change. Gihan is already dressed. I see him through the mirror in front of me, walking slowly like a tiger in a cage while keeping his toothpick in between his lips, and wearing his black spectacles. He suddenly comes up with a line... I instantly deliver my lines without thinking about it. Sunil makes us some warm tea with ginger. We sip our cups of tea while waiting in the dressing room.

The moment has arrived. Piyal calls everyone to the stage. We flock around connecting with our hands. Everyone seems tense and nervous. The front curtain is still closed and through the dim yellow light, I see others’ faces. We close our eyes for a moment. A silence... I hear people entering the auditorium, they chat in low voices, one coughs, another one laughs. After this moment of silence, all the colleagues withdraw from the stage. Gihan and I remain in the semi-darkness. A deep silence again. I check my props. I go to the chair and sit for a minute. Gihan begins to settle at his position on the bed. I put my matchbox in the shoe and tie the lace; I walk slowly towards my bed and sit. A moment of silence... I am waiting... I am calm but I am nervous about the next few minutes. It seems that time has stopped... inhale and exhale... I hear my breathing. The third bell ringing... I am on my bed sitting... still... in the semi-darkness, I see Gihan still on the bed covering his face with the paper. I feel the warm, yellow light beginning to intensify around us uncovering the objects and the living area of the room. I sense that the front curtain is opening.

Nothing is in my mind except I see my shoes... I focus on them... their laces are loosened. I am sitting on the bed, bending and trying to tie the shoelace. I start with my first task, tying my lace. I stand while yawning and walk slowly towards the left door but stop halfway, close to the chair. I shake my leg. I feel something in my shoes. I look down. I hear the paper rustle. I don’t look at Ben but I still see his figure on the bed, reading the paper. He changes his position and gives me a glance. In the mean time I sense a vast, dark space opening from the footlight. It's dark but I sense that there are people sitting and looking at us. I bend down and take out a matchbox from the shoe, shake it. I see Ben look at me again. I put it inside my pocket and start moving slowly.
All the actions and the subtle movements are beginning to flow like a stream of water without any interruption. Every action and the situation begin to unfold one by one interlacing everything together while pushing the enactment forward without knowing that it is flowing. All the actions are beginning to unfold as if a mechanical clock is releasing its energy through the motion of unwinding the mainspring. The accumulated actions, emotions and expressions are beginning to release energies like a volcano. In the beginning my actions and emotions are silent. Gradually they are erupting furiously and ferociously as the sequences are evolving. Eyes engulfed in the darkness of the audience, human shadows hidden behind wings are all magnetized by our bodies moving in the little room in the midst of the stage until we both come to the end of our performance.

I am still not sure whether I have completely immersed into Gus. But one thing is certain: I am completely captivated by the act. It is like I am entrapped and drawn by a strong current of a river. I feel that I do not want to struggle with the flow. I am taken by an unknown force; I am absorbed by the whole enactment. This enactment is taking me to the end of the play. I feel that I am not there anymore on the stage but someone is living through me. In the beginning of the play, my world is completely marginalized within the wall of the basement room and the only thing I see is my partner actor Gihan and other objects scattered in the room. It seems a complete isolation from the outer world. I feel that we are the only two human beings who have survived in the world. Everything I do, everything I say is related to this man Ben and the things that I encounter in the room. Whether it is Gus or myself, during this enactment, I go through a myriad of emotions that I have never been able to experience within a very limited time. I am calm at a time and again I am angry. I am frustrated and I feel fear. I am anxious and I feel isolated. Whether it is Gus or me, I feel that I have gone through this complex emotional journey while performing Gus on the stage. I feel that my emotional journey has infiltrated into the audience who are watching the play; their response, both during the performance and after, seems to confirm this.

Scoring and performing

When I first explored the score, it was a mechanical reproduction of how to live through this particular score. However, once the score became a part of my lived body, then each and every performance of that score began to trigger different emotional and affective
sensitivities for me. The emotional life that incarnated through performance varied and sometimes declined due to many variations of the bodymind and its connectedness to the environment. One night I experienced the emotional torrent of being in the enactment, another day, the intensity of the emotions varied and diminished. However, I realized that the emergence of this emotional experience (sub score) was the key to enliven the role on stage. The sub score was beginning to animate when the score played with full competence. I began to realize that I was experiencing the affective life of Gus.

The process of repeating actions enabled me to embed in the situation in the imaginative here and now. This bodymind awareness signalled a sense that I am experiencing the emotional life of Gus. It was a feeling of amalgamation with Gus’s emotional life and mine. I could experience the playfulness of the score once I cultivated the bodymind consciousness, which rooted from the bodily networking with the score. This embodiment of the score restructured my daily body-mind duality and cultivated a new bodymind relation. Through repeatedly exploring and embodying actions and movements, I acquired a body which enlivened as Gus’s bodymind. I experienced my bodymind consciousness as Gus’s conscious experience. I was no longer experiencing the duality of my ‘self’ and Gus but I experienced that I am Gus.

I was beginning to understand that the process of repeating the actions is a gateway to the affective life of the role (Stanislavsky and Benedetti 2010). Once I began to perform the learned action with my partner actor, I was concentrating on what I was doing in relation to the counter reactions coming from the partner. This attentive awareness of the other actor’s body and his reaction subsequently aroused my emotional reactions towards him. It was a growing awareness, an attentiveness and emotional tapestry that was woven between my bodymind and the series of actions that my body invented with the co-actor. I knew that it was me, my bodymind, which began to enliven as another existence, possibly the emotional life of Gus that I was seeking to portray. It affected my being and my body. Sometimes I was feeling sad, sometimes angry. Another time I was feeling happy or tranquil. This emotional torrent was beginning to invade me; it lifted me up and threw me down. My responsibility was to preserve and maintain the consistency and the attentiveness towards my performance. My bodymind consciousness was tightly bound with the score I performed.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a phenomenological description of my bodymind experience in the production Kontharāththuwa (The Dumb Waiter) produced in Sri Lanka. The key argument that I explicated is that my early experience of acting was an exploration, though I could not have articulated it like this at the time, into the function and workings of bodymind: the bodymind, I learned through practice and reflection, is not divided in the actor’s knowing process but a single process. I have further described how this bodymind consciousness works in different stages of the actor’s process. I discussed how the actor’s body is experienced in two distinctive ways: body-as-object and body-as-subject in the transformational process of acting.

I described the background of the theatre production The Dumb Waiter and how I was involved with it as an amateur actor. I described the reading process of the play. This description explored how the reading of a text is both cognitive and actional in the actor’s knowing process. The reading process creates opportunities for the actor to reflect his body, self and how these contesting ideas are negotiating during a rehearsal process. The bodymind understands and cultivates habits through integrating them into bodily spatiality. I described how the bodymind alters the objective time and space and expands its body by attuning to the stage objects and props. This description has further revealed that these abstract body aspects and mind aspects are germinated from the same lived bodymind. The actor perceives the character through the materials that she accumulates from the text, from her outer environment and through her imagination. I have explicated how my bodymind perceives the character and how it is perceived as a figure against background in the textual reality. I described how the actor animates the character through his imagination and how it is realized through bodily means. This process cultivates perceptual and motor habits in order to actualize the imaginative role. This further affirmed that the body and mind are not a separate existence for the actor but are mutually intertwining in the process of imagining and knowing. Finally, I have elaborated this epistemic and embodied way of knowing by elucidating how the bodymind interacts with the acting partner. I described how my bodymind is attuned to the other actor’s world through gazing, touching and working together on and through the score. This mutual engagement between the perceptual and motor grasping sediments a habit body for the actor. This habit body is the nexus of all knowing and poeticizing of the actor’s body. I have concluded with the description of performing for the
other. Providing descriptive materials, I have tried to provide evidence of how my bodymind works as an embodied experience and how this process is both an epistemic and aesthetic endeavour in my learning process. Hence, the next chapter provides the opportunity for me to explore how these ideas can be contradicted or consolidated with some selected actors chosen from the Sri Lankan contemporary theatre.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussing bodymind experience with actors

Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world.
Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

Introduction

In chapter four, I offered a phenomenological description of how I cultivated bodymind consciousness in my early apprentice years. I described this learning process in five key ontological categories: text; self; action; role; and the other. In this chapter, these ontological categories are further extended to analyse selected actors’ approaches to bodymind practices in actor learning. This chapter therefore provides ethnographic exploration into four actors’ interview data gathered through semi-structured interviews. My intention is to compare my experiential data with the interview material and consider whether these descriptions are either consolidated or contradicted.

As Barnacle suggests ‘all understanding reflects the particularity of the knower, and therefore cannot be thought of as absolute’ (2001, p. 7). This notion affirms that my perspective on bodymind practice is not absolute because I am a part of the life-world. When I try to understand the bodymind phenomena and the world alike, my knowledge acquisition is affected by my “self” as a social construction with a particular history and culture. In other words, my bodymind is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is a result of historical, cultural and social interactions. In this sense, what I try to do in this chapter is to obtain a better understanding of my bodymind through the descriptions provided by others (from my acting community) where my bodymind has been constructed and nourished. The phenomenological method that I have employed to flesh out my experience further dictates that I am not a rational knower, but a knower ‘being in relation to an other – or many such situations’ (Barnacle et al. 2001, p. 8).

Phenomenology has provided the premises to understand how my subjectivity is related to others in the world. Phenomenology as a method encourages understanding this otherness as an integral component of the individual’s subjectivity. Describing my experience in acting
practice I did not intend to provide an absolute knowledge of how the bodymind consciousness works for me. Rather I tried to establish how the bodymind process is formed and functioned within the self and the other. This chapter therefore divides into two parts. In the first part I will explore the thick interview data structured according to the ontological categories already deployed. In the second section, I will discuss how these data contradict or consolidate with my own phenomenological descriptions.

Field work
The series of interviews with four actors were conducted during a field visit to Sri Lanka in September 2012. Most of the interviews took place in Colombo where the majority of the actors work. These interviews were one to two hours in length and were conducted in Sinhalese, which is the native language of the actors. The interviews covered a wide range of experiences through retrospections and remembrances. Later these thick descriptive data were transcribed and translated into English. I was particularly interested in this qualitative approach in order to allow the actors to talk about their experience without providing a preset questionnaire. The interviews were loosely structured to permit the actors to feel – and, indeed, to ensure, irrespective of their feelings – that they were not being purposefully framed into the researcher’s objectives.

The process of conducting interviews with the actors was somewhat different from a traditional ethnographer’s role. I was not preparing to meet an unknown target group, like how the ethnographer prepares to meet his research object as an outsider. I have been working and sharing my experiences with these actors for many years. Because the Sri Lankan theatre is a relatively small community, every other person in the industry is well known to each other. Therefore, my presence in the actors’ community was warmly welcomed (I suppose I chose individuals who would be warm towards me). The gap between me as a researcher and the actors I met as interviewees was not very apparent in our encounters. This familiarity, I believe, created a comfortable atmosphere for both parties rendering greater intimacy. In this sense, my role was somewhat more participatory than observatory in the interview process.

The questions I designed to guide the interview process were fostered in relation to my assumption that the holistic approach to bodymind practices plays a major role in the actor’s
learning process. The actors’ experiential data played a key role in analysing and interpreting how they understand their bodymind experience in the learning process of acting. Some possible difficulties and issues pertaining to such a project were anticipated. Despite the familiarity between the researcher and the target domain of research, focusing on actors’ bodymind experience and knowing process was a new approach for some of the actors I interviewed. Reflecting on their acting practices and articulating them in a particular language was not a familiar task for them. Due to the fact that most of the actors are not institutionally-trained, the reflection on their own works was not especially easy. Because of the lack of such a pedagogical culture, the actors were sometimes somewhat anguished in attempting to describe their innate experiences. On the other hand, as I have noticed, describing what and how they experience their relationships to the acting practice needed a particular reflection via which the actor was possibly able to bring out their perceptual experiences into a meaningful language. I observed that the language they employed impacted upon their ways of seeing and describing the acting experience and knowing process in a dichotomous way.

I. ACTORS’ EXPERIENCE

Kaushalya Fernanado is an award winning theatre and film actor who has been working in the Sri Lankan performance industry for the last three decades. She was brought up within a family where her mother is a well-known theatre director and a veteran actress in Sri Lanka. Kaushalya graduated from the University of Colombo and had worked as an English instructor. She continues her theatre career with the theatre ensemble formed by her mother and has directed new plays in the recent past. I conducted an interview with Kaushalya at her residence in Kotte, Colombo.

Jayani Senanayake started her performance career as a schoolgirl and had learned up-country dance forms and singing pertaining to traditional dance and folk rituals. She graduated from the University of the Visual and Performing Arts where she studied the Bachelor of Performing Arts degree in traditional Sri Lankan dance. She has won best actor awards and nominations for her performances in theatre. Jayani’s interview was conducted at her home in Pannipitiya, Maharagama.
Dayadeva Edirisinghe (Daya) has also been a busy actor in Sri Lankan theatre and television. Daya’s acting career spans almost four decades, mainly in theatre and television. Daya’s performances in theatre have been recognized at the State Theatre festival, awarding him the Best Actor and other accolades during the annual award ceremonies. He was enthusiastically engaged with my interview session at his residence in Rajagiriya, Colombo.

Wishvajith Gunathilake (Wishva) is also a popular actor in theatre and television. Wishva first started as an amateur actor in a theatre group formed by Somalatha Subasinghe. He is currently a prominent theatre and television actor who has played major roles in contemporary Sri Lankan theatre and television serials. I conducted an interview with him at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo.

Bodymind relation
Actors are not exceptional human beings. They live and work similar to other people in society. Actors also learn a myriad of body techniques every day. As a social being, from infancy to the adulthood, the actor is trained to master skills required for everyday life. From washing one’s face in the morning to a more complex technique such as riding a bicycle, or driving a car, human beings cultivate techniques through continual interaction with their environment (Lutterbie and Palgrave 2011, p. 133). When the actor begins a career of acting, she does not begin to master acting skills from a clean slate. The actor’s accumulation of everyday body techniques through the bodymind may function as a springboard to acquire new skills she explores in the theatre. But this contradiction is a major concern in the actor’s experience.

