

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

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Maternal ruptures/raptures -- leakages of the Real ^[note]1

Introduction

The maternal in performance, we argue, has the capacity to set representation ablaze, to rupture the Symbolic and to infuse performance with the rapturous sparks of the Real. We draw from our experience of devising and performing two of Zoo Indigo's Practice as Research performances; these case studies are used to discuss the maternal as a catalyst for the emergence of the Real in theatre. These works are [Under the Covers](#) (2009), premiered at Edinburgh Forest Fringe, which presents the performers' babies via live video link, and [Blueprint](#) (2012), first performed at Nottingham Lakeside Arts Centre, which features the performers' real-life mothers on video call. To describe our mothers and children in our work we adapt the term 'non-performers' as used in an article by Geraldine Harris on how authenticity is created by staging real-life family relationships (Harris 2007: 15). A non-performer, in principle, is perceivable as such within a performance, usually not representing a character but present as themselves. The aim of the PaR projects was to rupture representation, to facilitate a rapture of the Real. This article, in reference to psychoanalytical theory by Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, explores the possibilities of the Real emerging through the presence of the non-performer in Zoo Indigo's work, particularly through the presence of our children and mothers.

Lacan's encounter with the Real is always 'a missed encounter' (Lacan 2004 [1977]: 55) as the Real is not accessible once we enter the Symbolic register of language. Kristeva describes the Real as the 'semiotic', which differs from the everyday understanding of Semiotics as the study of signs and making meaning. The semiotic according to Kristeva is a 'pre-linguistic order associated with the mother's body, with a space of heterogeneous drives and desires, with the feminine' (Fortier 2002: 105). Kristeva describes the hallucinatory state between real life and the Symbolic as rapture: 'The rapture

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

of the hallucination originates in the absence of boundaries between pleasure and reality, between truth and falsehood' (Kristeva, in Oliver 2002: 207). The Real can only be accessed through this hallucinatory rapture:

Floating in isolation, this vision of an unnamed real rejects all nomination and any possible narrative. Instead it remains enigmatic, setting the field of speech ablaze only to reduce it to cold ashes, fixing in this way a hallucinatory and untouchable jouissance. (Kristeva 1986: 227, emphasis in original)

The symbolic order of language is described by Kristeva as 'cold ashes', a mere residue of the flames of the Real. Kristeva notes that the semiotic remains untouchable, a notion similar to the Lacanian Real, which stands outside representation, and once we enter language, we cannot escape the symbolic register. To Lacan, the Real always resists language: it is 'the domain of whatever subsists outside symbolisation' (Lacan in Evans 1996: 162). Lacan's notion of jouissance could perhaps access the Real, the joyful union of mother and child described by Lacan as 'a specifically feminine, bodily kind of ecstasy' (Kaplan 1992: 31), which returns us to the pre-linguistic and the maternal. Lacan perceives subjectivity, becoming self-aware, as a cut through the Real, an interruption of the Real. Conversely, becoming mother interrupts subjectivity: the subject we once were has departed, we grow to be both self and other, the mother and the child. A new subjectivity emerges as the infant grows inside us, but in giving birth we are separated from our self, we are looking at the infant who once was us, and through this a fissure cuts through the subject. Kristeva describes the maternal body as a 'continuous separation, a division of the very flesh, and consequently a division of language' (Kristeva 1986: 178). In giving birth we lose ourselves, the child that was part of our body is now separate to us. Momentarily, away from being subject and unknowing of who we are, we connect with the Real. Motherhood can take us outside ourselves, less bound in the symbolic order. We experience a pre-lingual connection with our babies and are perhaps more connected with instinct, intuition, existing on the edge of language, experiencing the rapture of the Real.

With this article we investigate the emergence of the maternal Real in Zoo Indigo's performance work. We deliberately play on the similarity of the words

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

'rapture' and 'rupture', referring to Lacan's notion that we can only encounter the Real through a traumatic experience, a rupture, through which the Real can radiate. We adapt the term 'rapture' from Kristeva to express a sense of joyfulness in the emergence of the semiotic/the Real in performance, a sensation of violent bliss. The writing shifts between an inside and outside position towards the practice, as the authors recount their memories of the live performances, as well as taking a more distant position to reflect on the maternal in their work.

