

Phenomenology of An Actor's Work in Filmic Performance

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Abstract - Modernist approaches to acting practice has always been fascinated by the ways that the actor's work in live theatre as well as on screen is understood, interpreted and further appreciated as a representation of meanings. The actor's body is thus a tool or a communicative device via which the author's ideas, conceptions, and thoughts are brought forward. This paper questions this representational ways of understanding acting in filmic performance and suggests an anti-representational modes of perceiving the actor's work via phenomenological reading. Influenced by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its contemporary developments in cognitive sciences, this paper further proposes an enactive way to understand the actor's art, while bringing the actor's experience to the centre of the discussion. In order to do so, I shall introduces four ontological categories of the lived body via which, I will explore how the film actor's performance can be seen as a lived temporality, spatiality, and intersubjectivity within filmic performance. Building upon such phenomenological interpretation of the body, I further elaborate one of the leading film actors' works in Sri Lanka and argue how these phenomenologies of film acting can be applied to understand non-representation ways of enacting and perceiving acting.

Keywords - representation, phenomenology, enactment, lived experience, encroachment

'What is happening' (the films which are released) does not produce, on its own, any sort of intelligibility.
- Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought*

She had the ability to perform any role she was given. Some actresses refused to wear swim suits; but she didn't.
- Tony Ranasinghe (www.lankalivestar.com)

I. INTRODUCTION

The modernist approaches to acting¹ and theories pertaining to actor's work have always been fascinated by the ways how the actor represents certain meanings, images, and values pertaining to a particular social or cultural context. Actor's body as a device of acting or a tool of communication has been defined as a projector or rather in some extreme situations, a marionette of an author whose artistic practices and aesthetic sentiments are brought forward to spectators.

At this particular juncture I will consider actor Malini Fonseka's² particular appearance in Sri Lankan film called *punchi baba* (The Little Baby) and suggest an anti-representational ways of understanding the actor's work in film medium. However, it is not my intention to deny the discussion of representational ways of defining acting and how the actor's body becomes a semantic representation in diverse performance contexts. This paper, as it has been customarily done in the past, does not further intend to glorify Malini's work as a representation of Sri Lankan female identity or virtue of female ethics. Rather my intention in this paper is to develop a few key ideas via which the contemporary film acting can be explored through an anti-representational way of looking at the actor's work.

In order to do so, first I introduce some of the key assumptions of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology³ in particular and its contemporary developments in cognitive sciences to discuss how these ideas help to define the lived experience⁴ of the actor. For this purpose, I will introduce four ontological categories which I prefer to call them "modalities of the lived body": 1. Embodiment, 2. Experience, 3. Enactment, and finally, 4. Encroachment. While introducing these four areas of lived body in acting, I will draw Malini's debut movie *punchi baba* and re-contextualise these ideas within Malini's early stage of acting practice. In so doing, this discussion will unfold through these four areas of embodiment of acting through which I shall propose an enactive way to understand screen acting which questions the representational values and its predominance in the contemporary performing arts industry. This phenomenological reading of the actor's body, acting experience and the process of performance making may shed a light to define the actors' work on screen and perhaps help to illuminate screen actor's performance (as an enactment) in a novelty way.

II. PHENOMENAL BODY AND FILM ACTING

In fact, acting in general and film acting under scrutiny here in particular has been discussed, analysed, taught and perhaps celebrated in relation to the representational ways of defining acting. The actor who is capable of representing definite values and sign systems (social *gestus*) akin to a particular social era is highly appreciated and honoured by aesthetic regimes via which these values and aesthetic discourse are produced and continued to be maintained. The actor's responsibility within this model of gesticulation is to represent what she has been incultured through social interactions and reproduce and replicate those aesthetic values via her body to inform and entertain audience members' aesthetic needs. What this mode of acting practice and appreciation unwittingly neglect is the way how the actor

experiences her own ways of embodiment of acting before her performance is interpreted and celebrated in those established aesthetic discourses.

As Phillip Zarrilli argues, every mode of body practice knowingly or unknowingly represents a particular discourse of acting (Zarrilli 2002). In those discursive formations, we are not very much interested in exploring how the actor embodies a particular role, what relationship does she cultivate with her partner-actor and the surrounding or what is going on with the process of performing her role. What matters in general is how the actor represents a particular character, a particular emotion and perhaps a particular value system pertaining to the role she represents. In phenomenological sense, what it denies is the embodied experience of the actor. Being in a particular enactment does not count as an artistic practice of acting.

