

Mindfulness and Heightened Consciousness in Phillip Zarrilli's Psychophysical Approach to Acting

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**Tsu-Chung Su,**

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**Abstract:** In his article "Mindfulness and Heightened Consciousness in Phillip Zarrilli's Psychophysical Approach to Acting," Tsu-Chung Su intends to explore the significance of mindfulness and heightened consciousness in Zarrilli's psychophysical approach to acting. Su first traces and discusses the Chinese and Indian sources, resources, and knowledge that have forged Zarrilli's psychophysical acting techniques, theories, and approaches. Then, he critically examines and assesses the efficacy of Zarrilli's approach which combines Western theatrical concepts and techniques with what he self-consciously borrows from Chinese *qi* and *taijiquan*, Indian ayurvedic medicine, Vedic philosophy, performing aesthetics, Hindu religion, *kathakali*, yoga, meditation, massage, and *kalarippayattu* martial arts.

## Tsu-Chung SU

### Mindfulness and Heightened Consciousness in Phillip Zarrilli's Psychophysical Approach to Acting

In our age of global capitalism, more and more theater practitioners are seeking to cater to sensuality, intensified stimulations, or fun entertainments for general spectators. The typical example is the *Sleep No More* production in New York City. Primarily based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, it is a site-specific immersive theater offering audience multiple stimulations and intense psychological sensations. However, recently there has been significant interest in cultivating mindfulness, heightening spiritual awareness, and altering the state of consciousness not only in performers alone but in audience as well. Different theater artists use different terms to express or name their visions. Antonin Artaud. For example, always seeks to create a sacred experience in theater. His purpose is "to break through language in order to touch life" and to extend infinitely "the frontiers of what is called reality" (13). As for Jerzy Grotowski, he maintains that his holy actor is an actor with spiritual power who performs self-penetration and gives oneself totally (*Towards* 38). He conjures up words such as "trance" and "translumination" to explain his thoughts (*Towards* 16). Following the same line of thought, Peter Brook envisions a hunger for the invisible in theater, which is "a hunger for a reality deeper than the fullest form of everyday life" (44). He thinks that we need a holy theater or a true ritual to answer the call or the need of our time.

In the wake of his forerunners, Phillip Zarrilli has devised a unique "Asian" psychophysical approach in working with performing artists from different parts of the world. His approach employs hatha-yoga, meditation, and Asian martial arts, such as Chinese Wu style *taijiquan* and Indian *kalaripayattu* (the early twelfth century yoga-based indigenous martial arts), to train performer's mindfulness, energy flow, and overall psychophysical acting skills (*Psychophysical* 63-80). What is remarkable about Zarrilli is that he is not only a prolific scholar, publishing extensively on psychophysical acting, classical Indian *kathakali* dance, and Indian martial art *kalaripayattu* but also a serious-minded and diligent practitioner/trainer of *taijiquan*, yoga, *kathakali* dance, and *kalaripayattu*. He is knowledgeable with regard to all the Western acting theories, from the theories of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Michael Chekhov, Decroux, Copeau, Lecoq, Artaud, Grotowski, to Barba, etc. Of eastern theorists, he occasionally quotes Japanese philosopher Yuasa Yasuo and Noh theater aesthetician, actor, and playwright Zeami Motokiyo.

Many of Zarrilli's insights into actor training are gained from his long-term encounter with Chinese and Indian body theories and exercises. In his award-winning book, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (ATHE 2010 Outstanding Book of the Year Award), Zarrilli specifies that his book explores "some of the properties of the actor's instrument: the actor's bodymind, awareness, consciousness, and energy" (*Psychophysical* 2), and reconsiders "the nature of acting and its practice" (*Psychophysical* 2). For him, the actor's work is not based on "acting as representation" but on an "energetics" of performance (*Psychophysical* 1). "Engaging the whole body means working with a fully awakened energy coursing through one's entire bodymind" (*Psychophysical* 4), Zarrilli elaborates. As an actor trainer, Zarrilli often encourages his performers to seek a higher level of awareness. As is often practiced in training, to heighten an actor's awareness and consciousness begins with the working of the breath or vital energy within. This life-giving breath or the vital wind humor is often called *qi* in Chinese, *ki* in Japanese and Korean, or *prana* (or *prana vayu*) in Sanskrit. To attain the optimal performance state is to activate or awaken this inner energy (*kundalini sakti*) that travels along acupoints, the seven chakra centers, the spine line, or energy channels in order to animate the body and the voice.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the significance of mindfulness and heightened consciousness in Zarrilli's psychophysical approach to acting. It first traces and discusses the Chinese and Indian sources, resources, and knowledge that have forged Zarrilli's psychophysical acting techniques, theories, and approaches. Then, it critically examines and assesses the efficacy of his approach which combines Western theatrical concepts and techniques with what he self-consciously borrows from Chinese *qi* and *taijiquan*, Indian ayurvedic medicine, vedic philosophy, performing aesthetics, Hindu religion, *kathakali*, yoga, meditation, massage, and *kalaripayattu* martial arts.

