

## **Family Roles and Paternal/Maternal Genealogies within and between Psychophysical Performer Trainings and their Documentation<sup>1</sup>**

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Where ‘cross-fertilisation’ and the influences of earlier psychophysical practices can be viewed within and between psychophysical performer trainings (Hodge 5), one can situate these trainings, their practitioners and the transmission of their work within genealogical structures. Within the socio-historical context of the last century, in which far fewer women than men held the position of authority of director or practitioner, male performer trainers like Grotowski, Barba, and Brook, dominated psychophysical fields of practice and the content and authorship of writings further transmitting these practices.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Anna Cutler highlights how ‘women and women’s bodies have been poorly recorded’ (111). Hence, it is not surprising that Grotowski emphasised paternal genealogy in the practice, and therefore also the writing, space, in his 1987 essay “*Tu es le fils de quelqu’un*” (You Are Someone’s Son).’ However, the psychophysical field is now in a process of change, and the presence of, and knowledge about, women within these practices and writings is becoming far more evident. Despite these developments, the practices and writings of those male performer trainers who began work in the twentieth-century are frequently accepted, and treated or revered as canonical. This serves to discursively construct and uphold a dominant paradigm of a powerful ‘genealogy of sons and fathers’ (Irigaray qtd. in Whitford, ‘Section 1’ 23).

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<sup>2</sup> The positioning of women within the theatre has been extensively discussed in texts examining the beginnings of second wave feminist theatre. See Lizbeth Goodman’s *Contemporary Feminist Theatres* (1993) for such an examination in a British context. Furthermore, Jennie Long’s essay ‘What Share of the Cake Now?’ (1998) utilises statistics that display the situation of women in the English theatre at the end of the last century.

However, this dominant paternal paradigm cannot account for all the present and possible modes of, and roles involved in, transmitting knowledge within and between these practices and writings. This article, therefore, begins with an exploration of the dominant genealogy through the perceptions of Grotowski's work, and the negotiations with this genealogy offered by Phillip Zarrilli, and Suprpto Suryodarmo's practices and writings. I will then show how these negotiations are extended through the work of male and female psychophysical practitioners who provide direct alternatives or opposition to this dominant genealogy. I will specifically concentrate upon Julia Varley's work with The Magdalena Project and *The Open Page*, and upon the practices of Sandra Reeve and Phillip Zarrilli. I argue that the maternal structures and discourses about the family created by these trainings offer valuable and non-essentialist ways of reflecting upon and utilising the positioning of gender and family roles within the processes, transmission and documentation of these trainings. This argument is placed in dialogue with Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray's depictions of subversive maternal genealogies, and multiple and intermixed family roles. I use Cixous and Irigaray's theorised reconstruction of family roles as a means of drawing attention to and troubling the dominance of the paternal psychophysical genealogy. Cixous and Irigaray's gender-based theories are rooted within critical examination of the Freudian psychoanalytic concept, and the Lacanian post-structuralist interpretation, of the paternal, phallogocentric structures of the Oedipus Complex. By exploring and playing with notions of embodiment and embodied writing, these gender-based theories open the way for useful interaction with the embodied transmission and documentation of the legacies of psychophysical performer trainings.

### **The Paternal Genealogy**

A clear indication of the status and prominence of these male practitioners can be found in their overwhelming presence in the reading set for university modules focused on psychophysical trainings. These lists tend to focus upon texts like Barba's *The Paper Canoe* and *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Thomas Richards' *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, and essays taken from the heavily male-concentrated selection of articles within the key performer training anthologies: Phillip Zarrilli's *Acting (Re)Considered* and Alison Hodge's *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. The seminal status accorded these texts within and without the university sphere mean that readers may, for example, approvingly assimilate Grotowski's early emphasis upon the director and trainer as 'tyrant' (*Poor Theatre* 44) or 'strict' 'father' (*Poor Theatre* 48). Such approving assimilation further endorses the dominance of a genealogy of powerful patriarchs. However, such unknowing assimilation does not provide a full sense of the complexity and construction of this genealogy's dominant positioning. Therefore, as a means of exploring this complexity, this section will examine a few examples of the reproduction and manipulation of, and negotiations with, this paternal genealogy.