It is widely known that phenomenology is the philosophy of the body (Carman 2008, 2009). Unlike other phenomenological philosophers,⁵ Merleau-Ponty primarily focused on the problem of the body and human perception. Merleau-Ponty's seminal work *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 2002) revolutionised the ways we think and understand the inner and outer dimensions of the human being. He radicalised the way that the human experience and the body is understood in the Western epistemology (Kwant 1963). It is not my intention here to bring an extended discussion about phenomenological philosophy. But it is worthwhile to mention some of the key principles developed by Merleau-Ponty in order to proceed with the discussion I propose.

Acting as a representation germinates through the dominant epistemological paradigm imposed by the Western tradition of thinking. This formula is known as the *stimulus-idea-response* model (Barnacle 2009). According to this model, knowledge acquisition is a cyclical process which starts from stimuli (outside). These stimuli affect individuals to develop ideas (inside) in the brain and then as a result of it, these ideas ignite bodily responses (outward) as a reaction to the outer stimulus. This epistemological model presupposes that the humans assume a position of perceiving the world devoid from its environment and the perception and action are two separate functions of the mind and the body.

It is no surprising to see how this *stimuli-idea-response* model is easily adaptable to define the process of the actor. The actor's work, her emotional expressions, bodily action and the meanings have been regarded as a representation of certain ideas, thoughts and passions which germinate inside the actor (in the psyche) and expressed through the physical means (body) to the outside world. It is this actor who projects certain meanings and ideas absorbed from the social environment and later reproduces them through her emotional and physical means. In this sense, the actor is a *representer* or a *mirror* placed against the society through which spectators read and extract certain social meanings.

Merleau-Ponty challenges every mode of representational meanings of the human body. For him, human being is not a dual existence, or a combination of body and mind. He does not believe that there is a particular consciousness - an inner world that exists apart from the physical existence of the body (Olkowski & Morley 1999). Hence the body is not a representation or a container of the language, emotions thoughts or ideas. Merleau-Ponty defines that the body is itself a consciousness and further a 'project of the world' (Merleau-Ponty 2002). For Merleau-Ponty, the body and the world are constructed from the same elements. This idea denies the fact that there is an existence of a psychological life of a human being devoid of its attunement with the environment.

Along with these articulations, Merleau-Ponty rejects some of the prejudices notions pertaining to body, consciousness, time, space, sexuality, language and otherness. His articulation of the various aspects of the body, temporality, spatiality and communion help us to understand the actor's work as a lived experience or rather a *Gestalt*⁶ experience. It is not the fact that the mind is an all knowing entity of human perception. Mind and the body are holistically intertwined and it is the body as a consciousness which operates in the world. The actor's experience of performing is lived, temporal, spatial as well as communion in the sense that prior to her performance is projected on screen, the actor as a doer of her task perceives the performance prior to others interpret and give meanings to what is presented through the body. In other words, her experience is pre-lingual or pre-reflective. No language is capable of interpreting what it is to be an actor or how the actor feels and experiences the performing body because the actor's experience is holistic and embedded with the performance score.

2.1 EMBODIMENT

The notion of embodiment has been widely used in phenomenological literature, particularly in feminist writings, cognitive phenomenology, dance, and performance theory (Blair 2007; Parviainen 1998; Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991). The term embodiment generally refers to an individual's ability to engage with her ever changing environment and the process of being in a particular moment as a unified wholeness. The idea of embodiment therefore encapsulates Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the phenomenal body and its interrelatedness with the environment. Researching on the primacy of embodiment in arts education, Karen Barbour argues that embodied knowledge acquisition in arts education encompasses the mind centred model of learning. Embodiment operates as a combination of 'many things as one'.

In the field of acting, Russian pedagogue Stanislavski is the first one to identify the importance of the holistic experience of the actor. As the father of modern acting and the founder of psychophysical acting tradition, he saw that the imitation of the real life situation or replicating daily natural behaviour kills the authenticity and truth claim of acting. He believed that his ideal actor should experience her own self, passion and emotions while portraying a role on stage truthfully and sincerely (Blair 2009; Carnicke 1998). Therefore, his later research works and theorisations of acting

largely focused on these embodied ways of approaching to acting. He wanted to uplift the actor's art to a position where the actor experiences the autonomy of her creativity and emancipate from the prejudice idea of acting as a representation. His theorisation of acting in his last days at the Moscow Arts Theatre indicated these turn towards the actor as an 'experiencer' and a 'doer'.⁷

