

A Phenomenological Actor

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Abstract

In this article, I will examine my artistic research process, focusing on the corporeal conditions of theatrical or, as I call it here, *scenic* performance by aiming at identifying its phenomenological aspects and potential. My presentation will proceed as a series of practical demonstrations, which enable us to perceive how an actor as a scenic performer conceives their corporeal practice, and what kind of phenomena they produce, encounter, and operate with. The experience and idea of corporeality, rising from the scenic practices described, set new kinds of challenges to the phenomenology of embodiment.

Keywords: body techniques, phenomenology of acting, scenic body, artistic research

Phenomenology and Artistic Research

In discussions concerning the methods and methodology of artistic research, I have recurrently defended an idea, according to which artistic research always has a more or less explicit phenomenological aspect. This idea, which I aim to specify here, is based on two facts. On the one hand, insofar as artistic techniques and products can always be considered as techniques and products of appearing, the research based on artistic practice also has something to do with it. On the other hand, as an artist-researcher starts to focus on their artistic practice to transform it or something else through it, that practice is primarily considered from the first-person perspective of the practitioner. Given that the phenomenology of art is nowadays a well-established branch of aesthetics, it is worth considering how the introduction of artistic research, as a novel form of academic knowledge formation, relates to the existing tradition of phenomenological studies and how artistic research possibly informs and challenges the latter. What makes the *artistic phenomena*, i.e. the phenomena an artist evokes, encounters, and operates with specific as compared with the other areas that phenomenology can study? Phenomenologically, the question concerns the modes of artistic intention and its specificities, for the study of which artistic research may open new gateways.

What does an artist know about artistic phenomena in advance? One particular aspect relates to their artificial nature, in other words to the fact that, although we consider those phenomena as something given as such, and according to their genuine way of appearing, we nevertheless also perceive that they are technically produced and this evident produced-ness also informs our experience of those phenomena. In the case of artistic phenomena, that aspect is essential. It is inherent to the experience of both artists (those who can produce those phenomena) and of those whom they address, such as members of the public, spectators, auditors, readers, or participants. In Gaston Bachelard's terms, the outcomes of artistic processes could therefore be characterized as "phenomenotechnical" (Rheinberger 2005). This strange combination

of givenness and artificiality is crucial, and my following demonstrations are meant to highlight this point. This combination also enables a creative way of practicing phenomenology. The practice consists not only of describing and analyzing the ways different phenomena may appear but also of producing them, thereby problematizing the culturally and psychologically established understanding of the area under study. The production of the *problematic phenomena* opens a way for a particular mode of argumentation, that my demonstration will follow.

As these artistic practices are here considered phenomenologically, the basic operation of that consideration still consists of the so-called phenomenological reduction, the bracketing of the natural attitude. This bracketing consists of our sensory impressions and learned skills and habits. In other words, to practice the phenomenology of some existing practice, *we always have to first unlearn that practice*. We must become hypothetically and methodically unable to conceive how that practice is constituted and experienced.

Unlearning a practice, as a special mode of reduction, requires that the practitioner-researcher recognizes the questionable nature of the dispositions governing our ways of perceiving a practice, learning it and speaking about it, as well as its artificial nature, which enables its bracketing and ultimate transformation. Although phenomenological bracketing is always conditional, it has here an existential sense insofar as it concerns the person's bodily capacities. Only after a person has reached the level where they can either meaningfully and methodologically *pretend* that they cannot do something (although they can), or *admit* that they cannot do something (although they formerly believed that they could), can the process of re-learning of that particular practice start. Usually, the conclusion is motivated by a more ethical conviction, according to which *I do not want to continue practicing according to my previously adopted criteria, although that would be technically possible*. Once having reached that point, a person can only finish with their practice and do something else, continue nihilistically, or change their practice fundamentally. In the latter case, which is my concern here, the process is simultaneously investigative and transformative. *The state of unlearning itself has to be produced*. This article explores techniques for doing so.

The unlearning creates conditions for a creative reconstitution of the practice, and its re-learning, through the study of the logic of its appearing. The relearning may make use of more established modes of phenomenological observation, such as the "eidetic variation" (Husserl 1982, pp. 11-12) (that will also be practiced below). We just have to bear in mind that what is varied, and compared, are different modes of practice formative production. In this case, the practice under my un- and re-learning consists that of acting as it is encountered and studied from the point of view of an actor.