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[[figure 1]]

Under the Covers

We are really excited to perform for you tonight – we just had one little problem: we couldn't find any babysitters. You see, we are both mothers. Young mothers. But don't panic, we found a solution! Anybody ever heard of SKYPE? Great. So this is what we've done, the clever bit: we've attached infra-red cameras above our babies' beds, and we are filming them, now, live, so you can babysit, while we perform.

Now, we are going to be quite involved in the acting side of things. Focused. In the moment. So we can't really react, should there be any problems, any waking up or crying – so this is where you guys come in really handy. The audience. See this microphone downstage, it is attached to the laptop running the SKYPE connection, and our technician will switch this on, should the babies wake up. So, if one of them stirs, it would be great if you could calm them back to sleep, just trust your instincts, say what comes naturally, to calm them down. 'I know, I know, there, there, now, now', or a nice calming shhhhhhhh.

Remember - This is now. This is live. This is Charlie. This is Dylan. This is Ilona. This is Lydia. They are asleep. Please look after our babies.

Now let's begin with the show. (Zoo Indigo, 2009)

One by one the grainy black and white video images fade in, glimmering, flickering, exposing the minute movements of the non-performers. Four very young children appear on screen, two of them in their infancy, asleep and snuggled up in their beds at home, warm, safe. Comforters such as a fluffy soft toy ('rabbit'), a cloth, a dummy, and a superman outfit are visible in the

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

shots. 'This is live, this is now' (Zoo Indigo, 2009). We, the performers, perceive a breathlessness in the auditorium; some spectators have evidently sat up straight and pushed themselves to the edge of their seats, ready for action, willing to dutifully babysit our virtual babies.

The above extract describes the opening minutes of Under the Covers, which (dis)places the maternal body into performance where we encounter our digital infants. Kristeva describes the Real, or as she names it, 'the semiotic', as connected to the mother figure. The semiotic chora is a pre-lingual stage dominated by our drives, which involve 'semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother' (Kristeva 1986: 95). This stage of pre-lingual articulation links the subject closely to the maternal body, as 'certain semiotic articulations are transmitted through the biological code or physiological "memory"' (Kristeva 1986: 97). This suggests that these articulations are not signifying meaning, as they are erupting from an immediate physical urge, as a rupture of the Real: a rapture. The chora consists of an articulation that is not yet a sign or signifier to represent, 'neither model nor copy, the chora precedes and underlies figuration' (Kristeva 1986: 94). Plato 'calls this receptacle nourishing and maternal' (Kristeva 1986: 94), and with this description the chora gains spatial qualities reminiscent of the maternal body or womb. The maternal body is a spontaneous eruption of sounds and presence, instinctively and authentically communicating with the child, and this encounter is pre-linguistic, outside the symbolic order of representation. Bianchi analyses Kristeva's definition of the chora:

Signifying, inscribing, articulating, but not yet fully in language, this zone between active and passive voices, where the distinction between activity and passivity itself is dissolved, is thus marked by a dissolution and a fluidity that carries an irreducibly feminine mark. (Bianchi 2006: 129)

Kristeva describes the semiotic chora as an articulation beyond language, and this pre-symbolic articulation still has access to the Real, according to Lacan. By extension, the maternal body in performance is a dramaturgical tactic that hopes for articulation to descend to the chora, to enable an unsignifying presence. In Under the Covers this maternal body erupts and reacts to the