"Use your whole body, Zarrilli, your whole body!" (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 3)—this shout-out from Zarrilli's *kalaripayattu* teacher Gurukkal Govindankutty Nayar in 1980 initiated his lifelong quest to pursue what exactly his teacher has meant, namely the issues regarding the body-mind continuum, the whole body energy dynamic, the heightened awareness of the spiritual, the efficacy of performance, and the psychophysical acting in general. As Zarrilli argues, in the 1970s, the Stanislavskian acting

training was the primary paradigm of actor training in the U.S, also known as Method Acting. However, he quickly found out that Method Acting was problematic and very limiting for actors. As a result, he moved away from Stanislavskian work and went for a broad repertoire of tools and an alternative understanding of acting. At this critical moment of his career, according to Zarrilli, he was inspired by Jerzy Grotowski and decided to try the Indian way. As Zarrilli has expressed on several occasions, between 1977 and 1993, he had spent a total of seven years living in Kerala, receiving his *kalaripayattu* training with Guru Govindankutty Nayar at the CVN *Kalari* in Thiruvananthapuram, learning the art through twice-daily intensive training sessions lasting up to five hours daily (*Psychophysical* 4).

Meanwhile, during 1979-80, Zarrilli was invited to co-direct the Asian/Experimental Theater Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and had the chance to learn *taijiquan* directly from Adolphe Clarence Scott. From this time on, he has developed the habit of practicing *taijiquan* regularly and, like Scott, used it as a basis for his psychophysical actor training. In the end, by combining related trainings of *taijiquan*, *kalaripayattu*, and yoga, Zarrilli has formulated his brand of psychophysical acting. In what follows, I will trace and discuss the sources, resources, and knowledge of Zarrilli's Asian formula.

Both *kathakali* dance skills and *kalaripayattu* martial arts that Zarrilli has practiced for many years are founded on a set of fundamental cultural assumptions about the body-mind and wellbeing underlying the guidelines of yoga and ayurveda. The virtual goals of yoga and ayurveda aim to achieve mindfulness and heightened consciousness. As comparative religions scholar Mircea Eliade has remarked, "One always finds a form of yoga whenever there is a question of *experiencing the sacred* or arriving at complete *mastery of oneself*. . ." (196). As for ayurveda, it is the Indian knowledge (*veda*) of life (*ayuh*) and wellbeing. Its purpose is not only to heal or optimize the functioning of the body but also to use the physical well-being as the basis of mindfulness and one's journey toward spiritual enlightenment.

Yoga and ayurveda always go hand in hand. Both are means to keep the physical body healthy so that one can pursue heightened awareness and spiritual goals. For example, the kalari, the training ground of *kalaripayattu*, "was a center for training and healing in villages or with royal households, and also served as a temple where the guardian deity was either a form of the goddess or Siva/Sakti in combination" (Zarrilli, *When* 26). According to Zarrilli, in order to gain access to the divine or spiritual power, one must begin with the physical body and physical training so as to actualize particular powers, such as the strength of mental power (*mana sakti*) and the primordial power (*kundalini sakti*). These powers are awakened for the purpose of reaching spiritual enlightenment. The whole process always begins with the outer form of the body or the physical or gross body (*sthula-sarira*). In terms of *kalaripayattu*, the exercises include a vast array of poses, steps, jumps, kicks, and leg movements performed in increasingly complex combinations back and forth across the kalari floor. After perfecting the outer form through rigorous exercises and massage, the practitioner, then, by incorporating breath and its vital energy (*prana vayu*), gradually moves inward to discover the interior subtle and energy-flowing body (*suksma-sarira*) traditionally associated with yoga and meditation. In addition to the above psychophysical exercises, worship and rituals (*puja*), meditation, and devotion (*bhakti*) are essential to gain the divine power or the spiritual liberation (*moksha*) (Zarrilli, *When* 84-122).

