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Abstract

The human body and its existence in the discourse of performing arts has been a focal point of reference for many scholars and practitioners for decades. These discourses of the body have addressed some of the key issues pertaining to human engagement with various performance practices and their implications in the reception. As the faces of performing arts have been changing through various socio-cultural torrents sweeping over communities, the nature of performing arts and its key focal point, the human body has always been dramatically changing its nature and the role it plays in the human endeavours. For centuries, the body is defined as a 'thing' (objectivism) or an object (*Körper*) opposed to the sentiments of human psyche and aesthetics in performing arts. Further, the Body is also defined as a vehicle or a medium through which the aesthetic expressions and human psyche are presented and elaborated. Thus the body and bodily functions in the evolution of the performing arts have been positioned at a less privileged place allowing the 'mind' to celebrate its 'virtuosic power' in the performing arts. In this paper, I will introduce a phenomenological methodology in opposing the existing understanding of the 'body in performance' as an 'object' (*Körper*) through which the aesthetic meanings and significances are communicated and shared. Therefore, I am going to show how the human body as a 'conscious being' (*Leib*) operates within performing arts and various modalities that the body encompasses through performance process. This phenomenological description shows how one can describe the primordial ways of engaging in the human act and how the body understands and performs its task through pre-personal and pre-lingual ways of engaging with the world. I do it through 'phenomenological description' to write the experiential nature of bodily 'being-in-the-world' and how this body functions and engages within its own motility with the outer world. In so doing, this paper brings back the discussion of the lived body (*Leib*) to the centre of the debate by elaborating and describing the bodily importance of corporeal arts and suggests to bypass the dyad between the performing body and aesthetic expression in the current practice of performing arts.

Key words: performing arts, performing body, body-object, body-subject, phenomenology

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Body, Time & Spatiality: A Performer's Description

Vice Chancellor, Father Thomas C Mathews, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities Dr John Joseph Kennedy, Dr Lijo Thomas, Dr Nayanthara De Silva, all the academics, presenters, students and distinguish guests.....

It is a great pleasure for me to deliver the keynote speech at this International conference on performing arts at the Christ University Bangalore. Today, I am going to talk about one of the major problems related to performing arts: The performer's bodily existence in the performance practice and how we could understand the body not as an object through which we execute our artistic and aesthetic sentiments but how the body works as a sentient being in the performance process. In order to attain this philosophical task, I would use and also been influenced by one of the philosophical traditions in the 21st century named Phenomenology. In this talk I am going to explore a first person narrative of the performer's description on how and in what ways the body understands the bodily existence in the performance practice. In so doing, I further propose a methodological perspective of which the performer's own narratives could be brought forward for further research.

My body swims in the vast ocean of space which is eternal for me. My lungs, heart, Intestines and other organs also sink in the internal space that exists inside my body. Without my body, I cannot experience space and time. If I say that 'I occupy a particular space', means that I inhabit in that space at a particular 'time and space'. Therefore, temporality is a crucial factor for understanding my bodily orientation in the theatrical space. The time allows the body to cultivate certain practices and habituations which sediment as bodily knowledge for me. Further this sedimentation of somatic skills is cultivated, when I inhabit a particular space.

Living in the daily life, I construct my bodily temporality with the objectification of the three abstract dimensions: past, present, and the future. This abstract construction of temporality is objectified in relation to my body as an object. I call it objective body. I implicitly understand that my body has a past, present and the future. However, one significant problem pertaining to my temporal structure of the body is that my 'lived experience' (*Leib*) of the temporal body cannot be explicitly captured because this lived temporality occurs in the pre-reflective level of my body. In the pre-reflective level, my body does not

distinguish the temporality as past, present or future but it comprises as a 'lived here-ness' in the body. Temporality is not understood as an outside object but is lived within. As soon as I objectify my body as 'a thing' in relation to other object around me, then I consciously objectify the past-present-future temporal structure within which my body is engulfed.



I cannot see that my body is 'in' the space or 'at' a particular time because the space and time is engulfed within my body. Let me introduce an analogy: When I see an apple on a table, I actually see the apple but I can't see my seeing, because my sensory organs have a null point or zero point. But in order to see the apple on the table, this seeing needs the unseen of my body. My bodily-being-in-the-space and time has a similar account. When I go to the rehearsal space, it has a certain boundaries which limit my understanding of its spatial-temporal structure. This rehearsal space is defined by the objects and the bodies that dwell in the space. Without these objects and bodies, I cannot see the "rehearsal space." This space is an "empty space", because I cannot understand its objective existence without my bodily being in it. Inhabiting in this particular spatial-temporality I assume that I am in the "space" and "time." This conscious directedness of my intentionality towards my body has a further implication of perceiving the space and time. How does this affect to my understanding of the space and time in the theatre space?