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

infants on screen, exposing a non-signifying articulation, the semiotic chora. We are both still breastfeeding when Under the Covers goes on tour, extracting milk from our breasts with tedious pumping activity in the toilets before the performance commences. We then enter the stage brazenly, bras laden with breast pads to capture any sneaky leakage. During the show the digitally mediated babies occasionally wake up or cry. In these moments our sense of responsibility for these virtual entities genuinely distracts us and affects our performance; causing us to forget lines or spontaneously declare our love to the awoken child. Adele Senior describes our reaction to the children in Under the Covers as “authentic” non-scripted responses’ (Senior 2016: 75). These reactions happen spontaneously, motherhood running on autopilot, automatically, violently, inexorably. The way we communicate with our infants is not fully bound in the Symbolic, we return to the semiotic, where language exposes traces of the Real. In the articulation of our calming ‘there, there’ or ‘now, now’ whispered into the microphones the semiotic chora is accessed, which ‘includes emotions, sensations, and other marks and traces of psychical and material experience’ (Rickert 2007: 260-261). These unplanned moments are less performed in comparison to the scripted elements in the work. Furthermore our biological bodies might react, as our breasts begin to secrete milk, caused by the let down reflex. A breastfeeding mother when hearing her baby cry, or even just looking at a photograph depicting her infant, can experience this reflex, which is induced by the hormone Oxytocin, which has the ‘ability ... to stimulate milk ejection’ (Carson et al. 2013: 231). Additionally, the hormone has a relaxing or even sedating effect, which causes ‘short-term amnesic effects’ (Heinrichs et al. 2004: 36). Lactating mothers in theatre could potentially cause moments of non-performance, a rupture in the symbolic theatrical frame through the authentic presence of the maternal body. Through amnesia the performer becomes absent-minded, and temporarily unable to continue their task of representation, as the maternal body takes over from the performing body. Lisa Baraitser describes the interruptions in the every-day experience of motherhood as ‘breaches, tears or puncturings to the mother’s durational experiences bringing her back “again and again” into the realm of the immediate, the present, the here-and-now of the child or infant’s demand’ (Baraitser 2009: 110). In Under the Covers we experience these everyday ‘puncturings’ in a staged performance, the infants

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

bring us as performers back to the needs of our children. The crying infants interrupt the durational experience of theatre and transport us to a present where we are not performing as mothers, but we are present as mothers. This immediacy of us as mothers spontaneously reacting to the corporeal urges of the children renders the maternal encounter Real. Kristeva notes: 'Milk and tears ... are the metaphors of nonspeech, of a "semiotics" that linguistic communication does not account for' (Kristeva, in Oliver 2002: 322). The release of breast milk is beyond the Symbolic order, it transports us to Kristeva's semiotic, the non-symbolic, the Real according to Lacan. In one of the performances of Under the Covers Ildikó's breast milk begins to visibly leak. In this instance representation is discontinued, as the event of motherhood disrupts the illusionary framework of theatre.

As I write this I feel again the panic as the sweet milk leaks through my white shirt, I should be at home with my baby. I look at my digital child on the screen, Charlie is restless, this is the time of his evening feed. I have a momentary rush of guilt, an inexpressible urge to nurture, embrace and warm my baby. But I have to get on with the show. I somehow have to make light of this embarrassing and revealing moment, as I, as

Ildikó openly announces: 'Shit, my nipples are leaking breast milk!'. As we hand out shots of Amaretto to the audience we jokingly suggest: 'That might go nicely with the drinks. Shot of breast milk, anyone?' (Zoo Indigo, 2009). There is shocked laughter, the audience is unsure if this is a pre-planned gag, or if indeed milk is squirting. But if changes in the hormones of a breastfeeding mother 'send out signals which are picked up by others' (BBC 2002), perhaps on a biochemical level the change in hormones during lactation is subconsciously perceived by the spectators.

At these intersections in the performance the 'non-performing' virtual babies upstage the performers, and the spectators are no longer confronted with the performed mother; neither in the sense of us as performers portraying mothers, nor in the sense of the performativity of motherhood, where a social role is assumed. Instead the audience potentially glimpses the Real of the maternal body, the fluids and hormonal changes of us as leaking mothers rip

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

a temporary wound into performativity and representation. Through the un-signifying and spontaneous presence of the infants, the performers potentially reveal the pure and unperformed gesture of the mother, an instinctive burst, urging her to protect the child. Deborah Paes de Barros states: 'The reality of the maternal body -- its biological contingencies, its vast capacity for radical change, its evident sexuality and utility -- make it truly Lacan and Žižek's "Symptom". That maternal body harbours the inexpressible Real' (Paes de Barros 2004: 90). Slavoj Žižek describes the Lacanian Real as the 'inaccessible traumatic core around which symbolic formations circulate like flies around the light which burns them if they approach it too closely' (Žižek 2006: 390). This metaphor is reminiscent of Kristeva's notion of the flames, which make the Real inaccessible; the Real burns us. In Lacan's view the Real is also emerging from 'the body and its brute physicality' (Evans 1996: 123). This brute body is different to the imagined body, or the bodily functions we can control. For example the let down reflex during breastfeeding can be seen as a moment of 'brute physicality' of the maternal body, which literally leaks out traces of the Real. In Under the Covers the maternal body is physically present, with a painful distance to the digitally mediated babies; the leaking breast milk presents an un-signifying moment of non-performance of the maternal body.