The contradictions between everyday body techniques and their application in performance situations reflect the ways that the actor understands her bodymind in theatrical enactments. Kaushalya, for example, resisted acknowledging a connection between everyday skills and their implications for stage acting. She told me how her mother insisted that she learn swimming, traditional Sri Lankan dance and ballet, folk singing and Indian classical music. However, Kaushalya made no connection between her previous body practices and later acting career. For her, these body practices were purely focused on the physical aspects of training. These physical trainings failed to provide what she had been searching for her theatre acting, which was training for her manasa, or the psyche (2012 pers. comm., 17
September). Because, for her, everyday techniques are physical; by contrast, acting practice needs a psychical labour to execute a good performance. In this case, everyday body techniques and acting techniques are demarcated by a body-mind duality.

The division between the physical and mental aspects in acting were repeated throughout Kaushalya’s interview. She repeatedly mentioned the imperative of cultivating the ‘psychological competence’ of the performer. This psychological competence, according to her, provides ‘food for the thoughts’. Kaushalya’s dissatisfaction with her early somatic training indicated how these learned body practices may not help to develop her ‘acting body’ when she performs on the stage.

The problem was that I realized that when I am acting, I use my body, my walk, hand in a very monotonous way. I felt that all the movements of my body were the same in the characters that I play. The voice was monotonous. As I said, I had a problem with my hand; it is a problem because I have not been able to immerse into the process (Fernando K 2012 pers. comm., 17 September).

She articulates here dissatisfaction with the fact that her walking, speech and gestures on stage too-closely resembled previous body techniques she acquired in everyday life. Her body schemata, such as walking, standing and other bodily comportments, begin to contradict with the bodily habits she cultivates, or wants to cultivate, in the theatre.

Stanislavski discusses this classical problem and states, perhaps slightly tongue-in-check, that the main challenge for the actor is to learn how to walk on the stage (Lutterbie and Palgrave 2011, p. 137). What Stanislavski meant by this statement is that the actor is always confronted by so-called natural behaviour and the theatrical behaviours on stage. Everyday skill acquisition of walking and the requirement of stage walking collide with each other requiring a need for a new habit body. As Kaushalya’s description revealed, that everyday habit body and the elimination of such a habit body in the theatrical enactment was a greater concern for her performance practice. However her understanding of the habit body was largely articulated as physical training that is not related to her mental faculties. Her discontentment was aroused due to the fact that she had not been able to connect her physical practices to the mental aspects of the body.

Attention, concentration, and relaxation are some of the vital elements that she emphasized as the mental aspects of the actor’s work. Talking about her performance in the recent bilingual play Kalu Māli, directed by Ruwanthi De Chickera, Kaushalya explained the
problem of ‘attention’ in her acting as a key aspect of the bodymind problem she experienced. In this production, she said that there were three lines that she could not remember every time she performed them. She knew these lines well enough but once she came to the point of delivering the lines, she said that she got ‘terrified and panicked’. She assumed that her attention was directed towards something else outside the current task and this created a panicked situation when she delivered these lines. She said that enhanced and improved attention enabled her to ‘concentrate’ on the role and eliminate or at least reduce panic. However, if her attention wandered beyond the performance space and attached to something else in her everyday life, her concentration was disturbed and the panic could return.

I discussed in chapter three how Stanislavski explores the notion of attention. He emphasises the value of attention to be able to develop self-communion for the actor. Through phenomenological analysis I further explored how Stanislavski’s notion of self-communion is not purely a mental state but a bodily attentiveness that the actor develops towards the target environment (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967). Merleau-Ponty also affirmed that attention is a bodily perceptual faculty that intends to couple with the outer object. This process occurs through a shifting of the individual’s existing object of attention to focus on another object of attention. The relationship between the attention and the object is explained through the gestalt of figure-background structure (1962, pp. 31-32). Stanislavski introduced the notion of attention to allow the actor to bracket mundane daily life and to develop the attentiveness towards the scenic situation. Tortsov, in An Actor Prepares, explains how intense observation of an object cultivates greater concentration and the ‘desire to do something’ (Stanislavski and Hapgood 1967, pp. 75-77). Tortsov’s assertion of attention affirms how this mental state is connected to the motor function of the body. For Kaushalya, attention is a mental process and enhances her concentration. The attention provides the greater concentration towards the task she enacts on the stage. She explained:

When I am performing in the theatre, at least for two hours, I am concentrating on someone else, the role that I am performing. So I forget everything; I even forget my kids which means I am in a different state. In the theatre when you are performing, your mind does not travel anywhere else. Because I know that if my mind is attached to something outside this act, then it ruins everything, my lines and so on (Fernando K. 2012 pers. comm., 17 September).
For Kaushalya, attention and concentration are mind aspects of the actor’s art. She stated that if she is able to concentrate on the task fully on the stage by bracketing the everyday life, she is capable of performing on stage and forgets her everyday tasks. However, Kaushalya’s identification of the ‘forgetfulness’ in her acting practice also verifies how her bodymind is intertwined and ingrained in the knowing process in the enactive situations. Attention and concentration are interlinked processes for her. If her attention is increased towards the acting task, then her concentration on the task is also increased. For her, this concentration on the task environment provides the relaxation for the body and mind.

The relaxation is very important; the whole body and mind. But being relaxed you cannot achieve the craft of acting. There is another thing, the preparedness. You need to be sure about your movements, your dialogues, positions, props, etc (Fernando K 2012 pers. comm., 17 September).

As Kaushalya notes, relaxation means relaxing both body and mind. This bodymind relaxation can only be achieved if she concentrates on the on-stage task by bracketing her everyday attentiveness and stopping her mind to travel beyond the scenic environment. She further argues that relaxation is meaningless if the actor is not prepared enough for the performance task. The preparedness provides the competence for her to be sure about her bodily movements, actions, dialogues and even stage props and other technical involvements. What Kaushalya’s description of attention, concentration, and relaxation signifies is that the bodymind relaxation she wants to achieve cannot be fulfilled without achieving somatic preparedness. Her articulation of the process seems dualistic but this description further verifies how the actor senses the importance of the bodily aspects of the psychic functions.

Jayani’s case is somewhat different from Kaushalya’s description. Talking about her apprenticeship in dance training, Jayani revealed (2012 pers. comm., 15 September) that her bodily comportments and the vocal apparatuses were constantly trained by the dance forms she practiced. She explained how she acquired the training for the vocal apparatuses while reciting vannam (special dance recitals that belong to traditional up-country dance in Sri Lanka) during dance performances. In up-country dance practices, dancers are trained to perform while singing these particular vannam that need to be sung in high pitch with long breaths. Jayani explained that her ability to hold a long breath during dynamic physical movements is the result of her previous dance and vocal practice. In her interview, Jayani
indicated how her previous body techniques played a significant role in the acquisition of her performance body in the theatre.

The traditional dance training I gained earlier permitted me to think that I can transform myself into another body. Because, in traditional dance, I was trained to dance many forms such as gajagā vannama (Elephant dance) and mayurā vannama (Peacock dance) in which you create movements of the animals through your body movements. I think because I was trained as a traditional dancer, this training I believe helped me to acquire skills such as movements, flexibility, stamina, voice projection, and mental stability that I need to apply on stage (Senanayake J pers. comm., 15 September)

The ability to project her voice (handa mudāhereema), bodily stamina and endurance (darāgeneema), awareness of body movements (shareeraya hesiraweema), and mental stability (manasika ekagrathawa) are some of the important skills she developed through traditional training. Although she identifies these skills as mental and physical aspects of the performance, she never categorized them via a hierarchical relation. She cultivated these skills through a single process of performing traditional dance. These dance practices, skills and knowledge simultaneously disciplined the mental and physical aspects of her body and provided the basis for her theatre practice when she started working as an actor. She gained this knowledge through an ‘unconscious process’ of being in the training situations. The skills that she accumulated were sedimented beneath her conscious awareness while enabling her to employ them in her acting practice.

Unlike these two actors already discussed, Daya and Wishva did not learn (traditional) somatic practices prior to their acting careers. Daya and Wishva’s learning process was constituted by their continual interactions with their social environment. The fusion between the life-world and the enactive-world seems a similar experience for Daya and Wishva in their knowing process of acting. For instance, Daya (2012 pers. comm., 19 September) mentioned several times in his interview how he is inspired to learn from daily life incidents and how these situations and their mood inform him to re-create enactive situations on stage. He talked about incidents that he experienced recently and how these incidents led him to think about re-creating and integrating them in his acting practice. The intense situations that he confronts with people in daily life taught him how people and incidents in real-life situations can be a source for his acting. The interaction of the daily lived experience and the lived experience in the enactive situation parallels Daya’s bodymind experience.
At night when I go to bed, I think about the incidents that I experienced during the day time. So, when I am recalling those daily incidents, I recall them with some characters in my mind. For instance, if someone scolded me during the day, I try to imagine that incident and think the whole situation in my mind as a dramatic act. So, I am re-enacting that life situation not in the real sense but in my imagination. In this way I learn a lot about people, behaviours and emotions. Today I had a dispute with a taxi driver. I now try to recall these incidents and how that guy reacted to me. His face, his actions and so on. These images are useful for me to act in the theatre (Edirisinghe D pers. comm., 19 September).

In this way, Daya tries to juxtapose his real life-incidents with theatrical enactments. Daya transposes his daily experience into characters he portrays in the theatre. In other words, Daya’s knowing process in acting is informed by the ‘embodied foundation of social relations’ (Gallagher and Schmicking 2010). This transposition, as Daya explained, occurs as a mental image and this mental image is later utilized as an ideal model to create his character. Primarily, Daya’s perception about how he grasps the knowledge from his environment is an inner or a mental process. These mental processes are later transformed into a physical reality. But Daya’s practice of transposing everyday experiences into theatrical reality affirms that his bodymind is constantly being intertwined with the other bodies he inhabits within certain social situations. These confrontations undoubtedly have affected his cognitive and physical regions allowing him to grasp the others’ bodies as a living text to extract meanings that he employs in the theatre. For Daya, this process starts with the mental imagery and transposes into physical forms allowing him to impersonate the role he performs.

Wishva’s inspiration to learn from the life-world began in his early career as an amateur actor. He talked about how his life experiences were always juxtaposed and paralleled to his theatrical knowing. His interview consisted of long narrations and incidents from everyday situations and how they overlap with his theatrical experience. Wishva’s life experiences were highly influential for him in developing his ideas on acting and the way he presents himself on the stage. Talking about an actor’s moral task, Wishva (2012 pers. comm., 18 September) told me that an ‘actor is a rare person’ who has the ability to converge both theatre and everyday life. For him, it is difficult to divide acting from everyday living because, as he said, ‘[t]here is no such thing called acting; it is just the life’. He said that the true actor is very rare because the actor should have comprehension of both worlds. This
amalgamation between everyday life and the enactive world was further juxtaposed when he talked about his involvement in creating a role for the theatre.

**Actor-character relation**

The actor’s approach to character building and attuning to the role is a key element of the acting process. The actor’s relationship with the character, as Rick Kemp suggests, is mysterious as well as obvious (Kemp 2012). It is mysterious because the spectator cannot see how the actor attunes to the role. It is obvious because it is the actor who presents herself on the stage (2012, p. 93). The actor’s task is to hide behind the role and present the character according to the given circumstances set by the dramatic text. But there are many variations to actors’ approaches to character building. My discussion about these four actors is largely focused on character portrayal in realistic styles of theatre.

In this mode of realistic performance, the actor perceives the character as a living/transcendental entity that emerges from the dramatic text. Very often, actors tend to think that the role they ‘give birth’ to should be a separate being that emanates from the actor’s own self. In order to get this result, the actor should be fully immersed in the role and disappear in the performance process. This approach is famously known as ‘impersonation’ or ‘transformational acting’ (Kemp 2012, p. 130). Each of the four actors interviewed expressed an ambition of immersing into the character and disappearing in the performance process. The difference between their techniques was that they employed either inside-out or outside-in approaches in gaining access to the character.

In Kaushalya’s interview she said that her previous acting experience in *Marat/Sade* was a mere representation of the outer structure of her ‘self’ (2012 pers. comm., 17 September). According to her, if the actor represents the ‘self’ as the role in the enactment, that performance seems a false representation, whereas, the actor’s intention should be finding a ‘truth’ of the role by allowing herself to immerse in the role she enacts:

> When I played in *Marat/Sade*, all the people said that my performance was really good. But I personally know that I cheated; my acting was not truthful. I tried to develop

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80 Sri Lankan adaptation of the Play *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* by Peter Wiess was translated and directed by Sugathapala De Silva in 1992.
some external forms that I perceived, modulated my voice, sang all the songs and projected myself to be able to be seen and heard by the audience. Nothing else. But there was one advantage that the role was quite similar to my age. So I presented the role as I present myself. I did not have any inner relation with it (Fernando K 2012 pers. comm., 17 September).

Kaushalya’s description reveals that her early experience of character playing was similar to the projection of her ‘self’ onto the role she presented. According to her, the real character playing starts once she finds the immersion with the role which, which transcends the outer representation of the character and begins to embody the inner truthfulness of the role (the description closely parallels Stanislavski’s notion of the inner life of the human spirit he explicated in An Actor Prepares). She called this process an ‘authentic’ approach to character playing. Kaushalya did not feel her character playing in Marat/Sade because she could not fully embody the inner content of the role she played. When I asked what her ultimate goal in theatre acting was, she further told me that, ‘when I am performing I want the other to see the role but not me. I like to dissolve myself in the role from which one cannot identify me’ (2012 pers. comm., 17 September).

The individual’s body image creates the sense of self. The self is a metaphorically constructed entity that results due to perceptual and motor grasping of the environment. Whether the actor is projecting the self or impersonating with the role, the process involves the actor’s perceptual and motor movements coupled with the actions given in the text. Cognitive science affirms that the actor’s preparation and creation of certain actions of the role develops a neural feedback process of how she feels what she does. As Kemp argues, this process is largely inaccessible to the individual’s reflective consciousness (2012, p. 93). Kaushalya’s hazy relationship with the self and the role demonstrates how it is difficult for the actor to get rid of the duality pertaining to the actor-character relation. Her passion is to merge the character’s self with her own self and experience ‘sameness’ with the role.