When I begin to experience the bodily inhibition of moving in the rehearsal space, the spatiotemporal world also functions as an objective existence outside my body. The spatiotemporal world I inhabit in the rehearsal space resonate the continuation of my daily experience of objective time and space. I am engulfing in the stream of objective spatiotemporal world since my day starts. During my sleep I have no

particular awareness of how the time and space is evolving. However, once I hear that my alarm is ringing, I know that the objective time is 6.00 am. So, I have to get up and prepare for my keynote speech. I have to go to the conference venue around 8.30 am. If I could not go to that place, I would be late. As such, I try to plan my daily behaviours according to the time I objectify in my daily routine. In this objective world, the time is unfolding to me as a river, which flows from a particular historical point to an eternal end. Day by day, I pass different points of departures towards that eternity. It evolves from past to the present and present to the unknown future. Then the future evolves in the present and becomes a past as the present evolves as the past and the future again evolves in the present.



Time and space do not allow me to think about it as something that is embedded in my body because as soon as I think about it, my language also entrap me to think about them as something outside my body. Time is always “running” or “moving”. If I late for the today’s conference, then Dr Nayanthara would definitely say that “you are running late Dr Saumya.” Time is a “running” and “moving” from the past to the present and to the future. I am a person who is floating in that temporal flow of stream. Time is always moving and I need to run with it or capture it. The time is understood in relation to the ideas of “motion” in my body because I am a moving being.

The theatre space in which I move and indwell makes a challenging spatiotemporal world for my body. Although I am pre-reflectively aware, that my body is already orientated in the spatiotemporality, theatre restructures this vast ocean of temporal space to recreate a new theatrical space for my body. This theatrical space functions as a new spatiotemporality where my body needs to be re-orientated to the new theatre space. Before I place my body within the theatrical space, I find that there are other bodies

and objects that inhabit in the space. This creates another inhibition as to whether my body needs to find ways to deal and interact with those bodies within that particular temporal space. My body needs to understand and orientates the other bodily existences in the given space and how these relationships are maintained within the given theatrical space. Then what is a theatrical space and time for me? How do I inhabit in this theatrical spatiotemporality? In order to explore these questions, I need to understand my spatiotemporality of the body in the enactive situation. Being in a particular enactive situation for a certain period of time means I inhabit in the spatiotemporal world that is defined by the rules of that enactment.

I go to the rehearsal and I see that there is an empty space. Yet, if I walk onto the stage, I would say that I am "in" the space because, being in this space, I have occupied the rehearsal space with my body. I carry my objective understanding of the space through my own understanding of being with others, other bodies and objects. When I understand through habituating in a particular space with other objects and subjects as me, I am gradually beginning to get the sense of the spatial quality that I am sharing with others. This space is defined with the proximity of my body to the other objects that are placed in the space. How can I understand the idea of space if I don't understand it through my body? But as a performer, I experience a very significant issue: I am constantly stepping out from my 'objective spatiotemporal understanding to the 'lived spatiotemporal understanding of my body.



I assume that the space is something that objectively exists outside and is always 'empty'. In order to use the space, it has to be occupied meaningfully. This objective thought assumes that this space is a

geometrical form which needs to be filled with content. When I am in the rehearsal space this rehearsal space is filled with the content of my body. In the meantime, I also assume, that my body is a “container” in which I store my feelings, thoughts, breath, food, digestion, urination and other related functionalities taking place “in”-side the body. On the other hand, my vision, tactile, auditory and other sense experiences are taking place “out”-side the body. When I am drinking a glass of water I am implicitly aware that I am drinking something which has two spatial properties. First, when I see the glass of water, I see it in the objective space in front of me and as soon as I drink it, I have an understanding of taking that objective spatial object (water) into my internal subjective space. Even in my daily routines of certain activities such as caring my body, washing, cleaning, brushing, eating, and breathing implicitly affirm that I have a body which consists of certain inner and outer spatial qualities. In other sense, I feel that I am taking care of a body that has outer and inner spatial properties.



