

Opening Fields through Aikido:
An Embodied Dialogic Practice at a Martial Art Dojo

by

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ABSTRACT

The global spread of body techniques, such as Yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, Qigong, and non-competitive martial arts have been diffusing into socio-cultural spaces and institutions outside of their native contexts. Despite the ubiquity of cultural borrowing and mixing, the much needed conceptualization and theorization of cultural appropriation is nearly absent within intercultural communication studies. This ethnographic study examines one community of martial artists who practice Aikido, a martial art originating from Japan, in the United States to explore how members negotiate and appropriate its cultural elements in their practice, how the practice binds the *dojo* community, and how the practice cultivates an embodied dialogic practice.

The study takes an ethnographic approach that uses qualitative methods (e.g. participant-observation and interviews). It is also an experiment with methodology comprised of two moment: the first taking an informative and a communicative view of ethnography, and the second, a performative approach. The ethnographic account transposes the Aikido technique - 1) attack, 2) evasion, 3) centralization, and 4) neutralization – onto the chapters as a way to co-produce the world textually rather than extract representations from it.

At the dojo Shining Energy, corporeal, material and semiotic components coexist to produce both defined and latent relationalities that open fields and spaces not predetermined by meaning, law, and authority. The transmission of skill takes places through the relational openings in the rich structured environment during practice that each member helps to generate regardless of

their skill level. Aikido practice cultivates a latent form of coping strategy where practitioners learn to flourish in midst of hostile situations while maintaining their own presence and identity. Practitioners persist in the practice of Aikido to submit themselves to the processes to engage their sinews, senses and neural paths to keep up with the particulars of situations so that perception, control, and action to run together like the “flash of lightening” to open up inert reality into a process. The practice of Aikido points to a space and time beyond the movement forms to intimate and reveal new ways of not only moving in the world, but also moving the world!

DEDICATION

*To my mother and father,
for letting me pursue my twinkling little star,
and my sister Sungwon,
without whom I would not have known I had one.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“It is also the story of the men and women who encouraged me to see beyond or behind the mask of explicit, learned culture into that much more vast, less artificial world acquired in the deeply personal process of life as it is lived by human beings as they interact naturally with each other with neither thought nor artifice.”

- Edward T. Hall (p. xv)

Communicating the feeling of *ch'i/ki/qi*, a concept that has long been associated with life force and energy flow of both human and non-human entities and relations in East Asia (Chung, 2008), is no longer a phenomenon bound to the social reality of practices and modalities in Asia or of Asians. Global cultural flows are creating a new intercultural communication reality where the expansion and intensification in the multi-directional flows in people, material goods, practices, information, and the social imaginary (Appadurai, 1996) are reassembling the topography of collective lives and human experience. The global spread of body techniques, such as Yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, Qigong, and non-competitive martial arts – what Brown and Ledaki (2010) calls ‘Eastern movement forms’ – are diffusing into socio-cultural spaces and institutions outside of their native contexts. They are providing the experiential condition on which the once esoteric and hidebound indigenous concepts like energy flow are acquiring pragmatic significance for their non-native practitioners, but also

assemble these practices and ideas anew when they cross cultural boundaries. Cultural appropriation, broadly understood as the use of a culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture, is a central process when cultures come into contact.

Practice halls and studios of various Eastern movement forms have become an integral feature of the urban landscape of major cities in the United States. They are in part sustained by what Donohue (1994) calls the “the psychic allure” of these arts, especially of martial arts: “ritual performances which symbolically deal with fundamental questions of human existence that are...central problematic questions for contemporary culture in the United States – questions about power, the quest for control, the search for identity, and the relationship of the individual to the group” (pp. 4-5). The persistence with which contemporary people engage in the practice of martial arts, for example, cannot be explained by their ritualism and symbolism alone. These members engage in what Wenger (1998) calls, *communities of practice*, generating and appropriating a shared repertoire of ideas, commitment, and memories, and one that stretches across cultural boundaries.

Learning is located in the relational context of people's “practical engagement with their lived-in environments” in which a participant's skilled practice emerges from the development of ‘attentive engagement’(Ingold, 2000) and not mere mechanical coupling to transfer skill (e.g. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). In these spaces, members are not only enmeshed in an assemblage (DeLanda, 2006) of moving bodies and cultural resources, but also grappling with the

specificity of bodies through the mastery of somatic techniques. When these movement practices cross cultural boundaries, the material, symbolic, and historical resources that had previously carried the accumulated knowledge, such as vocabulary, symbols, tools, documents and routines are not absorbed in wholes but undergo cultural appropriation. The assemblage of transforming bodies becomes the medium through which the martial art form transmits anew. As such, the practice halls of “Eastern movement forms” are sites of communicative space and practice where meaning and relationships across multiple lines of difference are negotiated.

Cultural borrowing and mixing does not stop with the exchange of cultural elements, but the heterogeneous elements drawn into presumed ‘purer’ cultural wholes also influence each other to produce new forms, such as yoga and martial art studios, through indigenization and changing of the setting itself. Yet, despite the ubiquity of such transcultural phenomenon in intercultural contexts, Rogers (2006) exclaims that the much needed conceptualization and theorization of cultural appropriation to explore a new set of questions posed by globalization and increased connectivity are paradoxically “almost entirely absent” (p. 500) within (intercultural) communication studies.