Stanislavski's articulation of the embodied experience is not one sided, psychological theorisation of the actor's work. Instead, he defines the actor's work as a psychophysical process where the perceptual (consciousness) and actional aspects (motile) of the acting process are intertwined (Zarrilli 2012). Such psychophysical process combines the actor's inner and outer apparatuses, blending the 'conscious' and 'subconscious' agencies⁸ in the rehearsal process to embody a particular score. Stanislavski's term *perezshivanie* in Russian means experiencing (Carnicke 1998). The infinitive *pere* means 're' or repetition; *shivanie* means 'to live'. In general, this word *perezshivanie* signifies 're-living' or 'experiencing': an action learn and embody through repetition. Learning involves the perceptual consciousness of the actor; repetition involves the sensory-motor faculties of the body. The actor learns things by memorising text, actions, movements and repeating them as they are happening instantaneously. These repeated actions and the movements coupled with the text develop a series of combined actions which is developed as a score. Nevertheless, the actor's first approaches to recreate the action of the text are purposeful and Stanislavski coined this as a conscious process of the actor (Stanislavski & Hapgood 1967). But as Stanislavski believed, the ultimate goal of the actor is to forget the conscious process and allow her subconscious (nature) to take the hold of the performance process. Stanislavski believed that the nature is the greatest of all arts (Ibid, 1967).

2.2 EXPERIENCE

Unlike theatre acting or other modes of live performances, film acting is very often evaluated after it is shot, edited and developed into a cohesive filmic narrative. Theatre acting and acting for the camera are placed as opposite approaches due to its very nature of practices and technology involved with. Consequently, theatre actor enjoys the continuation of the embodied experience of performing a particular scene while the film actor does not have such privilege to enjoy the flow experience due to constant cuts and other technological requirements which occur during film shoot. Theatre actor's experience is more vulnerable than a film actor whose performance is directly exposed to the audience members because of their responses to the performance is spontaneous as well as instant. The film actor is rather privileged to work within a closed environment where his performance can be seen by a few people who are involved with the making of the film. The film actor's vulnerability is always compromised with fewer members of the crew and she has a greater chance to repeat and correct her performance until all are satisfied with the outcome.

Despite these contradictions between mediums, as Pichel Irving argues, the end result would be the execution of acting (Pichel 1946). Theatre actor and the film actor similarly experience the flow during performance. But the duration of their flow experience can be limited for the film actor due to the various technical requirements of the process. Although Stanislavski's articulation of the experiencing (*perezshivanie*) of a role cannot be fully actualised during film acting, the film actor also experiences the flow of action while engaging with the score. However, this flow is customary being disturbed and fragmented by the disposition of the camera shots, angles, lenses and cuts. Nevertheless, the lived experience is occurred during the camera rolls while the actor is fully engaged with the enactment she has rehearsed before the shot is taken. As Aaron Taylor suggests, there are two key things to be considered when film acting is evaluated as embodied process of acting. First, film acting is an essential part of meaning making process of the movie. Second, it is vital to recognise film acting as 'actual being – acting' (Taylor 2012, p. 93). Here Taylor emphasises the term 'actual being – acting' akin to the theatrical live performance. As I discussed earlier, the departure of live performance from the film acting occurs due to its discontinuation of the actor's involvement with the performance score. But as Taylor further argues, film actor is also capable of experiencing the real – *being acting*, an authentic way of embodiment of acting similar to the theatre actor because film actor's body is also an 'instrument of comprehension' (Ibid, p. 95). Although the film actor's experience is embodied and wholesome during the process of capturing it through the camera, it is this technology that can isolate her experience and further fragment the body into separate parts depicting certain meanings. Even though the actor's organism is practically engaged with the performance process as a whole, the camera is capable of dissecting her lived body into isolated parts. Unlike live performance, the film actor's lived experience is not directly transported to the spectator as it is captured by the camera. Filmic acting is filtered, altered and further interpreted as fragmented body parts which will later become a cohesive narration. The final meaning making process is completed through the viewing of the spectator. Although the ephemeral nature of film acting and its lived experience is declined during the process of movie making, the spectator again reconstructs and re-vitalises the lived experience of the actor when the fragmented montage of the images are integrated through building narratives.

2.3 ENACTMENT

The question is whether the film acting can be evaluated and perceived as an enactment similar to dance performance or live theatre? New Oxford American Dictionary suggests that the term enactment means 'a process of acting something out' (Stevenson, Lindberg & Oxford University 2010). As I have discussed in the previous sections, it is justifiable to assume that the actor who is involved with filmic performance and the score she is embedded with, whether it is short or long, can also be considered as an enactment.