In Under the Covers we are staging this maternal body, we are present as mothers, observing our real-life babies on screen. In placing/displacing our maternal body in performance, we attempt to stage the 'inexpressible Real'. This staging of the Real is a paradox, but it is perhaps in juxtaposition to the staged that the maternal Real can shine more rapturously. The performance deliberately establishes binaries, such as between autobiography and play-acting, real and fake, and through this a sense of the authentic is perceived in juxtaposition to the blatantly staged. However, Real and fake moments are embedded within each other: 'One of the intriguing aspects of the show is the way in which performance and fiction are interwoven with simple from-the-life truth telling' (McGregor 2009). An important point here is the notion of 'interweaving', the Real does not exist in isolation, it is implanted within representation.

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

[{figure 2}]

Blueprint

Blueprint explores reminiscence, nostalgia and motherhood, featuring four female performers and their real-life mothers digitally mediated via video call. As the mothers appear on screen something changes in the stage performers' presence: the performance modus diminishes, there is nervousness, embarrassment, as we engage with our mothers virtually via video call to exchange polite greetings and concerned inquiries over each other's wellbeing. There are giggles erupting from the auditorium, hesitations in performers' introductions of their mothers. These hesitations perhaps return us to the semiotic chora causing a rupture within the planned performance content, and (as with the crying babies in Under the Covers) these moments potentially create elements of non-performance. The relationship between the daughters on stage and the virtual mothers is presented in order to achieve a disappearance of the performers' personae or characters, and for a moment we are present on stage not as performers but as daughters. Potentially, even as adults, we fall back into pre-lingual, semiotic communication with our mothers, that of sounds of contentment in an embrace, the embodied memory of articulating 'semiotically' with the mother, using a language that perhaps offers a rapturous access to the Real. With Blueprint we hoped to present the intimate and embodied relationships to our mothers to achieve seemingly unperformed moments of spontaneity. A sense of jouissance could be experienced in communication with the mother, which potentially reconnects us with Lacan's Real or Kristeva's semiotic. As we talk to our mothers now, we experience jouissance in the gaps between signification, 'there in the blank spots, the silences, the affect, the shock' (Radley 2012: 104). Blueprint searches for these moments to briefly escape from the Symbolic register. Encountering our mothers, we fall into a shock of silence, reacting to a familiar gesture, which temporarily fractures the theatrical construct with the momentary return to the maternal. In Blueprint the performers interrupt their mothers' lives, whilst the mothers equally interrupt the performance situation and representational framework of theatre. For Baraitser 'the maternal encounter operates on the level of punctuation, interruption, and disruption --

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

effectively, on the level of a Real dimension of language' (Radley 2012: 103). The notion of interruption in our work hopes to access this Real dimension of language, in the hesitations that follow unplanned disruptions from both daughters and mothers. Whilst Under the Covers had the infants interrupting the performance, in Blueprint more often the mothers disturbed the flow of the show and ruptured the representational frame. For example Ildikó's mother, who lives in Germany, watched an international football match while being visible on live video during a performance of Blueprint. Germany won with six goals, and each goal was loudly and joyfully celebrated by Ildikó's mother, resulting in frequent rapturous interruptions of the performance.

