

The Embodiment of a Performer and Character: Psychophysical Pathway to the Practical Attunement of a Performer's Body

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Abstract

This thesis explores the embodiment of a performer and a character/role specifically by examining what the term character is associated with and implies in a sense of the performer's bodily training through which what happens to their body. First of all, this research begins to investigate the relationship between a performer and a character centred on the performer's bodily experience through training and/or studio work. From a perspective of a performer, the concept and practical approach of a character itself essentially includes and signifies all the given circumstance of a specific play which has to be acknowledged then inhabited through the performer's body. That is, the internal structure of the text parallels with articulating and developing the spine of a specific character which take place as the substance leads the performer's body to an organic action and/or that of way corresponding to what the character needs and wants to obtain through a series of moment on stage. Here, we argue that the purposeful action as a process and result of applying/inhabiting the substance enhances the performer's body as the whole being participates in the given environment within which his/her body can also work or function by means of the integrated oneness. Second, in a manner of the most fundamental level, both the ethic of acting and the central task of a performer remind us the significance of allowing therefore experiencing subtle bodily movement, namely, responses to stimulus from in/outside of his/her body either visible or invisible on the one hand. At the same time, such a journey of self-discovery empowers the performer to explore new potential possibilities on the other. Finally, as the research finding suggests that these practical insights are necessarily need to be acknowledged as a point of the departure through which the quality of a performer's body is also cultivated by means of the changeable wholeness in order to being on stage.

Keywords: Performer, Character, Bodily Experience, Psychophysical Engagement, Present Moment, Readiness.

1. Introduction

This thesis endeavors to address a performer's psychophysical pathway concerned with the nature of a performer's body focuses in particular on the work and process of the performer-character/role relationship.

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The concepts and practical approaches for the work/process are drawn from a study of the performer's bodily involvement and/or the manifestation of psychophysical intentions particularly centered on the principle of a performer's scenic behavior within the approach and practice of fictive character and/or role. Specifically, in the context of a performer-character/role on the nature and function of performance/theatre has consequently been discussed and developed by those theatre directors and practitioners especially from the previous century to this contemporary era. The central question with the ongoing argument in relation to its practices, techniques and methods emphasis on the question of how to develop and cultivate the performer's body as to be alive on stage in the field of performer training and acting technique by conducted comprehensive studies on acting and disciplines.

As a consequence, from a performer's point of view, developing and/or cultivating his/her body is the key pathway in order to reach the fundamental level/state of any performance where the performer's body itself reflects psychophysical readiness within the surroundings the performer works on. Among many, Eugenio Barba has identified the qualities and principles of the manipulation of the performer's energy through his work on the Odin Theatre. For Barba, the study of a performer's scenic behavior founded from eastern and western codified theatre tradition is understood as the term, 'scenic bios,' which he calls as a performer's 'pre-expressivity,' referring to the quality of a performer's liveness where the performer fully engages the "whole body in the activity and focus all the energy on the activity" [1].

In a similar vein, Phillip Zarrilli provides specific aspects of a performer's psychophysical pathway on both sides of the theory and practice. Above all, his concept for performer training has been combined a various practices centered on a performer's psychophysical engagement in order to facilitate a "state of calm and repose as well as a heightened sense of awareness of the body-in-action" [2]. The concepts with the practical assumptions in relation to a performer's liveness on stage implies the fact that any theatrical discipline and practice necessarily need to connect into 'change process' since the performer's body is to being in a dynamical and constant transformation as his/her character/role wants constantly to change and/or transform within the context the performer is now working. In other words, it is the value of action stressed by Stanislavski which directly links to the importance of a performer's job on stage, "moving from action to action within the given circumstances" [3]. This reminds us of the following questions:

- How can a performer understand and acknowledge the relationship in-between him/herself and a character/role?
- How to allow his/her body as to being in the series of moment on stage?
- What happens to a performer's body through the moment?
- How the moment can be arisen on stage within which what is the role and place of the performer's body?

In this sense, therefore, we will examine how the performer's bodily training should be understood and treated in relation to the embodiment of a performer and his/her character/role which s/he ought to take and then develop through studio work. Also, we will further explore the practical meaning of a performer's bodily experience through the exercises and/or disciplines particularly interrogating what happens to the performer's body. By examining the two main elements and/or processes as discussed above, this thesis will argue that theatre studies and bodily practices has to be placed as a way to develop and enhance the performer's personal insight of his/her own awareness and bodily experience on stage providing a way to the attunement of his/her body.