Approaching Acting Phenomenologically

The "phenomenology of acting" has been under an explicit academic discussion since the beginning of the 1970s, when Jean-Paul Sartre devoted a series of seminal remarks to the topic. (Sartre 1973, pp. 211–226) Since the 1980s (Wilshire, 1982; States, 1985), phenomenology has increased its importance as one of the major methods in the academic study of scenic practices. (Bleeker et al., 2015, pp 1–19; Johnston, 2017, p. 76; Grant et al., 2019, pp. 19–38; Johnston 2021) Since my focus

in this article is on my artistic research practice, I have to leave the discussion with this fast-growing field for another occasion. However, if I should name one author that my reflections here communicate and debate with, I would name Phillip Zarrilli, who passed away in 2020 and whose final statement on the topic, (*toward*) a *phenomenology of acting*, appeared the same year. (Zarrilli, 2020) My reasons for this choice are various. I share with Zarrilli an artistic and pedagogical interest towards physical or corporeal performance. (Kirkkopelto, 2015) Zarrilli always takes special care of linking his argumentation both with the long philosophical tradition of phenomenology (starting with Husserl) and with the much shorter tradition of the phenomenology of acting. Moreover, his theory of acting comprises a significant intercultural dimension, in particular concerning Indian and Japanese body techniques and the corresponding traditions of acting. As one engages with Zarrilli, one also simultaneously and (more or less) implicitly engages with a wide range of other authors, and other cultures. Finally, what I am going to propose in the following will interestingly contrast with his fundamental statements, in particular concerning his way of building, via acting, a bridge between phenomenology and enactivist cognitive theories of “bodymind” or “embodied consciousness”. (Zarrilli 2020, pp. 9–19, 73–123) As I would argue, the phenomenological consideration of the scenic corporeal performance entails several aspects, which do not necessarily fit the enactivist idea of the body. That may also problematize more general attempts to link phenomenology with cognitive science. I will return to this collateral argument briefly at the end of my article.

What do we generally understand as we consider “acting” in an artistic sense? We may agree that acting consists of what actors do during a performance in a theatre, or in front of a camera and/or a microphone, in the case of film or radiophonic acting. An actor performs to others, the spectators or public, and the primary sense and criterion of their activity are artistic. How is their performance distinguished from other modes of performing arts, such as dance, performance art, opera or circus? According to the classical Aristotelian definition, the frame of reference of acting consists of the representation, reproduction or imitation of the speaking and/or acting human being: *mimêsis praxeôs*. (Aristotle 1957, 6, 50 b 3) No matter how far we extend the limits of art, calling something “acting” implies a reference to that frame, regardless of the pro- or anti-theatrical nature of that reference. In this article, my aim is now to consider that frame, and the specific mode of intentionality it entails, more phenomenologically.

An actor is involved with various human processes of meaning-making. Among these processes, speech – the production and use of an oral or non-oral system of signs – has a primary significance. As I will soon demonstrate, even in cases where during a performance no single word is pronounced or no sign made, the performer’s body *speaks* in a scenic sense. Their performance is largely understood within and through the framework of speech, and that particular mode of corporeal speech can be considered as acting. In every case, an actor follows a “score” or a “sub-score” of meaningful actions (Zarrilli 2020, pp. 34–39) and actualizes a dramaturgical or compositional structure, that can be articulated and, in most cases, is also written down. Improvisation does not constitute an exception here: improvisations consist of instant compositions. Neither does this definition exclude the possibility where a dancer or a performance artist or an opera singer or a circus artist starts to act. They can act as well. The frame of reference of those arts is only different than in a theatre or in film to the extent that acting, the mode of appearing of a speaking being, is at the

focus of the genre. Lastly, acting belongs essentially to the repertoire of the means of everyday human interaction and communication. “Theatre of everyday life” and theatre as an established art form are essentially linked via the practice of acting, the characteristic features of which are recognizable for every one of us, insofar as we are speaking and acting human beings.