Like the training goal of a *kalaripayattu* practitioner, for Zarrilli, what a *kathakali* actor needs to achieve is the heightened sense of consciousness because this awakened awareness can help the actor actualize the powers like "serpent power" (*kundalini sakti*) and enables him/her to perform roles and enact emotions in *kathakali* dance dramas (Zarrilli, *Kathakali* 171-74). This heightened or mindful consciousness is at once "an idealized state of being/doing" and "a state of intense concentration of energy" (Zarrilli, *Kathakali* 171, 174) which is essential to any optimal performance where the "body is all eyes" (*Psychophysical* 1).

Of the whole training session, Zarrilli puts breathing exercises at the forefront of his approach. He devotes the entire second chapter, entitled "Beginning with the Breath," of his *Psychophysical Acting* to the topic of the breath, strongly believing that breathing exercises with the inner eye can take one to the edge of a breath and sensitize "the body-mind to the nuances of the space between in- and out-breath" (*Psychophysical* 90). He identifies with the thought that the breath is the life force which could animate the potential power of the martial art practitioner or the performer alike. For yoga, *taijiquan* and *kalaripayattu* practitioners, to master special breath control techniques is a must because it can help activate and circulate the practitioner's *qi* or "internal energy" (*prana vayu*) and, therefore, contribute to the actualization of the vital force or the primordial cosmic energy (*sakti*) to be used in fighting and/or healing.

The use of *qi* is essential to the practice of *taijiquan*. As is well-known, the term *taiji* refers to Lao Tzu's philosophy of the forces of *yin* and *yang* which are in constant motion and transformation. The practice of *taijiquan*, thus, involves rhythmic breathing coordinated with slow stylized movement, balanced play of *yin* and *yang*, a calm mindful state, and free flow of guiding *qi*. It serves multiple

purposes, such as health benefit, physical healing, spiritual meditation, martial arts training, and performing arts exercise (Wong 1-8). In India, this inner energy is often identified with kundalini/tantric yoga in the *Yoga Upanisad* and *Tantra* (Zarrilli, *When* 123-24). In either tradition, only after years of rigorous training, can one fine tune the coordination of one's breath and body-mind. Once the actor's breath is awakened and his/her perception and awareness are heightened and honed, he/she is able to produce a qualitative vibration of energy that is palpable and perceived by the audience.

Zarrilli's focus on the breath-in-action as a performance score is of particular interest to me, for only through energizing and fine-tuning the breath can the actor sense, experience, and embody the performance score, according to Zarrilli. Besides practicing and teaching Wu style *taijiquan*, Zarrilli adopts a rigorous meditative path which emphasizes "*kalarippayattu* as an active, energetic means of disciplining and 'harnessing' (yuj, the root of yoga) both one's body and one's mind, that is, as a form of moving meditation" (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 2). Thus, by combining yoga, meditation, *taijiquan*, and *kalarippayattu*, Zarrilli's Asian "cocktail" formula for the actor has gradually taken shape in the 1980s.

Through Zarrilli's masterclasses around the globe, we can see *kalarippayattu's* potential influence expand and multiply. Even though it is a form of martial art, *kalarippayattu* focuses more on mental dimension than on physical aspect. As Zarrilli's teacher Gurukkal Govindankutty Nayar explains, "You should wash the floor of the *kalari* with your sweat. *Kalarippayattu* is 80 percent mental and only the remainder is physical" (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 63). Occupying up to 80%, the mental dimension "is the subtle domain of inner activation, i.e., the flame of an active, inner, vibratory perceptivity and engagement" (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 62). In Indian yoga philosophy, the working of energy is always linked with the transformation of body and consciousness, or even with the goal of spiritual liberation (*moksha*). Thus the "energetics" of acting is not just the "energetics" of the body but very much the "energetics" of the mind and the spiritual, manifested through the continuum of the body-mind in performance.