I simply cannot get rid of the objective awareness of spatio-temporality as a form in which my objective body is situated in. As a performer, I am rehearsing a play, dance or an act means, that I am beginning to learn unlearning. In other words, I am learning to leave behind my daily behaviours and accumulate non-daily behaviours. It is what Bharatha formulated many centuries back as ‘Loka dharmi’ and ‘Natya dharmi’. When my body begins the process of unlearning, I am simultaneously beginning to get conscious about my body. I am conscious about my body because I need to unlearn the body-history, allowing my body to be absorbed a new body-culture. In the meantime, I am not only expected to unlearn my learning habits of the body; but it is a rite of passage, that my body is beginning to surpass through objective

spatiotemporal world. It is a migration from the known, objective spatiotemporal world to an unknown spatiotemporal world where the new experience of spatiotemporality is engulfed in my lived body.

If I use an analogy to describe the unlearning of learning, it is similar to a snake that sheds the skin, allowing a new skin to be appeared underneath the old skin. In this process of unlearning, first, my body becomes an object of my mind. In this 'unlearning to learning' situation, I need to direct my attention to the every single body compartment that I need to learn and deconstruct the previous body demeanours that have been assimilated as an old skin of the snake. As long as my consciousness is directed towards my body, I simultaneously objectify my body and then my body objectifies the space and time as abstract, ideal notion which exists outside my objective-body. The time and space, at this moment is an abstraction which exists as an object outside my lived experience. Therefore I still assume that my body is "in" a particular space and time. Being in a rehearsal space for me at this stage is being a body-object in the abstract geometrical time and space.



In order to unfold the mysterious relationship between my body as a performer and its relationship with the phenomenal spatiotemporal world, one might need to describe its hidden relationship between these two phenomena. I dwell in two types of spatiotemporalities: First I experience my daily spatial-temporal awareness through being engulfed in daily activities. For instance, I have a certain routines of daily behaviours that I am succumbed to follow. I wake up at a particular time; I take my breakfast at a particular time, I go to work at a particular time and finally I come home at a particular time. All my activities are measured, calculated and structured within objectively defined time and space. When I am entrapped with this objective temporal frame, I am simultaneously entrapped with the objective spatial frame as

well. Hence, my body cannot be trapped by the objective time without my body being trapped by the spatial structure in which my body is habituated. The time frame works in the body to discipline it in the vertical axis; while the space works in the horizontal axis to limit and frame the body in certain spatial structures. The objective time and space in a way work as a dungeon in which my body is trapped. Even though I feel that I have a great freedom to move and work, in fact, as we see, my capacities and potential are limited by the objective time and space.¹ Performance for me is a way of gaining my freedom, rebel against my daily spatiotemporal world that I am succumbed to follow.



However, my body is aware of a second layer of spatiotemporality once I am anchored into a particular enactment. It can be brushing my teeth, preparing morning breakfast, riding my bicycle or performing a particular dance act on stage. If we consider a dance or an acting situation, it distinguishes its spatiotemporal field from my daily attitude of the spatiotemporality because I cannot consciously attend to such objective understanding of the time and space during an enactment. This particular enactment

¹ The social and political implications on the time and space can further be elaborated within different social eras. It is not my intention to go further about these themes here. But, one can further think about how our bodies have been habituating within certain spaces- structures, institutions and buildings. Michael Foucault has extensively discussed about the implications of those power institutions and how human bodies are disciplined, punished and even marginalized indifferent social orders. One argument against phenomenology is that because its subject matter is more personal, and perspectival it fails to consider the wider socio political and cultural structures which influence to structure the body of the subject (Allain & Harvie 2006). But as I have argues, we can further show how for instance, phenomenology of time and space could works as oppressive social phenomena as the constituents of human experience.

operates its own spatiotemporal world which does not obey the daily routine of my objective time and space. The enactment in which I am dwelling provides a particular temporal and spatial feel when the body begins to unfold its movements. Then I begin to aware of an innate spatiotemporal flowing between the body and the surrounding. When my body moves in the theatre, the gestures which unfold my movement patterns begin to envelop a sense of temporal flowing within. The conscious awareness of my daily objective time and space is beginning to shift from its objective consciousness attention to the pre-reflective consciousness awareness of spatiotemporal field. The body-mind consciousness still be aware of such space and time not as a 'daily conscious attitude' of it but as a pre-reflectively being aware of it. Bodily temporality flows not similar to my conscious awareness of the objective time and space starting from a particular objective point to an eternal end as a clocked time. There is not such clocked time functioning in my lived body. It is the bodily rhythmic time that counts when the bodily movements are unfolding as a connected stream of somatic patterns.