In Blueprint the mothers sing songs, teach traditional folk dances and correct their daughters in the telling of anecdotes. One of these anecdotes describes a traumatic incident in the early 1980s: Aida Garton, the single mother of one of the performers, Rosie, walked her children to school, her infant daughter asleep in a pushchair. Rosie begins by narrating the text (written by her mother), and as she talks, her mother's voice from the live video link joins in until finally this voice takes over from Rosie and completes the anecdote:

Rage rose unbidden as I pushed and rushed against time and frozen breath. Lonely, frozen hearted, anger – he didn't live with us anymore. But we were fine, the three of us. Broke, anxious, late - silently cursing, coursing upward towards the school. The path had got rougher as we neared the top. It needed a big push to get the front wheels up to the pavement. I slipped on the icy stones. I took one hand off the pram to try and regain my balance. As I did so the pram turned to the side. The hand holding on to it twisted and I had to let go. I tried to grab the pram wheel. I missed it. My hand and feet kept slipping. I moved as fast as I could, one hand reaching out to try and catch the pram. It ran on down the hill. Did I cry out? If I could just get to it. Anger, fear, tears welling. Willing myself closer. But the pram went faster. (Zoo Indigo 2012)

This text is a poetic composition, which is common of anecdotes that are retold again and again. These lived stories become a script, what once was raw and indescribable is now bound in signification, like a film in our head to represent the Real we no longer have access to. Blueprint makes deliberate

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

reference to these anecdotes becoming cinematic. As the videoed mother concludes her story, a film begins to play on the screen next to the live video, the iconic 'Odessa Steps' scene from The Battleship Potemkin (1926) by Sergei M. Eisenstein. The scene features a mother with her baby in a pushchair. Soldiers shoot the mother, and as her body slides to the ground, lifeless, it knocks the pushchair over the top step, and it rushes down, fast. This homage to cinema acknowledges previous representations of motherhood in popular culture whilst being juxtaposed to the real-life mother narrating the autobiographical anecdote, and it also highlights the filmic quality of the anecdote. The intertextual dramaturgy of multiple and fragmented maternal narratives makes the process of representation transparent. Blueprint creates a performance montage of these juxtaposed texts, the narration by the mother, live via video, and a cinematic reference to The Battleship Potemkin. In Blueprint it is through the deliberate juxtaposition of these recognisable, emotional blueprints, including references to popular culture, with moments that are unperformed, that we hope to evoke an affect, a sense of the Real. The non-performed presence of the mother stands in contrast to the pre-constructed film sequence, and with this the non-performers can cause a sense of the Real. Kristeva suggests that signifying systems, including language, are always marked by the semiotic: 'Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he [sic] produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both' (Kristeva 1986: 93). Lacan also stresses that language is chained to the Imaginary and the Real: 'Lacan does not simply equate the symbolic order with language. Language involves imaginary and real dimensions in addition to its symbolic dimension' (Evans

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

1996: 202). The mother's text is representation, but the mother's presence as a non-performer potentially infuses the Symbolic with the Real; this could enable the audience and us performers to access the Real, as the mother nervously stumbles over lines and reveals private and unintentional gestures. During one of the performances of Blueprint Rosie's mother is more upset than usual as she tells the above anecdote, which makes reference to her separation from her husband. At this time Rosie herself is going through a separation from the father of her two children. Her mother, in tears, is clearly struggling to deliver the lines. She is worried about her child. The text which was bound in the Symbolic, the past and the cinematic is suddenly painfully present, Real. Rosie pauses,

I am looking at my digital mother with her real tears. She is reading me, as her; tired and letting go of the pram on that icy day, and she is worried for me. But in this moment I am worried for her, emotionally exposed to an audience and too distant for me to touch. I want to reassure her, I am alright, whisper some comfort -- she did well. But we have an audience, and I don't want to upset her more -- all I can do is let her catch her breath, then lean into the microphone and speak to her across the digital void ...

'Aida, are you okay?' (Zoo Indigo 2012), Rosie asks her mother, off script. It is within those pauses, sighs and moments of the unplanned and the inexpressible that the Real has the potential to fracture the Symbolic, to pierce the constructed nature of the anecdote. Tears leak from both the mother's and her daughter's eyes, as Rosie silently nurtures Aida's unrehearsed emotional reaction and composes herself before she speaks into the microphone to her

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

mother: 'Thank you Aida' (Zoo Indigo 2012). This seeping through of the semiotic chora into the Symbolic construct of the anecdote could re-connect us with the Real, where we partly depart from representation to be immersed in the semiotic chora. 'The chora is a modality of signifiante in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of the object and as the distinction between the real and symbolic' (Kristeva 1986: 94). Signifiante is a semiotic articulation where the Symbolic is not separate, but embedded within the Real.