My ethnographic study examines the practice of Aikido, a form of non-competitive martial art originating from Japan, and its community of practitioners in the United States to explore the communicative space the practice of movement forms and techniques generates in which members negotiate and appropriate its cultural elements. What is of interest for my study is also exploring how the

traditional art inserts itself in the everyday lives of people outside Asia as part of an ongoing process of absorption and transformation rather than static (re)configuration. By implication, such a study will also be an experimentation with knowledge to embrace not only uncertainty and ambiguities of processes and practices of everyday, but also diversity and contradiction rather than cohesiveness and convergence.

The study also examines how the art's *technique du corps* (Mauss, 1973[1931]) confronts the bodymind and being-in-the-world (Csordas, 1999). The martial art techniques are more than a set of self-defense combat skills. It is a craft, an art that demands precision in the coordination of perception and action to order to respond to real world attacks effectively with minimum damage to all parties involved. Moreover, repeated practice of the movement forms, similar to dancers (e.g. Hahn, 2007) and musicians, is a crucial dimension of becoming skilled. Yet, practicing the movement forms extends “far beyond the skin of the practicing individual” (B. S. Turner & Yangwen, 2009) and is, therefore, no longer about the body per se, but about the intersubjective ground for experience when understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the world. Martial art forms are, therefore, not just techniques but moving embodied subjectivity that responds to life and the world. It is already relational and communicative. Bodies are not simply a medium, but “a *different* mode of symbolic activity” (italics original, Rogers, 1998). As Peters (1999) contends, if communication is a project to reconcile the self and alterity, it may be less about how signs elicit divergent meanings than about “the conditions that keep us from attending to our neighbors and other

beings different from us” (p. 269). In this sense, the practice of a martial art movement form is not only a transcultural project, but also a communication project.

Background

I had never done martial arts in my life nor ever imagined that I would be so engrossed by one. Any knowledge I had of it came from TV or movie screens where actors swirl, duck, and punch through their choreographed sequences. When walking along the streets of Ethiopia’s capital, children sometimes approached me, “Bruce Lee?” and showed off their side-kick with clenched fists as if to break down the language barrier. But over a year ago, I found myself looking into martial art classes in the Tempe area partly out of a need to find a site with an overt cultural dimension for the advance qualitative methods course I was going to take and a desire to use the opportunity to engage in a physical activity that would be both practical and interesting. I was also feeling vulnerable not only because I was single and a woman, but because I was living in a pro-gun state.

There were so many martial art styles to choose from. Not knowing how or whether one style differed from the next, I defaulted to Tae-kwon-do – the martial art form Korea exported to the world. The beginner class I had visited was attended by young teens. I felt too awkward to join. Then a friend suggested I try a martial art practice hall near campus, called Aikido that was Japanese in origin. I had no idea what it was, but felt apprehensive. Even though I had grown up as a global nomad (Ender, 2002), the likelihood of being pigeon-holed by the Japanese head instructor and members to behaving appropriately as a cultivated and learned

Asian woman made me think twice about the idea. The prospect of navigating through the heavy innuendos and subtle suggestions to take on an effeminate persona in order to learn a self-defense skill already felt too constricting. Nevertheless, the need to find a site and learn self-defense propelled me to check out the practice hall. I was in for a pleasant surprise. And there began my journey in search of culture.

I found no Japanese head instructor nor hardened bodies. What I found instead were hints of Japaneseness permeating throughout the hall. Hand-written calligraphy with the three characters ‘ai-ki-do’ hung over the threshold into the main hall. Cloth dyed with intricate motifs covered the doorways to tease and please wayward eyes while ensuring the occupants of the interior space privacy. In the main practice hall, the letter-character “*ki*” connoting energy was placed between two weapons racks for everyone to see. Practitioners on the mat had taken off their slippers and shoes with toe-side facing out and heels touching the borders around the mat, just like the way shoes would be removed and arranged before entering a house or private quarters in Japan.

There were two head masters at the *dojo* (practice hall in Japanese), a white American couple who had been practicing the art for thirty years. Neither of them spoke Japanese, but incorporated archaic Japanese in their instruction to label techniques and movement patterns. The master-disciple hierarchy of respect was embedded in the practice rituals. The master instructor would invariably sit underneath the character “*ki*” and face a row of member practitioners sitting on their knees to begin and end the practice by initiating the exchange of deep bows.

Even the senior-junior hierarchy became quite clear not only by the color-belt system, but in the interdependent system of accountability and responsibility. When something goes awry during practice, it is the seniors who are severely reprimanded, even if the fault may lie with the careless junior. The juniors, in turn, sweep and dust the *dojo*, throw out the trash, and ensure a constant supply of drinking water. But men and women, high-ranking and novices all practiced together.

After about a month of training, I thought I had made sufficient observations through my participation to have an idea about the training and culture I experienced. I was quite certain that the community was not only honing a very gentle and smooth style of martial art and defense techniques, but trying to mimic Japanese group life so as to prove its fidelity to its lineage - the art's founder and country of origin. Rather than being pigeon-holed, I was trying to pigeon-hole the Aikido community. There then began my rounds of interviews that started with novices, then seniors, and finally culminated with master instructors. Instead of finding closure, the stories and response my interview questions had generated, or failed to generate, left me wondering about the community life I had come to take part in and observe.