2. The Relationship Between a Performer and Character/Role: Toward the Integration of His/Her Body in an Organic Way

Before we discuss the relationship between a performer/doer and a character/role, it is necessary to articulate and identify what the term character is associated with a performer's work and implied in a practical sense. We, as one of players and/or doers have taken a particular character and role when turning a literary play/text into live performance. Through the process, we have also interpreted the character in a selected methodology and/or approach which we generally call it as a process of 'reading for a character and role'. It is interrogating and articulating the concept of a character's textual situation(s) which fundamentally signifies as "consideration of all the given circumstances of the play" [4]. The process of these translating, adapting, and/or precisising the character through a performer's body suggests melting or inhabiting the key sources and characteristics found from the play/text into a specific way of breathing, speaking, walking and so on, the performer's body.

In this sense, James Thomas, a professor of Theatre and Head of the PhD for Scholar-Directors, Wayne State University, addresses that the notion of character is understood "not a static object fixed forever in time, but rather a coherent pattern of actions associated with a particular figure" in a play or text [5]. Here, it is important to note that the question of how a performer interpret, understand, and inhabit the character through his/her body emphasis the necessity of exploring and articulating the internal structure of the text/character or for example what Uta Hagen strongly encourages and emphasizes the importance of "finding both the spine of the play and of the character" which must be made apparent in order to function through the given circumstance on the one hand [6]. Because the process, obtaining a clear sense of the total action of the character, leads and regulates the performer in order to define and enhance the essential action which only occur within the circumstance. At the same time, the performer's full bodily engagement in what s/he is doing on stage where his/her body therefore is 'not a static object fixed forever' on the other. In this manner, we can evidently see that the performer's body is placed as the vehicle of a problem or obstacle that the character would solve, overcome, and/or achieve through the series of moment in a specific scene on stage.

To be more appropriate, being in such a moment, the performer's body begins to function to fit into a specific purpose of what the character, play, and/or text own by means of a 'coherent pattern of actions associated with a particular figure' as Thomas notes above. Specially, the term character in relation to its function associated with a performer's body on stage requires articulating a performer's evident and precise understanding of what the dramatic action(s) is necessary in terms of its application, not restricted to just one single right way. Because the action is only valid when a performer's body and the key element(s) of a specific character appropriately encounter and/or meet in an organic way since the performer's "body, world and meaning come together through [an animal's] purposeful action". In other words, this is the central principle of acting, that is, developing, making, and creating from the invisible to visible as "all active, dynamic processes, existing only in interactive behaviours" by means of the whole being participates in a "multi-levelled environment" [7].

More significantly, this process in turn enables the performer's body from representing to functioning in that moment on stage where the performer's body is not pretending but rather having the possibility to truthfully doing centered on what has to say or deliver to the spectator. Nevertheless, as Christina Kapadocha, a London-based actress and somatic acting educator, aptly notes that there are still many performers who are "invited to challenge problematic dualities in acting (such as mind-body, inner-outer, self-other) and traditional text-based hierarchies" [8]. In addition to this, the performer's embodied awareness with his/her expression

has not yet been developed and inhabited specially within Korean performer training academies and/or institutions where we can evidently notice that the dominance of text-based approach is mainly centered on the performer's intellectual manner.

Here, we clearly find that focusing and reconsidering the aforementioned principles and processes lead our attention to the enquiry of what does it mean to act on stage and what is the most adequate and reasonable way in order to prepare, develop and create the character. In the same manner, Thomas discusses that the term character is "composed of a habitual pattern of action identifying a figure in a play is satisfactory for practical purpose" [9]. We acknowledge here the relationship or connection of a 'coherent pattern of action' and a 'habitual pattern of action' is carried out mainly through committing for the specific purpose or target underlining the important connection of an organic/appropriate way in which the performer's body develops or makes it as real and/or live action.