In Part III "Production Case Studies" of his *Psychophysical Acting*, Zarrilli talks about the knowhow of his directorship by identifying twofold directorial goals: Firstly, "to find a means of activating each actor as an individual through psychophysical processes and images that constantly engage that actor's body-mind, energy, awareness, and the sensation/feeling of form," and secondly "to find a means of activating the actors intersubjectively as an ensemble so that they are being active/reactive in the moment for each other" (*Psychophysical* 113). From Zarrilli's two main concerns, we learn that his approach is realized through actor's "energetics of the bodymind" and is not actualized through character's psychology, emotion, or affective memory as in early Stanislavsky's system but rather through the circulation and working of energy.

For Zarrilli, his psychophysical exercises begin with the body and move both inward toward subtle realms of feeling and spiritual experience and outward to meet the environment. His poetics of energy or the so-called "energetics" of performance focuses on the preperformative preparation. In other words, Zarrilli's approach emphasizes what Eugenio Barba terms "pre-expressive" state or stage. Barba's theater anthropology is the study of the performer's pre-expressive scenic behavior, which constitutes the basis of different genres, roles, and personal or collective traditions. In an organized performance situation, the performer's physical and mental presence is modelled according to principles which are different from those applied in daily life. This extra-daily use of the body-mind is called "technique." To act is to dilate the body and engage the entire body's energy, in the words of this method. The secret of the performer's body technique is to dilate "the body's dynamics" (Barba, *The Paper* 62). Barba's notion of the dilated body bears a concrete physical existence and is a typical body-mind continuum which employs extra-daily techniques, organizes the performer's scenic "bios," generates new performer-spectator relationships, and produces unexpected possibilities for meaning in performance.

Like the dilated body envisioned by Barba, the goal of Zarrilli's approach is to guide the actors to fulfill an embodied acting style with full energy embodiment and full body-mind awareness. In the end its purpose is to affect a specific coordination experience among actors as an ensemble and to establish a rapport between actors and spectators. As Zarrilli notes, the ideal state of his approach is for performer to achieve the state of "*Meyyu Kannakuka*," literally "the body becomes all eyes." When one's "body is all eyes," Zarrilli explains, then like Lord Brahman "the thousand eyed," "one is like an animal—able to see, hear, and respond immediately to any stimulus in the immediate environment" (*Psychophysical* 1). By mastering and embodying the various states of "being" whilst engaged in the "doing," a performing artist becomes one with his/her inner life in each movement/moment and interacts with the people and space surrounding him/her.

Both the breath-in-action and the "energetics" of acting are not just practices through which an actor enacts a performance score; rather, they are "technologies," in the Foucauldian sense of the word, of the actor's body-mind through which actors not only "develop knowledge about themselves" (Foucault



18) but also refashion their force/power, reposition their agency/self/identity, and build up their body-mind networks. Thus, practices are exactly the technologies of embodied doing through which everyday as well as extra-daily experiences, techniques, meanings, and knowledge are shaped and negotiated. The embodied practices-becoming-technologies eventually help actors (re)fashion themselves and attain the altered states of consciousness for a theater of presence rather than one of representation.

In many ways, I find that Zarrilli's "psychophysical" actor with the *qi/prana* awareness and full embodied and spiritual devotion fits well with Grotowski's "holy" actor, who makes a gift of himself/herself and is no longer subservient to other theatrical elements. To be "holy," for Zarrilli, is for actors to embody states of mindful "being-doing" in the now-time (the *kairos*) rather than in the chronological or sequential time (the *kronos*) of performance. Enabled by the emergent qualities of simultaneity and ubiquity, the "holy" actor is all eyes/body-mind/emotions/mindful awareness like a god, presenting (not representing) artistic virtuosity, experiencing divine revelation, and exerting impact on those who are present at the scene emotionally and spiritually. To the question "What, precisely, is acquired or brought to accomplishment through long-term body-mind training?" Zarrilli answers: "To become accomplished is to achieve an optimal level and quality of relationship between the doer and the done where 'the body(mind) becomes all eyes'" (*Psychophysical* 213). In other words, this most desirable state for him is exactly the moment when the actor/dancer and the action/dance become one.