Mimicking Japanese mannerism or embodying Japanese ethos was not the concern of my interviewees. Many of them were in it for the long haul and were enthused about having found an art form they could learn and practice for the rest of their life. They felt a close family-like bond for the *dojo* community and the master instructors. Their references to other sister *dojos* and practitioners across

the U.S. came across like a kinship system. The monthly membership fee only paid for the rent, insurance, and upkeep of the physical space. The practice did not help anyone gain an edge in their respective professions. No one sought after fame or extra income from their mastery of Aikido. But everyone was deadly serious and earnest about their pursuit of this mastery without end. It did not add up. And the use of the Japanese names to describe the techniques was not a relic of tradition. It was used with the intention to keep its non-Japanese practitioners from prematurely committing to cognitive concepts (e.g. Langer, 1989). The wearing of *gi* (cotton uniform) and belts had their practical function, but also assisted practitioners leave behind their worldly identities and preoccupations at the door and slip into the universe of Aikido and practice. The ultimate clincher came from the master instructor who would often say, “Just because there is a sign ‘Aikido’ on the door, does not mean they do Aikido.” What is Aikido if not its form? My pigeon had escaped and my head was in a muddle.

I continued practicing Aikido. I was relieved to set aside the intellectual challenge of trying to figure out the Aikido community. I engaged in the practice for its own sake. Learning about my bodily habits and postures, and developing perception and sensitivity to the different parts of body and joints, body types and their movement dynamics were enthralling. Moreover, I was introduced to a breathing technique and was shown how to sense *ki* and try to use it in my techniques. Of course, *ki* wasn't just lying there waiting to be grasped and manipulated. I had to first be reminded by senior practitioners, who would catch me off guard and suddenly lift my hand out of the blue to check whether I was

embodying “correct posture” and “positive mind” on the mat. Then I had to perceive it. There was a multitude of things I was sensing and perceiving. But which was what, I could not distinguish. It was only when the master instructor nodded with approval the very moment I had sensed something mercurial fleeting by. That was my very first clue to *ki*. But how did the master instructor recognize what I felt inside?

In addition to martial training, *ki*-based healing skills were also honed under the guidance of the master instructors. Occasionally after practice, the master instructor would provide *ki* therapy to those practitioners who experienced discomfort from muscle tightness, back or neck ache, and even sprains. On rare occasions, *ki* therapy experiments would be underway to explore human physiology or test out a massage technique that the master instructor had seen in a documentary. One of them reminded me of the time in my childhood when I climbed on the backs and thighs of my mother and aunts and treaded in place until they told me to step down. I laughed at the irony of my situation: to be undertaking a discipline of self-cultivation and learning about “one-point,” “*ki*,” and “reliable self” away from home and half way across the world and being taught by an elderly American couple who had never lived outside the U.S. except for their three - or was it six? - months of Aikido training in Nagoya. Through their teaching, I was discovering a new path to connect with my own “esoteric” tradition that neither my parents nor grandparents had passed down. Like so many contemporary Koreans, learning table manners, greeting rituals, and ceremonies for ancestors were more crucial in the eyes of my parents. Lessons of self-

cultivation and the descriptions of vitality embedded in the language and sprinkled throughout classical texts were only that – esoteric and pre-modern.

Something was going on at the *dojo* that went beyond the martial arts and a community of hobbyists. Something had shifted and gave away under my feet. Culture was not simply group affiliation, language, history, and place of origin – what Hall (1992) refers to as “the mask of explicit, learned culture.” Culture also shifts our imagination with real appreciation for its life processes. The master instructors inhabited two spatio-temporal frames of experience simultaneously in a way that brought the world of sword-wielding and self-disciplining practice to life while grounding the practice to the here and now with as much appreciation for the former as the latter. They did not cling to the first world with nostalgia of Edward Said’s Orientalism, nor did they hold the present contemporary world with an over-determined regard. Both worlds were natural and, as Hall (1992) describes, “acquired in the deeply personal process of life as it is lived by human beings as they interact naturally with each other with neither thought nor artifice.”

My own hybridized outlook and Korean identity were refracting the already complex dynamic at work between the martial art form and practice, skill mastery and self-mastery. I was drawn to the space and the people at the *dojo* not only because I found a rare opportunity to meet people who understood and spoke about “one-point” and “*ki*” as if they were the most natural human experience, but also because seeing the pre-modern tradition through their eyes was challenging me to rework my own understanding to access theirs. A question I had to ask myself was, would I have been as fascinated to examine a community of a martial

art practitioners back home in Korea, or elsewhere in Asia, who were just as passionate and earnest in their practice for over twenty years? The answer is no...at least for now. Traditions often smother sparks of curiosity and wonder from those born into it. In the eyes of the community members, however, the deadweight of tradition had evaporated and presented itself as an opportunity. What was this opportunity they saw and felt? Martial art is not only the “martial way” but also an art. And like art, was Aikido being used to explore diverse cultures of lived bodies in order to purge one’s atavisms and reinvent oneself?

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The Global Flows of Eastern Movement Forms