These preliminary definitions and restrictions are necessary to justify the use of the term “acting” while focusing in this instance mainly on the oral expression of a performer, their production of speech. Culturally, Western theatre is based on the presentation of acting and speaking human beings. Practically, the artistic reproduction of speech is something that a person is supposed to master to some degree to be considered as an “actor”. But the reason for my focus goes much further than that. It can be argued that phenomenologically, and from the point of view of the actor, *the production of speech does not distinguish from any other mode of corporeal expression*. The distinction between those areas is here precisely something taken-for-granted, a “natural attitude” that my following demonstration aims at challenging and dissipating.

The demonstration advances as a series of “exercises”. They derive from my artistic and pedagogical research practice, which is not bound to any existing tradition of performance training, although it draws inspiration from many sources. I consider these exercises as phenomenological arrangements, whose aim is here to highlight essential aspects of the performer’s body at the moment of acting, the scenic transformation. Each one of the exercises is reductive (a moment of unlearning) in a special way, enabling a reconstruction of new kind of practical understanding (moment of relearning) based on the phenomena discovered. Practically, unlearning implies that one unmakes the connections the previous mode of practice has taken for granted and thereby inhibits its use. This dismantled state creates a starting point for practical reconstructions, which follow more faithfully the way the phenomena themselves tend to connect with each other. The exercises are quite easy to do, and they are meant to be done alone even in cases where they are performed as a group in the same space, and basically anyone can do them. In most cases, it may suffice that one reconstructs the exercise in one’s imagination while reading its description, and tests it afterwards if needed. In the scenic contexts, imagining is already doing.

How Does a Body Speak on Stage?

Let’s start by comparing how the body of a speaking person appears as they are considered in a scenic perspective, and how their appearance distinguishes from cases where the same person is met during everyday communication. Normally, grasping that difference does not require much effort. But on what is that facility based? In other words, how does our perception and understanding of the person’s body – since that is what we are perceiving here – change from one case to another? In most cases the difference between acting and acting in artistic and everyday situations, depends on the context. When a person appears on the stage of a theatre, everything they do looks like an actor’s art, whereas the case is contrary for instance in a supermarket. But let’s now try to bracket those obvious social and cultural contexts and focus only on the corporeal performance or behavior as much as that is possible. Now the difference is much harder to detect. The following exercises are meant to help us with it.

Exercise 1:

- a) Select an everyday phrase that you often use to address other people. Say it out loud by paying attention to its prosodic features (intonation, rhythm, pitch, etc.) and exaggerate them.
- b) Strip away the words and try to repeat the same phrase merely by imitating the sound of your speech, its prosodic features. Repeat the phrase until the result satisfies you.

Variation: Listen to a person speaking on the radio or television. Pick one of their phrases. Repeat it without words by imitating its prosodic features.

The exercise is funny and easy to do but, precisely because of that, it reveals something worth considering: on any occasion, we can distinguish in a speech act two levels of appearing that are overlapping and interconnected, and without which a speech would not be considered as speech. To make a difference between these two levels, I now call the first one, which consists of semantic and syntactic aspects of speech, as *logic*, and the second, consisting of the prosodic and corporeal aspects of speech, as *mimetic*. By mimetic, I refer both to the specific outwardly perceptible likeness of the body and its attunement or feel, its more affective modes of appearing. (Cf. Blackman, 2012, pp. 10, 15, 24; Gibbs, 2010) As we speak, we always communicate corporeally in both registers. Unlike one might suppose at the first sight, these registers do not correspond to the structuralist divide between “enunciation” and “enounced”. (Benveniste 1974) Instead, the division takes place at the level of the enunciation which, as a phenomenon, is a complex one. Insofar as speech always has these two layers that inform each other, our perception or experience of speech is internally split. That split is essential. It cannot be reduced without losing the phenomenon itself. The experience is conditioned by our capacity to make the difference in question, as is performed specifically in the exercise. Finally, the two registers of appearing are overlapping but not knitted together. One can easily produce and/or imagine a speaking situation, where the logic register dominates the mimetic one, as well as situations where the mimetic aspects dominate the expression at the cost of the logic one.

Let’s now imagine a situation that is most typical in theatrical contexts. An actor in rehearsals is given a line, a piece of text, that they are supposed to perform. The starting point consists of a series of written words that should be turned into a speech of a stage character. As they read the phrase silently, it immediately starts to sound like something in their mind, since reading can be conceived as a kind of inner speech. Saying a phrase aloud does not cause any problem either. But how to pronounce it in the right way, how to perform it? To study this, I suggest that we first bracket all the questions that normally tend to dominate the attention, specifically ones regarding “interpretation”, and focus solely on the corporeal act of performing a word. The very fact that a word is acted, performed publicly and artistically, that is scenically, already changes the way of pronouncing it, as well as the way the pronounced word appears. The difference that in our daily speech occurs spontaneously now turns into a yawning gap, that distinguishes the performer’s mimetic body from the logic register of words. Let’s study that gap by making it even more abrupt.