The term 'enactment' signifies a particular shift occurred in the performance theories in the recent past. Theories involved with acting whether it is theatre or film have been primarily understood with the meta-theatrical narratives of how the body, mind, self, emotions and the others are interpreted, defined and articulated within certain cultural domains (Zarrilli 2012, p. 45). Film acting has no exception. The interpretation of film acting has also been succumbed to such meta-theoretical narratives of acting which exemplify the third person's view or representational ways of understanding acting. The shift that is imposed by the phenomenological philosophy and later development of post Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology⁹ and Asian phenomenology¹⁰ implicate the importance of understanding the perspectives of the 'experience' or bring forth the doer's perspectives to the centre of the discussion (Ibid, p. 45-46).

Among other post-phenomenologists, Francisco Varela and his associates' research on embodiment reveal that the human cognition and experience is not a pre-given phenomenon but processual which means, the perceptual process (cognition) of the human being is a continual process, an 'enactment of the world' than an established, pre-given entity (Zarrilli 2012, p. 46). They named this process as enactment. In this sense, the actor's process in general is an enactment, where the actor's bodymind is fully engaged with what she does before the camera or on stage. Thus the actor's performance within a particular environment through which she leans to 'inhabit, act within, and respond as a sentient, perceptual being to the very specific (theatrical) environment that constitutes the *mise-en-scène*' (Ibid, p. 44). Although Zarrilli particularly comments on the theatrical enactment, his theory of enactment in actor's work can be extended to apply to the actor's work in *mise-en-scène* of the movie setting. Similar to theatrical performance, the film actor's work is also guided by the score of actions devised and embodied through repetition during short rehearsals. In film acting, these scores, are still existing while the actor's gestalt experience of being-in-the-enactment is heightened. This score engages the actor's sensory-motor agencies to a higher level where the subconscious, as Stanislavski argued, takes hold of the conscious attention of the enactment. Because this enactment is processual with ever changing environmental factors, the film actor is capable of articulating and improvising her performance according to the subtle changes occurred during performance.

2.4 ENCROACHMENT

Merleau-Ponty claimed that the human is not a disembodied subject. The subjectivity and the objectivity are chiasmatically interlaced with each other. His idea of bodily reversibility explains this encroachment between the body and its otherness. In this sense, the term encroachment is vital to understand the actor's involvement with the other - the counterpart of the actor's subjectivity and how the self is intertwined with the partner-actor in executing a successful performance. Further, this encroachment is operational within the spectator's relationship with the actor's work on screen. The spectator's perception is thus attuned with the animated body of the actor and generates a system of co-existence within shared space and time.

Merleau-Ponty assumes that there is an operational intentionality, via which the human body is pre-rationally engaged with its surroundings. It is not a particular mind or a consciousness that rationally takes hold on its world, but the body as a consciousness, operative within its environment. As Remigius Kwant suggests the human body operates and engages with the Other through a 'not-yet-free-level' (Kwant 1963). This means that human being is not a free subject. Before the actor assumes that she is experiencing an ultimate freedom, a freedom of moving and making meanings through her body, the body (body-subject) as Merleau-Ponty argues already engages with the ambience and makes it meaningful prior to any rational speculation. What does Merleau-Ponty really mean by pre-reflective engagement of the body? He suggests that bodily engagement with its ambience does not occur through a particular consciousness or a mind. Whereas, the body takes its position through spatial and temporal domains while cultivating and rearranging its own corporeal schemas when the human body inhabits in the world.

This idea can be further elaborated with the film acting process. The actor who enacts a particular scene demonstrates the ability to attune with the space, time, objects and other bodies through which her enactment is fulfilled. A skilled swimmer, who swims in the water, demonstrates the reversible nature of bodily engagement with the water and how the water engages with the swimmer's body. The encroachment between swimmer's body and the water needs to be fully intermeshed enabling the swimmer to cut through the water. The successful swimmer as it occurs in many situations, does not splash much water when the act of swimming occurs. Similarly, an experienced actor swims in the vast array of spatio-temporal stream; she blends her bodymind through actions she performs while engaging and heightening her continual involvement with being-in-the-enactment. The performance score she habituates enables the actor to familiarise with other bodies, and re-define the spatiotemporality through the body.

Unlike film acting, live theatre obviously demands a rigorous engagement with the partner-actor and the audience alike. In the process of film acting, technology and the composition of shots demarcates the disengagement of the actor's body from its production process of acting. Film actor assumes that acting in films can be performed without having a mutual engagement with other bodies. For instance, when the close-up shot is taken, the actor's engagement with the other can be temporally shifted, altered or in some situations, omit. When the dialogue scene is captured with a close up shot, the actor's engagement with the other is shifted to an imaginary Other while her tactile, auditory and visual perception is disturbed with someone else's voice, face or presence.¹¹ In these situations, the actor has to talk with an anonymous existence as the opposite role.