To discuss and explore this process and principle further, let us consider what Vladimir Mirodan uses the concept of 'attitude' which he states not only as an "approach to character construction" but also for him this term "encapsulates the connection between ideas, psychology, and the body." According to Mirodan's linguistic analysis of the term, attitude fundamentally means a performer's "physical readiness" involved with a "neutral readiness to act in a certain way" within which the performer's whole body is interrelated, not separate entities [10]. We notice here that a state of a performer's neutrality combined with readiness signifies the nature of a performer's body which is profoundly initiated and moved in accordance with his/her internal and outer organs in a sense of unite and/or oneness. Namely, being in a state of neutrality parallels with that of readiness where a performer's body is being free from unnecessary trait(s) or tension.

Both Thomas and Mirodan's concepts and practical assumptions demonstrate that the crucial stage in this sequence is emerging the moment of an ethics of acting. That is, the performer's body is able to (re)act immediately to any stimulus from in/outside including seeing, hearing, sensing, and responding as corporeality. Also, the change, particularly a full commitment to what a performer/doer is saying and doing in the character would facilitate the performer's inner/outer intensity by means of a 'neutral readiness'. In addition to this, as we have explored and discussed that it is an ideal state of a performer's body in which his/her body wholly and/or totally participate to what is happening in the moment, here and now. Except for these certain principles and purposes, we cannot expect these accessible, intelligible, and practical insights and ways.

Consequently, the notion of (being) in the moment here underlies (being) the moment of taking action(s) in an organic and/or certain way which remind us of the relationship between a performer/doer and a character/role can be explored and then applied when the nature of a performer's body and its environment encounter and interact in a sense of complimentary manner. In this sense, this thesis would argue that the term performer training with theatre practice has to be understood and/or treated based on learning, applying, and embodying the well-defined action from text analysis, the character/text own this in turn leads and facilitates the performer's body as to being in a state of a purposeful and organic action. From a perspective of a performer, the challenge is learning and adapting how not to disconnect from the vital sources within his/her body in order to work and eventually function on stage.

3. The Meaning of a Performer's Bodily Experience: What Happens to His/Her Body?

By focusing on the key elements with the principles of the relation between a performer and a character/role, we can explore and analysis what a performer's bodily experience is undertaken by what happens to his/her body on stage. Evidently, the central aim is to achieve the identified action(s) found from the text/character/role

concerning the nature of acting which must meet the demands of the comprehension of a performer's bodily experience. Here, we have to recognize that the emphasis is to reconsider a point of departure as a first step in the direction of dramatic procedure which specifically include the choices and processes to what the performer eventually take place on stage.

To discuss and evaluate a possible or an alternative way, we shall focus on a Feldenkrais practitioner, Victorial Worsley's concept and a master lecturer at Boston University College of Fine Arts, Betsy Polatin's teaching of some significant applications with the examples of acting/training in a sense of fundamental level although there are numerous approaches, methodologies, and/or pedagogies for performer-training specially to integrate the performer's body in a somatic manner. Victorial Worsley makes it clear providing some useful definitions with structured reference point to facilitate and enhance a performer's experience as an integrated whole.

First of all, from a perspective of being 'present' and 'ready' to play, Worsley's research engages in considering and articulating the question of how to "remain 'present' and 'in the moment' all the time" which for her is being in a state of "actually really do it and engage in doing it" [11]. The idea for the exploration of a state of remaining in a series of present/moment while actually engaging in doing underlies the performer's central job is experiencing then allowing any subtle bodily shift or movement in accordance with his/her impulse in every tiny moment on which his/her body enable to explore and/or work on a range of different possibilities. This totally differs from a perspective of those codified theatre traditions in which a performer's role and place is to master a specific character therefore the "action is predictable. The 'characters' too play out their pre-determined destinies, their fates," for example [12].

For Worsley, meeting and developing such new experience through studio work is far from maintaining the performer's habit and/or more specifically an "automatic way" that does not invite the performer to pay attention to what s/he is doing. Rather, as a result of this, the performer's body/work is "no space for a real, fresh, spontaneous – and possibly different – kind of response" since any text goes with a flow of action to occur or happen [13]. Now, we can well be aware of the fact that the performer's repetitive pattern of use (habit and/or an automatic way) through his/her unconscious level can become problematic because the performer's body is not paying attention to what was going on within his/her inner/outer state. As a consequence, the performer is not working on investigating or exploring the possibility of change, that is, being in a state of unchangeable and/or nonflowing which in turn interrupts the other possibilities to experience a new journey of self-discovery.