Global flows are, according to Lash and Lury (2007), “both constituted in and constituted of local occasions and events...[where] the relations between ideas and stuff, substance and sociality, space and time are constantly being redrawn” (p. 150). Contemporary practices of Eastern movement forms, whose distinctive traditions and styles of embodiment are continually reinterpreted and reinvented as they flow through the channels of globalization and transnationalism (Farrer & Whalen-Bridge, 2011; Strauss, 2005), are no exception. Scholarly inquiry tracing the variegated paths of these movement forms most often take three approaches to the subject matter. The first set of writings examines how the movement forms and their practices are intimately entwined with issues of national identity and politics in their “native” territories. For example, Theeboom and De Knop (1997) trace the formation and remaking of *wushu*, martial arts in Chinese (cf. *budō*, the martial way in Japanese), across the turbulent Chinese history to the contemporary period where their “traditional” combative elements were removed and reinvented as performative arts by the Maoist socialist modernization efforts only to be reclaimed and popularized later. Xu’s (1999) in-depth account of *qi* and *qigong*’s history in China demonstrates the enormous pressure the Maoist modernity project placed upon a nation’s profoundly rich tradition with mystical and superstitious enmeshments to denature it into a rational and scientific practice. Xu, furthermore, adds that the transition to a commodity economy stoked the

sudden craze over *qigong*, restoring *qigong*'s "fantasy-construction" (p. 985), which led to emptying *qi* of meaning and substance all together by some of its key leaders in order to retain state sanction. Another means through which traditional movement practices, such as Yoga and *qigong*, were able to peel off their hidebound folkloric and religio-philosophical associations and acquire scientific respect was, according to van der Veer (2007), the westbound global circuit. Transcending their traditional moorings through a circuitous route abroad ironically facilitated their reception back home, especially by the burgeoning middle class, as was the case for (re)positioning Yoga (Strauss, 2005).

The second theme looks at how the Eastern body-based practices have entangled with the social, spiritual and health interests of the middle and upper middle class in contemporary Western societies. Authors who have turned to these movement practices to draw out their therapeutic and health-related implications often subdue the folkloric and ritualistic dimensions associated with these art forms. For example, Sagli's (2008) ethnographic account describes a particular style of therapeutic *qigong* currently practiced in Norway as a gradual process of learning "to be affected by *qi* as well to affect *qi*." Even though it is a progression of exercises that begin with learning body movements, to which concentration is added, then *qi*, and then remove concentration when practicing the movement forms, so that in the final stage remains a still body with moving *qi*. *Qi*, according to Sagli (2008) is not simply energy, but can take on multifarious qualities: ranging from emotional outbursts, creativity, ethical consciousness, to connection with the universe, and then finally, blurring of distinctions. Meanwhile,

Ryan (2008) explores challenges *taijiquan*, a martial style originating from Chinese *wushu*, face to gain a foothold in the United Kingdom. It, along with other closely related styles (such as *qigong* and *tai chi*) are in the midst of trying to figure out how to best formalize and institutionalize an association that not only ensures the plurality of instructors, styles and practices, but also enhance their legitimacy and credibility by introducing quality control standards to help therapeutic-oriented practices meet the challenge of increasing state regulation.

With greater theoretical drive, the third and last theme examines the penetration of Eastern movement forms into modern Western socio-cultural spaces. Adhering to Bourdieu's work on *habitus* (1990), Spencer (2009) examines how the training process of one of the most grueling of sports, the mixed martial arts, engendered a particular set of body techniques in which meaning and identity are invested. Similarly, Holthuysen (2011) has examined how the popularity of martial arts in contemporary U.S., especially mixed martial arts in particular, cannot be explained without accounting for the sociopolitical and economic arrangements, the entertainment and sports industries eagerly reinterpreting and repackaging the martial art form with mystique that feed modern imaginations of masculinity, violence, and super human prowess.

The work by Jennings, Brown and Sparkes (2010) describes how one Wing Chun Kung Fu association functions as a secular religious practice for its core members through everyday practice and the bodily *habitus* it cultivates. A large part, according to the authors, is contributed by the conflation of (Zen) Buddhist, Taoist, and other esoteric Asian traditions with the martial art form into

the *dao*, or the “way.” Some (e.g. Campbell, 2007; Donohue, 1994; Shilling, 2005) have interpreted this cultural interaction as being symptomatic of the embodied anomic dispositions induced by the modern secular existence in the West. Shilling (2005), for example, argues that,

Yoga, Tai Chi Chuan, and other East Asian exercise (often mixed with elements of Oriental spirituality such as Zen, Taoism, or Tantra) have become increasingly popular among those disillusioned with rationalized uses of leisure time. (p. 124)

One consequence of such malaise, according to Brown and Ledaki (2010), is the commodification of these movement forms as experience and lifestyle:

“functional responses to modernity...as a new means of integration in the anomic worlds of suburbia, and as responses to the secularization, and consequent loss of meaning in everyday life” (Chaney, 1996, p. 11). The other two being Orientalism and reflexive modernization and scientific validation.

From a more movement focused examination, Cohen (2009) provides a rich and nuanced examination of *karate* practice in the Israeli capital of Jerusalem. The work has struck a persuasive balance between the art’s physical and tacit dimensions by presenting esoteric understandings, such as *ki* and *kime*, as non-discursive somatic codes and their extensional processes. According to Cohen,

Kime is the decision to renounce decision, to allow the body and its fighting experience take over the decision. *Kime* is also used to detect the opponent’s decision to move; it helps a warrior feel an opponent’s

decision to take action and thus attack even before the attacker is aware of it. (p. 84)

In other words, it is to perceive the emergent action without recourse to cognition, to grasp a full, undetailed picture at one glance. At the same time, it is to respond to that momentarily visible emergence to divert the course of opponent's intended action at its inception so that its final realization dissolves and is transformed into a different chain of potentialities. This capacity develops from the social body learned through interaction: "They [somatic codes] link our bodies together and permit the social passage of body, form, culture and meaning; they thereby also fluidly link the qualities of innerness and outerness of our somatic existence" (Cohen, 2009, p. 89).