Further, the film actor does not directly get confronted with an audience. Her audience is also an anonymous existence, in the sense that she cannot experience direct responses of the audience. This inherent gap between filmic acting and its reception glorifies the disengagement of bodies in making of film and their appreciations. As a result of this disengagement and lack of reciprocity between actors' bodies, the glorification of the stardom is further established in popular cinema. They are blind to the fact that a successful performance relies on the encroachment of bodies in enactive situations. As it is clearly evident, the reciprocity of actors' bodies, their relations and communion, enhances the quality of performance practice either on stage or in cinema. On the contrary, it is assumed that the actor is the sole agent of making meaning in film acting. However, as phenomenology of film acting argues that the mutuality of the actor's bodily engagement with the audience is further enhanced by the viewers of the actor's image appeared on screen. The spectator takes the position of the actor's subjectivity and passively enacts the situation while sitting in the film theatre.

This dual aspect of the process of encroachment is phenomenologically important to understand how the actor's creative process is a shared workspace through which the actor and the Other are unified as a single fabric, both on the set and on the screen. This reversible nature of acting thus operates in two modes: first, the actor's body mimics the other's movements and expressions pre-reflectively during rehearsals and performance. Second, when this performance is projected for the viewing, the spectator mimic the actor's subjectivity through empathise with the actor's body and movements. Nevertheless, the prejudices of representation in acting argue that the actor's ability to make meanings pertaining to a particular enactment germinate as an arbitrary process. The actor's presence, her codification of social meanings through the body and aesthetic refinement of the bodily work are produced akin to the actor's ability to reproduce them through the divine poeticisation.

The power of bodily expressivity of the stardom generally refers with the term presence of the actor. The actor's presence as the locus of pre-expressivity of the body is a complex notion as well as a matter of a heated debate among performance scholars (Auslander 2002; Barba 1985; Phelan 1988; Zarrilli & Barba 1988). There are two ways that the actor's presence is understood in the contemporary theatre scholarship. First, presence is a legitimate occurrence emerged through performer's lived experience (Barba & Fowler 1982). Second, this presence is not an autonomous existence; it appears through what it is not, that is through absence. The second interpretation of the notion of presence is propagated by post-structuralist writers such as Phillip Auslander (2008) and Peggy Phelan (1988). Along with Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, both writers invite us to see how the actor's aesthetic presence is appeared through an intermingling between the bodily presence and absence. The actor's presence and the ability to project her 'self' or the persona during enactment is not a matter of divinely given aesthetic quality or an ability, but a product of the play of *différance* as Derrida postulated (Krasner & Saltz 2006). Theatre theorist Eugenio Barba argues that the actor's presence is manifested through the intermesh between the actor's body and the spectator's perceptual synthesis (Barba 1985, p. 369). Writing about the phenomenal attunement between the screen actor's presence and the spectator, Taylor further argues that the spectator 'co-exist with the film actor in a "relational of internal encroachment," where his body and the other's body form a system' (Taylor 2012, p. 101). Therefore, the phenomenal encroachment between bodies further demonstrates that the screen actor's work should be re-considered as a continual process of arranging and rearranging the body schema within intersubjective relations. It is evident that a success of an actor both in theatre as well as on screen primarily depends on the ability to attune with ever changing task environment and her capacity to intermesh with others.

III. MALINI'S PERFORMANCE AS EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

I now take the reader to a specific case study via which I intend to demonstrate some of the arguments I have articulated in the foregoing section. In the previous discussion, an anti-representational way of embodiment of filmic acting is elaborated through a phenomenological reading of the actor's body and experience. I now turn to Malini's debut film, "*punchi baba*" to discuss these four key areas of embodiment and these assumptions have been realised through her performance within this particular film production. I have chosen this movie not to elaborate a particular representational value of her filmic performance, but to demonstrate a naïve self of Malini which has been overemphasised through the chores of her acting career over four decades. I further assume that her naïve self and vulnerable persona in front of the camera as an amateur actor, may help to analyse her embodied process of acting while neutralising her presence as a pretext. Before she embarked into the film industry in early 60s in Sri Lankan cinema, Malini had acted in several stage plays from which she had primarily gained a national recognition as an actress. In this short paper, I do not intend to focus on these aspects of theatre acting in her career. Instead, my attention is drawn towards the debut film she acted in 1968, titled "*punchi baba*" (The Little Baby) directed by Tissa Liyanasuriya.¹²