Estelle Barrett notes:

Signifiante is an alternative signifying process that is the result of the heterogeneous workings of language which articulates both symbolic and semiotic dispositions. This double articulation of language allows a text or artwork to signify what the communicative or representational function of the work cannot say. (Barrett 2011: 14)

As the mother-non-performer delivers the anecdote, the text articulates the semiotic (or the Real) which cannot be communicated through the representational function of the text alone. Her non-performed presence ruptures the text, and creates a moment of signifiante.

Another scene of signifiante is the moment presenting Ildikó's mother singing a Hungarian lullaby. The words become materiality, the melodic singing escapes signification and transports the performer to the pre-signifying warmth within the womb, through a

voice that is known to me from before birth. As I write this I notice the style of the writing shifting, from the distanced analysis to the re-lived emotion, I can clearly hear my mother's voice, I feel the moment outside the symbolic construct of this article. And now again I temporarily shift from the pronoun 'we', to the first person singular 'I'. Maybe the 'I' can rupture this text with a spark of the Real. In Blueprint gestures, sounds and tears emerge that are so embedded in my communication with my mother, from a time long ago, from infancy, smiles, smirks, giggles, sighs, utterances of the semiotic erupt and interrupt representation. Maybe the audience can potentially sense or share these moments of my regressing, leaving language; I am so close to the Real.

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Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

as I move outside language, returning to the maternal, the singsong, the humming, the lalala, 'viragom, viragom'. [(note)]²

But we return to the outside and distanced analysis. Signifiante is in contrast to signification with regards to the Symbolic, where the signifier is seen as separate to the signified, according to semiotics; or, returning to Lacan, the Symbolic signifier has no access to the Real it signifies. Signifiante, according to Kristeva, describes an articulation where the semiotic is not merely signified, but embedded within the act of signification. When singing a lullaby to the infant this Real could be accessed. Barrett states:

Where the mother chooses to sing a lullaby to the child, the words of the song communicate shared social meaning: 'Go to sleep little child' constitutes the symbolic; the rhythm, tones and other auditory elements of the mother's actual singing of the song, on the other hand, articulate the semiotic dimension. (Barrett 2011: 10)

These lullabies present the semiotic chora, an articulation bound both in the semiotic and symbolic. Similarly the lulling rhythms and low tones of the Hungarian song in Blueprint carry traces of the semiotic, the song emerges from both the Symbolic and the Real.

In conclusion: the maternal in performance has the capacity to create a rupture. Jouissance potentially inflicts a wound in the Symbolic framework of representation, through which the Real may be glimpsed. The unpredictable crying, bleeding, lactating maternal body causes a shock and catches us by surprise. The unpredictability of the mothers' presence -- both the digitally mediated mothers in Blueprint, and the mothers facing their real life children in Under the Covers -- pierce the fictional framework of theatre, rupture the safe haven of the divide between stage and auditorium. Suddenly we, the performers, do not know what comes next. We are off script, we are beyond words, beneath the symbolic, dangling dangerously close over the flames of the Real. The sparks flutter closely and cause a joyous moment of rapture.

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

Notes

1 The article grows out of Ildikó Rippel's PhD thesis Raptures/Ruptures of the Real: The non-performer in contemporary performance practice (Lancaster University, completion anticipated December 2017).

2 Hungarian, translating to 'my flower, my flower'; Lyrics from traditional Hungarian Folksong Tavaszi Szél Vízét Áraszt.

Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

Credits

Under the Covers

Performed by Rosie Garton and Ildikó Rippel (performers); Dylan Garton Pinchbeck, Lydia Garton Pinchbeck, Ilona Williams and Charlie Williams (on video).

Blueprint

Performed by Rosie Garton, Suzy Gunn, Olwen Davies and Ildikó Rippel (Performers); Janet Callaway, Janet Davies, Aida Garton and Bernadette Tettenborn (on video).

Videos of Under the Covers and Blueprint are available to view on the Performance Research Journal YouTube channel, 22.4 On the Maternal playlist.

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www.youtube.com/channel/UCk9OgcBbJ6gl3ny7_hFKlrg
and the following clips -

Under the Covers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CCoZR58mjQ>
Blueprint: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qp1l4RodJ44> }} |

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Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

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Ildikó Rippel and Rosie Garton, Zoo Indigo

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