Whether the context is native or non-native, in both accounts, power exerts a rationalizing force on "traditional" and "esoteric" body movement practices. In the case of the former, authoritative systems driving modernization overtly deploy powerful rationalizing influence, and in the case of the latter, the influence of power is made covert by the socio-economic structures of a consumer society. The practice of Eastern movement forms intersects with issues of (pre-modern) tradition and modernization, nation-state building projects and the therapeutic projects of the self, whose practice and knowledge forms not only respond to such large social forces but also have flexibly wed with science, medicine, art, and even the occult (e.g. Farrer's (2009) work on martial arts and Sufi mysticism in Malaysia). These discussions provide important insights into

the ways large structural forces continually shape and are shaped by the knowledge and practices of Eastern movement forms today.

These discussions have explored a wide range of social and cultural domains. As Farrer and Whalen-Bridge (2011) explain, Asian martial arts not only are “microcosms of culture *par excellence*” in the way practices and communities interact with and organize other ways of knowing and being, “including what [people] tend to call philosophy, religion, magic, medicine, and theater” (p. 8), but also “collapse the simple dualisms of traditional and modern, east and west, and of us and them” (p. 4). What is often overlooked is a closer examination of how the resources that carried accumulated knowledge in the previous cultural context appropriated and used to bind the practice in the “non-native” context anew? How do practitioner navigate the “always already” condition of transculturation embedded in their practice and *dojo*? Appropriating cultural elements and forms is not mere mechanical coupling but is inextricably constituted in the environment in which a practitioner’s embodied martial art skill emerges.

Setting the Embodied Feeling of Culture in Motion

Several (intercultural) communication scholars have started to engage with issues embodiment, corporeality, and the material in their investigations. Most notably, Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) proposed “the embodied feeling of culture” as a crucial dimension of intercultural competence: “this intuitive feeling of culture...built on sensory feeling, but [residing] more at the interface between physical sensation and conscious awareness” (p. 250). They concede that “the

major limitation of the current intercultural approach is its inability to adequately explain the translation of cognition and attitude into behavior” (p. 251). The predictive modeling used to explain socio-cultural phenomena was based on the assumption that culture resided in attitudes, beliefs, and values rather than the body itself. This could not account for the ways in which our palate, for example, is resistant to change. Behaviors, they argue, should instead be treated not as codes to be parsed and decoded, but rather to treat them as a “window” into the process of external couplings from which our culture and the culture of others emerge in a particular form and our experience of it. In effect, what they are suggesting is to approach bodily phenomena not simply as a mechanical extension of psychical interiority, but as the result of “co-structural drift” with other bodies and surrounding. Our body scheme is always in relationship with the materiality of our environment, “even before words meet in the dialogue” (p. 257).

This ‘feeling of culture’ authors delineate is neither those affective conditions associated with psychical interior, nor feelings that comprise individual subject positions. It is the feeling that emerges from our “habit body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), the way we habitually maintain our body, such as posture. It gives rise both to the world in a particular form and to our experience of it: “By inhabiting the world in particular ways, the body takes the form of the feeling of those habits” (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004, p. 262). Cultural patterns are not the issue, but how we feel those patterns perceptually in the way we simultaneously expand and constrict the boundaries of our body, going beyond the limit of the skin to include its “energetic field”. It is the “experience of difference” which

intensifies one's feeling of culture. For example, seeking familiar space, they explain, represents a kind of "embodied ethnocentrism" (p. 258). From this view, Bennett and Castiglioni point out, "adaptation to culture is indistinguishable in essence from the physical adaptation that characterizes all living systems" (p. 258). They argue that by exercising awareness, we can exploit our embodied capacity. By modifying, contracting, and expanding our body schema, we can exercise empathy to apprehend embodied experience of the other culture: "Eventually, we can give form to our feeling for a different culture in such a way that our behavior becomes "adapted" to the other culture" (p. 260).

The inroad that Bennett and Castiglioni's (2004) have made is quite significant. Hall (1976) had long recognized and tried to reconcile the gap between life's organic processes from the mask of "learned" culture in human behavior. Their work extends Hall's study of proxemics which focused on establishing cultural patterns rather than its processes. Even though their suggestion of overcoming soma-based ethnocentrism and shocks is idealistic, by foregrounding "feeling" and bringing attention to the material-corporeal account of our bodymind beyond deterministic biology and corporeal superficiality is undoubtedly noteworthy. Their initial foray opens up new possibilities for investigating intercultural phenomena, namely to take account of both the body and culture as living processes, rather than as static entities.

The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, the cultural, product. The very question of the ontological status of biology, the openness of organic processes to cultural

interventions, transformation, or even production, must be explored.

(Grosz, 1994, p. 23)

Well then, what happens to “the feeling of culture” when our bodies recover from the initial shock of difference encountered during physical adaptation and recover its equilibrium? Our bodies are the seat of motility and praxis, which serve as the baseline from which we experience the world and ourselves. With time, our bodies begin adapting to the new rhythm and assemblage. Our corporeal selves are, after all, always moving and doing something.

The relationship between soma, feeling, and embodiment is a complex one that implicates time, space, and their materiality as part of an unfolding of a path to keep life going. Take for example *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990), a set of ‘durable, transposable’ dispositions which predisposes a person to perceive and respond to both familiar and novel situations in an art-like way:

...I said habitus so as not to say habit – that is, the generative (if not creative) capacity inscribed in the system of dispositions as an *art*, in the strongest sense of practical mastery, and in particular as an *ars inveniendi*.