punchi baba is a movie which narrates a story of a clerk named Sena. He accidentally finds an orphan child left in his old car. With this finding, his life is beginning to twist with many social and moral issues. Sena is in love with a wealthy girl named Mala and his relationship with her and his intentions to marry this girl become a contradictory task once he becomes a father for the child he found. Similar to much melodramatic structure of early films in Sri Lanka, this movie is also centralised with a puzzle of an orphan child and further questions the ethical and moral duties of an individual whose actions are polarised between the selfishness and the social responsibilities. As it is usually predictable, all the puzzles and the complexities of relationships are resolved once the child's mother who works as a babysitter reveals her ownership of the child. The film concludes with the happy ending after Sena finally marries Mala predicting how the melodramatic film ought to be concluded.



Fig. 1 Malini's first appearance in the movie *punchi baba* is captured by a profile shot

Malini, as a young and eloquent actress first appears in the movie as an upper class girl whose affection directs towards a lower middle class man, Sena. Although Malini's role is somewhat secondary to Sena's role which was played by much experienced actor Joe Abeywickrama, Malini's embodiment of her role also predominantly plays a key role in the flow of the filmic narrative. Malini first appears on screen after eleven minutes of the movie starts. First the camera sees her cooking something in a middle class kitchen when the maid comes and informs her about Sena's arrival. The camera sees her profile in this shot and we as spectators don't know whether her figure is captured in a profile shot is executed purposely or not. However, her first appearance in the movie is not very much gripping as half of her body is captured through a profile mid-shot. After a few minutes, the film offers a wide-shot in the sitting room of the house where Sena is waiting to see Mala impatiently. His uneasiness is depicted through an exaggerated walk signifying cliché actions replicating of a 'tiger in a cage'. Then Mala enters in the wide-shot making it a two-shot. In this, the camera captures her playfulness and the affection towards Sena for the first time. Sena straightaway expresses his love towards her in melodramatic gestures and vocal expressions while making Mala laugh at this act. Now the camera captures her face in a close-up where she reacts to Sena with a pleasing manner.

As an amateur film actor, Malini faces a few key challenges in executing her enactment in this scene. First, she needs to find the ways to embed with her scenic environment and the props and utensils she is given in the situation. She requires manipulating objects and uses that space in order to be able to behave naturally in this situation. Secondly, she is confronted with another subject, in this scenario, it is her co-actor Joe Abeywickrama. (These prerequisites of the actor in a particular enactive situation are mutually relevant for Joe Abeywickrama's ability to integrate with his opposite role and his environment. But in this discussion, I don't pay special attention to his embodied experience). Malini, as an individual subject also experiences an ambiguity between her "self" and the other actor's selfhood in making the situation as an enactment.



Fig. 2 Malini's pleasing facial expression is captured in a close up shot which depicts her tactile emphasis of the actor's presence on screen

Malini's challenge as a film actor is to redefine her body schema (the ways her body is integrated with her surrounding and how she perceives her corporeal changes) enabling her to integrate with the scenic environment. The more she demonstrates her integration with the given space, time and props, the more she is capable of blending her enactment with the situation. As Merleau-Ponty argues, one's ability to change her body schema encapsulates how one rearranges her body schema within certain task environment (Merleau-Ponty 2002). In this sense, Malini's rearrangement of her body schema in the above situation demonstrates her immaturity of performance practice in the filmic context in relation to the opposite actor at the time. As a much experienced actor, Joe usually takes hold of the situation and his performance instigates his ability to embed in the enactment overriding Malini's naïve self. In cognitive phenomenology, Shaun Gallagher contends that there are two modes of schematic embodiments that an individual experiences while being in a particular situation: first it is the body schema that informs how the individual experiences the sensory motor movements of the body. It encapsulates the interoception (inner sensations) and exteroception (sense of balance and positioning). Second, body image informs the individual, how she perceives her surroundings. It encapsulates the inner life of the individual generally identified as a psychological aspect of the body (Gallagher 2006).

Thus the filmic actor's experience is consisted of two aspects of the embodiment. It is the actor who perceives through her senses and makes sense of her world constructing her own selfhood against the other subjectivities she confronts. Further her ability to behave in a scenic situation informs her sense of schematic modalities via which she integrates objects into her body schema while expanding and extending her bodily manipulatory powers. For an actor this is paramount for executing a successful enactment which provides her a sense of flow of action in which she learns to inhabit. If motor movements and perceptual faculties are not adequately attuned and synthesised with the given enactment, the actor's ability to persuade the audience's perception consequently begin to diminish. Malini's debut film appearance in *punchi baba* depicts such reality of the actor's embodied experience.