Jayani’s experience is somewhat similar to Kaushalya’s experience. She primarily understands her acting as a way of impersonating someone or something that she perceives in the real world. Thus she identifies her life as a dual existence between the life-world and the fictitious world. For her, acting is germinated from imitating life-world phenomena in the context of a theatrical enactment. In her approach to creating Sylvia in the play dawasa
thāma geunene (*The Typists*), she provided a description of how she found the person called Sylvia by asking certain questions. These questions provide her with a sense of actuality of the role she looks for in the text.

When I was playing Sylvia, I thought what sort of person is Sylvia? What would her parents be like? What sorts of things might she have liked... what kind of education might she have had? These types of questions are always asked. Likewise I always try to develop such questions and try to get answers to them. As you all know I haven’t done any formal actor training. When people ask about my acting, this is what I say (Senanayake J 2012 pers. comm., 15 September).

Jayani’s approach is to excavate the archaeology of the character by asking a series of questions and try to get answers to those questions. The character, which is written as a fictitious role in the dramatic text, is considered as a role derived from the everyday life-world. Asking certain questions and finding more information that is not provided in the text, Jayani intends to reconstruct the character as an actual image. Once she is satisfied with finding the correct self, in this case, the empathic self with Sylvia, then she finds the correct mood. Once the correct mood is found, she gets the correct voice. The correct voice is then followed by the correct body.

Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson, Kemp shows how two different approaches of empathic relationships function in such a situation to immerse with the character. They are known as advisory projection and empathic projection (2012, p. 106). These two methods are metaphorical approaches to how the actor can project herself onto another person or how the character’s values can be projected onto one’s own self. In advisory projection, the actor tries to project her values onto the character she imagines. Then the actor experiences the character’s life with her own values. This process is widely known as persona acting. In ‘empathic projection,’ the actor experiences the character’s life while projecting this person’s values onto her own self (2012, p. 106). This mode of empathy is known as transformational acting.

According to this analysis, Kaushalya and Jayani’s approaches to character playing seem empathic as both try to project characters’ values and qualities onto their selves in order to empathise with the roles they enact. As Kaushalya described, finding the inner truth of the

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81 *dawasa thāma geunne* (1999) is the translation of the American play *The Typists* by Murray Schisgal (1926-). This play was directed by Buddhika Dhamayantha and was first performed at Lumbini theatre, Colombo. 

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role helps to find what the character’s intention is. The intention provides the character’s values, objectives, and life goals for Kaushalya to empathise with. For Jayani, the process starts with the exploration of the inner mood and working out how to find the expressive body through the correct bodily comportments. In doing so, she creates a bridge between herself and the role. She did not clearly mention what she meant by the term mood, but I came to an understanding that she used the term ‘mood’ to indicate how the character provides a particular ‘emotional engagement’ with her. Asking questions about the role, she tries to find this emotional engagement with the character.

For Jayani, in the theatrical context, finding a ‘correct mood’ is attuning to the self of the character. The term mood here designates a particular affective awareness that exists in the attunement process.\(^8^2\) The mood of the character arises when she finds herself in the enactment. In other words, once the correct mood is established the whole structure of bodily sensitivities and motor capacities attune to the role. These motor movements begin to correspond with the qualities she empathises within the role. She starts to find the affective, emotional content of the character and work out how to find the proper movement structure for the role.

Although she explained the functionality of her method as a way of approaching character playing, she also confessed to me that in some occasions her method has failed to function as a tool to find the empathic relationship with the role. In her transcript, she discussed her failure of performing in a recent theatre production directed by Rajitha Dissanayake. In this play, *bakamunā weedi basiy* 2011 (*Owl on the Street*), she played the role Sujatha:

I have performed this role Sujatha for ten performances and I gave up playing it because I could not identify that role. I still have a problem with the script. I should say that Sujatha was not given a proper *form* and the *colour* in the text (Senanayae J 2012 pers. comm., 15 September *emphasis added*).

\(^8^2\) Nagatomo Shigenori explains how the individual’s engagement with the ambience renders such ‘affectivity’. Nagatomo argues that the affectivity is essential for the individual’s ‘coming-together’ with a particular ambience, an object or a situation to be able to make that engagement meaningful. The importance point that Nagatomo makes here is that this affective faculty is an ‘animation’ of the body. When this affectivity is arising through the bilateral engagement, the affectivity is characterised by ‘feeling-judgement’ (Nagatomo 1992, pp. 207-208).
In this case, for her, the character has not been given enough scope in the text. She uses metaphorical language to depict that the character has a *form* and *colour*. Form seems to be the outer structure, the motile qualities of the role. The colour perhaps indicates the ‘character qualities’ and ‘values’ she searches for in the text. These are the values that she intends to project onto herself. The dislocation between herself and the character appears as a result of her failure to grasp the given qualities. As Nagatomo argues the bilateral engagement of the body with the ambience sometime fails to negotiate (1992, p. 208). This failure of not being able to successfully grasp the role can trigger affective qualities again for Jayani.

In Kaushalya’s experience of acting in the play *Yadam (The Trial of Dedan Kimathi)* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, she exclaimed how she found the difficulties of finding a correct ‘internality’ of the role while trying to find the outer structure. As she described, first her approach was to find all the habits and behavioural aspects of the African woman and learn all the physical gestures and postures that would construct the role in the text. She explained:

I first learnt how those African women walk, sit, behave, etc. Then I started performing the play. While I was doing this character, one member from our theatre group once came up to me and said “Kaushi, your acting is ok but your soul is not there”. What he meant was that I was technically doing the character but there was no underlying thread in it. With this insight, I began to think what should I do to tackle this problem? Then I started thinking about this African woman. What is her ‘intention’? Then gradually I realized that I was beginning to immerse into her *process*; the intention of that woman (Fernando K 2012 pers. comm., 17 September *emphasis added*).

Although she managed to construct the outer structure for the role, she said to me that she was unable to find the ‘real internality’ of the role. Therefore she started to find the role by asking the question of what is the intention of that character? Subsequently, after a couple of shows she said to me that she managed to find the correct ‘internality’ of the role. She further said that after a while, when she was very much familiar with the process, she was able to tap into the correct mood, allowing herself to sense the internality of the character.

The relationship between the actor and the character, according to these actors, is characterized by inner and outer dualities. The finding of an ‘inner self’, the correct ‘mood’ or the ‘intention’ of the role designates their understanding of the character, which consists of interior and exterior parts. Engaging with the character in order to find the inner truth or the inner content creates a tensional relationship between the actor and the character. Kaushalya’s concern of not being able to grasp the ‘internality’ of the role affirmed that
although she managed to mimic the outer structure of the role, she failed to experience the ‘inner content’ of the role. Jayani also failed to grasp the role because she could not find the correct mood or colour of the role. The affective capacities and the motor functions in the process of attuning to the character thus are polarized as body and mind.

Daya’s first successful character portrayal took place in the 1975 play *thurang sanniya* (*The Horse by Julius Hay*) directed by Sugathapala De Silva. He was twenty-two years old when he first performed this role, but the character he had to portray was an eighty-year-old man who works as the owner of a bar. His method of approaching this role was described as imagining an old man and impersonating that imaginative character with his body. He said that “[i]t was a very old character; but this character was created in my mind” (2012 pers. comm., 19 September). This imagination of the old man is followed by the bodily comportment that will be aligned with the role. These bodily comportments of the old man were crucial to the transformation from his own self to the fictitious self.

When the actor tries to utilize a different bodily comportment on stage, these new physical gestures suggest a shift to the body schema that has already been sedimented through daily situations. When the actor’s body schema is changed due to the introduction of a new bodily comportment, then the actor’s body image also changes accordingly. In other words, if the actor assiduously trains new body movements, such as a new way of walking and speaking, this may directly affect how the actor’s self is perceived because these motor movements render a shift to the sense of self. This is what the impersonation process does for the actor.

Daya argued that the character’s body gestures, movements and postures are defined by the way that the actor is involved with the character. He used a Sinhala phrase to express this idea: “*thamun kochchara charithayath ekka innawada*” (how far you are being involved with the character). He further emphasized that the gestures and movements are generated through the way that the actor understands the character. According to Daya, the character is always embedded in a particular socio-cultural context. Therefore this character’s movements and gestures are defined by that socio-economic context. “If the social economic conditions are changed the bodily gestures are also been changed” (2012 pers. comm., 19 September). Then how does Daya explain his engagement with the character he portrays?
Daya’s observation of everyday situations and people provide preliminary engagement for imagining his character. These situations and human beings allow him to think about the ways that he can create the character as an ideal model (modèle idéal)\textsuperscript{83} in his imagination (Roach 1985, p. 125). Daya also used some metaphorical language to describe his experience. This imaginative character is identified, as he terms it, a ‘sketch’. Once this sketch is drafted, he then begins the process of ‘colouring’ the role. The term colouring was employed to indicate how he constructs the inner qualities of the role.

Daya further talked about how he recognises the primary qualities of the role by reading the text. Talking about his 2004 play 

*sihina horu aran* (Dreams are Robbed), by Rajitha Disaanayake, he told me how his character *piyarathne* was first conceived through what the character says in the text. For him, how the playwright has given the words to the character provides vital information to identify the role he enacts. For instance, he identified the character *piyarathne* with a metaphor of motion. As he explained, if the character speaks little dialogue he identifies the role as a *thanpath* or a ‘calm’ person. If the role is talkative his definition is that he is more ‘dynamic’ in character. If the role is a ‘calm’, tranquil person, then the tone of the character would be light. If the role is more dynamic, then the tone will be brighter. The perceptual grasping and the motor grasping are interlaced and transposed in Daya’s imagination of the role. His observation accumulates experiential data and is transposed into the locomotion of his acting body.

First and foremost, the metaphor of motion is understood through the fundamental movement qualities felt through the individual’s bodily movements. Mark Johnson’s studies have revealed how these understandings or meanings are generated through nonpropositional means of bodily interacting with the outer environment. Johnson identifies these nonpropositional meanings as image schemas (1987, pp. 1-2). Daya’s primary understanding (reasoning) of the role does not come from the unknown territory of a consciousness. As his metaphors suggest, his understanding and meanings come from his bodily-rooted understanding incarnated through his interaction with the environment.

\textsuperscript{83} French philosopher Denis Diderot (1713-1784) first commented on this notion of modèle idéal in order to explain how artists imitate nature. Diderot concluded that the artist’s immediate encounter with nature creates the modèle idéal permitting him to recreate these mental images in his chosen field of practice (Roach 1985b, p. 125).
A compelling description of the character transformation was stated by Wishva. In 1998, he was rehearsing the play *Mother Courage and her Children* directed by Somalatha Subasinghe. As an inexperienced actor, he was given an old character to play. He explained to me how he was having difficulties understanding and portraying the character. He then described the first performance experience of the character and how he found the key to the transformation:

I was so excited and at the same time panicked. Then I came to the theatre and I sat for the make-up. The make-up artist started to paint my face. He painted my hair with white colour and painted my face. After a while I looked at the mirror. I was astonished! I haven’t seen this strange person before. He was a different person. When I saw this figure I realized that this is not me. This is totally a different man. This feeling was indescribable. This feeling triggered me to move. I got up and started walking. Then I felt that my walking was changing. I was beginning to walk like a hunchback and my voice was changing accordingly. I was really astonished being persuaded by this image I saw in the mirror. I could not wait to go to the stage. Finally I went and...that is it...it was a great success (Gunathilake W 2012 pers. comm., 18 September).

Wishva’s description reveals how his connection to the character began from outer visual perception and worked into the inner world. After having make-up applied and seeing his reflection in the mirror as an old man, Wishva’s inner experience of being with the character began to accelerate. It was this visual perception that inspired him to find the character’s motor movements, which connected him to this psychological state of being as a ‘different person’. During his rehearsal process, as he explained to me, Wishva was continuously negotiating with his own self and the character’s self to find the sameness between him and the role. Finally he transported the character’s self onto himself through ‘empathic projection’ (Kemp 2012, p. 106).

In *Embodied Acting* (2012), Rick Kemp discusses a ‘model of learning’ strategy applied to the actor’s mastering of her art. The first stage of the learning process is for the actor to obtain the preliminary knowledge about the work she does. At this ‘conscious incompetence’ stage, the actor’s body is opened to absorb new changes that will arise through the connection between the body and the object attached (2012, p. 137). In the second stage, the actor tries to learn what he has explored in the text through transforming these textual meanings into physical processes. This is a ‘conscious competence’ stage for him. The actor is still conscious about what he does and tries to achieve the competence through repetition. The
final stage of learning is the ‘unconscious competence’ state where the actor is no longer conscious about her body and allows the body to execute the action that she has assimilated in the rehearsal process.\textsuperscript{84} The ‘skill has been assimilated to the extent that it has become part of the body schema’ (Kemp 2012, p. 137). This moment of bodymind integration is the focal point for the actor to enable her to perform without having any split or disagreement between consciousness and the body.

Wishva’s attempt to immerse with the character was not always an easy task for him. As he explained, his early experience of empathic projection brought him a real feeling of immersion. However, in his later acting experiences, he told me that he was not able to experience such transformation as a consecutive event. Due to this condition, Wishva then turned to try other ways of performing characters. As he described, his later approach seems similar to advisory projection, which explains how his own self projects onto the character he plays:

I experienced a real transformation in the play \textit{Mother Courage} and people talked a lot about my performance. Then I was trying to use the same method for the roles later, but I could not experience such a transformation. I then turned to myself and began to grasp my own self and perform it. While doing this I thought can there be many other persons within myself? Then I realized, with my own figure, you can perform different characters (Gunathilake W 2012 pers. comm., 18 September).