Exercise 2: Choose a word, preferably a noun, and start to repeat it by varying the ways of pronouncing it. Strip the given or normal meaning of the word by focusing on its prosodic aspects and playing with them. You can imagine situations, where the word is pronounced without understanding its meaning. Try to imitate such situations. You can once again easily amuse yourself with this exercise.

As one continues to do the exercise, they can notice at least the following point: The word does not disappear along with its suspended meaning. On the contrary, the meaningless word turns into a kind of material thing or a body, whose mimetic nature – its likeness and feel – is singular, and one can both imagine and sense it. The prosodic variation strengthens the word's specific corporeal existence that, as one can also notice, is not fully dependent on their will. Of course, the word disappears immediately one finishes pronouncing it. But if others were repeating the same word at the same time, the practitioners could afterwards easily discuss the word and reflect on its particular aspects as if they were considering a piece of sculpture or some natural formation from outside. In sum, the estrangement that the repetition of a word causes at the logic level familiarizes us with its mimetic corporeality. At the same time, the word continues its existence in a strange *virtual* way. (Kirkkopelto, 2021)

This state, as I claim, now constitutes the starting point for my phenomenological analysis of the scenic embodiment of a word. Unlike in everyday talk, where the words we use have their accustomed embodied forms (as in the phrase we pronounced in Exercise 1), the words to be performed scenically are first alienated and dumb. In other words, to embody a word scenically, that word has first to be changed into a certain kind of body comparable to the body of the actor. The word to be embodied combines strangeness (what does that word mean, or does it mean anything at all?) and familiarity (its thingness or corporeality). That word is not entirely living (present, conveying its meaning) but not entirely dead either (absent or a sign-object). It is hovering at the limit of meaning as a problematic entity.

What does the body of the spoken word consist of? Can we even speak about its “body” without quotation marks? For something to constitute and to be called a body (and not just an empirical object), a concomitance of a certain number of aspects is required, such as likeness, feel, materiality and a consistency. We have already encountered the likeness and the feel of the spoken word, but how about its materiality? Empirically, that matter consists of air bursting out of our lungs with the help of the muscular work. It is fashioned by the vocal apparatus within our throats and it finds its final form in the mouth. Let's now try to make that vocal materiality appear more on its own terms.

Exercise 3: Start to emit a continuous sound that is as long as your exhalation. Extend the sound by extending the exhalation. Focus on the singular prosodic form of your vocal expression and listen to it. Walk around. Avoid imitating singing, reciting or speaking. Bracket all the external definitions. Continually vary the prosodic nature of the exhaled sound. Try to visualize the form of the current or column of air bursting out from your mouth. You may help the visualization with your arms and hands, by letting them outline the form of your voice. Play with it.

Thanks to this quite rudimentary voice exercise, we have met something that we might call a “bare” voice, the carrier of speech and other modes of vocal expression, whose likeness and feel are very much dependent on the habitus of the practitioner’s body. As in the case of speaking, the voice does not consist of a mere sound, neither does it consist of a mere current or column of air, but their combination. Through the vocal apparatus (diaphragm, throat, mouth), the physical matter – air – is transformed into a body of air having its particular likeness, feel, and form. Its ephemeral corporeality is not given but produced by the performer. For the same reason, the performer could also imagine the body in question and fashion it according to their creative will. As a result, the body of air performs to the performer themselves. Their voice is like a body within their body, a body that exits and re-enters their body constantly, not belonging to either side. It is the voice of this body, an essential mode of its bodily appearing.

Phenomenologically we, as potential actors, now face the following challenge: how to make these two elements coincide: the body of the word (Exercise 2) and the body of the voice (Exercise 3) to produce a phenomenon, that looks like a speaking and acting person (Exercise 1)?



The Scene

To reconcile the performer’s body, the body of their voice and the body of the word, another concept and phenomenon needs to be introduced, which I have used already but not explained, namely that of the “scene”.

