

Pilates Politics

**From Michael Miller:
(circa 1997)**

Because the politics of a class action suit are long from being resolved the evolutionary thrust of the method is being offered by everyone as himself or herself. Quite elegant really. It makes Joe's impact all the more profound.

After seeing so much diversity of expression, it strikes me that no matter what the substance being taught everyone is on the same business curve, and those further down the line recognize that you have to train internally. Traveling to learn or paying someone else to travel, is great, but usually prohibitively expensive as an exclusive course of action. Developing your own training program makes you less dependent on the precious scarcity of teachers and helps you take advantage of their comings and cushion the effect of their goings. What you call your program and who you hold up for credentials will ultimately matter much less than the quality of the method being taught.

What seems important is to recognize where all this enthusiasm for the method is leading and jump right into where you want to be coming from. Leap as far out on the curve as you can. Assume the situation you want.

**From: Michael Miller [mailto:michaelmiller@hermit.com]
Sent: Wednesday, May 01, 2002 3:24 AM
To: THEMICHAELMILLERLIST
Subject: Pilates Method Alliance Boycott**

Many of you have asked me if I am going to Miami for the meeting of the Pilates Method Alliance. Just saying "No" hasn't felt like enough of a response, so this is meant to elaborate:

I am not going because it requires membership to attend. (that's elitist in my opinion, and a convenient way to suppress dissent)

I am not going because I object to would-be-leaders who come from nowhere and pick up someone else's dream and say they lead for the good of all yet keep control for themselves.

I am not going because I object to promoting fear of being left out to gain compliance and acceptance.

I am not going because I object to a few members of the aristocracy seeking to secure their prestige, power, and income at the expense of everyone else.

I am not going because I object to anyone who knew Joe personally claiming that their association to Joe matters more than an understanding of what Joe was so passionate about.

I am not going because I object to the messengers of Pilates coming off as being more important than the message. I am not going because I object to intellectuals acting as though Pilates can be contained within their domain.

I am not going because I object to "spirit" being left out of Joe's very own definition of his method ("Contrology is the complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit") by people who don't understand what it means, or do, but choose not to muddy the profit waters.

I am not going because I object to people who believe any organization is better than none, and that it can always change down the line. I am not going because I object to Pilates not being held as an idea open and available to everyone and anyone.

OK, I did my thing, I spoke up. Many of you are going to the meeting, go with your eyes open, go knowing that the PMA is one very small fish (struggling to become a piranha) in an ocean of Pilates passion being chummed by equipment manufacturers. Don't be afraid to speak up, don't let any of the "old ones" cower you with their longevity, hear me now, believe me later: "Pilates is an idea."

From: Michael Miller [mailto:michaelmiller@hermit.com]
Sent: Monday, April 26, 2004 4:17 PM
To: THEMICHAELMILLERLIST
Subject: "Fear" & "Authentic" in the Pilates community

This is my third set of published political remarks in over 22 years of teaching Pilates. Maybe this makes it three too many, but it gets it off my chest and I can go back to teaching Pilates. My web site is www.hermit.com. To be taken off this list send an email request to michaelmiller@hermit.com

These remarks started out as an email to someone about to open their own studio. I'm a lousy editor, but from these remarks I hope you can get a sense of what I was (and am) trying to say.

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Dear Studio Owner,

The part that I choose to focus on in your last email is the part where you ask me for my personal opinion. Your request lets me speak from my heart and reach for my best response.

I am in the midst of writing a political email out to my mailing list that addresses two words as they relate to our Pilates community. One is "fear" the other "authentic".

I received a letter from a studio promoting the Pilates Method Alliance (a cartel seeking to establish self-serving standards over the Pilates community.) They seek to "raise critical funds" to "establish credibility" and "ensure consumer safety." They say that "without your support our profession will not achieve the respect and authority it so deserves." This is an example of selling "fear" to protect income and prestige—and asking all the new comers to contribute money to make a set of rules that puts someone else in a position of authority (and dictatorship) over your teaching of the method. It's only natural, to seek to consolidate and control power, prestige and income. I take issue with the validity of their efforts, and this takes me to the word "authentic."

Recently, a friend of mine went to take a lesson at probably the oldest studio in New York City from somebody that knew somebody that knew Joe (rather well actually.) My friend said that too frequently during the course of her lesson she was told that what she was being taught was "authentic" Pilates.

Until I came along, Pilates was a tradition governed by an entrenched aristocracy, based upon who knew and worked with Joe. There are many "lineages" of Pilates each claiming their authenticity through some avenue of personal association to Joe combined with their expertise in some other field (dancers, doctors, physical therapists, personal trainers, yogis, psychics, mystics, and countless others) ((they

assuming, of course, that the expertise in their field magically osmoses over into an expertise in Pilates. Usually, it's just the other way around.))