In developing his approach, Zarrilli decided to use the term "psychophysical" coined by Stanislavski whose initial intention was to bridge the gap between the "psycho" and the "physical" elements of acting and make efforts to solve acting problems for new forms of drama such as formalism and symbolism. To support his vision, Stanislavski based his theories of "psychophysical acting" on the work of psychologist Théodule Armand Ribot (1839–1916) and his knowledge of Indian yoga (Carnicke 15). In *My Life in Art*, Stanislavski suggests that the optimal state of acting is for the actor to make use of all his senses and embraces "his mind, his will, his emotions, his body, his memory and his imagination" (465). For Zarrilli, Stanislavski, rather than systematizing his "Method Acting" as misunderstood particularly in the US, continued to experiment with new acting methods in his life. He himself picked up Stanislavsky's experimental momentum and attempted to overcome René Descartes's mind-body dualism pervading Western performance thought by moving beyond character portrayal and mimesis theory all together.

For both Zarrilli and Grotowski, Stanislavsky's notion of the "psychophysical" is re-examined in the light of actor's body-mind practice, namely the "mindful" technology of the embodied self. Their view of performance as presence-in-action and performer/actor as doer has been a catalyst for spiritual journeying, which is also shared by its spectators. As Grotowski writes, "*Performer*, with a capital letter, is a man of action. He is not somebody who plays another. He is a doer, a priest, a warrior: he is outside aesthetic genres... Knowledge is a matter of doing... *Performer* knows to link body impulses to the song...The witnesses then enter inter states of intensity because, so to say, they feel presence. And this is thanks to *Performer*, who is a bridge between the witness and this something. In this sense, *Performer* is a *pontifex*, maker of bridges" ("*Performer*" 376-77, original emphasis).

Integrating body and mind, Zarrilli's psychophysical approach is a fascinating method of actor training which has potential benefits for actors, directors, and spectators alike. What is unique about his method is that he teaches by example, using his own personal learning, acting, and directing experiences to elucidate his purpose and enlighten the novice. His way has included his dedicated academic studies of Asian, especially Indian and Chinese, theater and martial arts as well as his assiduous and indefatigable practice of yoga, meditation, *kalaripayattu*, and *taijiquan* for over 40 years.

Since actors nowadays are expected to perform across a broad range of new or alternative dramaturgies, or work with "postdramatic" texts or "new writing" plays, Zarrilli considers that his approach is able to keep up with the times and offer a way to deal with these new types of performance by coordinating actor's psychic impulses and physical responses as well as resisting the temptation of representation and characterization. Thus, by pointing out the fact that the "psychologically whole character was no longer central to many types of theatre after the 1960s" (*Psychophysical* 7) and arguing that the "psychological" is no longer "a paradigm with sufficient explanatory and/or practical power and flexibility to fully inform the complexities of the work of the contemporary" (*Psychophysical* 8), Zarrilli ambitiously uses his psychophysical approach to initiate a paradigm shift in actor training with the hope to help actors go beyond Stanislavsky's legacy. His goal is to assist them to cultivate the capacity to exercise breath and its vital force, to refine one's inner energy, to develop a heightened consciousness to meet the immediate demands of acting, and eventually to engage more fully with other actors and the audience alike.

If the end result of Zarrilli's psychophysical training is to cultivate actors' ability not only to shape and move energy with control, grace, and ease but also to develop a body-mind awareness inside and

out, a long and rigorous preperformance training is something actors cannot do without. For Zarrilli, the best strategy for an actor to (re)discover his/her body-mind is through repetitive practice day in and day out. However, one must have a clear sense of the training goal. As Zarrilli specifies, "The self on which one works is not the psychological/behavioral self, but rather the psychophysical self—the experiential/perceiving self—constituted in the moment by sensory awareness, perception, and attentiveness to one's body-mind in the act of doing and as responsive to the environment" (*Psychophysical* 29). To avoid becoming empty and habitual, "the actor must commit him/herself fully to training as an ongoing process of self-definition... This process of self-definition and personal justification can never end—the practitioner must constantly (re)discover the self in and through the training with each repetition" (*Psychophysical* 30, original emphasis).