Wishva’s previous approach of empathic projection with the character has been changed in the course of his career. This affirms that there is no a single way to empathise with a role. Actors, as I have illustrated, have provided evidence that they have employed both ways to empathise with the role: projecting their selves onto the roles or projecting the roles’ values onto their selves. In both situations, what the actor achieves is a psychophysical habituation demanded by the values and behavioural patterns akin to the role they enact.

\textsuperscript{84} The actor’s competency in mastering a craft is also similarly described in Asian martial arts traditions and in related Buddhist teachings and meditational practices. The compelling example comes from the oldest text written by a Buddhist Zen monk, Takuan Zōhō. As Nagatomo describes, Takuan identifies the dualistic nature of mind and body. In order to overcome this duality he suggests applying particular cultivation practices pertaining to Buddhist meditational practice (\textit{techné}). Once the practitioner embodies the \textit{techné} through unremitting attention towards the body practice, this contradiction will disappear. This achievement is thus characterised by the state of ‘no-mind’ (Nagatomo and Leisman 1996, p. 443).
**Inter-actor relation**

Performance environments, of course, are almost always interactive and inter-personal and because of this present various challenges to those involved. Kaushalya affirmed, for example, that she experienced uncertainties regarding her interactions with partner actors. These uncertainties of interacting with bodies signify the tension created between herself and the perceiving subjectivities of others.

Kaushalya revealed her ambiguities of relating to other bodies in her initial experience of rehearsal processes. She particularly talked about her experience in relation to the *dhawala bheeshana* 1988 (*Men without Shadows* by Jean Paul Sartre) directed by Dharmasiri Bandaranayake. Kaushalya reflected on feeling, as a newcomer, naïve and vulnerable in the rehearsal process. On some occasions, she asked the director to rehearse her parts separately until she became confident enough to interact with other actors.

When I first go for a theatre production, I always have difficulties to interact with actors. So, it takes a while for me to get into other people’s bodies and interaction. I remember the director once said to me, “Kaushalya, don’t stay isolated, come and join with the group; otherwise you won’t be able to act.” I remember that I was so reluctant to embrace a male body that I was supposed to do in this play (Fernando K 2012 pers. comm., 17 September).

Kaushalya’s description here indicates two aspects of her reluctance to interact with the others. First, it is characterized by the division between the self and the other. Second, her uncertainty of the other is characterized by the gender division – male and female. This phenomenon seems to be culturally significant for the actors who work within certain social and cultural value systems, but phenomenology is interested in exploring the pre-reflective attunements between individuals. These primordial relations transcend, to some extent, the apparent cultural and social inhibitions that individuals experience in their daily dualistic life. Hence, the construction of the self and the other is paradoxically determined within Kaushalya’s experience of being with the other in the theatrical context. First, cultural, social or gender structures seem to be a part of the construction of her individual self which demarcates the ‘self’ as a separate existence from the others. On the other hand, as phenomenology suggests, this otherness is paradoxically bound with her cultural self through a not-yet-free level (Kwant 1963).
As discussed in chapter two, Merleau-Ponty argues how cultural artefacts may render a sense of otherness to the perceiver. These cultural artefacts sediment an ‘atmosphere of humanity’ in and around them (2002, p. 405). For a subject to see certain cultural artefacts is to sense that there are other human presences in the same spatial-temporal world. Sometimes these sediments are highly visible or culturally significant and sometimes they are ‘determinate in a low degree’ (ibid, p. 405) which means that ‘[o]ne senses another self without seeing whether they are male or female, young or old, and so on’ (Romdenh-Romluc 2010, p. 131). On other occasions, these cultural, social sediments can be highly recognisable.

For Kaushalya, in this rehearsal room context of interacting with others, cultural sedimentations appear highly determinate prior to the sensing of the generic human presence. In the theatrical context, when Kaushalya confronts with the other, she perceives the other as a highly determined cultural object. In other words, she sees the other as an ‘opposite sex’ and marks her territoriality of the self as a conscious subject against the opposite actor’s self. When she engages with another actor, she begins to perceive the other not as a similar human being, but as a ‘cultural object’ saturated with gender identities that divides her from the other. These ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ are generally based on the empirical self and how the individual identifies herself as a separate being from others. Nevertheless, there are some other ways that these cultural meanings may help to create unison between individuals. In other words, my conscious awareness as a unified self is created in relation to the existence of another self-conscious being. I am existing because there is other.

It is not my intention here to deny the cultural implications of the construction of the self and the other. However, consideration of the cultural construction of the self also potentially affirms a pre-reflective shaping of ego consciousness. The division between the self and the other is the result of this operation of the ego consciousness. However, according to Merleau-Ponty’s assertion, ego consciousness is the result of the actor’s higher-order operation (conscious operation) of the perceptual faculties and their interactions with the outer world (Kwant 1963). These conscious operations reflect cultural and social inhibitions between the self and the other by hiding their inherent reversibility between individuals and the other. Despite these conscious levels, there are other layers through which the actors’ bodies are being touched and communicated. The actor’s bodymind is already being attuned to others beneath the layer of these social and cultural boundaries.
In Jayani’s interview, she talks about the ways that her body is engaged with the other bodies through intersubjective occurrences. She said that she wants to feel how the other actor feels, senses, breathes and moves in order to develop a mutual relationship in the rehearsal space (2012 pers. comm., 15 September). She said that when she comes to rehearsals, she ‘feels’ how the other actors feel on that day, how they breathe and sense at the rehearsal. She believes that if the actor wants to feel how the other actor feels, the actor needs to develop a close relationship with the other. Observing and sensing the other actor’s body she finds her own corporeality and similar trajectories between herself and the other. She states that ‘you should enjoy the other actor’s body; you don’t have to panic with the other person’s flesh! If I panic with other’s bodies, how can I act with them?’ (2012 pers. comm., 15 September).

Merleau-Ponty insisted that emotional expressions are not only ‘internal psychic factors’ but are ‘types of behavioural or style of conduct’ (Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 182). Those emotions are not hidden behind bodily comportments but are embedded in physical actions. Merleau-Ponty further suggests that the other’s consciousness is not a puzzle as subjectivity is reflected through comportments or the ‘type of conduct’ towards the world, which reveals so called higher-order conscious life (ibid, p. 182). Similarly, Grotowski, as seen in the chapter three, argues that understanding the partner actor lies within the understanding of corporeality, emotions and movements displayed through bodily motility (2002, p. 130). As Jayani stated, her understanding of others depends on the observation and perception of the other actor’s body. Reading facial and motor movements allows Jayani to make a meaningful relationship with the other actor. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, ‘[t]he perspective on the other is opened to me from the moment I define him and myself as conduct at work in the world’ (cited in Luft and Overgaard 2011, p. 182). The rehearsal space opens avenues for actors to read their presences as an interlocking transference of meanings shared between their perceptual faculties.

Describing her involvement with the script reading, Jayani revealed how she was further influenced by her co-actors in the dialectics of reading a text. Jayani’s initial reading is a cold reading. She does not concentrate on emotions or particular meanings derived from the text. She allows herself to merge with the other actor’s voice and find the meaningful delivery through hearing the other’s voice. She explained:
First, I just read the text. In my initial readings, I do not try to touch any feelings or emotion. Then after I start reading with other actors, then I begin to experience emotions. That means I begin to understand how I am going to react to another actor’s voice. This is what I first do; just to react to the other person’s dialogue. If the other actor asks you a question, the way he asks it, the tone, the pitch, the meanings, affect my reply to him. My reply is formed by the other person’s vocal delivery (Senanayake J 2012 pers. comm., 15 September).

As Jayani’s experience suggests, the meaning of the text, rhythm, tone and the phrasing of the dialogue delivery is absorbed and learnt through merging with actor’s bodies and voices. In a dialogical conversation, the actor becomes a ‘dual being’ (Diprose and Reynolds 2008, p. 156). Merleau-Ponty writes about language as a special ‘cultural object’ which renders our understanding of the other as embedded in us. The actor’s bodymind grasps the other actor’s bodymind in a shared space of conversation. Jayani begins to feel and emotionally engage with her dialogues once her utterances are connected to the other actor’s delivery. In a dialogical relationship Merleau-Ponty states that ‘my thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric’ (2002, p. 413). The result of this communion of learning dialogue is that the two actors come to a shared space of conversation that enables them to feel that neither of them are the creator of that conversation (ibid, p. 413).

In the process of reading a text, actors tend, at least initially, to be trapped in this dichotomy of the self and the other. Actors identify their character’s lines as given to ‘me’ and the other character’s lines as given to ‘others’.85 Merleau-Ponty argues that infants do not distinguish the self and the other as separate worlds until they develop a subjective perspective (cogito) around the age of twelve (2002 p. 414). However, during reading sessions, as Jayani suggests, her intention is to blend her voice together with the partner actor so as to obtain the feeling of everyday conversational situations. In the everyday conversational situations, subjects are not necessarily conscious of how to deliver every word, sentence or grammar structure. Much of the conversation occurs beyond the conscious control of both parties.

One of the key factors that Daya emphasized about inter-human relationships was the importance of ‘freedom’ in acting. What did he mean by the term freedom? How does it

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85 When I observe some rehearsal process and how the actors’ relate to their texts, I have noticed that some of the actors have a habit of highlighting their role and the lines with a highlighter. This affirmed to me how these actor’s are keen to mark the division between self and the other in the text reading.
relate to the inter-human relation? Once again Daya used metaphorical language to articulate this meaning. According to him, the actor should be freed like a ‘blank paper’. The paper should be cleaned so that any unnecessary marks or scratches should not be seen or visible. Daya explained:

I believe that the actor should be freed; free from any attachment and free from himself. Then he can easily transform. He should be like a blank paper. The more you clean it, the more you can draw. But you need to keep it clean every day. If you draw things upon the old sketches, it won’t work at all. Before you draw anything the paper should be cleared. But how do you get it cleaned? That is the tricky part. It only can be cleaned by relating to the other actors and minimizing the issues, problems, ideologies and whatever differences we experience among each other and maintaining a healthy relationship among us. That is how you could become a free actor (Edirisinghe D 2012 pers. comm., 19 September).

The metaphor of ‘cleanness’ he referred to denotes the psychological freedom of the actor. In Daya’s case this freedom cannot be actualized in isolation but is achieved through the empathy of others. The performative freedom and the subsequent joy of acting can only be achieved through intersubjective understanding. He emphasized the importance of understanding the other actor in order to deliver a good performance. On the other hand, he is aware of the difficulties and challenges that the actor experiences during this infusion of bodies.

For Merleau-Ponty, freedom is not an absolute phenomenon that is situated outside human existence. He argues that freedom arises and embeds as a situated freedom (Kwant 1962, p. 208). What Merleau-Ponty denotes here is that one cannot experience a sense of absolute free-self through disengaging with the other. Instead, the freedom for me is situational and is being part of the other. In that sense, Daya’s account of freedom and intercorporeal relation is not absolute but is a relational and situational phenomenon within the theatre context. He spoke of achieving his freedom to perform and become other. Daya

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86 This idea again corresponds with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of body-subject. As seen earlier, the body-subject operates within a not-yet-free level, which means it has already made meaningful engagements with its surrounding prior to the individual’s conscious attention. In other words, the body-subject is already engaged with the other through its operative intentionality of the body. Therefore, as Kwant argues, Merleau-Ponty was opposed to the idea of ‘absolute freedom’ that was conceptualized by his colleague Jean Paul Sartre. Rejecting Sartre’s notion of absolute freedom, Merleau-Ponty concludes that freedom is always ‘interwoven with the field of existence’ (Kwant 1963, p. 208).
achieves this freedom to perform through intersubjectively being-in-the-enactment. The more the actor intertwined with the other, the more the actor experiences the freedom. In fact, the only way to become a free subject of acting, for Daya, is to experience the totality of being with the other.

Among the actors, Wishva offered the most compelling revelation of intersubjectivity. Wishva’s relationship with his dog revealed another dimension to this discussion. Having a nineteen-year-old dog and being inspired by its emotions, Wishva talked about how he learned human emotions and behaviours through observing his dog. This human-animal interaction revealed how Wishva was pre-reflectively inflected by his dog:

I was really upset when I first saw this little puppy lying down on the garbage. I took her and brought her into my room and said, “You can stay here forever”. So, since then she is still with me. Nineteen years of age, blind and can’t hear anything. She is the one who taught me about animals. Actually it is indescribable. I also have some animal, dog behaviours because of her. We share a lot of things. We understand each other very well. If I am away from home, she does not eat. So I was so attached to this dog and literally I began to see other dogs as humans. I can see different characters in dog’s faces; I can read their faces. I sense people very well and I gained this ability from my dog (Gunathilake W 2012 pers. comm., 18 September).

Wishva’s account of his relationship with the dog explains how he relates to animal behaviour and emotions. He does not see his relationship with the dog as a hierarchical human-animal relation. When narrating this story his tone was very similar to a description of a human relationship. He described his relationship with his dog as an emotional relationship that he similarly shares with other human beings. The exciting factor of this description is that he brings out very important research aspects of human-animal relationships and how animal and human beings share similar emotional experiences as well as space and time in the life-world.

Wishva’s account of animal relationships not only explains human-centred description of how he perceives his dog, but also of the extent to which his dog develops an emotional relationship with him. Peta Tait’s studies on animal performances reveal how emotional connections create a bridge between animal trainers and the animals trained (Tait 2012). Tait explains how animals observe trainers physically and learn to perform through body-to-body modes of exchange. Trainers also observe physical changes of the animal during performance training sessions in order to understand the mood of the animal (2012, p. 184). The trainers
acquire ‘attunement’ to the animal bodies after being with animals for a long time and within
close proximity (ibid, p. 184). As some of the trainers claim, they can manipulate animals
without even seeing them but sensing them through the body (ibid, p. 185). This statement of
sensing through the body and understanding the animal behaviours suggest that pre-reflective
comprehension is possible in human-animal interactions. This exchange of affective
meanings is not widely expressed in language but the intercorporeal attunement occurs at an
unspoken pre-reflective level.