By “scene” we may understand a spatial arrangement, a podium, a stage, but also a temporal sequence in a dramaturgical structure, a dramatic situation or event. In every case and phenomenologically, the existence or persistence of a scene is very much dependent on what is happening “there”, namely on the corporeal performance of an actor. (Kirkkopelto, 2009) Merely a simple gesture from the performer is sufficient for introducing and opening a scene, the scene of that gesture. For the same reason, we need to suppose that the “scenicity” of the scene is somehow implied in that performance itself. In other words, the presupposition of acting as a scenic

performance constitutes the phenomenological frame of reference for every scene. The factual absence or invisibility of the performer, or the cases where a performer is replaced by non-human agents, living or non-living, do not contradict or undermine the evidence of this conclusion.

If the scene has been “there” all the time, where has it been located? How does the phenomenon of the acting and speaking body imply and carry it along? The scenic aspect of the performer’s body comes forth most easily by comparing it with a spatial scenic construct, the stage. The stage is a space of performing that the actor enters and exits. That is to say that the stage always implies its outside, the off-stage. The etymology of the word nicely confirms this: the Greek term *skênê*, means originally a “tent” and that term, in turn, derives probably from the noun *skia*, meaning a “shadow”. (Chantraine, 1999, pp. 1015–1018) In other words, there is no scene without a shadow, a possibility to move from the state of relative non-manifestation to the state of relative manifestation and vice-versa. Traditionally, the division is marked and materialized by a curtain, a backdrop. But phenomenologically, that is not necessary: a scene opens every time someone just enters it. Therefore, everything now depends on the manner of that entering, which I will focus on now.

Let’s start with a thought experiment and imagine a situation, where a person starts to perform in a public place: the case of street theatre. They can start their show and spectacularly make their entrance, but that is not necessary. Maybe the performer just starts to perform and then, little by little, the passers-by understand that they are acting. How do we recognize it, if there is no external sign helping our interpretation? In other words, how does theatre make itself appear at the level of the body of the actor? It seems evident to me that the observation is based in the way *the actor makes their body a scene for their performance*.

Concretely, the operation implies that only a part of the body of the performer is at play at one time, whereas another part withdraws and constitutes both virtual and actual, that is *virtualized* background for the transformed part or area. In other words, the body of the performer divides into parts or areas, of which some are more manifest and distinctively transformed, and others less. By revealing themselves in such a state of division, the actor articulates themselves as an actor and we, at least the adult side of us, understands the division “spontaneously”: that the person is not fully what they appear to be; that they are just making an appearance of another person or being; that they are acting, i.e. performing scenically. The scene is not therefore just a category of mind that is projected onto outer sensible reality, but it takes place physically at the level of the performer’s body, making it appear in a certain characteristic way. We recognize the scenic difference that divides the body of the performer – the phenomenon of the actor is constituted by that divide – although in many cases it may be empirically impossible to indicate the location of that corporeal demarcation line. The latter is not only changing its location all the time. It is also uncertain if that line strictly speaking perceptible (visible, audible) at all. Neither is it an idealizing abstraction, unless we consider the latter in the state of its making. Are we facing here the same difference as above in Exercise 1, between the mimetic and logic registers? Not exactly. To see the difference, that prevails here again between artistic and everyday action, I need to carry my analysis further.

The partiality and the dividedness of the corporeal performance become particularly obvious, if they are exaggerated. This is what happens for instance in

more stylized forms of theatre and acting, as in the Indian *Kutiyattam* theatre (Zarrilli, 2020, p. 59), where acting mostly takes place between the face and the arms of the performer. That fact does not need to be underlined. What is less obvious and often against our taken-for-granted idea of acting, is that we cannot get rid of partiality and dividedness, even in cases where the action of the stage or film character appears integrated. I would claim that even in cases of so-called psycho-realistic acting, the division and partiality in question do not disappear, they are only hidden or their effect is attenuated. The area where the difference takes place may for instance be restricted to the head of the actor, in which case the actor's face functions like a mask, with which they operate and behind which they conceal.