Zarrilli's words imply that if one practices the traditional trainings, such as *kalaripayattu*, *kathakali*, yoga, *taijiquan*, etc., deep and long enough, and in a correct and devoted manner, one is likely to find resonance and some similar underlying principles and elements embedded inside different forms of psychophysical practices created by different cultures. Also in so doing, according to Zarrilli, actors can really locate and know how to make use of the energy hidden in their creative center(s), *dantian*, acupuncture points, or chakras, and begin to transform their material bodies with mindful circulated energy. This is the reason why Zarrilli emphatically insists on the importance of embodied repetition because repetitive practices are the only way which can lead a practitioner to the discovery of unknown possibilities, links, and terrains within their bodies.

I find that the demanding requirement of Zarrilli's approach is ill-fitted to the logic of global capitalism which seeks high return on investment. One needs to understand that even being an awakened and accomplished psychophysical practitioner who has a keen *qi* or *prana* awareness does not guarantee that he/she can offer a compelling acting presence during the performance because he/she still needs to hone the skills to interpret a role, to present him/herself in the best and most favorable light at a particular scene or story in a theatrical space in a telling manner, to use his/her body-mind awareness to create effective dramaturgy, and eventually to compose/perform an optimal performance score. As Zarrilli notes, oftentimes, novice actors have a hard time to relate the psychophysical training they receive to their acting on the stage. As one participant confesses, "For the longest time I had difficulty imaging how the discipline work could be directly applied to my acting!" (qtd. in Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 30). Except Patricia Boyette's reflection on *Not I* and Jeungsook Yoo's account on her performance of the Girl in Scene 1 of *The Water Station* by Ota Shogo, in his *Psychophysical Acting*, Zarrilli does not say much about accomplished psychophysical actors' application of the method in real performances or include the reports of their own step-by-step implementation of the acquired psychophysical skills and techniques on the stage. Moreover, Zarrilli does not "demonstrate" or "explain" in a detailed manner how an actor, through systematic and effective psychophysical doing, training, and cultivation at different stages, can gradually become a competent psychophysical actor like himself. Apart from offering his own personal embodied experiences and performances in the productions of Samuel Beckett's plays, such as *Act Without Words I* and *Ohio Impromptu*, Zarrilli showcases only Patricia Boyette's laborious rehearsal practices and impressive performances in *Not I* and *Rockaby*, and demonstrates his own directorial strategies to induce, engage, and enact actors' psychophysical impulses and awareness in *The Water Station*.

As a *taijiquan* and yoga practitioner myself, I find Zarrilli's approach problematic. His goal to "emphasize the inner work" is not realistic at all in today's market. As Zarrilli himself makes clear, a martial art practitioner needs to work on the outer form first before he/she incorporates breathing and makes his/her inner energy flow. In most of the cases, it requires years of rigorous training and uncompromising practice to cultivate the interior subtle and energy-flowing body (*sukksma-sarira*), which then could be "translated" or "put to use" on stage. As one can well imagine, rigorous repetition and arduous devotion to practice are either too high a goal or too impractical for many actors working in our global consumer society. Zarrilli himself perceptively points out that the would-be-actors in the United States and the United Kingdom "may not have had sustained in-depth training in a particular discipline" (*Psychophysical* 31). The same applies to the actor training situation in Taiwan. Other than traditional *xiqu* players who are more likely to brush up on their skills regularly, most actors in Taiwan do not have "sustained in-depth training in a particular discipline" either.

I believe Zarrilli would agree with me that only very few practitioners of martial arts could reach the zenith state, that is, the state to "make the body all eyes." Due to this reason, I am quite skeptical of his approach's efficacy, especially under the circumstance that in many of Zarrilli's projects performers can only receive very short period of the psychophysical training in a commercial production. At best, we can say that Zarrilli's psychophysical approach is a "cocktail" therapy to "cure" or address the wrongs or limits of current actor training methods. But whether his cocktail approach is a better solution to

equip performers nowadays, it remains to be seen. The production of *The 9 Fridas*, which was one of the feature productions of the 2014 Taipei Arts Festival scripted by Kate O'Reilly and directed by Zarrilli could serve as a good example. Under the restrictions of the limited time and budget, Zarrilli's actor training was only skin-deep because some actors were unable to develop well-integrated psychophysical skills within a few weeks of rehearsal time. When being asked the question of Taiwanese performers' response to his psychophysical approach in a special interview, Zarrilli confesses that for those performers "who never or seldom 'used the body' to feel and learn, they need to spend longer time to adapt themselves to the approach" (2014 Taipei Arts Festival Program).