And now Pilates is being shuffled into other disciplines like Yoga to get Yogilates. (ah, it hurts to even talk about)

My profession can be summed up in four words:
Pilates is an idea.

The idea makes sense. It was never elucidated as such by Joe. "Pilates as an idea" is Michael Miller's view of Pilates, but I assure you the survival of the essence of Pilates will come from the fact that it has an essence.* "Authentic" is being actually and precisely what is claimed. If Pilates has an essence then authentic Pilates must have more to do with the essence of Pilates than with who you are, and who you know.

The moment you allow Pilates to have a distinguishable essence you supplant the authority of the aristocracy to determine authenticity, with an ideology—the fact that Pilates has an essence and can be derived directly from Joe's archives of words, photos, and film. I predict an obvious outcome—what ever makes the most sense to the most people will become the common perception of what it is.**

So here you are, or there you are, way down there in some far away place, looking for the best "lineage" for your studio. ((you better duck from the swarm of offers you get)) If you chose my teachings you would be choosing ideology, all other options are based in aristocracy. (Everyone wants to make more money. The biggest and most concentrated way to make money in Pilates is to manufacture and sell equipment; it's the equipment manufacturers who are pressing the method into a box that will sacrifice the essence of the method to increase and accelerate profits. It's the training programs pressing bodies through their homogenized programs not only to maximize profits but to leverage their view into dominance by sheer numbers (and now, too, by political fiat in "the sky is falling!" attempt to make a Pilates certification exam. Quick, send me your money, I need it too!) It's also the health clubs and gyms trying to hold onto their members' money by offering Pilates in their facilities.) I'm all for making money off of Pilates, let's just not throw the baby out with the bath water.

You see, dear studio owner, it's not so much about choosing a "lineage" as it is a training program. And I know the perfect one for you to offer—yours! your program, your money, your time, your control. Then allow other programs to come in and be contributors to your training program. Keep and invite back what you like, don't be committed and have to pay through the nose for what you don't.

Authority goes to those willing to claim it. What makes it authentic is what identifies it as what it truly is. What I'm saying is, you don't need somebody to teach you the essence; it can be arrived at just from Joe's original material. The secret is out, for anyone who is willing to look and read, and wants to understand the essence of Pilates. Just what Joe wrote, just from the pictures and movies he took, you can understand the essence of Pilates and walk right by the doorman screening for the aristocratic elite.

More than a few are teaching around the world under my aegis, but what your teachers really ought to have is your certificate hanging on their wall. What this means to you is that given there is no resolution to the authenticity of Pilates based on aristocracy, and Pilates is already being distorted everywhere you look, the only logical and sane approach is one where you are in control (Contrology) and you claim your authenticity based upon the assumption that Pilates does have an essence which can be looked at, understood, and powerfully taught as an idea.

If you are still with me and you understand this, establishing your own training program makes sense for Pilates, makes sense for you, but doesn't make sense for the entrenched aristocracy trying to preserve dominance in a community that is destined to expand beyond them. (There will always be an aristocracy, but the numbers of people doing Pilates and the attempts to make it something that it isn't will force the paradigm shift to ideology.) (you might as well start out there, self determined, than buying into the old norm.)

Remember, the idea comes from just what Joe left us, his writings, his photos, his film. Like any riddle or puzzle, once you know the answer, its doesn't matter who you learned it from.

I wish you good geist in your endeavor!

Michael Miller

*this essence is not what a Pilates Certification Exam would be based upon, but rather in their claim to legitimacy and "authenticity" based upon who they know that knew somebody that knew Joe—the entrenched aristocracy. I used to foolishly believe that there would only be one Pilates method in the world, now it's apparent that all the normal factions will have their view to offer.

**I'm not saying reality is subjective, only our perception of it. Pilates has a defining essence because reality has a defining essence. We subjectively approach the ideal.

PS: If you want off this mailing list just let me know at michaelmiller@hermit.com

PPS Your attitude towards the future is inescapably chosen by you.

"Fear" is a negative attitude towards the future.

"Hope" a positive attitude towards the future.

Both are different sides to the same coin--
the choice of your attitude towards your future--
that only you can make.

PPPS "Authentic" can mean more about what you know, than who.

You can find this and my previous two political remarks at my web site here: <http://www.hermit.com/hermit/politics.pdf>

Michael Miller
www.hermit.com
michaelmiller@hermit.com