Being in a particular theatre space requires a particular way of inhabiting. Particular way of inhabiting means a particular way of moving in the theatre space. When I acquire this 'particular way of inhabiting', by cultivating my motor skills, I further dilate my 'perceptual habits'. Perceptual habits dilate my motor habits; motor habits further dilate sense of bodily speciality. Then this bodily spatiality brings changes to his understanding of the objective space-time. Now, it should be noted that the perceptual activities are equivalent to the motor habits for me. In other words, thinking through body-mind means thinking through movements. Day by day, I begin to cultivate my motor habits towards the task environment. This way of

inhabiting in this theatrical space is a certain way of 'styling' my bodymind in the enactment (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 177).

Theatre performance is always fashionably seen as an aesthetic production perceived and appreciated from the spectatorial point of view. This relationship between the viewer's gaze towards the theatrical product entails that theatrical elements such as set, props, voice, body, costumes and lighting are seen as objects pertaining to the spectator's eye (Garner 1994, p. 47). However I experience that even though my body which is performed on stage could be reduced to an object similar to other objects possessed on stage, my body functions as an embodied subject in the theatre space (Garner 1994). My bodymind as a living being operates as point of reference to the other elements functioned in the theatre because, me as a living being already encompasses all the elements of the theatre through my bodymind.

Among other objects in theatre, my body is the only animated entity that is situated on stage. For instance, theatrical objects should not necessarily be seen as theatrical 'semiosis' but appear as 'ready-to-hand' objects subjected to my bodily intentional manipulation (Garner 1994, p. 89). The spectator has a limited access to the embodied experience. As a performer I indwell in the enactment while interacting and manipulating the given objects on stage. Even though the spectator tends to experience the aesthetics, cultural and social coding through the visual spectacle, me as a living performer simultaneously experience a phenomenal field in which I enliven with the other actors, objects and the audience. When I see a glass of water, I have a privilege of touching and further drinking this glass of water by manipulating the object of the glass through my body. Seeing, touching, grasping, drinking, tasting, and digesting allow me to experience the emotional and sensual world of experience that the audience members cannot experience with their limited visual and auditory perception.² It is a kinetic tactile experience that I gain through embodying the act of drinking water on stage. Furthermore I am capable of sensing (to some extent) the internal experience of the water going through the digesting system. Therefore, I have a privilege of experiencing such lived, bodily connectedness with theatrical environment than other bodies involved in the theatre. Therefore I sense my bodily synthesis of other objects in the theatre space as embodied. In doing so, I further change the objective spatial relationship with my bodymind by extending my motor habits towards the objects in the theatre space and embedding and synthesising them into my bodymind.

The human body is a meaning giving existence. These meanings are always generated prior to our intervention of the symbolic language.³ This idea of 'meaning giving existence' provides further

² Even if the glass is absent in this instance, the actor has a great deal of ability to 'recon' the activity of drinking without a glass of water. It does not make any changes to her/his act because his whole act is executed within an imaginative structure. However, I am not going to put the actor's role as a privilege position in the theatre experience because there are many examples that demonstrate that the primary intention of the theatre is to be able to render the actor's true experience to the spectator. For instance, Indian dramatic text *Natyashastra* supposes that the actor's ultimate goal is to render 'rasa' to the '*sahurda*' (similar hearted) or the audience member and transforms his/her to the level of the performer's experience.

³ Philosopher Mark Johnson and cognitive linguist George Lakoff's recent studies have suggested that the body make meanings prior to the conscious activities. 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).

explanation of how the human body possesses and acts as a meaning making entity through preconscious and not yet-free level. (Kwant 1963a, p. 21). In different frontiers, the human body opens up the body and interlace with the life-world⁴ (*Lebenswelt*). This open up or intertwining occurs through bodily orientation of space, through sexual and sensual intertwining with the world. For instance, body has an ability to make meanings and oriented of the space prior to the abstract idea of meaning of the space is grasped.