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 122)

The distinction is that *habitus* is improvisation, not the simple mechanical reproduction of habit. When operating from our *habitus*, however, Leder (1990) argues that the sense of our lived body becomes phenomenologically “absent” and “necessarily self-effacing”, receding from direct experience and rarely the object of our experience. At its optimum, we experience being “in flow” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) where despite being engaged with the social and physical

environment, we not only lose track of time passing but rarely experience our body. According to Leder (1990), skill acquisition is a process of *incorporation*, meaning to “bring within a body”, is accompanied by a simultaneous “extension of absence” as one become more adept at the sensorimotor powers of a new technique (p. 31). This simultaneous process of incorporation and extension of absence has a spatial reach as well: “the very house in which one dwells is both a reconstruction of the surrounding world to fit the body and an enlargement of our own physical structure” (p. 34). In other words, over time, the embodied feeling of culture recedes with greater physical adaptation to the new environment.

DeLand’s (2006) explication on the social theory of assemblages uses a more systematic analysis of various (de)structuring processes in social life. The theory approaches the analysis of entities characterized by “*relations of exteriority*” where the properties of the component parts can never explain the relations constituting the whole and the components can be detached from and plugged into different assemblages (pp. 10-11). What is interesting about the processes of an assemblage (any entity with relatively stable identity) is that they can be multi-directional. Processes that help to increase the internal homogeneity, mainly “*habitual repetition*”, of an assemblage can co-exist alongside processes that destabilize it. The loss of routine, such as madness, sensory deprivation, and deliberate interventions aimed at disrupting daily routine of members can destabilize the identity of an assemblage, but so does augmentation of capacities through the acquisition of new skills: “New skills, in short, increase one’s capacities to affect and be affected, or to put it differently, increase one’s

capacities to enter into novel assemblages, the assemblage that the human body forms with a bicycle, a piece of solid ground and a gravitational field, for example” (p. 50).

Yet, one and the same assemblage, be it groups or one’s own corporeality, can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components changing or transforming it into a different assemblage. In fact, DeLanda argues, one and the same component may participate in both processes by exercising different sets of capacities (p. 12). An example of multiple and counter-acting processes is the case of Vivian Sobchack (2006), who describes her experience of having a prosthetic left leg as follows,

...the way in which learning to walk and incorporate a prosthetic leg has made me more – not less – intimate with the operation and power of my body: I now know where my muscles are and am physically more present to myself. I also enjoy what for me (previously a really bookish person) always seems my newfound physical strength, and I have discovered my center of gravity (which, in turn, has transformed my entire comportment in ways that include but also exceed my objective physical bearing.) (p.

32)

The destabilizing effect of having to relearn pedestal movement with an prosthetic leg has, in effect, intensified corporeal sensations which ironically has enabled Sobchack to apprehend not only its center of gravity, but also utilize the newly found bodily capacity to enter into a novel assemblage, transforming her entire comportment.

Somatic codes (Cohen, 2009) in martial arts, such as *kime* in the case of Karate and *aiki* in the case of Aikido, are the result of prolonged movement practices with other moving corporeal subjectivities over time. The Japanese word *kime* is the noun form of the verb *kimeru*, which means to decide or to commit. It is used often in Karate to refer to a body-based non-cognitive quality that is intersubjectively sensed, that communicates the presence or absence of decision or intention in the moving body (Cohen, 2009). Similarly, *aiki* is a somatic code used in the martial art of *Aikido* that refers to unifying energy; that is, the experience of synchronizing with the dynamics of the opponent's intention and motion of an attack to exploit its inherent potential energy without conscious thought so as to transform the evolving path of the attack to bring it to a peaceful conclusion. Yet, they are not codes conveying information, but codes indexing the reverse process of symbolization and categorization which opens the corporeal subjectivity to grasp and respond to “a truly radical empiricism, an unadulterated exposure to the otherness of nature” (Evernden, 1992, p. 114).

If the above discussions tell us anything, it is that embodiment and the various soma-based processes are neither strictly psychological nor mechanistic phenomena. These soma-based codes and Sobchack's “center of gravity” are not skin-based sensations either. The corporeal subjectivity has to be made intense to open up other subtle, yet material sensations - such as *kime*, *aiki*, “center of gravity”, and ‘the feeling of culture’ – which transforms the way corporeal self responds to the world. Studies have yet to explore what corporeal transformational possibilities ‘doing’ Eastern movement forms over extended

periods of time produce, however: “Our duration,” Bergson wrote, “is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but present...Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances” (quoted in Hallam & Ingold, 2007, p. 11). How and why do Aikido practitioners persist in the iterative process of movement practices that involve more repetition rather than individual expression or stylistic innovation? In other words, how does the practice of Aikido make the body intense and, as Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) would ask, provide the opportunity to modify the continuous process of category construction and symbolization to give different form to feeling and to feel forms in different ways?

Post-humanist Dialogic Practice

The dialogic perspective is particularly well-positioned to examine transculturation processes and the corporeal intersubjectivity emerging from the practice of Eastern movement forms in the United States. As “a particular kind of quality of communication that happens when the people involved are present to each other as persons – as unique, reflective, choosing, valuing, thinking-and-feeling beings” (Zediker & Stewart, 2002, p. 586), dialogue not only attends to communicating discursive understandings and fostering ‘relational empathy’ (Broome, 2009) in face of (cultural) difference, but also provides a communication framework to examine pragmatic and ethical dimension in the entangling of ‘lifepath of beings’ (Ingold, 2008, p. 1808) in a community of practice.