In this section on the actor and the other, I have explored how these four actors explain
their relationships with other actors in enactive situations. Discussing Kaushalya’s
description about her engagement with the other, I discussed how the actor experiences the
vulnerable self through the gap created between self-consciousness and the other. Jayani
revealed how she learned acting through observing other bodies. Daya talked about how
important it is for him to imagine others, ideal models, in order to create his characters.
Further, he talked about another aspect of the other by emphasising how important it is for
him to attune to the other to be able to access the performative freedom. Wishva’s account
further affirmed how his subjectivity is intertwined with nature. In the discussion of the actor-
other relation, Wishva’s account of his animal interaction further verified that consciousness
is not a separate, self-given entity, but a product of ongoing bodily interaction with the
surroundings.

II. DEPARTURES AND CONVERGENCES

In this section I compare the material generated by the actors’ interviews with the discussions
that have preceded this material, chiefly my phenomenological description provided in
chapter four, but also the broader theoretical insights of phenomenology and of acting
pedagogies discussed, respectively, in chapters two and three. As part of this discussion, I
will be drawing together (in summary) many of the overall threads of the thesis as a whole: in
this way, the following section functions almost as a pre-conclusion to the overall conclusion
that follows it. My perhaps somewhat wilful general argument in this section is that even
though the actor interviews often articulate a split between body and mind, an affirmation of
bodymind wholeness is consistently latent in those very articulations of duality.
Without doubt, the interview descriptions expressed an understanding of the experience of the actor’s work that is polarized between mental and bodily processes. The actors I have discussed in this chapter demonstrated how they make meanings of their beings and act in their environments in relation to certain realities of the world they grasp as a knowledge base for their practices. For them, these realities exist outside their subjectivities and remain as stable truths providing access to knowledge (Kwant 1963, p. 65). This creates a gap between the cognitive and visceral experiences of the actor as two distinctive domains of knowledge acquisition.

Duality and the gestalt

The actors’ understanding of their bodies, and how they function, and relate to other human beings, were codified within dualistic attitudes to body-mind practices. Because the actor’s body is the centre of their art and experience, the cognitive faculties and the physical processes always collide together in reflecting their practices. The body as a ‘thing’ (matter) and the body as an ‘existence’ (mind) are juxtaposed in many experiential data provided by them.

When the actor is at work, she is confronted with two ongoing issues pertaining to acting practice: one is epistemological and the other is existential. It is epistemological because the actor’s involvement with a particular enactment demands certain knowledge acquisition. This engagement exemplifies how and in what ways her bodymind is attuned to make meanings with the enactment. Reading a text, improvising it into a physical actualization, and engaging with other actors and the environment, demonstrate how the actor’s perceptual and motor activities are epistemologically vital in gaining knowledge to enliven the performance situation. On the other hand, the actor’s attunement to her enactment is also existential because her intention is to find a mode of being via which she can transcend her own self into a character and be with others within an imaginative realm.

In both cases, the actor’s psychosomatic apparatuses need to be highly attuned and refined in order to achieve these tasks. This process involves both the actor’s perceptual and motor capacities, enabling her to grasp the skill required to perform in such an imaginary situation. This is what Merleau-Ponty has identified as a ‘higher-order function’ of the human body. Actors very often identify this higher-order existence as a mind function over the body.
Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is a ‘relative concept’ and can be experienced in different levels (Kwant 1963, p. 47). The corporeality could incarnate as a higher level of conscious attitude and individuals may identify them as mental functions (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. xvi). But for Merleau-Ponty, this higher-level function is never a separate consciousness but an integral part of corporeality itself (ibid, p. 47).

As I have discussed, the self is the result of such higher-order operation of the perceptual activities and it carries its own cultural and social baggage with it. An individual’s interactions with the world therefore are orientated through his own ways of dealing with the surroundings. The world is perceived through the self-centred position and this ego-centric position defines the self and the world as two separate entities. This perceptual grasping of the environment can render different meanings and awareness for each individual in different ways. These different ways of perceiving and dealing with the environment creates individual identities. Phenomenology argues, however, that an individual is not an absolute self-conscious being but is a project of the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002). In that sense, there are possibilities that individual’s subjectivities can be converged with others, but a comparison between actors’ subjectivities and their experiences still represents a complex and a challenging task.

The juxtaposition of these four actors’ interview data with my own bodymind experience raised several methodological problems. First, throughout this research project, I have been largely influenced by phenomenological thought and its understanding of bodymind. This understanding influenced me to articulate my bodymind experience in phenomenological ways that I explicated largely in chapter four. This description critiqued the common notion of bodymind function as a duality and thus argued for an understanding of the bodymind experience of the actor that is simultaneously embodied, epistemic and aesthetic.

The actors I have interviewed have no or little familiarity with these phenomenological discussions of the lived body. While I have articulated my bodymind experiences in the light of phenomenology, the actors have described their experiences through the ways they feel them. However, these actors’ interview data reveal that their modes of practice and how they feel them are a product of ideological and discursive contexts within which they are embedded. These cultural codings have been part of their construction of self and the ways they perceive their own cultural practices.
This factor is also applicable to my upbringing as an actor in Sri Lankan theatre. I may have the same perceptual and motor habits pertaining to certain cultural, social and aesthetic value systems in which I have been working. This project initiated due to such prejudices and practices that I have experienced in my acting community. As I argued earlier, the body-mind duality is omnipresent in local conceptions of acting practice. This project has therefore allowed me to find ways to analyse this problem through the knowledge I gained through phenomenology. It provided a method and tools to bracket off such dualities, enabling me to describe the bodymind as a holistic experience in my acting practice. But during this project, I noticed that how the actors ‘feel’ their bodymind practice and how I have ‘described’ my bodymind experience are characteristically different approaches in reflecting the bodymind knowing in acting.

The phenomenological level of embodiment explores how individuals feel things in their daily circumstances (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, p. 103). The phenomenological reflection makes this region of experience explicit in order to understand how humans make meaning for themselves and with others through social interactions. This direct feeling of things can range from tasting coffee, the touch of a body, listening to a piece of music, or watching a play. Living a life means experiencing things in certain ways and embodying them in and through the body. This body-world interaction occurs through making meanings, reasoning them, acting and communicating them with others.

However, phenomenological reflection not only reflects how you feel certain things but hypothesises how these experiences structure our unconscious experiences (Barnacle et al. 2001). My description differs from these actors in that my experience not only provides how I feel my bodymind in the enactive situations, but how I assume the ways that bodymind experience is pre-reflectively structured in my practice. This marks a primary departure between my reflections and the actors’ interview data provided in this chapter.

This primary departure between my bodymind description and the four actors’ interview data is characterized by this methodological distinction. The distinction is articulated through the ways these individuals and myself described the acting process. My approach largely foreshadowed phenomenological reduction of bracketing off the empirical consciousness in order to arrive at some primordial meanings. These four actor’s interview data generated through semi-structured interviews are not directly akin to the method I employed. Even though their interview data were generated through stories and narratives
during the interview process, they were limited by certain restrictions posed by the presumptions of body-mind dualities inherent in their practices. As seen in the previous section, mind aspects and body aspects were clearly divided in describing the bodymind experience in acting.

**Habit and techniques**

In chapter four, I described how the paradox of cultivating a new habit body was an ongoing search for my apprentice body. I argued that the actor needs to find an ‘unknown body’ through the ‘known body’ that the actor has inherited from her social life. Using these two terms, I tried to distinguish two types of body schema, namely daily and non-daily body schema, to argue how the actor transforms from an everyday habit body to a more refined scenic body. I further argued that daily spontaneity is not enough for the actor to execute action in imagined situations. I described how it is important for me to cultivate theatrical spontaneity through habituating my bodymind in the theatre. I introduced an actor’s *aporia* to explain this paradox. This *aporia* signified the dualistic experience of bodymind during a transformation of daily body techniques to a much more refined non-daily body technique in an imaginative situation.

I described how my bodymind experience of everyday situations contradicts with the acquisition of new skills in the theatre. For me, accumulating a new skill requires a conscious attention towards the target activity in order to learn it. This conscious attention was paradoxical. In order to perform a certain skill with precision and ease, I realized that the conscious attention needs to be removed from its inherent attentiveness towards the target object. I further explored how this conscious attention incarnates in enactive situations and interrupts the flow of the bodily action. One way of avoiding this inherent attentiveness was to habituate the actions learned to a point where the bodymind takes hold on the enactment. Once the activity is fully comprehended by the bodymind, the bodymind is capable of executing the activity without being conscious of it. I realized how important it is for the actor to cultivate this unconscious competence state in executing a creative act.

In the earlier discussion, I have explored how some of these actors conceive their daily attitude of body practices and how they demarcate these practices as mental and physical. Kaushalya particularly opposed the idea that her previous bodily techniques impacted upon
her theatrical spontaneity. She contrasted her body training as purely physical against the mental preparedness. Even though she prioritized the mental aspects of the acting process, she further revealed that in order to execute a successful performance, she needed to ‘relax with her body and mind’. She argued that when she is fully involved with the performance, her mind does not travel anywhere. This experience indicates that she was (unconsciously) aware of the bodymind function as a unified entity in the actor’s practice and how this unification lends ease and precision to her performance.

Jayani, Daya and Wishva each described their interaction with the life world and how these practices and encounters impacted on their acting practices. Jayani explained her previous dance training and how this training influenced her to cultivate a flexible bodymind. But her analysis was described in physical and mental terms. Daya had no prior somatic training but talked about how his acting practice has been influenced by everyday incidents and interactions. In his interview, he also articulated his convergence with the social environment as a mental and physical relation. His method of approaching acting was conceived through the notion of an ideal model and this model was identified as a mental imagery incarnating in the mind and transposing into bodily expression. Similarly, Wishva also acknowledged his relationship with the social and natural environment. Rather than dividing his process as mind versus body, Wishva emphasized the importance of understanding the actor’s work within ‘nature’ as a single process. The actors’ interviews revealed how perception of their life world is characterized by the ways they inhabit their environment, but they rarely identified connections between motor habits and perceptual habits and how these schemata are interrelated.

What I have tried to establish in my description was how these two poles, namely bodily action (body schema) and the intellect (perception), are not two separate functionalities but an intertwined and interdependent phenomenon. However, it was evident that learning a technique or mastering a particular habit is purely a physical endeavour for these actors. This physical learning had nothing to do with the intellect or the perception of the body. But my phenomenological description was set out to argue that these two poles are not separate: perception, rather, is an embodied and epistemic function in the actor’s corporeality. In the second chapter I discussed how Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the body-subject affirms that habit formation (body schema) combines both perceptual and actional faculties of the performer. In ‘Eye and Mind’, Merleau-Ponty describes how the eye and the
movements are interlocked in the perceptual grasping (1964, p. 162). The visual field opens up for individuals to interact with the environment: ‘Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the “I can”’ (ibid, p. 162). These two maps (vision and motor) complete individuals’ bodily grasping of the objects, combining the ‘visible world’ and ‘motor projects’ into a single enactment (ibid, p. 162). Cultivating a habit body for a performer is not only habituating her physical or sensory-motor functions, but her perceptual faculties are also being simultaneously habituated into a higher level of grasping of her surroundings.

Cognitive analysis of the actor’s work also affirms this stance. Memory, attention, executive function, movement, gestures and language are six key areas via which actors connect their bodies to the creative process (Lutterbie and Palgrave 2011). The elements such as memory, attention and executive function ostensibly appear as the mental aspects of the actor. The movements, gestures and language are considered to be more physical. Although these key areas may appear as mental and physical aspects of the actor’s craft, they are not separated functionalities in the skill acquisition of the actor. This can further be illustrated through an actor’s gestures.

Actors very often experience awkwardness when using their hands in performance situations. Hand gestures are perceived as a part of the physical comportment. They are considered to be representations of meanings conveyed in speech acts. But cognitive science argues that gestures are not representational of the language. Language and gestures are interdependent (Lutterbie and Palgrave 2011, pp. 123-124). When Kaushalya told me that ‘I have a problem with my hands’, she indicated that she was having an issue with what to ‘do’ with her hands. The problem with this perception, as Lutterbie suggests, is that the actor perceives the hands gestures as ‘a form of movements’ (Lutterbie and Palgrave 2011, p. 123), but gestures are an integral part of the language and thought process. The gestures do not convey meanings alone and language does not convey meanings without the gestures. Both faculties are intertwined in the process of speaking (2011, pp. 123-124). The fact, however, is that one cannot separate gestures from language because both functionalities stem from the same area of the brain (ibid, p. 124).

Lutterbie states that when the individual acquires skills in everyday situations to accomplish certain activities, this skill acquisition process allows the individual to develop neural templates that facilitate performance of the task while paying attention towards other
multiple activities. While the individual’s conscious attention focuses on a particular task, ‘the habitual pattern provides the flow of movements’ (Lutterbie and Palgrave 2011, p. 137). In performance situations, the actor uses her memory to forget one set of body techniques in order to acquire another set during skill acquisition. Lutterbie argues this cognitive function is related to the active suppression of an old set of body memories and paying attention to grasp a new set of body techniques (2011, p. 109). The actor simultaneously uses ‘intentional forgetting’ and intentional attentiveness to capture a new body schema. This model of body schema begins to operate autonomously when the actor is fully grasped by a particular activity on stage.

Theatrical situations demand different ways of behaving on the stage. These four actors were aware that their bodies were demanding new ways of moving and working on the stage. When the actor is acquiring a new way of behaving on the stage through changing his bodily comportments, these behavioural changes also affect the perception of the actor. Simply, when the body develops new ways of behaving, this affects the performer’s ways of thinking. As Lutterbie suggests, the body techniques work like building blocks. They provide a foundation for acquiring new skills and performing them with the sedimented skills (2011, p. 133). When the actor masters a particular movement pattern or action, it becomes a second nature of the body. This second nature of the body schema works without a particular ‘perceptual monitoring’ (2011, p. 139). When the actor is in the rehearsal situation, her bodymind habituates new ways of moving with the dialogues created between the bodymind and the space. It is not that the actor habituates his mind aspects first and transfers those perceptual habits into bodily expressions. Whether the actor starts his performance process from the inner to the outer or outer to the inner, the process sediments both motor and perceptual habits simultaneously in executing a creative act.