Zarrilli's psychophysical approach seeks to refashion and deepen the "psychophysical" awareness pioneered by Stanislavski who attempts to overcome the gap between mind and body, between knowledge and emotion, and between intellectual analysis and physical action through psychophysical improvisation or a more physically grounded rehearsal process known as the "Method of Physical Action." Veering away from Stanislavski's character-centered psychophysical experiment, Zarrilli's purpose is to create a "post-character" energy-filled embodied performance. However, what he has desired for is always undercut by limited rehearsal time and by the fact that many of his actors might have difficulties to awaken their energy and then to establish a distinguishable acting style as an ensemble, not to mention to exert their impact on the audience. Thus, in this paper, I argue that Zarrilli's psychophysical approach, in the best possible scenario, is a "cocktail" therapy which "remedies" the limits of current actor training methods, be it Stanislavski's System, Lee Strasberg's Method, the Suzuki Method of Acting, Anne Bogart's Viewpoints, etc. But whether his cocktail approach is a better solution to energizing performers nowadays, it remains to be seen.

In recent years, performance studies has developed a variety of research methods. The application of practice-led or practice-based research methods has become a widespread phenomenon. These practice-led research projects integrate personal pursuit and history with performance research and practice (Barrett 135-46; Jones 18-32; Dean and Smith 1-38). For example, Zarrilli's ethnographic practice/research of/on *kathakali*, *kalarippayattu*, yoga, and *taijiquan* was led by his strong interest in performing arts and martial arts. Over the years, Zarrilli's ardent practice-as-research has yielded fruitful results which have been documented in many of his articles and monographs. Three of his best-known practice-led publications are as follows: *When the Body Becomes All Eyes* (1998), *Kathakali Dance-Drama* (2000), and *Psychophysical Acting* (2009). Exemplified in these three practice-as-research projects are Zarrilli's personal embodied practice experiences, reflections, and visions. While specifying *kalarippayattu* martial arts and *kathakali* dance-drama in the first two monographs, Zarrilli ushers in his newly devised psychophysical approach to acting with historical surveys, theories, and production case studies in *Psychophysical Acting*. His purpose is to redress Western actor training method up to the point of Stanislavski's legacy. The approach he proposes is thus "post-Stanislavskian" (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 8), emphasizing the fact that Asian martial and performing arts practices may help the actor engage the "bodymind" holistically and attain higher states of consciousness rather than working solely on the body or the mind. Through his sustained efforts, Zarrilli's approach has played a vital role in the advancement of directing and acting theories, body-mind practices, and methods of physical action as a field of research and inquiry.

As one can observe, Zarrilli's impact on contemporary performance scene can be seen mainly in emerging intercultural theater since the second half of the twentieth century. The notion of interculturalism and the agency of intercultural theater provide Zarrilli with a convenient means to engage Asian martial arts, Indian theater, culture, philosophy, religion, medicine, massage, yoga, and performing arts in general. His "cocktail" approach and practice-led research testify to this intercultural exchange in our global age.

Nurtured by interculturalism and the New Age spiritualism, Zarrilli's approach, nevertheless, suffers from its *Weltgeist*, namely a method of philosophizing about a topic in the spirit of universalism. Throughout his writings, we can see that Zarrilli's psychophysical approach is built on the a-historical, a-ethnic, and a-gender conception of body, breath, and energy. Its premise is dependent on the truth of the spiritual consciousness. Generalization thus is unavoidable in his discourses. Zarrilli seems to believe what he has proposed is applicable to all if an actor is disciplined and works hard enough. He fails to address the cultural differences embedded in the concepts such as body and energy, and evades the different social and religious frames of reference, especially the Indian way and the Chinese way. The Indian way always appeals to divinity and religious beliefs whereas the Chinese way tends to be more secular. Also, different schools of yoga and martial arts practice embrace and implement different practices, methodologies, and philosophies.