Where many of these psychophysical practitioners, like Phillip Zarrilli, Grotowski and Barba, have drawn from and written extensively about Asian trainings, it is useful to consider how the paternal traditions of these trainings may have influenced their practices. On the surface, Phillip Zarrilli's position and practice appears to adhere to the dominant male genealogical pattern. However, Zarrilli's reinterpretation of these Asian paternal traditions, accompanied by the deployment of the multiple and intermixed family roles that will be discussed at the end of this article, provide an alternative perspective rooted in his practice. Zarrilli's training is

based upon *taiquiquan*, 'Indian yoga and the closely related Indian martial art, *kalaripayattu*' (Zarrilli, 'Toward a Phenomenological' 661). Through a daily routine of repetitions, the forms and sequences from yoga, *taiquiquan* and *kalaripayattu* are ingrained into the participant's body-mind. These forms require co-ordination of breath with movement, lower abdominal support, balance, centring, correct spinal alignment and precise external focus. Zarrilli focuses upon the development of an 'interiority', an internal bodily 'relationship between the doer and the done' ('On the Edge' 191) of the forms, which is rooted in the circulation of energy and breath, internal focus, readiness and awareness.

In *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*, Zarrilli's ethnographic report of his participant-observation investigations of *kalaripayattu*, he describes how, participants were traditionally predominantly male and how, within the families of *kalaripayattu* masters, techniques were originally passed between uncle and nephew but, 'as the nuclear family emerged in the early twentieth century,' were then 'primarily' passed between father and son. ('When the Body' 260, n.46) ('When the Body' 260, n.46).<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this traditional mould of *kalaripayattu*, Zarrilli positions his own training as an 'intercultural translation' designed for a 'cosmopolitan, transnational, global culture, where the translation is between tradition and modernity, rather than East and West' ('Embodying Awareness'). Whilst, in the context of Kerala, first time *kalaripayattu* students are children with a natural aptitude for the practice, Zarrilli's training and teaching discourse is orientated towards adult, individual bodies of differing abilities within a modern context ('Embodying Awareness'). Many of his students, at all levels of advancement, including that of teacher, are female. Zarrilli's 'translation' is a 'political and

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<sup>3</sup> Girls also participate within the training in Kerala. However, traditionally, they do not continue training beyond puberty (Psychophysical Performer Training 19 October 2005).

ideological decision' ('Embodying Awareness') stemming from his 'liberal politics' (Psychophysical Performer Training 6 October 2004), but is positioned as one choice or decision, rather than the right approach to the training.

Through this emphasis, and by carefully differentiating between his position and that of the dominant *kalaripayattu* master in India, Zarrilli's practice refuses the authority and power of the patriarch transmitting to the participant-son. This echoes Javanese movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo's rejection of the titles 'Guru' and 'teacher' ('Discussion'). Suryodarmo's work, entitled 'Amerta Movement,' is, his student and fellow practitioner, Sandra Reeve explains, 'based on the basic movements of daily life: walking, sitting, standing, crawling and lying down and the transitions between them' ('The Next Step' 19-20, n.1). By 'guiding' movement through movement ('Guiding through Movement Seminar Presentation') and facilitating participants' exploration of 'the relationship of movement to mental attitudes, to the environment and to communication skills' (Reeve, 'Guiding through Movement' website), Suryodarmo supports the participants' developing consciousness of, and ability to evolve beyond, their movement habits. Through this supportive role of moving with the participant, Suryodarmo replaces the word 'guru' with the equality and dialogue displayed by the term 'sharer' ('Discussion'), and Reeve stresses that his practice 'comes from a very humble place' ('Interview').