Embodiment of a role
In my description of the attunement with the role in *Kontharāththuwa*, I described the preliminary process as a direct engagement with the actions described in the text. Rather than analysing a particular inner content of the role, my approach was to replicate the given situations by embedding the actions in and through my body. I described how the imagination as a mental agency simulates the character as an actional being. I illustrated how the actor transposes the imaginative character into a sensory motor experience. In this process, I
further described how this reciprocity between the body and the actions stimulate affective faculties and enhance the grip between the body and the enactment. These affecters were the result of my grasping of certain actions akin to the role I perform. These affecters provided my emotional engagement with the character, my failures and my successes, my aesthetic experiences and judgements towards the construction of the role. My description primarily explored how my bodymind is primordially grasping the character without distinguishing it as an inner and outer construction. Therefore, what differs from these actors’ experience and mine is that my phenomenological description revealed a direct, non-thetic bodily awareness of the enactment as a gestalt experience.

My phenomenological description began with the question of how the actor makes the character he impersonates as a believable existence. The question that I raised was existential: does the actor impersonate the character or does the actor represent himself with his affective capacities to portray the character? This ontological problem was characterized by the actor’s understanding of the character as a dual existence - body and mind. I raised the question of the character as a non-existence until the actor embodies the character as an enactment. If the character is perceived as consisting of a consciousness and a body, then how does the actor perceive the character with her own bodymind?

Describing my experience, I realized that what my bodymind does in this situation is mimic the actions described. This primordial understanding and awareness was directly related to my bodymind and how my conscious experience is characterized through my bodily intentionality. In other words, I had an intuitive awareness that my conscious experience was replicated by my bodily actions. I applied this tacit understanding when I tried to understand the character’s inner world. This tacit understanding was rooted in the bodymind relation with the text. The text and the situation described provided a background via which the action of the character presents as a figure. Phenomenologically speaking, the law of figure-background structure is applied in this situation. My bodymind captures the character as a figure against the background structure of the situations illustrated in the text. When I use my pen, for instance, I perceive it and my bodily comportment makes a meaningful connection with it in order to be able to identify it as a pen. Perceiving and manipulating the pen in my hand affirms that it is a meaningful object for me. I can use it as a writing tool. My bodymind relationship with the character was somewhat similar to this. But theatre is different. The character that I am ready to perform is not an object, perceivable to
my visual and tactile perception. It is a perceptual image derived from the linguistic construction in the text. But still I perceive it as something attached to my consciousness. When I perceive the pen, my bodily operative intentionality was actively engaged with the manipulatory function of the object. Similarly, I assumed that the character I perceive has this manipulable, usable nature to my bodymind. If I further refine this statement, I would say that my body is being grasped by the character I perceive as an actional object embedded in the text. The retention of the character as a one-sided structure is being developed through my protention\(^87\) of how these actions are improvised within the given situation.

My conclusion was that because the character I play is a textual construct, what I need to do is to understand what this character ‘does’ in the situations given in the text. I described how I tried to understand the character’s intentionality by capturing its action in the given circumstances. This may sound superficial but what the bodymind does in the pre-reflective level is to engage with its ambience in action. I described this reciprocity between my bodymind and the character as an ‘actional relation’ rather than a ‘mind relation’. I described how my bodily intentionality grasped the character’s actions described in the text as preliminary ways of attuning with it. In doing so, I did not intend to reduce the actor’s complex process of attuning with the character into a mere imitation of actions, but what I wanted to demonstrate was how the bodymind grasps the character as a series of actions combining them in and through the body. This instinctive understanding, I claimed, facilitates the projection of my bodymind onto the character through finding an equilibrium between my bodymind and the character I perform.

In this sense, my approach to character building was somewhat similar to what acting theory identifies as persona acting (Kemp 2012, p. 130). Persona acting is generally conceived as projecting actors’ own selves onto the character and performing them with the actor’s own values. Even if the actor performs different characters at different situations, the actor’s persona can still be apparent in the role. But in the acting industry generally, persona acting has less currency than transformational acting. Character or transformational acting is more favoured than persona acting because it signifies a clear transformation of the actor into

\(^87\) This is a phenomenological term that signifies the anticipation of, or one’s ability to project, the unseen aspects of an object prior to the grasping of its other sides.
different character qualities and behaviours. As Kemp argues, this distinction between the actor’s approaches to character building should be understood through an ‘empirically reliable way’ (2012, p. 131). What he suggests is to understand these approaches through the physical movements that actors use. The transformational actor uses a ‘variety of behavioural communicators’ in the process of attuning to the character (ibid, p. 131), whereas the persona actor uses limited body movements similar to her own in developing a character. This absolute distinction is not always useful when the actor’s process is concerned. As I will demonstrate here, the actors I have interviewed have generally fallen into these two categories. However, a close observation of their practices further reveals that these categories often overlap or, indeed, are exchanged from one project to another.

As the interview data suggests, the actors’ approaches to character building generally fall into these two poles – persona and transformational acting (Kemp 2012, pp. 130-131). Kaushalya much favoured empathic projection in her acting practice, finding the inner content of the character and transposing it onto her own self. But she further affirmed that in some projects she failed to find the character’s values and transpose them onto herself. She revealed that one of her successful performances was not crafted through this empathic projection but presenting her ‘self’ and the values onto the character she played.

Wishva’s description also described various approaches to acting. As I explored in the previous section, he first experimented with finding the character’s values and projecting them onto himself; but, as he revealed, he too failed to do this repeatedly and later he tried to find the ways that he could project himself over the character he played. His argument was that because the actor may have several selves, he could possibly use these different selves to portray various characters with different qualities. Wishva’s argument challenged the idea of an irreducible or absolute self when he discussed how he used different selves to portray characters.

Daya’s perception of character and performing in the theatre is primarily related to empathic projection. But this division between the persona (advisory projection) and transformational (empathic projection) acting was not clear cut. Many convergences between these two methods emerged in his interview. He observes the social world and grasps human behaviours. Then, this information transposes into his imagination as an ideal model. The creation of an ideal model is not purely a creation of an imaginary character. As he described, the process of creating an ideal model is an amalgamation of both the imagery and his own
values combined together to create the character. Daya’s interview transcript further revealed that creating an ideal model is not just ‘an imitation’ of a character he observes in social situations. Rather, it is how he combines his own values and the images together to reconstruct the role through his own body and mind.

My experience of approaching character building and these actors’ approaches converge on several levels. As far as character building is concerned, whether the actor’s relationship to the character is advisory or empathic, it is characterized by reciprocity between the unison of two phenomena – the actor’s body and the role. This unison triggers the actors’ affective faculties by increasing their awareness between the body and the target domain. What this affirms to me is that whether it is advisory or empathic, the successful performance of an actor does not necessarily depend on the ways the actor relates to the character and how he perceives its inner and outer dimensions, but the ways that he presents himself on the stage.

Kaushalya described her relationship with the character as a symphony. She told me how this symphonic structure develops once she is familiarized with the score. Understanding the character as a symphonic structure signifies how her bodymind tries to materialize the character in order to attune to it. The intangible character in the text is transposed into an auditory perception. Then Kaushalya hears the character as a symphonic structure. For Kaushalya, this psychophysical attunement allows her to sense the ‘mood’ that grasps the ‘correct internality’ of the role.

In Jayani’s experience of attuning to the role, she talked about looking for the ‘form’ and the ‘colour’ of the role as her primary motives in the process of attuning to the role. Daya also talked about the ‘sketches’ and ‘tones’ in relation to the actor-character relationship. This language denotes an attempt to grip the character by transposing the mental experiences of the role into a sensory-motor experience. Colours and tones are related to visual perception. Sketches and forms are related primarily to visual and motor functions. For instance, in Daya’s analysis, the character is a ‘sketch’ seeking colours and tones. The processes of imagining the character as a mental sketch and colouring it through the bodily mimicking are both perceptual and actional. The character development is thus encapsulated in and through these perceptual and visceral experiences: it is described through metaphorical language expressive of a primordial bodymind understanding of the character.
As seen in the previous section, concepts such as imagination, imitation and empathy have played a significant role in the actor-character relation. Although they are crucial to the actor’s bodymind process, these actors seemed hesitant to declare that they use tools such as imitation to portray characters. Imitation has been regarded as a superficial method of portraying characters. But as Merleau-Ponty’s body-subject and contemporary cognitive science demonstrate, these fundamental elements play a key role in the actor’s learning process. These key concepts of imagination, imitation and empathy demonstrate different modes of human intentional directedness towards certain objects with which they are engaged. For example, imagination is always about imagining something else. The actor’s perceptual consciousness is attached to something in his surroundings. The notion of empathy is also the same. Empathy is not univocally achieved but it is experienced as a reciprocal relation. The actor empathises with someone or something. The sympathy is impossible without its counterpart. This mutual engagement of the actor’s so-called mental aspects and their reciprocal relation with objects also affirms how operative intentionality is pre-reflectively engaged with the environment. It is the bodymind consciousness that is operative prior to reason or judgement.

**Habituating with others**

In my description of my relationship with the other actor, I explained how this relationship in the first place is somewhat ambiguous and perhaps characterized by tension developed between me and the co-actor. This tension is apparent due to the fact that my body is governed by a strong sense of self that hesitates to accept the other as a self-conscious being sharing the same rehearsal space. The result seems to be a gap created between mind and matter: my understanding of the self as a separate existence creates a gap between my own self and my understanding of my body; in return, it affects my perception of the other as a non-unified being.

However, in my apprentice experience, this difference between me as a self conscious being and the other further allowed me to understand the other actor as a similar conscious being. In the rehearsal space, I described that I sensed the existence of other similar human beings. The objects and artefacts triggered my bodymind to perceive that there are similar human beings who inhabit and manipulate these artefacts in the rehearsal space. Seeing and
manipulating the stage props and other objects, I implicitly understood that the others are in conversation with me in many implicit and hidden ways. Even the empty space seemed to interact with me. I explained how it occurred through my bodymind in emotional and tactile ways. My intention was to show how my bodymind comprehended the other in the enactive situations and how this intersubjectivity affected and completed my knowledge of being with others in the theatrical context.

When talking about the intersubjective learning process occurring between actors, it was evident that some of the actors tended to be more reserved in talking about how the partner actors fulfil their needs in the rehearsal process. As Kaushalya’s interview suggested, her sense of the other was complex when she first started acting in the theatre. She revealed that in her early experiences of acting it was difficult for her to interact with other actors. Her interview was full of such inhibitions about cultural factors, gender concerns and personal issues with others. But this same information further revealed how the other is partly constitutive of her self-conscious subjectivity. As seen in the previous discussion, the actors’ conscious experiences were always characterized by the presence of the other. It can be an object, a thing, a concept or another subject. What most of these actors have not recognized is this dialogical relationship between their subjectivities and the world that is part of the construction of their conscious life.

However, with a close analysis of some of the interview data, I realize that there are many convergences in how the actor’s experience of bodymind is characterized by the other actor’s presence in the completion of their knowing process. These experiences also merged with my own experience in relation to the actor-other relation. Jayani clearly stated how she was affected by the other actors during her rehearsal process. Jayani talked about how important it was for her to observe the other actor’s body demeanour. Her script-reading situation also further affirmed how the dialogical relationship was a vital part of grasping the meanings and emotions given in the text.

Daya and Wishva’s descriptions about inter-human relationships paralleled my descriptions in many ways. They both confirmed how their acting process begins with a dialogue between themselves and their surroundings. They extensively discussed how these environmental factors affect their imagination and construction of the character they intend to portray. Daya talked about his freedom in the performance situation. He achieved this
freedom by understanding the other and reducing the friction between himself and the other actors. Wishva also revealed a compelling example of how his subjectivity is affected by his inter-animal relation. These instances clearly affirmed how the actors’ subjectivity is not self-given but a product of their bodymind relationship with the outer world.

In general, these actors were reluctant to admit that their relationship with the other actor or the environment is dialogical due to the fact that they believed that this dialogical relationship is a mere imitation of others. I discussed earlier how this empathic relationship is primordially a simulation of how the other can mimic my subjectivity. My experience of being in the theatre affirmed that the actors’ bodies are always intertwined pre-reflectively as soon as they are exposed to each other. The knowing process that occurs mainly underneath the pre-lingual level is inaccessible to actors’ conscious process of learning.

For these actors, playing a character involved sensing the inner feelings and constructing the outer structure of the role accordingly. Lakoff and Johnson have studied how individuals make sense of their bodies as a ‘container’ with two sides to it – internal and external. The bodily interaction with the environment creates certain patterns that develop metaphoric understandings of abstract ideas (Johnson 1987, p. xv). The container schema is one such metaphor through which the individual makes sense of the inner and outer dimensions of the body. These inside-out or outside-in approaches emanate from a bodily image schema known as ‘container schema’ (physical containment) (1987, pp. 18-21). The familiarity of the body as an organism which takes food, water, air into our bodies, and waste, blood or other secretions coming out from the body, describes how the individuals understand the organism consisting of ‘in’ and ‘out’ boundaries. Further bodily orientation in the space provides ‘physical containment’ of how the bodies are in or out of the space (ibid, p. 21). These metaphors not only work to define the interior and exterior containment of the individuals in the spatial world, but create divisions between the self and the other.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined four Sri Lankan theatre actors’ interview data gathered through semi-structured interviews during my field research. The main intention of this interview analysis was to find out how these actors describe their bodymind experience in
relation to their acting practices. In doing so I sought to compare and refine my experiential data with theirs.

In the first half of this chapter, I analyzed how these actors describe their bodymind experience in performance situations. I was guided by key ontological categories such as bodymind relation, actor-character relation, and inter-actor relation to discuss how these actors have articulated their experiences in relation to these categories. In general terms, the actors I have interviewed expressed their views of bodymind practice and knowing processes of acting in dualistic ways. Their relationship to the outer environment, the attunement with the character, and the relationship with the other actor in the enactive situation were represented in dichotomous ways.

