

“*Bokken ranga pāmuda*”: gut feeling, instinct and rhetoric of Sri Lankan actor learning

Saumya Liyanage¹

The mental representation of learning as a dominant model of knowledge acquisition has been a long standing formula for Western pedagogy. Within the sensation-idea-response model (Barnacle 2009, Horn and Wilburn 2005) the subject perceives the objects and conceptualizes ideas in the brain and generates actions through the body. Thus, the relationship between perception and action is hierarchical as the action is secondary to the perception (Noë 2005, Johnson, 2007). This epistemological problem is the result of the disembodied mind propagated by the Cartesian tradition. It is no exception when it comes to the discourse of acting: the rhetoric of acting has also been affected by this split (Zarrilli 2002); the actor’s mind is regarded as the rational knower and the active mover of the body. However some actors in Sri Lankan theatre often refer the phrase “*bokken ranga pāmu*” (act from the gut) as metaphorical expression of how the actor should act truthfully. It further means that the good actor does not act from the heart or intellect but from the ‘gut instinct’ of the body. This metaphorical idea of ‘gut’ replaces the ‘disembodied rational thinking’ in the mind with something fleshy embedded in the ‘intestine’ of the actor’s body. In this paper, I utilize a cognitive phenomenological reading of Sri Lankan actors’ descriptive data gathered through semi structured interviews. In doing so, I want to show how these actors challenge the idea of mental representation of learning by introducing a visceral origination of their knowing (Dewey 1896, Merleau-Ponty 1962, Dreyfus, 2002) and the synergy of thoughts and imagination coupled with the lived body.

Key words: Mental representation, Gut, Lived body, Acting