

The voice of a relaxed body



AUTHORS

Aleksandra Kotecka and Tomasz Wierzbowski
VoiceLab



WHERE DID THE PILOT SESSION TAKE PLACE

This text is drafted based on the experimentation in a pilot session of the Intellectual Output no. 2: Workshop experimentations in Wrocław led by VoiceLAB in April 2022

APPLYING RELAXATION TECHNIQUES AND WORK WITH IMAGINATION TO RE-FIND AN EMBODIED VOICE AND ITS POTENTIAL.

The voice is the most basic and the first tool of expression that we discover in our lifetime. We may observe how children use their voice in an unbound, free way: their voice is an unrestrained tool of clear expression, unburdened by conventions, stereotypes or presuppositions.

The voice is the body, and the body is the voice: when we look at a crying infant, we have no doubt about it. (Viewed from our perspective, small children use their voice in an extreme way, screaming loudly and frequently – however, they rarely if ever lose their voice: when they do, it is related to an infection rather than the strain itself.)

As time passes, however, we lose this close connection, and the body-voice relation gradually becomes blurred, until we realize as adults that we hardly keep any awareness of this fundamental relation. The voice seems a separate

phenomenon, unrelated to the body and physicality. This dichotomy is often paired with a sensation that we speak with a voice that is not our own, that our voice does not find its place in the body. We find it difficult to find sonority, can't speak loudly enough, and our voice strains quickly.

Rebuilding the connection between the body and the voice may mark the beginning of a road for new ways of using the voice, in order to find its fuller sound and ease in using it.

WHO ARE WE?

VoiceLAB is a laboratory of the voice. In relation to the tradition of closed theatre studios – including Laboratory Theatre – that have explored the complexity of actor's art, VoiceLAB offers in-depth laboratory work dedicated to one of its elements only, however one that is the closest, most original, characteristic, and intimate.

We believe that the voice is the most sensitive instrument of an actor, much more so than the body. The laboratory approach allows the participants to reach deep into the nature of their own voice, not stopping on the surface that is usually governed by presentation-related objectives. Deeper work with the voice allows one to get to know this instrument better and gain better control over it. It allows for a calm and profound process of exploring one's voice, with its anatomy and psychology. This kind of work allows one to discover its full potential. Our work focuses on the sound of the voice, its reverberation and capacity. We encourage the participants of our workshops and give them essential guidelines to discover the vibration and the reverberation of their voice: We work with body resonators in order to feel the physical experience of the voice within the body and get to know the full potential of our bodies as an

instrument for the voice. An important part of our practice consists in working with the breath, which has two aspects: we focus on increasing the capacity of the breath, but at the same time we treat breathing as a means to relax those body parts which are supposed to vibrate, thus enhancing the reverberation of specific resonators of the body. We propose an approach where the volume we speak/sing with is not associated with tension, but rather, it results from relaxing specific parts of the body, because only then the voice is free to use the whole capacity of the body as a container of the sound/resonator. We also take into account the fact that the voice is highly susceptible to one's psychological state, and that any stress/tension is immediately reflected in it. Therefore, elaborating the skill of recognizing and eliminating tensions (including stress-induced tensions) in the body, is an important and integral part of our work.

BODY-VOICE-MIND RELATION

The voice is a very sensitive instrument that can easily react to the most subtle associations and emotions. However, before we bring this less visible emotional sphere into the picture, let us focus on what is easily observable, i.e. the body.

BODY——>VOICE/BREATH

The body serves not only as the source of our voice: it is also a resonator, the only resonating vessel we have. The way how we use this resonating box will influence how the voice will sound – whether it will be loud, resonant, and sonorous enough to be heard. The anatomic construction of the facial bones, with a system of sinuses (empty cavities between the bones) facilitates the production and transmission of the sound. But thinking about the process of making a sound only from the perspective of the face and throat as its only sources, is very constricting. It is only through regarding the whole body as an instrument and using it in its integrity that we can discover the full potential of the voice.

Voice, just as any sound, is essentially vibration, which travels through the bones. Every unnecessary tension of the muscles muffles this vibration.

These relations can be presented in a linear fashion:

MIND——> BODY——> VOICE

Tensions related to emotional uneasiness generate tension in the body, and these in turn influence the voice.

VOICE/BREATH——>BODY——>MIND

Working on the awareness of tensions and conscious relaxation is vital, and being aware of tensions that gradually build up in the body is the first step to release them. An awareness in the breathing is a tool for recognizing tensions in the body.

We are often unaware of tensions accumulating in our bodies, as they build up gradually. The moment when we become aware that we feel tension, it is very often already very big.

Observing a different way of breathing than the one we are used to in a situation that demands body relaxation

A conscious breathing may help us recognize tensions earlier and thus, become aware of tensing up, so that we can try and reduce the tension before it builds up to the point that we are not able to do much about it.

DEVELOPING SELF-REGULATORY MECHANISMS

The venting mechanisms that we have often leave us two options, coined 'fight or flight'.

Working with relaxation involves a long process, as the body gradually learns how to relax more and more. Initially, long sessions are necessary, but they may be gradually shortened later on, since the nervous system uses a priming mechanism, where the body 'remembers' the process and its outcome and can respond to a given stimulus quicker the subsequent times.

WORKING WITH IMAGES

We use abstract images that refer to basic and universal human experiences as a tool in voice work, to help the body and mind connect to the given stimuli.

HOW DID WE WORK IN OUR PILOT SESSION

Originally the work of VoiceLAB is based on three-part polyphony. When we work with polyphonic music, we search for qualities of the voice, focus and presence that help enrich the work of an actor/performer. The workshops we led during the pilot session were a major challenge for our work. It was for the first time that we had to deal exclusively with participants who had not had any previous experience with the specific art-based way of using the voice, as the pilot session had been targeted specifically for adult educators, with no artistic profile whatsoever. We were very curious to see how we would manage to translate our approach into the language of participants who have no professional relation with performing arts and often no practical experience in this domain at all. In the process of the work it quickly turned out, however, that the voice is such a universal phenomenon that we did not need to struggle at all to find common denominators. We were very positively surprised with the very focused and sensitive approach of the participants. At first we were struck by the general reluctance to sing within this group, and because of that, we needed to diverge quite a bit from the usual practice that constitutes the everyday work of VoiceLAB. It was a bit of a challenge to do so ever since we joined the

consortium of the Voice and Body of Adult Educators project, we had been motivated by an intuition that the methods we use in our practice will be useful for non-artistic applications, but we were not sure whether abandoning singing at all could be productive in helping the participants acquire certain skills and a certain level of awareness in the breathing and using of the voice. Once we found a way to do that, the participants were very eager to re-discover their voice and search for its new qualities, and their feedback after the workshops proved that the method, although inspired by strictly artistic objectives, can be successfully applied to meet non-artistic needs - confirming once again that the voice may be a tool that is used for more expressive goals (such as singing); but in its origin it is a universal every-day instrument that can be enhanced through methods oriented towards goals that go beyond the quotidian range of use.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



VOICE – Voice and Body of Adult Educators
Project n°: 2020-1-FR01-KA227-ADU-095264