Fig. 3 Malini portrays her non-complex emotional journey in the movie between two poles: the happiness and the sadness which draws spectator's empathy towards her facial actions and allows the spectators to feel her/his intentional actions are displayed on screen.

In this discussion of the actor's embodied experience in film acting, I would further prefer to discuss about the process of encroachment which occurs during this filmic enactment. As I argued earlier, the film actor's process of encroachment can be elaborated in two modes: first the actor attunes with her enactment during the film shoot which demonstrates how her selfhood is a product of the Other. Secondly, the actor's presence on the screen is attuned with the spectator who shifts her sense of self with the virtual actor's self appears on screen. This phenomenological assumption reveals the actor not as an autonomous entity but a product of the other factors involved with the performance process. In the first instance, that the actor's self or the presence is a product of the Other, signifies that the actor's performance presence does not arbitrarily germinate through her role or her spiritual soul. This idea further can be explained with Malini's enactment in *punchi baba*. Malini's performance body and her attractive presence is visualised through other female characters that are paralleled with her body presence. In *punchi baba*'s case, it is her opposite female roles, two maids (Anula Karunathilaka and Thilaka Perera) are juxtaposed with her body to be able to construct Malini's selfhood in the movie. Despite her bodily juxtaposition with Other female bodies in the movie, the main protagonist, Joe Abeywickrama undoubtedly plays a key role in making Malini as a performance text in the movie. Although, inherent ambiguities between opposite sexes are a major significance in early movies, one can still identify a successful execution of bodily intertwining with Joe and Malini in many scenes they appear together. Therefore, Malini's enactment as a film actor needs to be recognised not as a single text which signifies her individual filmic self as an autonomic entity but an inter-textuality which is constructed and constantly been nourished by the absence of Other bodies.



Fig. 4 Malini's filmic image (self) is a product of her engagement with the other actor. This encroachment between actors is highly significant factor of analysing the embodied experience of Malini's film acting.

The second mode of encroachment is occurred when Malini's image is projected on the silver screen as a virtual construct of her role. The spectator's role in the movie theatre is generally defined as passivity. It is believed that the spectator who sits in the dark theatre is isolated in a dream world where s/he does not actively participate with the aesthetic product offers on screen. Yet phenomenological reading of the spectator as a viewer of the virtual image and her/his relationship with the actor's image projected on screen, is an active participation in the meaning making process. This is similar to the spectator who shares the theatrical experience with others. Malini's bodily movements, gestures, expressions and her vocal work are highly provocative for the spectator whose visual perception is continually encroached with her body. This mutuality between Malini's body and the spectator's perceptual synthesis are intertwined allowing the spectator to shift her/his self and attune with Malini's virtual self. In the movie *punchi baba*, Malini's physical movements and bodily gestures virtually create the spectator's body as a moving and enactive body with which s/he empathises with her gestures, postures and vocal modulations. In general, Malini's expression and emotional display in the film is confined to limited human emotions such as happiness, exultation and sadness. This non-complex emotional display is an easy access to the spectator whose emotional reactions simultaneously mirrors Malini's emotional journey of the movie. I believe that Malini's complexity of the performance is not enunciated through her emotions, gestures or postures in this particular movie but it is delivered through her work on vocal modulations. Her vocality is highly persuasive via which her visual and vocal structures are the key components of the spectator to simulate her/his self with Malini's screen image. The voice which carries her auditory meanings and intonations of the dialogue also carries *actional* elements to the hearer. Thus the auditory image offered for the spectator is not merely a second layer of the filmic image but a highly significant enactment which draws the audience member's motile engagement with the actor. In summing up, I would argue that it is needed to re-read not only Malini's performance but other actors' performances on silver screen to configure how these bodies of images depict meaning through a shared networking of the actor's embodiment and the spectator's *synesthetic* perception.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have introduced a counter-thesis to tackle the problem of representation in film acting. My intention was to articulate some of the importance ideas derived from phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and later developments of cognitive science to understand how film actor's work can be an embodied mode of acting practice. In order to do so, I have presented four ontological categories of bodily existences of the filmic actor. Through these categories, I have tried to illustrate four ontological existences of the film actor and how the acting process in film medium is phenomenologically viable process both on set and on screen. I have attempted to demonstrate how phenomenology as a method is useful for analysing and understanding the film actor's work. I have further argued that the filmic body is not an autonomous entity of meaning making process of acting, but a relative phenomenon, which generates its meaning through the encroachment with the Other. I here suggest that it is important to understand the filmic performance not only as a single text, but an inter-textual, intersubjective occurrence in the sense that the film actor's self is not an autonomous entity but a co-existence because there is Other exists.