In the second part of the chapter, I initiated an analysis of their data by comparing it to my own, in order to judge whether or not it fit with the assumptions I had arrived at in the descriptions of my own acting practice. In order to deconstruct these actors’ dualistic ways of articulating bodymind experience, I employed Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and later developments of cognitive science to argue how these dualistic perceptions are, at least potentially, metaphorical representations of a single bodymind enactment. Along with my description, and the phenomenological analysis, it affirmed that this dualistic attitude of their understanding of the acting phenomena arises due to the ways that they articulate their experience in a particular dualistic language. The language here played an important part in describing their experience in various dichotomous ways. Using phenomenology and cognitive science, I have argued that these dualistic ways of understanding the body and the conscious experience are a product of the metaphorical language they have employed. I therefore contend that the metaphors employed to articulate their experiences further demonstrate that the actors’ bodymind process is not dualistic but a holistic experience articulated and explained through a dualistic language. Their interview data further revealed that the bodymind duality is not a stable reality for them. The majority of actors I interviewed generally agreed that their knowing process has been nourished and sustained through being in the enactment. I further conclude, therefore, that the actors’ primordial engagement with the theatrical environment is epistemologically important for the actor’s knowing process. Lutterbie argues that ‘[a]cting, like life, takes place against a background, from which it differentiates its singularity and recognizes its mode of participating in the world’ (2011, p. 128). As the actors’ interviews reveal, their rational speculations of acting processes were
based on a primordial engagement developed between the lived body and the natural ambience.
CHAPTER SIX

Evaluation and Conclusion

The past, therefore, is not past, nor the future future.
Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to revisit and offer a final evaluation of the major claims of this research project. Those claims began with a discussion of the inner and outer dimensions of the acting experience and knowing process, for which I employed a combination of phenomenological and auto/ethnographical research methodologies. Therefore, I will first evaluate the methodology used in this research project. Secondly, I will examine the claim I have made in relation to my acting practice, which I learned to act through the use of the bodymind. Finally, I will sum up the implications of this study and how this study leads future research in the areas of bodymind relation in acting, performance epistemology and phenomenology.

I. EVALUATION OF METHOD

As Robyn Barnacle suggests, phenomenology starts with wonder (Barnacle et al. 2001, p. 3). This research journey also started through wondering about bodymind in acting. This wonder led me to explore the unknown territory of the tacit knowledge of my acting practice. As Barnacle further argues, phenomenology does not answer the question of ‘why I wonder?’ (2001), but allows the individual to embark on a journey. It is a journey from the visible to the invisible that attempts to make the invisible visible.

In order to go back to this invisible domain of knowledge acquisition in the actor’s knowing process, I needed to find a path or a methodology to flesh out the epistemological relevance of this mode of learning. But the methodology in the first place did not appear as a
‘method’ or a set of tools for me to be able to collect ‘data’. Thus, the method that I was seeking was not to be found elsewhere but within myself. The method already existed within my performing body that had been sedimented as tacit knowledge. My method was to eliminate pre-existing methods thereby allowing the phenomenological method to emerge through the description that I created.

I looked at the lived body, lived temporality, lived spatiality, and lived communion to understand how the body-subject is undivided and perhaps knows better and before I speculate with my rational mind. In line with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body-subject, I tried to describe my bodymind experience within these experiential domains where the bodymind consciousness incarnates as the nexus of my learning of acting. The methodology that I was seeking was gradually emerging through my learning of phenomenology and my attempts to describe my experience through a first-person narrative.

In chapter two I elaborated my orientation to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as a partial fulfilment of the methodological requirement for this study. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology reveals the existence of the body-subject beyond rational understanding of the body. His articulation of the habit body enabled me to see how bodymind consciousness is the core of my knowing in enactive situations.

The habit body reflects its otherness through being a habit body. In other words, the habit body is the result of the actor’s bilateral engagement with its physical score. Looking at the function of the body schema explicated by Merleau-Ponty, I came to an understanding that the habit body is corporeal which means that consciousness and the body cannot be separated. The habit body incarnates as a perceptual consciousness. Perception and actions are both habituated simultaneously to cultivate a habit body.

Furthermore, I understood that this habit body is spatial and temporal in quality. This spatial temporal awareness is embedded in the habit body allowing the actor to cultivate and sediment the habit formation in the enactment. I began to realise that objective time and space do not exist in the bodymind conscious experience of the actor. The actor’s habit body allows him to experience a lived time and spatiality embedded in and through the body. This further affirmed that the actor’s consciousness is embodied.

Finally I realized that the habit body is communal, or in other words, intersubjective. It affirmed that cultivating a habit body is being for oneself and at the same time being for
others. The habit body reflects this intersubjective reversibility between the body and the environment. This outer world, other subjectivities and objects are partly responsible for cultivating a habit body. Having a habit body for oneself is having others in their bodies without knowing that the others are embedded in the flesh. The phenomenological description I sought to develop in chapter four was based on such a phenomenological understanding gained through the orientation to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

**Inductive and deductive methods**

Introducing the phenomenal body, Merleau-Ponty questions traditional scientific methodologies of enquiry. His body-subject raises a question of how to reflectively attend to and analyse the pre-reflective existence of the body if the body-subject is already attuned to make meanings beyond reflection. Introducing the phenomenal existence of the body-subject and its meaningful relation with the world, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the difficulties of using traditional research tools to unveil the invisible aspects of human existence.

Merleau-Ponty rejects induction because an inductive approach does not allow penetration of the body-subject as it operates within a pre-reflective domain (Kwant 1963, pp. 33-34). Instead, Merleau-Ponty adapts a descriptive method to flesh out this pre-conscious region of the body. Casey states that Merleau-Ponty’s ‘description is not to be taken as the description of a historically specific happening which he is observing or has observed. This is the force of the “suppose that….“ which inaugurates his analysis’ (1981, p. 181). What he argues is that Merleau-Ponty’s description, particularly in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is plausible as well as presumed (ibid, p.181). Thus the phenomenological description is not about ‘what is happening or what has happened but what might happen’ (ibid, p. 181). This affirms that the phenomenological description that Merleau-Ponty employs is a more ‘imaginative than strictly perceptual activity’ (ibid, p. 182).

Finding a method to unravel my bodymind consciousness and how it is embodied in my acting practice revealed that the method already and pre-reflectively exists prior to my application of a particular method (Kwant 1963, p. 35). That method was already characterized by my tacit understanding of the unified wholeness of my acting practice. It was immanent to my habit body that I was cultivating and experiencing during my performance process. This awareness and the wonder of the tacit knowing was the motive
that led me to describe my experience in chapter four. It further revealed that the method was already in place before (and better) than my reflective description of it in this thesis.

**Phenomenological description**
I adapted a phenomenological description to construct a personal narrative through which I sought to describe my bodymind experience based on the play *Kontharāththuwa (The Dumb Waiter)*. This process was autobiographical as well as phenomenological in the sense that I sought to dig out my memories and reflections from my embodied past. I began to identify these memories as embedded in the lived body and accessible through recollection and the act of phenomenological writing. As Sokolowski argues, the phenomenological description primarily does not intend to describe the features of a particular object, situation or a phenomenon but it further describes how such objects or phenomena are experienced by an individual (1983, p. 223). As Zarrilli argues, this type of description considers the actor as a doer and offers the ‘doer’s perspectives of the experience in question. This approach thus considers acting as a phenomenon or a process rather than a representation or the actor as a presenter in the theatre (Zarrilli 2012, p. 42).

Phenomenology supposes that it does not use theoretical presuppositions to describe worldly phenomena. Phenomenology strives to go back to the essence of the phenomena and examine their structures as they appear to the consciousness of the individual. Some may argue that phenomenological enquiry is partial or marginal because it only provides the individual’s ways of perceiving and thinking. Phenomenological enquiry assumes that the object does not appear only as a presence (representation) but also as an absence. This is what phenomenology identifies as intentionality (Sokolowski 1983, pp. 224-225). Therefore, the phenomenological description is closer to the object perceived than how the object is perceived according to more conventional types of description. In other words, intersubjective relations between individuals and worldly phenomena are much closer and intimate than how we rationally think and perceive of them.

This methodological problem can be further articulated in this way: bracketing the bodymind experience of the actor is a way of attempting to look at the body and mind as abstract entities taken out from one’s experiential domains for reflection. As Shaner argues, the body aspects and mind aspects of experience are one and inseparable. It is only through
abstraction, such as imagination or reflection, that these body and mind aspects become separable (Shaner 1985, p. 45). Therefore, phenomenological description is more related to the object than to our own ideas and thoughts in the natural attitude (Sokolowski 1983). Our natural attitude of the phenomena is more abstract than the phenomenological reflection (1983, p. 225).

**Flesh in the research**

This methodological complexity runs throughout this research work. I was the researcher and the researched in the same project, wanting to come to a reflective understanding of how the bodymind works as a knowing agent in my acting practice. This dualistic positioning between myself as a researcher and me as an acting practitioner demonstrated the difficulties of articulating a methodology to conduct this research. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the reversibility of the flesh affirmed for me how hard it is to split the body from its inherent attunement to the ‘ambience’ of its environment. Being both researcher and research object/subject, I witnessed how this dualistic problem of my reason and my concrete lived experience contradict each other.

Being a researcher, traditional methods do not allow me to remain as a body-subject. Rather, I am required to depart from my being as a body-subject and to step back and reflect on how the body works in contrast to the mind. Being a researcher and being researched in this project allowed me to reflect on how hard it is for me to depart from my embodied experience and reflect on my own process of acting in order to provide valuable data. As a researcher and a subject of this research, I may have undoubtedly been entrapped in a dualist attitude. This position may have worked as an antithesis to my thesis. This further affirmed to me that the practice is still more pragmatic and mysterious than theoretical analysis. However, being the researcher as a subject and at the same time being an object of the research, I have had to further confront an extension of the body-mind metaphysic in current epistemology. I realized that it is still predominant in the epistemological inquiry. The bodymind duality drags me again into a dichotomous world of observer and observed. Is this the way that the bodymind metaphysic works?
**Limitations**

The ways I embody and learn through the bodymind are the central themes of this investigation. The data I have gathered was generated primarily from my own retrospective and tacit knowledge that my body carries as a self-taught actor. It is true that I employed retrospection to gather my experience that occurred sometime ago, and objections might be raised about how I have been able to reconstruct a lived theatrical experience that took place in the past. This re-enactment is possible only through retrospection and relying on memory data. During such a re-enactment, slippages of some of the important aspects of a live performance inevitably occur. Because live theatre is always ephemeral, the elements of such a lived experience may vanish once the performance is over: only the fragmented memories remain.

One significant problem is that even if I reconstruct my past lived experience, I have not been able to reconstruct my ‘naive self’, which is far away from my contemporary selfhood. My current selfhood has been constructed and enriched through both past and present experiences that are absorbed through my daily habituation in the social world. My reconstruction of bodymind experience is inevitably affected by my contemporary knowledge of the bodymind and my habituation in the current socio-cultural world.

Acknowledging the fact that there are slippages in my phenomenological description, I have argued that this description disregards the temporal past, present and future as an objective temporal flow. The temporality represented in the description is not particularly relevant to the enactment that has taken place in the objective past. My description about bodymind experience provides a lived experience that is illustrated as a lived temporal present. It describes how the actor relates to bodymind phenomena within a descriptive enactment rather than narrating how it has ‘happened’ in the past.

Describing and reconstructing this theatrical experience may sound purely like an act of memory. But as I have witnessed during this process, the phenomenological description has enabled me to reconstruct some of the experiences that I have never been able to describe during my apprentice years. This act of remembrance has awakened memories that have hibernated in previous perceptual acts. This proves to me how a personal description can facilitate an unexpected and unpredicted experiential world that has been sedimented as a
tacit knowledge of perceptual terrains. Nevertheless, my intention was to describe the bodymind experience and re-enact it through a language available to me. This language undoubtedly cannot capture the whole experience of the actor. It is even true with everyday circumstances that one cannot fully grasp what one experiences in diverse situations. There are many human expressions, gestures, feelings and sensitivities that occur beyond the limits of language and many meanings and nuances that occur beyond the reflectivity of the individual.

I accept the fact that the embodiment and experience of actors is diverse and culturally determined. Therefore, there are numerous other ways that actors may embody and experience the bodymind in varied theatrical contexts. Thus, I have only tried to focus on my own embodied knowing as the subject of inquiry. I further accept and acknowledge the existence of other variations and possibilities. The embodied experience is covered by a wide variety of disciplines. This study has not considered gender-oriented embodiment or cultural variations of embodied knowing in performance practice.

II. EVALUATION OF CLAIMS

I claimed that bodymind consciousness is a learning agent. This learning agent is embodied, epistemic and aesthetic in my actor learning experience. In this section, I will offer an evaluation of this claim according to these three sections.

**Bodymind consciousness is holistic**

One of the key principles that emerged in my phenomenological description is that the correlation between the body and the conscious experience of actors can be generated due to the *aporia* governed in the knowing process. I described this *aporia* as a paradox of the learning process. In order to be free from the duality of body and mind, the actor needs to work through the duality. The conscious awareness or consciousness fragment in acting practices is an integral part of the knowing process. But the consciousness is not a sole agent of the learning process but a part of the bodily function.

I tried to identify disjunctions between consciousness and the body in my performance practice. I described how conscious experience and the body negotiate in such occasions to
be able to maintain a balance between the body and perceptual activities. I discussed that the actor's perceptual and actional body is incarnated in the same flesh, the bodymind. The perceptual consciousness allowed me to describe how my noetic (perceptual) and chthonic (corporeal) emanate from the single bodily ground and its intercourse with its surroundings. I discussed how consciousness is incarnated in the body as a higher level of operative intentionality. This so-called mind aspect is the bodily-rooted consciousness that operates between my body and the world. Describing through experiences, I explored its reciprocal relationship with the world and how it sediments knowledge through the bilateral engagement with others.