The attuning with a particular task and executing this task with a competence proves that the actor learner demonstrates a bodily spatiality which extends through his expansion of the perceptual synthesis in the task environment. Grasping a glass of water in the centre of the stage signifies that the actor is capable of moving and grasping the object and executes the act of drinking. Although the example may be a simple one, what I want to show is how the actor's perceptual and motor faculties are joined together to grasp the act of drinking. The layman's action and the actor's experience in this regards may not differ from each other. What I argued instead is that, in order to understand the bodily spatiality I need to look at how the perceptual habits and the motor habits are not two things but a single enactment of the bodymind process. Now I can say that cultivating a motor habit towards a particular task mean, cultivating perceptual habits of that task. The bodymind thus expands its horizon by knowing others, and the surrounding world through indwelling and extending its bodily synthesis with them.

⁴ The term Life-world (*Lebenswelt*) is widely used in German Phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl's writings. However, prior to Husserl, this term has been used by poet Hugo Von Hoffmannsthal. Life-world means our daily experience of the natural attitude. In addition, 'the world of living being' also be interchangeably used to denote the idea of life-world (Moran, Cohen & Library 2012).

Spatial objectivity

Earlier I stated that my bodymind is not only inhabited in the time and space, I move through the time and space. As an actor as well as a human being, my understanding of the spatiotemporal relation fluctuates between my bodymind and objective experience of the time and space. When people ask questions such as “at what time you are coming?” or “where do you live?”, these questions objectify our understanding and the relationship with the time and space as ‘things’ which are existed outside our bodies and understood them as geometrical space and time.⁵ These concepts of time and the space are understood in relation to the grounding concepts of motion and the objects that human beings experience through the body.

When I go to the middle of the rehearsal space, I feel that the vast array of space is extending from my body towards the walls of the auditorium. I walk towards one of the walls and stands there. Then I realise that the objects in the space create different perspectives and spatial relations towards my body. Every time I move to a different direction, my spatial relationship with the objective space begins to change with certain meanings. My bodymind begins to sense that objects scattered in the auditorium stand out against my bodily speciality and the background of the objective speciality. For instance, if I take the example of a chair standing in the centre of the stage, then this chair appears as a figure against the objective background as well as a figure against my bodily horizon (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 115). My bodymind and the objective space provide a double horizon for the figure (chair) to appear in my perceptual grasp. The bodymind stands out “against” the figure of the chair and the chair stands out “against” the background of the rehearsal space. This spatial relationship between the body and the object in the space as “against” the bodily space presupposes the orientation of the body in the geometrical space (2002, p. 116). This objective understanding renders my bodily relationship with objects in the space as they are geometricalized towards my body. Therefore, I am beginning to perceive that the chair is “in” the middle of the space. The table is “next” to the chair. The glass of water is “on” the table. I am “behind” the chair.

This orientation of the figure-background structure of perceiving the objects in the rehearsal space is beginning to merge when I am beginning to learn the scenic action on stage. For instance, When I am asked to explore the act of sitting on the chair, my bodymind first grasps the object (chair) as a figure in the background of the space. It stands off from the horizon of my bodily space and the objective space because my gaze is directed towards it. Once I repeat habitual actions, the chair begins to embed as a part of my body schema. Thus body schema has a spatial and temporal quality. When I am beginning to cultivate my body schema by rendering the act of sitting through 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 my attention but a part of my own bodily spatiality. My perceptual synthesis of the objects in the rehearsal space thus ingrained as an extension of my body schema. The bodymind therefore does not perceive the chair as an object of my attention any longer; the chair appears as a part of my dilated bodymind, a matrix

⁵ Edmund Husserl's analysis of the time further elaborates how our objective understanding of the abstract notion of time is linked to the human intentionality. Rather than denying the validity of the 'everyday comprehension' of the time, he suggests that the time is a 'time-consciousness' or a 'form of intentionality' functioned as intentional object (Luft, Overgaard & Ebook 2012, p. 191) similar to other objects that human perceive.

of learned actions through which I inhabit in the rehearsal space. Now I can conclude saying that my bodymind is spatial and temporal in quality when I inhabit in the rehearsal space. The bodymind for me is not a mere passivity; but it is embedded in the domain of intersubjectivity (2002, p. 162).

In this paper I tried to tackle one of the long lasting problem of performing body: the spatial and temporal qualities of human body and bodily consciousness of being in the enactment. I tried to explore these notorious issues through a first person narrative and tried to bring out phenomenological description of the bodily existence in performance. Furthermore, I argued that my body works as a consciousness opposed to the existing understanding of the body as an object pertaining to the performance practice. Hence, phenomenological description can also be useful methodology for exploring the bodily lived experience of a performer whose body and mind are not separate entities but unified totality in performance.

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