Temporally (since the scene is also a temporal phenomenon), partiality implies repetition. An actor has to repeat their entrance on the scene and their withdrawal from there to maintain their performance. The scenic transformations between entering and exiting are momentary and ephemeral. The reality of the everyday world soon consumes them, if they are not repeated, and every time in a new manner. As Denis Guénoun, a French philosopher of theatre once formulated it, *le jeu, c'est le passage au jeu*: "playing consists of a (constant and repeated) transition to play." (Guénoun, 1998, p. 33) Once again, this back-and-forth movement can be exaggerated and made more apparent. A performer can make manifest when they are in their role and when they leave it. If the transitions are hidden or attenuated, it gives the acting a more continuous and "realistic" appearance. Creating a singular and momentary scenic transformation is not that difficult. We do so constantly in our everyday communication by imitating the way of behaving and speaking of our fellow beings. The particular skill of the actor is rather related to their ability to play with these apparitions, bringing them forth and withdrawing themselves from them, combining them and moving from one apparition to another in an artistically meaningful way, and doing all that together with the other actors and in front of the audience or a camera.

That is why an essential aspect of an actor's skill is to be able to distance oneself from oneself, to open the scenic division within one's body, a division which also enables the artistic or aesthetic reflection of the action produced and shown. That division is never only "mental" but it always has its physical and bodily correlate, that may be minimal but is still perceptible. That is what acting is about from the point of view of the spectator: it does not consist of mere illusions, virtual representations, but also of the showing of their making. As I underlined at the beginning, artistic phenomena are born as artificial, but they also have their embodied substantiality. At the end of the last section, we faced a task of combining the body of the word and the body of the voice in a performative way. Now we can understand what this task requires in addition: the encounter and fusion in question must take place on the scene of the body. The following exercises show how this becomes possible.

The Scenic Embodiment of a Word

To open the actor's corporeal and scenic operation to phenomenological consideration, I have developed the following, slightly more complicated exercise, where a performer divides their body with a help of a line marked or attached on the floor in front of them. The exercise is once again done alone, but it can also be performed with a collaborator.



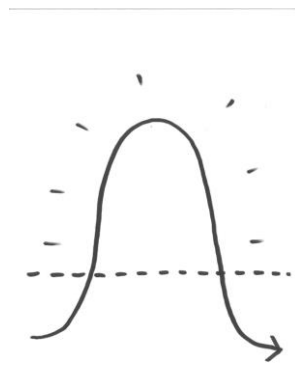
Exercise 4:

- Attach an adhesive tape, extend a rope or draw a line on the floor in front of you.
- Stand next to the line. Imagine that on this side of the line your body is off-stage and withdrawn. On the other side, your body is on-stage and performing.
- How does it perform?
- Choose one body part or area of your body at one time and extend it over the line, on stage. The rest of your body remains off-stage at the same time as it provides a background or backdrop for the body part on stage.
- The performance of the body part on-stage consists of getting affected unpredictably and showing it. What does that mean? Just decide that at the moment you extend your body on the other side, that part or area will be seized by some specific feeling that you cannot predict, and that feeling animates the body part in a certain way. Let that way simultaneously affect your voice. Emit a sound that corresponds to the quality of the specific feeling. You will notice how the sound helps you to imagine the way your body part is affected. It is the voice of that body(part). Do not use words and avoid human interpretations. Let your body make the kind of noise spontaneously.
- Let the body remaining off-stage reflect on the affected part and react to it freely.
- Linger for a while in each state and observe it.
- Exit the stage and then enter it again with another body part that, in turn, gets affected in some other way. Vary between the parts and their size (belly, breast, nose, a tip of a finger, buttock, knee, neck, elbow, etc.). You may also sit or lie or go on your knees to help your body parts to perform.
- After each exit, you may also re-enter and try to repeat the preceding state.
- You can amuse yourself with this exercise.

Variation 1: Imagine that the affected body part on stage is an unfamiliar creature who finds itself in unfamiliar surroundings. The sound of the creature rises out of its contact with its surroundings. Study what the creature is like, where it is and what it is doing.

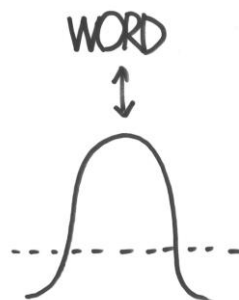
Variation 2: Ask your collaborator to sit on the floor on the other side of the line, opposite to your stage. Entertain them with your partial affective states and creatures.