Zarrilli's cocktail or hybrid pedagogical model, mixing Western, Chinese, and Indian traditions, therefore lacks distinction, connection, and consistency, and remains skin-deep. He intends to articulate



the post-character scripts from his western sensibilities—"what may be called a translation. This does not involve translating the techniques, which I try and keep [the same] as I was taught. I emphasize the inner work that goes into this sort of training as the most valuable part of it" (Majumdar), Zarrilli explains. Even though time and again Zarrilli keeps stressing the significance of repetition and mindfulness, his western sensibilities and his "translation" of the Asian training methods might severely compromise the efficacy of each individual practice. The reason is quite simple because every "translation" is a re-interpretation. It is impossible for Zarrilli to keep the original techniques and spirit intact after he reprogrammed or reformulated the original practice. Also, without the optimal outer form and techniques, it is quite unlikely that the inner work can take its effect. In his seminal book *What a Body Can Do*, Ben Spatz perceptively questions and critiques Zarrilli's conceptions and practices: "Throughout *Psychophysical Acting*, Zarrilli relies on precisely the concepts of 'neutral,' 'extra-daily,' and 'empty' technique... In general, Zarrilli fails to precisely articulate the sources and technical framing of his own practice. As a result, he seems to put his own work forward as a universal solution for the problems of 'the actor,' rather than as a research project in a particular area of technique" (155).

Another problem with Zarrilli's approach is that he clearly states that one of his main objectives is to apply his approach to what Hans-Thies Lehmann calls a postdramatic theater (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 8). In this type of theater, there is no longer a conventional plot or character portrayal at the core of the event and staged text "is merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc. total composition" (Lehmann 46). It requires alternative acting style to solve the specific acting problems created by "postdramatic" dramaturgies embedded in the work of Sarah Kane or Martin Crimp. My argument is that Zarrilli's psychophysical actors, who are geared for a "post-Stanislvskian" era and performance, can best flourish in postdramatic theater pieces which make use of bodily movements with minimal words, or stand out in avant-gardist experimental performances which make nonsensical sounds and gestures, or act out in plain silence as showcased in Zarrilli's productions of Samuel Beckett, Ota Shogo, Kaite O'Reilly, Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp. Traditional textual plays, in which portraying a character is of prime importance, are therefore not suitable for Zarrilli's psychophysical actors because voice and articulation as well as character portrayal and interpretation are not in his actor training agenda at all.

Zarrilli takes an uncritical stance in his intercultural enterprise. The question of his approach has nothing to do with appropriation, exoticism, and orientalism. It has more to do with its applicability, practicality, and efficacy. By pointing out the self-justifying nature of Zarrilli's approach, my purpose is not to undermine or dismiss his contributions to acting theory and practice. On the contrary, personally I identify with Zarrilli's psychophysical approach to acting and consider it one of the definitive ways to train a good actor. His model brings forth an alternative paradigm and provides holistic stimulus and much food for thought. It has the potential to cultivate an extra-daily body-mind "that is totally open in the moment" with mindfulness and heightened consciousness (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 89).

Once and again, in his writings, Zarrilli stresses the importance for actors to stay "in the here and now" (*Psychophysical* 31). For me, his approach has a close kinship to religious practice and to something sacred and spiritual, even though the terms and phenomena discussed here, such as "religious," "sacred," and "spiritual," are far from transparent or self-evident. When being asked whether the practice of the psychophysical disciplines he teaches is spiritual or not, Zarrilli simply quotes Dalai Lama's definition of the word "spiritual" to resolve our doubts: "when I say 'spiritual' I do not necessarily mean any kind of religious faith. When I use the word 'spiritual' I mean basic human good qualities. These are: human affection, a sense of involvement, honesty, disciplines and human intelligence properly guided by good motivation" (*Psychophysical* 15). As to the question whether he has been changed by the disciplines he teaches, his answer is a simple and definitive "yes, of course" (*Psychophysical* 213). "Any long-term psychophysical discipline practiced assiduously and with appropriate attentiveness will fundamentally change the relationship between one's body and one's mind" (*Psychophysical* 213), Zarrilli adds. Given this, I argue that the nature of Zarrilli's approach is not that of an actor training method per se; rather, it should be deemed as a quasi-religious devotion whose purpose is to bring about long and lasting change in the body-mind and in consciousness.

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