Parallel with Worsley's notion above, Betsy Polatin provides a performer's developmental journey with experiential processes in the embodiment of the character/text through the performer's body. In terms of presence, Polatin observes:

When you think about it, the present moment is the only actual real, all-inclusive moment that we have. The other states of awareness are imagining of what might be or what has been. [...] To be in the present is to be aware of yourself and your environment in this moment. Somehow, we often forget to be present. We tend to think about the past and the future: "what he said" or "what you are going to say." In reality, the past is gone, and the future has not happened yet. The more you are in the present, the more you understand its value. [...] Allow yourself to participate in the present and just be [14].

From Polatin's practical concept above, the term present moment is a point when a performer is invited to participate his/her whole bodily engagement by means of the performer's body is to being in a state of 'actually

all-inclusive moment.’ As the performer’s prerequisite step to explore further and find embodied places through his/her body, the process requires the performer’s severe and/or strict challenge to allow the dynamic awareness of the given circumstance, ‘environment.’ Rather than just being anticipated to what comes in the next, the outcomes. It is important to note that the process makes sure the transition function or happen in that moment by using the performer’s own “psychophysical actions to develop the relationships that tell the desired story.” At the same time, the spectator could meet or “see how and why” a specific character changes each other’s action or behaviour [15]. For Poltain, in such embodiment step, the performer’s body as unity come into the reality where his/her body works as a vehicle taking place as the flexible and/or changeable wholeness which in turn enable him/her to interact between his/her body and that of the surroundings.

This essay would argue that the aforementioned concepts and approaches should not be understood as such a process of becoming a character or role, namely that of a believable or truthful character/role particularly thinking, assuming, and/or maintaining a performer’s emotional involvement. But rather, as we have explored and acknowledged that for an explanation of how the performer develop his/her body as reality or being in a state of readiness specifically highlights answering the question of what happens to the performer’s body which must to be considered and experienced in the ongoing interrelation between him/herself and the environment given by the text/character. The investigation of the ‘ongoing procedure’ echo how to maintain a mode or state of a performer’s activity-passivity interrelation without losing the engagement with the theatrical surroundings. Also, inhabiting or embodying the qualitative bodily transition suggests that the performer is aware of what is happening around him/her and at the same time his/her body is also integrated and/or connected through a series of the performative moment on stage.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, we have explored the relationship between a performer and character specifically addressing what the term, character is associated with a performer’s bodily engagement and implied in his/her training and acting. In a discussion of the performer’s bodily function, we have also understood and acknowledged the significance of the spine of the character/text which necessarily need to define and develop as a map of action of the performer. Here, we have argued that attaining an apparent sense of the total action of the text/character own, the substance defined as the vital source to initiate and move his/her body in accurate way, precede for example the question of how to develop and create the character and/or how to communicate with the other characters and spectator.

In this sense, the key principle is that any character and that of action begins or generates in order to achieve a specific want or desire the character inevitably intend to complete in the final. And, more importantly the process in turn enables the performer’s body to work and function as a whole or unity in an organic and/or certain way on stage. We called the pathway as connecting into ‘change process.’ The concept and principle remind us that the lack of the performer’s bodily objectivity caused by either maintaining his/her presumption or a set of habitual pattern in an ordinary sense interrupt the balance of his/her intellectual knowledge and dynamic relationship with his/her body, the character’s action.

Regarding these aspects, we have engaged in articulating a state of the performer’s readiness referring to Vladimir Mirodan’ s idea of ‘attitude.’ We found that this concept take place a significant role especially in understanding of the nature of a performer’s body and adapting the elements into a practical way. Above all, the notion of attitude requires the performer’s intensity of bodily awareness by sensing and listening his/her body as a point of departure rather than representing or demonstrating what the performer him/herself

determine or mostly think.

We argued that except for the departure, the performer's body does not correspond to the given circumstances as his/her body does not participate to the work. In addition to this, what is important in relation to a state of readiness and/or neutrality is that the loss the ongoing interrelation between the performer's body and the given circumstance undermines to being in an appropriate distribution or not to be subordinated to that environment. This would mean that the whole process addressed in this thesis emphasis the necessity of the performer's sever ethical attitude to facilitate and/or enhance his/her bodily experience as a basis for his/her own training. Plus, the investigation of what each performer's body need to explore the potential possibility in the most fundamental level, that is, what element or quality does the body is needed to achieve in order to being on stage.

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