What happened in these exercises? Schematically, their structure can be clarified by the following diagram, which depicts the scenic apparition of the body both spatially and temporally:



How does the case connect to the previous exercises? As I see it, the exercise produces a virtual entity, whose existence is scenic and where the mimetic and affective qualities of body (Exercise 1) and voice (Exercise 3) combine with a momentaneous corporeal consistency. Phenomenologically, the voice is located in the body part. It is the voice of that body. The scene distances the performer from their creation, allows them to reflect on it and show it to possible spectators. The mimetic quality of the partial voice-body, its likeness and feel, is unidentifiable but precise. It could easily evoke different kinds of human or non-human interpretations but, so far, we have bracketed all of them.

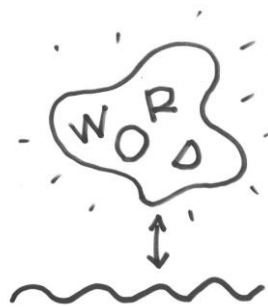
Now we are ready to accomplish the final part of my demonstration. The last thing to do is to combine the partial voice-body thus created with the body of the word (Exercise 2). The task we face in the next exercise can be depicted in the following way:



Exercise 5:

- Choose a word (for instance the same you used in Exercise 1, or a two-word phrase like “Come here”, “Hold on”, “Good morning”, etc.). Let’s play with that single word or phrase.
- Use the same technique as in Exercise 4, but now, every time your body part and its voice get affected on stage, try at the time to pronounce the word or phrase, and let the voice-body affect and define your way of pronouncing it. Repeat the result a few times.
- To start with, you may first test how this particular body part and its voice are affected, and only then add the word and pronounce it. But soon you notice that you can do both phases (almost) simultaneously.
- Reflect on your expression but do not try to inform it otherwise than via your performing body part.
- As you vary between differently affected voice-bodies while simultaneously repeating your word or phrase, you can notice how the latter starts to sound like a verbal expression, yours or somebody else’s.
- Listen to the outcome and imagine what kind of personal interpretations each expression might provoke: in which kind of situations might you pronounce that word or phrase in that particular way, or who would speak like that?
- Once again, keep the exercise playful and enjoyable.

The result of the exercise can be clarified by the following diagram:



I now call the virtual entity that is born from the encounter and fusion between the transformed body and the verbal material, *a scenic body*. It provides us with an example of a genuine artistic phenomenon, whose existence is irreducible despite its virtual, artificial and endlessly variable nature. The performing body of the actor produces, shows and sustains it by techniques comparable to those highlighted in the previous exercises. But what has that entity and its particular mode of production to

do with acting in the sense we are used to encountering and recognizing it? The connection is now easy to establish. We only need to add two variations to the exercise:

Variation 1: Cross the line on the floor with your entire performing body and imagine, that it is now divided by an invisible line that constantly changes its location. Keep on extending your body parts across that line and let your body and voice become partially affected as in Exercise 4. Move around in space while doing the exercise. After a while, add a word or a phrase to your action like in Exercise 5.

Variation 2: Imagine that you are spectated by people around you. Perform to them. “Internalize” the affected body part by imagining that it is situated invisibly within the contours of your body. Let it now affect your verbal expression as if from within. You can now easily control the quality of your outer expression according to your will. At the same time, you can notice how the appearance of your vocal and corporeal expression approaches that of a habitual social communication.

This is how our phenomenological actor has scenically embodied their first words. In the final variations, we met two things at once: 1) a series of stage characters based on the repetition of some characteristic gesture or a mode of reaction, including voice and movement; 2) a series of scenic embodiments of a word or a phrase, where the sense of that same word or phrase changed from case to case, every time opening a new scene, that could be interpreted as a representation of some particular life situation. The acting thus produced is, of course, rudimentary, but sufficient to highlight phenomenologically the way the actor’s body works at the moment of the scenic transformation. Despite the seeming strangeness of my starting point, the exercises finally led to a situation that, in principle, corresponds to more conventional modes of scenic performance. To support this contention, let me conclude this section by quoting a historical anecdote concerning the performance of a Stanislavskian actor, as related by the linguist Roman Jakobson:

A former actor of Stanislavskij’s Moscow Theatre told me how at his audition he was asked by the famous director to make forty different messages from the phrase *Segodnja večerom* “This evening,” by diversifying its expressive tint. He made a list of some forty emotional situations, then emitted the given phrase in accordance with each of these situations, which his audience had to recognize only from the changes in the sound shape of the same two words. For our research work in the description and analysis of contemporary Standard Russian (under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation) this actor was asked to repeat Stanislavskij’s test. He wrote down some fifty situations framing the same elliptic sentence and made of it fifty corresponding messages for a tape record. Most of the messages were correctly and circumstantially decoded by Moscovite listeners. May I add that all such emotive cues easily undergo linguistic analysis. (Jakobson, 1960, pp. 354–355)

Conclusions

I have presented a phenomenological analysis of the way the performer's body operates on stage at the moment of the scenic transformation. The analysis has been presented from the point of view of the performing body and its specific mode of intention. The latter differs significantly from the modes of everyday communication. Yet, the relation between these two modes of acting and intending is not exclusive. On the one hand, a performer never forgets the actual setting of her performance, the artificial nature of the situation and its effective empirical conditions. Traditionally, that ability of an actor to live and work in two modal spheres at the same time is called their "double-consciousness." (Coquelin 1954) On the other hand, our everyday behavior and communication include repeated shifts to theatrical modes of expression and back. For instance, as we, after a workday, recount and demonstrate the reactions of our workmates to our friends. If we now return to the comparison between the way a speaking body appears at the occasion of everyday communication (Exercise 1) and the "same" body at the moment of the scenic reproduction of that communication (Exercise 5), we can notice how both cases include a constitutive difference. In the first one, the difference resides between the two levels of expression I have called logic and mimetic. Whereas in the second one, the performer's body was divided into a more withdrawn part and a more salient part, so that the withdrawn part could provide a space and support for the apparition and transformation of the salient part. We may now grasp intuitively how these two fundamental modes of appearing sustain and penetrate each other, but the way they do that would require a further analysis that I cannot enter here. Instead, I would present the consequences of the former analysis as a series of nine propositions that I, to conclude, would leave to reader's consideration:

- An actor's body on stage is never fully present, but always also partly withdrawn and hidden.
- Their corporeal performance is always partial and repetitive, divided and sustained by a scenic difference.
- The scenic body created and shown by the actor's performing body is a virtual entity: something transformed, material, momentary and local.
- As a hybrid entity, it is indistinguishably logic and mimetic (thereby differing from the elements of everyday language): an artistic or poetic entity instead of a discursive or empirical entity.
- Mimetically, the scenic body is not necessarily anthropomorphic: it can take whatever mimetic form, likeness and feel.
- Logically, the sense of scenic bodies, their semantic and syntactic power, is unlimited: they are capable of meaning anything whatsoever and nothing at all, capable of connecting with any other scenic body, each one opening its partial universe, the scene of its sense.
- In their artistic virtuosity, a scenic body is like an ideal actor exemplified endlessly (embodied and represented) by the body of an actual actor.

– Scenic bodies are the ultimate elements of the scenic composition, artistic components, that makes the actor’s bodily composition, the actor’s dramaturgy, and thereby their *art* possible.

– Scenic bodies provide an example of genuinely artistic phenomena.

Whether these conclusions are polemical or not depends entirely on the reader’s and the practitioner’s experience and point of view. As to taken-for-granted ways of conceiving acting and the theories of acting based on them, I would presume that the model outlined here is distinguished from them in many respects (although there are certainly many common features and interfaces as well). It may also be, that only after this kind of demonstration, which indicates how it is possible to conceive an actor’s corporeal process in an alternative way, we can come to an understanding of what those “accustomed ways” really are and how they could be changed. If acting is understood through the model of impersonation – that is the embodiment of a character, a fictional model of another human being – then our experience and perception, both as performers and spectators, is inclined to jump over, or to take as granted all the steps and degrees that the phenomenological analysis above has revealed. That happens also for Zarrilli, who takes the body as the “zero-point” (Zarrilli, 2020, pp. 73, 114) of all cognition and all action, a self-given starting and reference point of all meaning-making, instead of considering how the body divides itself, gives itself to itself and, thereby, constitutes a fundamental problem, and a source of joy to itself. If we focus on the latter aspects, the consequences would not only be aesthetic or pedagogical. They would also add to our phenomenological understanding of corporeality, regarding its innate artistic capacities. Those capacities, insofar as I have learnt to know them, should not be reserved for artists only.

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