Influenced by the philosopher, Martin Buber (1971), dialogue lies at the crux of an *I-Thou* relationship, in contrast to the mechanistic *I-It* relationship prevalent in mass media and large crowd communication in modern societies. Dialogue has been conceptualized as a type of relationship, a form of communication, a framework for knowledge creation, an interaction between interpreter and text, of a characteristic of language itself (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). It is described as a form of discourse, a tensional event, a relational space, and a mysterious experience, as well. Examination of esoteric dialogic practices, especially those that transcend dialectical tension and push the limits of the ‘language game’ altogether, have complicated theoretical perspectives on dialogue. Take for example the Japanese dialogic concept of *ishin-denshin* (the meeting of minds and hearts without recourse to words) and *Zen mondo* (the question and answer exchange between a master and disciple in Zen training) where the dialogic exchange cannot be deciphered using conventional logic (Miike, 2003, p. 66). This is possible because true feeling, intention or thought is assumed to be contained in the stomach¹, or *hara* (Nagai & Hiraga, 2011), not the head or the heart. In explaining the process of knowledge transmission of traditional Japanese dance, Hahn (2007) writes,

Buddhism, particularly Zen philosophy, stresses the value of direct transmission (teaching without words) that manifests itself through the active body. A moment’s thought and further intellectualization are seen to interrupt the direct process, creating (unnecessary) mediation and a loss of clear transmission. (2007, p. 44)

Precise explication of dialogue is difficult. Not only are its modalities wide ranging, its processes and products are multifarious.

The fundamental premise of dialogue is a dyadic relationship where listening, the *giving* of our *attention* to another (Lipari, 2010, p. 349), is as integral as speaking.

The roots of the word dialogue come from the Greek words *dia* and *logos*. *Dia* means “through”; *logos* translates to “word,” or “meaning.” In essence, a dialogue is a *flow of meaning*. [...] In the most ancient meaning of the word, *logos* meant “to bring together,” and suggested an intimate awareness of the relationships among things in the natural world. (Isaacs, 2002, p. 580)

Such view on dialogue suggests that we are not bound within our own skin for meaning-making, but that we also must let the other(s) happen to us. Dialogue, Bohm (1996) explains, is uniquely suited to the exploration of the relationship between “literal thought” and “participatory thought” (p. xvi). Literal thought is practical and result-oriented, and it aims to form discrete, unequivocal pictures of things. Participatory thought, on the other hand, is a mode of thought in which discrete boundaries are sensed as permeable, objects have an underlying relationship with one another, and the movement of the perceptible world is sensed as participating in some vital essence. Listening, according to Lipari (2010), can go beyond constraints of categorical schema, memory, and dualistic thought – what Bohm (1996) refers as the literal thought - through an ethos of *listening being*:

...a listening that does not merely tolerate but openly embraces difference, misunderstanding, and uncertainty, and invites entrance to a human communication and consciousness beyond discursive thinking, to dwelling places of understanding that language cannot, as yet, reach. (p. 360)

This attention giving to apprehend subtlety and materiality is possible once we suspend the noise of inner discursive thought – our familiar conceptions, beliefs, and understanding. An understanding is not only emergent and procedural as the dialectics of dialogue unfolds but also has to be discovered and inhabited on one's own terms.

Theories on dialogue have also been developed to examine communities of practice, including those intercultural encounters where mutually shared (linguistic) meaning system is nonexistent. Scholars and practitioners have applied the prescriptive understanding of dialogue to tackle challenges facing communities and society at large (e.g. Frey, 2006), including intercultural conflict (e.g. Oetzel, Dhar, & Kirschbaum, 2007) and support (e.g. Mortenson, Burleson, Feng, & Liu, 2009). For intercultural encounters, scholars have drawn on ethical and affective orientations to explain how the process “to make something common” (Bohm, 1996, p. 2) becomes possible despite disparities in meaning systems. Most notable are Casmir (1999), who introduced the notion of third culture to intercultural communication research, and Broome (1991), who extends the notion of third culture as spaces to create “relational empathy” in intercultural encounter.

Casimir (1999) defines the third culture as “the construction of a mutually beneficial interactive environment in which individuals from two different cultures can function in a way beneficial to all involved” (p. 92). In applying a post-modern chaotic conceptual model of culture, Casimir (1997) sets his theoretical model in a dialogic process where individuals from two culturally divergent groups not only work out answers to various challenges together. So neither “third” nor “culture” refers not to an end-state, but process of personal and cultural change and growth. Broome’s (2009) work on relational empathy further develops the meaning creation and sharing process for intercultural encounters. Relational empathy, according to Broome (2009), is a kind of space that provides a tentative and experimental approach to meaning which allows, on the one hand, understandings to remain open as new information is gained and as new learning develops and, on the other, the emergence of shared meaning that transcends “the original divisive culture of the two communities and gave rise to an inclusive, multivocal culture of understanding, appreciation of differences, and solidarity” (Broome, p. 193).

These dimensions of dialogue make it particularly useful to examine both the meaning-sharing and relational processes emerging from the body-marshalling practice of Aikido. Moreover, recent addition to the rich discussions and perspective on dialogue above is Rogers’ (1998) proposal for a “materialist, transhuman, dialogic theory of communication” as an alternative theory of communication. He writes,

The primary criteria for the type of materialist, transhuman, dialogic theory of communication I call for here might be (1) the resurrection of a place for natural forces, traits, and structures in communication theory while avoiding a return to natural determinism; (2) an affirmation that we humans are embodied creatures embedded in a world that is not entirely our own making; (3) a rehearsal of ways of listening to nondominant voices and nonhuman agents and their inclusion in the production of meaning, policy, and material conditions; (4) the deconstruction of common sense binaries such as subject/object, social/natural, and ideational/material, and a reconstruction of relationships as dialogic; recursive, interdependent, and fluid. (p. 268)

In effect, he is asking us to imagine communication anew beyond the information model by dismantling concepts, practicing listening, being open to radical empiricism, and to find a path beyond humanism and scientism.