However, whilst pursuing a role of 'sharer,' Reeve emphasises that it is impossible for the practitioner in the process of teaching and disseminating to completely distance themselves from the associations of power. Therefore, Reeve believes that 'acknowledgement of power is the first step of negotiating with it' ('Interview'). Such negotiations are particularly important when the practitioner is

male and many of his students are female and much younger than himself, as is the case with Zarrilli's university-based practice.

This negotiation could usefully travel both ways, as although Suryodarmo tells participants 'Don't put me in Guru' (Reeve, 'Interview'), one participant highlights the 'Guruism' (Participant 1) that still surrounds him. This Guruism derives not from Suryodarmo's behaviour but from the 'slavish way in which participants behaved towards him' (Participant 1). Whilst, as Reeve points out, Suryodarmo's overtly formless practice is very different to the structure and discipline of classical Javanese training, which can be compared to the traditions of *kalarippayattu* ('Interview'), this Guruism is shaped by a distorted impression of the treatment of Gurus of traditional Asian practices. This impression is rooted in what Reeve describes as the exoticisation of Suryodarmo's Javanese male body by European male and female participants ('Interview').

This distorted impression and construction of the practitioner as an exoticized patriarchal power is intensified through manipulation and exploitation of, what Cixous calls, 'the proper name' ('Mamae' 344). 'The proper name' refers to the power of the inherited male surname, 'the name of the father and the name of the son' ('Mamae' 343), which 'has the power to *survive*, to *outlive* the person who carries it' ('Mamae' 344). The attachment of proper names like Grotowski, Meyerhold and Barba to practice or documentation lends status to these creations and their creators. One result of the valuation of the proper name can be seen in the way in which, as Thomas Richards highlights, 'many people have experienced "Grotowski workshops" conducted by someone who studied with Grotowski in a session of five days, for example, twenty-five years ago. Such "instructors," of course, often pass on grave errors and misunderstandings' (qtd. in Wolford, 'Grotowski's Vision' 191).

## **Maternal Genealogies**

Cixous and Irigaray critique the moment outlined within Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex when the bond is severed between mother and child, and women learn to devalue their own and other female bodies as 'lacking' as the 'little girl comes to devalue her own sex by devaluing her mother's' (Irigaray, *Speculum* 40). Cixous and Irigaray propose the rehabilitation of the loving, embodied relationship between mother and daughter through the creation and articulation of a subversive maternal genealogy (Irigaray, *Speculum* 76). Irigaray highlights the necessity for

the sentences that translate the bond between [the mother's] body, ours, and that of our daughters. We have to discover a language (*langage*) which does not replace the bodily encounter, as paternal language (*langue*) attempts to do, but which can go along with it, words which do not bar the corporeal, but which speak corporeal. ('The Bodily Encounter' 43)

The creation and articulation of this maternal genealogy would provide the potential to undermine the oppressive dominance and authority of the paternal genealogy and its transmission, resulting, as Irigaray highlights, in 'the coexistence of *two* genealogies' (Whitford, 'Section 1' 23. Emphasis in original). Examples of supportive, collective maternal genealogies can be viewed in the discourses surrounding The Magdalena Project and *The Open Page*.

In *The Open Page* article 'Ants in a Carpet of Clouds,' the Odin Teatret psychophysical performer, Julia Varley, declares that:

I believe in history, in the experience that is passed along the generations, in life that remains in the actions and body memory of those who follow, in the existence that becomes future behaviour and implicit knowledge. My way of being is the result of many women who have lived before me and my life will continue in the life of those who come after me. (100)

This belief in an embodied legacy passed between women was and is actualised through Varley's position as founding member of The Magdalena Project. The Magdalena Project: International Network of Women in Contemporary Theatre was

formed in 1986 in an attempt to give women from the performance world, particularly those from a body-based background, the space to share, create and discuss performance work and performer training together in a supportive environment (The Magdalena Project, 'About the Project: Introduction'). It works to

increase the awareness of women's contribution to contemporary theatre; enable women to explore new approaches to theatre making that more profoundly reflect their own experience rather than that of men; create the fora that can give voice to the concerns of women working in theatre; encourage women to examine their role in the future of theatre and to question existing structures. (The Magdalena Project, 'About the Project: Aims')

Through its development and growth, The Magdalena Project has created the possibility of a maternal genealogy. Varley's position in the project of 'belonging to a third generation in relation to the younger women who approach me to learn from my experience as actor, director and organiser,' means that she is now 'considered a grandmother' to these women (Varley, 'Magdalena Grandmothers' 47).