Exploring Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and his key concept of body-subject affirmed for me the validation of the claims that the bodymind consciousness is holistic, as well as that his phenomenology of the body supports the integrated wholeness of the bodymind experience. His notion of the body-subject further contends that the body and consciousness are not two separate ontologies. His ideas led me to confirm the bodymind experience as a way of my habituation in a particular enactment. I gained the knowledge that my consciousness in the process of acting is not a particular psyche but my power of perception, the bodily intentionality (perceptual consciousness) that functions in between my body and the world. His analysis of body schema further affirmed how my bodymind is attuned to a particular score and how cultivation can be described as the dilation of my body schema. My perceptual grasping of a particular enactment, a score or a style of action is a unification of my perceptual synthesis towards such an enactment. It further proved for me that this perceptual synthesis heightened my awareness of the bodymind as an integrated wholeness.

**Bodymind consciousness is epistemic**

I realized that the habit body is the nexus of the actor’s learning process and the creative work alike. Describing habit formation in my acting practice, I tried to make sense of how these perceptual and bodily activities are intermingled in the habit formation of the actor. My description of the knowing process further allowed me to understand how motor habits influence the perceptual habits in acting practice. In the process of habit formation and the sedimentation of such habits as a tacit knowledge, I noted that the actor’s bodymind
incarnates as a higher order consciousness overriding and subjugating the bodily ground of its origins.

When the actor is attuned to a particular activity, action or a score, the body and the target activity develops a bilateral engagement. This bilateral engagement is epistemic. It is epistemic in the sense that it demonstrates bodily knowledge of grasping and attuning with its target activity. This bodily grasping is both perceptual and actional. This engagement with the ambience renders affective and sensual awareness during the perceptual grasping of the object. The knowledge pertaining to this grasping of the object entails how and in what possible ways the actor engages with her activity. These perceptive and actional engagements render perceptual feedback by enhancing the grip between the body and the object. The process further sediments what the body needs to learn and store in the perceptual and corporeal memory. It occurs through unremitting attention and manipulation and iteration of the activity in question. During this habit formation, the body begins to learn and sediment knowledge in and through the body. The perceptual and motor grasping thus iterates in order to grasp the activity to perform with competence. This sedimented knowledge allows the actor to repeat the learned action as it is happening at the present moment without having a particular conscious attention once the integration process is over. Further, the imagination, or ‘power to reckon’, functions through the habit body. My imagination of the character, improvisation of actions, and possible anticipation of situations I create in the theatre are powered by this perceptual imagination.

Because the bodymind is undivided, the meanings of space and time also tightly embed with the lived body. Therefore, the bodymind is spatial and temporal in the process of my habit formation in acting. The habit body is, as well, a dilated body. This dilated body encapsulates new skills and new relationships with the outer world. I began to realize that the cultivation of a habit body is a cultivation of new bodymind relationship with my theatrical environment. These new relationships rendered perceptual synthesis of time and space. I learned how time and space are embodied in the actor’s habit body.

**Bodymind consciousness is aesthetic**

Informed by Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the ‘body as a work of art’ I described how I experienced my own aesthetic in the process of habit formation. I called this aesthetic experience proto-aesthetic or aesthetic of the flesh to denote that this aesthetic is primarily
experienced and possessed by the actor. The bodily engagements are not fulfilled unless they are aesthetically verified by the actor’s awareness of the engagement. The proto-aesthetic is an aesthetic awareness that is emanating through the bilateral engagement between the bodymind and the target activity during habit formation. Zarrilli has identified this as both inner and outer bodymind aesthetics (2007, pp. 51-59). Merleau-Ponty, as well as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, have both discussed ‘melodic qualities’ of human gestures and movements (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 120; Sheets-Johnstone 2011, p. 460). I have discussed how the individual can be aware of these gestures and movements as felt qualities of movements pre-reflectively in the process of habit formation in acting. It affirms to me that whether the actor impersonates or represents a character, his aesthetic choices and judgments play an important role in executing a successful performance practice. This aesthetic awareness is key to the actor’s ability to poeticize her body – delivering lines, attuning with the score or working with the acting partner.

III. DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

I extended Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body-subject to analyse three key acting practitioner’s articulations of the actor’s work. This allowed me to contextualise my assumptions of bodymind consciousness within these practitioners’ analyses of the body and mind in acting and to identify parallels with the phenomenological analysis.

The emphasis of the habit body (body schema) is one such parallel common to the three practitioners’ articulations of the skilled body of the actor. Stanislavski’s notion of experiencing and incarnation, Grotowski’s articulation of the body-life and Barba’s analysis of the body-in-life (dilated body) affirm how the habit body is actional as well as perceptual in knowledge acquisition of acting. Phenomenological analysis of operative intentionality of the body is also a key theme for each of the practitioners. Stanislavski’s ideas pertaining to consciousness and the subconscious designate how the body schema works as the bodymind integration of acting. This subconscious operation is akin to Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the body-subject. It works beyond the conscious experience of the actor.

Grotowski similarly posited inner ‘impulses’ as a mode of intentional activity emanating through bodily interaction with partner actors. His conceptualization of elimination affirms the importance of returning to the primordial elements of the actor. It is a
mode of reduction of the mundane empirical self in order to access the primordial self of the actor. Barba also articulates the lived body through his notion of body-in-life. He rejects the actor’s body as a tool and suggests that the body is a consciousness. Barba’s notion of presence further reveals that the presence is an existence where the perceptual synthesis of the actor and the audience member’s experience meet together as the ‘flesh’ in the theatre. Similar to the phenomenological concept of the intersubjectivity, Stanislavski, Grotowski and Barba all discuss the inherent engagement between the actor and his counterparts. For Stanislavski, communion is a vital process for the actor to engage with the other. Grotowski proposes an existential project to elevate the actor and the other into a unified experience. For Barba, the actor’s dilated body is a way of being in the theatre with others.

In this thesis, I have selected four acting practitioners as case studies from the Sri Lankan contemporary theatre. The interview method was used to gather their experiences and transcribe them in order to analyse these experiential data. These four actors’ descriptions of their acting practices rendered an overall approach to my methodology. Key phenomenological themes I explicated in chapter two, theories of bodymind practices explored in chapter three and my phenomenological description of bodymind experience offered in chapter four intersect with the actors’ descriptions offered in chapter five.

Phenomenologically speaking, I am not a neutral position or a passive subject. I inhabit and act with other human beings sharing the same spatial temporal world. However, my associations with others render personal biases. These personal biases, emotional attachments and disengagements are an inherent quality of the self-other communion. Hence, my experience of being an actor is partial for me because I have chosen a particular way, a style of conduct via which I occupy the theatre and engage with others. Although the personal narratives appear as marginal, phenomenology does not deny the value of such personal descriptions. This is because, as Shaner suggests, phenomenological description is not only a description about oneself, but it is also a place where others can share their ‘configuration’ (Shaner 1985, p. 22).

The four actors’ interview materials have been analyzed in relation to my own phenomenological description provided in chapter four. This juxtaposition allowed me to see how their descriptions contradict or converge with my phenomenological descriptions. I employed the phenomenological method to bracket off their abstractions of bodymind experiences and to see how these abstractions either verified or contradicted my assumptions.
This analysis further confirmed that the actors’ articulation of their bodymind experience and knowing process varied based on how they describe them. These variations occurred due to specific language they employed to articulate their experiences. This affirmed that the bodymind experience and the knowing process are intact but the duality is engendered through the ways they are described.

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section I will provide some implications and recommendations stemming from this research project. There are four key areas I would like to point out in this section. They are as follows.

Acting self and the other
First and foremost, this research impacts upon my thinking about acting and the way I perceive and modulate my future practices of acting. Because this project is based on my acting practice and my quest into bodymind practice and the knowing process, I have gained a better understanding of how the actor’s bodymind functions in the performance process. As an acting practitioner, this understanding will influence me in the future to reflect on my approaches to acting and working with other actors. I have cultivated a vocabulary and knowledge to discuss the mental and bodily aspects of the actor’s craft and how these faculties are working in the actor’s knowing process.

As I am still actively engaged in the Sri Lankan performance industry, this work has further implications for the ongoing discussion about the actor’s work in my acting community. I can further contribute to this ongoing discussion about acting practices in the industry and offer my reflections on the actor’s work I have explored in this thesis. This work can be a springboard for me to initiate a discussion about the future development of the actor’s work and training in Sri Lankan theatre. In the recent past, theatre and drama as a university degree has been introduced to some of the major universities in the country. Drama as a subject has also been introduced to primary education in Sri Lanka. As an acting educator, working in the university sector, this research helps me to engage with student
actors and to understand their psychophysical dimensions of acting practice in such educational settings.

This research work has not dealt with acting in film and television. I believe that the research tools, such as phenomenological description and auto-ethnographical approaches, can also be employed to study the actor’s work and the experience of bodymind in film acting. Further phenomenology of actor’s experience in film acting can reveal different aspects of acting in visual mediums. It is interesting to explore how the bodymind experience, temporality, spatiality, and the inter-human relation affect the actor’s experience in acting and knowing in film. As a theatre and film actor, I can think of applying these ideas to understand the bodymind experience and the learning process of the film and television actor.

**Enactive approach to acting**

One of the major implications of this research lies within the emerging area of study called ‘acting as a process or a phenomenon’ (Zarrilli 2012, p. 42). As Zarrilli explains, any acting theory currently available in acting scholarship implicitly enacts meta-theoretical assumptions about the body, mind, emotions or the actor’s relationship with the audience. The majority of these theories of acting largely favour some sort of ‘representational’ or ‘mimetic meta-theory’ of acting from the observer’s point of view (2012b, p. 42). Acting as a process and a phenomenon implies a shift from the observer’s perspective of acting to the actor as an ‘enactor/doer from inside’ (ibid, p. 42). It explicates the perception of acting from the doer’s perspective. This approach to understanding acting from the doer’s perspective has been influenced and developed under the shadow of phenomenological philosophy and later developments in cognitive science. Thus, enactive approaches to acting may reveal the actor’s embodied experience in enactive situations. However, this thesis does not cover all the aspects of the actor’s experience. Future research should be carried out to explore the various modes of embodiment of acting to flesh out the doer’s perspectives in the art.

**Phenomenology and performance**

There are a wide range of possibilities and opportunities phenomenology can offer for performance practice. In fact, Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* has implications for many theatrically relevant ideas and thoughts. Contemporary dance, sports, nursing education, teaching, and medical sciences have extensively used phenomenological
philosophy and its methodologies to analyse and conduct research works. But it is evident that applying phenomenology to acting and performance practice is very limited. In the recent past, writers such as Zarrilli (2008) and Stanton Garner (1994) have used phenomenology to describe the actor’s process and performance practice in the theatre. Dance theorists such as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1963), Jaana Parviainen (1998; 2011), and Legrand and Ravn (2009) have used phenomenology in dance education and practice. I suggest that there are further opportunities for researchers to look at how phenomenological philosophy can be applied to analyze acting practice, modes of embodiment and inter-embodiment of performance.

In the recent past, cognitive science, neuroscience, cognitive linguistics and consciousness studies have been widely used in interdisciplinary approaches to performance practice. Most of these disciplines have been heavily influenced by the continental phenomenology explicated by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Cognitive phenomenologists such as Franscisco J Varela and Humberto Maturana (Maturana and Varela 1980; Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991) have argued for the importance of turning towards Eastern thought and philosophy to study bodymind and human experience. Consciousness studies (Baars 1997; Vandekerckhove 2009) have also been influential for the development of analyses of consciousness and theatre practice (Demastes 2002; McCutcheon and Sellers-Young 2013). Consciousness studies have developed a ‘theatre model’ of the brain that explains how the brain and consciousness works. Further research can be elaborated in the areas of the actor’s consciousness and attention. Surprisingly, this theatre model can juxtapose with the actor’s work and can be used to study how the actor’s conscious and unconscious processes work, as well as how the learning process occurs in performance situations. Researchers such as Peter Malekin, Ralph Yarrow (2001), Jade Rosina McCutcheon, Barbara Sellers-Young (2013), and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005) have conducted research into consciousness and performance. Meyer-Dinkgräfe’s works, in particular, have focused on Eastern theories of performance practice, particularly on Natyashastra’s theory of Rasa and how consciousness studies could shed light on centuries-old Indian aesthetics of sentiment.
Acting and Asian phenomenology

This research allowed me to explore varieties of phenomenological approaches available in the Asian region. Some of these phenomenologies are highly influenced by Buddhist psychology and Hindu philosophy (Boisvert and Canadian Corporation for Studies in 1995; Sarachchandra 1958; Yasuo 1993). My explorations into phenomenology guided me to many relevant literatures pertaining to bodymind practices and aesthetics in Japanese and Indian philosophy (Hamilton 1996a; Obeyesekere 2012; Pirruccello 2002; Yasuo 1993). In Japanese philosophy, Yuasa Yasuo, Ichikawa Hiroshi, and Nagatomo Shiganori’s works integrate continental phenomenology and Buddhist psychology to explore the bodymind experience in artistry and other somatic practices in the region (Nagatomo 1992; Shaner 1985; Yasuo 1987, 1993). Future research can be conducted towards the actor’s work and the bodymind relation through these Buddhist phenomenological approaches. Particular attention can be given to exploring how the Buddhist phenomenological analysis of the five aggregates of the body is relevant to the study of the actor’s bodymind relation in the theatre (Hamilton 1995; Harvey 1993).

V. A FINAL THOUGHT

This personal journey into my bodymind consciousness in acting has come to an end. It has been a fascinating journey for me to explore bodymind experience in acting practice. This research has provided an encounter with many exciting thoughts on acting practices and the bodymind philosophies in Western and Eastern regions. These encounters have broadened my understanding and the way I perceive the phenomenon of acting. Above all, I have realized that the process of acting is still a complex phenomenon that needs further explorations to flesh out its hidden dynamics and complexities. As an actor, I will resume my journey again, the journey into my world of performance where all the wonders of bodymind practices intersect and converse with me. I presume that the bodymind is still hiding its secrets and potential, waiting to be revealed. If I borrow Merleau-Ponty’s words again, as long as the actor extricates the body from the reality into a realm of imagination, the wonder of the apotheosis of acting still remains in the darkness (2002, p. 212).
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*It should be noted that this bibliography contains work cited and the literature consulted in preparation for this thesis.*