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NOTES

¹ Theories and practices of acting have directly or indirectly targeted to claim a particular truth about human nature which can be exemplified through acting. In order to achieve this modernist truth claims, actor trainers and theorists have devised different approaches to acting to be able to achieve this truth or logos. These theories as Phillip Auslander argues treat acting as philosophers treat language. Language is considered as a tool via which the individual is capable of communicating thoughts and ideas with others. According to Auslander, majority of acting theories in modern era demonstrate that the acting is a 'transparent medium which provide access to truth, logos, or a grounding concept which functions as logos within a particular production' (Zarrilli, 2002, p. 53). Modernist approaches to acting based on the pre-given self as the grounding concept upon which this truth claim is actualised.

² Malini Fonseka is one of the foremost actors in Sri Lankan film industry whose career has been extended over four decades. Starting as a theatre actor in early 60s, Malini has acted in over 150 movies to date. Despite the fact that Malini's name has been glorified as the queen of Sinhala Cinema, undoubtedly her acting career demonstrates variety of roles and complex human creativity portrayed on silver screen over these decades. Malini has won national film awards including best actress, popular actress and supporting actress and many other accolades for her performances. Her movies have been screened at many prestigious film festivals in the world and her performances have been recognised and honoured a few times. Later in her career, she started directing and has produced several films.

³ Phenomenology as a philosophical enterprise was first founded by France Brentano and later developed into a comprehensive philosophy by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl primarily questioned the epistemological problem posed by the Western philosophical tradition³ and proposed a phenomenological turn towards the essences which he defined as 'going back to the phenomena.' French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) as a keen reader of Husserl developed his phenomenology based on some of the key concepts developed by Husserl and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)³. Yet Merleau-Ponty is largely indebted to Husserlian phenomenology and his discussion of the body and consciousness.

⁴ The term lived experience or lived body (*Leib*) is derived from phenomenological philosophy. It signifies the body that we experience devoid of a third person's analysis. Edmund Husserl identifies two ways that the humans experience the body: we experience the body as an animation, a mode of being in a particular situation and in some instances it is the body that we have or possess as an object (*Körper*). Thus the body is experience as subject as well as an object (Moran and Cohen 2012, pp. 193-194).

⁵ There are key figures in continental philosophy. They are Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

⁶ The term *Gestalt* is first derived from a group called Gestalt psychologists worked in Germany. Edmund Husserl adapted this term to indicate the human experience is wholesome and unified through body and mind.

⁷ Stanislavski's project of defining the actor's work as a 'doer' and the 'experiencer' encapsulate within two key texts he has written in the course of his career. These texts, *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character* summarise his understanding towards the actor's work as a holistic enterprise consisted of actor's experience and embodiment. In recent translations by Jean Benedetti of these two works further demonstrates this emphasis of the actor's experience and embodiment as a dual aspect of a single process in performance making for the theatre.

⁸ These two terms, conscious and subconscious are originally used by Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares* (Zarrilli 2012). There are many variations and terminologies to understand the conscious (consciousness) and subconscious (unconscious) operation in the contemporary psychology and psychoanalytic theories. Contemporary cognitive science and phenomenological literature use terms such as consciousness and unconscious to indicate the intentional and autonomous operations of the human body.

⁹ Post Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology here refers to the contemporary development of cognitive neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, and philosophy of the mind influenced by key assumptions of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

¹⁰ Asian phenomenology is largely derived from the Buddhist interpretation of the perception and the body. In line with this, the tenants of Asian phenomenological philosophy have been mainly influenced by the continental philosophy. Key figures in this field are Nagatomo Shigenori (1992) and Yuasa Yasuo (1987). They have developed an Asian bodymind theory coupled with Buddhist philosophy and phenomenology.

¹¹ In the film trade, I have observed many times that when the close-up shot is taken, the dialogue coach or an assistant director read the opposite actor's dialogue and the actor plays the scene with the absence of the real counterpart.

¹² It is my view that *punchi baba* seems to be an apt reconstruction of Charlie Chaplin's famous film, *The Kid*. One may see some similarities between *punchi baba* and Chaplin's *The Kid* as *punchi baba* narrates a story of a man who gets into many troubles after he finds a little kid in his car seat. Although Chaplin's film is highly critical of the political and social milieu in which these social injustices and inequalities are erupted, *punchi baba* purely questions the morality of the society within a highly melodramatic narrative of the movie.