The Magdalena Project has also laid the foundations for this maternal genealogy through textual documentation of female performance practice. Varley highlights how 'the general absence of women in theatre history books demands women practitioners take the responsibility of sharing their experiences in other ways than simply on stage,' or within the space of practice ('Magdalena Grandmothers' 48). Therefore, in 1994 The Magdalena Project set up *The Open Page* journal. '*The Open Page*' Varley, Geddy Aniksdal and Maggie Gale explain, 'seeks to give space to many different [female] voices, some of them dissident, others not,' to 'report on their work and express their thoughts, feelings and analysis about theatre, as a means of building their own memory and a critical perspective within theatre history' (Foreword). This supportive collective of diverse multivocality reverses Harold Bloom's presentation in *The Anxiety of Influence* of poet-sons battling with the precedent set by their precursors, their father-poets (Bloom 11). Indeed, the articles

within *The Open Page* can be viewed as mother/grandmother-texts, transmitting useful knowledge to their readers as daughters/granddaughters. Moreover, through the assimilation of influences from the practices and *The Open Page's* textual documentation of the practices of these female practitioners, a number of the articles within *The Open Page* can be viewed as daughters to other mother-articles or practitioners.

The participant-writer could usefully explore the supportive, connective maternal genealogical possibilities provided by Cixous and Irigaray, and by practitioners like Varley. However, the emphasis on the maternal can be viewed as essentialist, thus restricting these possibilities to women. Therefore, in the final part of this paper I will demonstrate how these maternal possibilities can be opened up to everyone. I will examine several specific practical examples of guiding or guidance that require male and female psychophysical practitioners and participants to reconsider or inhabit the roles of, and relationship between, mother and child.

### **Family Roles**

In 'When our Lips Speak Together' Irigaray extends the maternal alternatives to the paternal genealogy with a complete rejection of all family positions and titles. She emphasises that these positions cannot escape the framework of the paternal genealogy, and that they serve to solidify phallogentric gender roles. Thus, writing as if from within a supportive feminine bodily encounter, and addressing the other woman involved in that encounter, Irigaray declares that such encounters produce the strength and experience of alternatives to these family roles and relationships:

I love you who are neither mother (pardon me, mother, for I prefer a woman) nor sister, neither daughter nor son. I love you-and there, where I love you, I don't care about the lineage of our fathers and their desire for imitation men. And their genealogical institutions. Let's be neither husband nor wife, do

without the family, without roles, functions, and their laws of reproduction. I love you: your body, here, there, now. ('When Our Lips' 72)

This rejection of family roles can similarly be traced within Reeve's instructions on how to approach the process of guiding movement through movement, and the bodily encounters that this process produces. Reeve deploys this Suryodarmo-influenced process within 'Move into Life,' her practice 'based on a variety of sources in psychophysical training which are in a constant state of dialogue with each other' (Reeve, 'The Next Step' 19, n.1.). These sources include: training 'with Jacques Gardel at Théâtre Onze in Switzerland,' in a form of physical theatre 'closely influenced by Grotowski' (Reeve, 'Performance'); qualifying as a Shiatsu practitioner and as a Dance Movement Therapist; Theravada Buddhist mindfulness practice; and, most particularly, ten years of studying with Suryodarmo. All these elements serve to shape Reeve's mode of guiding movement through movement. Through direct instruction, music, noise, action and gesture, Reeve guides participants through engaged free form movement that is receptive to the surrounding space and the other individuals within it. This free form movement stems from the participants' individual bodies, concerns, emotions, memories and dreams and is shaped by simple movement tasks or scores set by Reeve.

Reeve describes how, when taking the position of 'guide,' one adopts 'a role' ('Guiding through Movement Workshop'). Whilst Suryodarmo defined Reeve's role as 'the *kindergarten*' or 'babysitting,' both Suryodarmo and Reeve explain that this supportive role could not be one of 'mothering' or 'fathering' ('Guiding through Movement Workshop'). The adoption of either a parental or babysitting role would suggest a problematic placement of the mover as child or baby to the guide's adult. However, Suryodarmo deployed the terms '*kindergarten*' and 'babysitting' (without completely ridding the titles of their problematic connotations) in order to describe the

way in which Reeve ‘supported the situation for the mover and made it safe for them’ (‘Guiding through Movement Workshop’).

This form of guiding support without over-attachment to the mover is contrasted by Suryodarmo and Reeve with the way in which adoption of a parental role would reduce the autonomy of both mover and guide. Reeve stresses that ‘what’s important for me [as guide] is that I have my own creative process alongside the process of trying to offer something supportive for [the mover’s] process. Otherwise, I’m just putting myself in the role of slave’ (‘Guiding through’ DVD). Reeve’s refusal of the role of overbearing slavish parent, and the over-dependence this induces in the mover as child, reflects Cixous and Irigaray’s emphasis on the need to be careful when renewing the relationship between mother and daughter. When renewing this relationship, it is necessary to free ‘the daughter from the icy grip of the merged and undifferentiated relationship’ with the mother (Whitford, ‘Section II’ 77), by resisting a return to the pre-oedipal state of wholeness. One can review this state of female undifferentiation through Reeve’s non-essentialised attribution of the problem to a position of over-bearing child-caring by male or female. This undifferentiation in the practice space results, according to Suryodarmo, in the participant ‘copying’ the ‘parent’ rather than ‘find[ing] their own line’ of movement (‘Discussion’). Therefore the participant-writer could also deploy this rejection of family roles in the documentation of psychophysical performer trainings in order to prevent that documentation from further enhancing the dominant positioning of the paternal genealogy, and in order to similarly prioritise the bodily encounters specific to that practice and to pursue one’s ‘own line’ within the writing.

However, the analogies evoked by these family roles can provide useful explanations of particular positions and emphases within these psychophysical

trainings and their documentation. Irigaray's solution to the 'undifferentiated relationship' between mother and daughter offers some suggestions for making use, whilst also rejecting the enculturated understanding and deployment, of these family roles and titles. Irigaray stresses that we must 'establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters' ('Women-Mothers' 50). This exchange of positions, or dual position, would enable the woman 'to "play" her role of mother without being totally assimilated by it' (Irigaray, *Speculum* 76).

Such reciprocation and literal playing of and with this role by both male and female is evident within the structured encounter of Zarrilli's 'umbilical cord' partner exercise. This partner exercise helps participants to gain a strong impression of what it feels like to move from the lower abdomen whilst carrying out the *kalaripayattu* lion steps. The *kalaripayattu* forms and sequences are based upon animal poses and kicks. With the lion steps, participants move forwards and backwards through a low centred pose where the spine is lengthened, hips face the front, knees are bent, one leg points forward, while the other leg is open to the side, so that the feet are at right angles to one another and the heels of the feet in line. With Zarrilli's partner exercise, the doer tightly ties a long-sleeved top around their lower abdomen and their helper winds the sleeves of the top around one another to create what Zarrilli jokingly calls an 'umbilical cord.' The helper takes a strong hold upon this cord as the doer moves forwards, so pushing the doer to focus upon and root their movement in the grounded power of lower abdominal engagement. In this exercise the helper participant, of either sex, through the connection of the 'umbilical cord,' might be viewed as mother to the doer participant. Thus, a reciprocal relationship between mother and child is

clearly displayed through the way in which both participants have a chance to play each family role.

While the exercise is conducted under the guidance of Zarrilli, who could be viewed as parent or grandparent to all these pairs, Zarrilli will often demonstrate the role of child-doer as well as that of parent-helper. Moreover, within this task the participants, rather than participants and practitioner, are positioned within a mother and child relationship. Therefore, whilst perhaps retaining the associations of these familial roles, this exercise could be seen to further separate the roles from the positions of authority and reliance traditionally bound up with that of teacher and student, or mother and child. The equalising possibilities of this reciprocal relationship are intensified through the way in which, where the balance of the exercise is retained through the right amount of grasp upon the cord and through the energised activity of the doer within that grasp, each person learns from and is reliant upon the other. Through this mutual support, both participants avoid the risk of the 'merged and undifferentiated relationship' of over-dependence. This mutual support between 'mother' and 'child' echoes the way in which Suryodarmo sees himself as 'learning with his students' (Reeve, 'Interview').

Following this, Cixous emphasises the necessity for women to rejuvenate and express their 'relation to childhood (the child that she was, that she is, that she makes, remakes, undoes, there at the point where, the same, she mothers herself)' ('The Laugh' 252). By experiencing the positions of both mother and child in the umbilical cord exercise, the participant embodies Cixous's emphasis and works towards providing their own mothering guidance. This self-mothering enables the participant to move from the lower abdomen with the remembered sensation, but without the need, of this external support. This form of guidance can be viewed through the

context of Reeve and Zarrilli's emphasis on facilitating the participant towards a state of self-facilitation.

Cixous reflects this process of being both mother and child in her portrayal of textual practice, emphasising that, whilst the writer is mother to the creative act/text, 'there is also a reversal in the maternal relation between child and mother, since life is exchanged' (*Three Steps* 78). The participant-writer can similarly operate as both mother and child to their textual documentation, constructing the text that will act as supportive and guiding mother, and so self-mother, to their practical process. In then receiving, and so rewriting, the documentation, participant and text can both be viewed as a fluid, interwoven mix of mother and child in a bodily encounter.

Just as these interwoven roles of mother and child within the practical and documentation space may be inhabited by male bodies, one student explained how when she first observed the training and saw Zarrilli teach, bending gently over his students to carefully adjust and check for energised activity within their bodies within the forms, he reassuringly made her think of her caring grandmother (Participant J). This highlights how transmission from or between males need not suggest the absolute or exclusive presence of a paternal genealogy and further shakes the biological specificity attributed by Cixous and Irigaray to maternal genealogies.

However, this non-essentialist example can also be viewed through Cixous's own emphasis on disturbing the singular patriarchal categorised roles of the nuclear family with a fuller description of these roles conveyed by multiplicity, heterogeneity and further intermixing. This multiplicity and intermixing also serves to shatter the hierarchical binary structure, which the sole pursuit of maternal genealogies still maintains. Thus, Cixous stresses that '[i]f we were not so lazy in language, we would weave more precise and more just family ties [...] and we would not simply say

father, or mother. We could also say father-son, or son-father, or mother-son or mother-daughter. We would be more sensitive to the presence of several kinds of mothers in a mother' ('Mamae' 347-348). The participant-writer can usefully draw upon such lexical multiplicity and intermixing of roles. This would enable the participant-writer to allow for, question, and play with the changing and different perspectival interpretations of lineage and family roles within and between different practices and their documentation. It would also provide the means of expressing and exploring the embodied radical change and possibilities, potentially far more radical than sole pursuit of the subversions of a maternal genealogy, produced by the assimilation of traditionally paternal genealogical practices by female bodies.

There are now usually far more female than male participants in these practices. These women assimilate, teach and articulate these trainings through their individual evolving body-minds. This can lead to the extensive development of, and changes to, these practices' paternal genealogies. As a result of articulating and playing with these changing lineages and family roles, the participant-writer would then be able to draw from previous documentary examples and practical influences now perceived to be positioned within a shifting, intermixed, and non-essentialised structure and understanding of genealogy. This open genealogical structure would provide many possible places within which the participant-writer, of either sex, could situate their own writing.

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