The different perspectives on dialogue bring a new dimension to the experience of dialogue. Nevertheless, the common thread that runs through the humanist, cross-cultural, and transhuman conceptualizations of dialogue is that it is relational and other-oriented. As Peters (1999) states, “The other, not the self, should be the center of whatever “communication” might mean” (p. 265). Then how do we know we have successfully communicated with others? There is no ultimate answer except a pragmatic one – their response. In this sense, the central concern of communication is the question of ethical and pragmatic engagement

with “life” (p. 246) - living with “others” in the chaotic world. So, how does the *dojo* help cultivate a transcultural and post-humanist dialogic practice?

Focus and Research Questions

This ethnographic study takes a plunge at the intersection of global flows of “Eastern movement forms” to examine the process of transculturation of a traditional disciplinary art, the practice of its somatic techniques, and embodied corporeality. In other words, the concern is to describe the ways in which the practice of a traditional martial art form works to shape social relations, corporeal interactions, and transformational capacity even as it produces skillful martial artists. To this end, the study explores one particular community of practice, an Aikido *dojo* that practices one branch of non-competitive Japanese martial art form in the southwestern part of the United States. With above literature review as sensitizing concepts, my ethnographic study contributes to martial art studies, embodiment, and intercultural communication literature by seeking to answer the following research guiding questions:

RQ1: How does the transculturation process of the Aikido practice at the *dojo* look like? How does the practice bind the *dojo* community?

RQ2: How and why do Aikido practitioners persist in the martial art practice?

RQ3: How does Aikido help cultivate an embodied dialogic practice?

CHAPTER 3

Method

The overarching approach of this study is ethnographic that uses qualitative methods, such as participant-observation and interviews, to examine the social life of an Aikido *dojo* and the transculturation process (Rogers, 2006, p. 2) of a body-based tradition (e.g. Hahn, 2007). As a study that explores issues of practice (Bourdieu, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991) and embodied feeling of culture (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004) in the context of cultural appropriation of the martial art and its transmission, ethnographic approach provides a holistic description of “all (or at least most) relevant aspects of a culture’s material existence and meaning systems” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 16). Human interaction that is irreducibly embodied, such as the mastery of a martial art, is not discursive knowledge (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). As such, the ethnographic immersion can “access tacit, taken for granted, intuitive understandings of a culture” (Tracy, in press, p. 9) as well as provide interpretation explaining and enacting the cultural code that can “[sort] winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones” (Geertz, 1973, p. 16). More than any other methods, the interpretive approach has been characterized by its focus on “the logic of discovery and attention to the diverse forms and details of social life” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 19) where “thick” description (Geertz, 1973) of the contextual significance of action for their performers is its key attribute. Most importantly, however, ethnography is the only method that intends to create the unexpected,

which cannot be anticipated through a research design at the outset (Strathern, 1999).

I began the practice of Aikido more than a year ago and continue practicing it. As someone who had never done martial arts nor committed herself in any practice of Eastern movement forms before, entangling my own lifepath and corporeal subjectivity with those of others was an effective way to gain insight into the lifeworld of the dojo. Learning through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) provided an appropriate entry to the social world of the martial art community. It was congruent with the Aikido community where learning, training, and apprenticeship were an integral part of its social life. Participation as a full dojo member provided the means to generate the field of intersubjectivity and interaction between the researcher, the researched, and the context that allowed for a kind of knowing situated in practice (Wenger, 1998). First, the intersubjective field emerging from such intimate and interdependent processes of participating in the production of the dojo provided me the means to enact *verstehen* that strives to gain empathic insight into others' attitudes by making connections in face of difference (e.g. "relational empathy" in Broome, 1991). Second, studying body-based practices entails conducting research "not only of the body, in the sense of object, but also from the body, that is, deploying the body as tool of inquiry and vector of knowledge" (Wacquant, 2004, p. viii). The martial art practice was not only the object of my study, practicing the art became the means through which I came to understand the interpretive scheme community members employ in performing and knowing their world.

In terms of the specific methodological strategies and tactics I devised for the collection and analysis of data and my eventual synthesis, they can be summed up as an experiment with methodology. The experimentation was an inevitable process for me as a researcher who had to develop and acquaint herself with a workable research “lens” where aspects of myself as a researcher introduced additional shifts (Heider, 1988). It was also developing her “eye” to apprehend the contours of her moving target - practicing Aikido. The strategic adjustment did not necessarily lead to more efficient and effective data collection. It was more the process of learning to work with shots generated by a lens whose focus was sometimes a turn too much to the right, or a turn too much to the left, or even altogether too blurred. Most importantly, it was developing patience and a working feel (cf. "mouthfeel" which refers to the final craftwork in Tracy, 2010) of the prism-like lens and shots that would yield the collages. The methodological journey that I trace is one of movement, therefore: moving from what began as primarily an *informative* and a *communicative* view of ethnography but ended in adopting a *performative* approach not only in terms of the subject of the study but the method itself. What resulted was a research method comprised of two distinct moments. Although the dissertation presents mostly the work coming out of the second moment, the latter would not have been possible without the preliminary phase. In the following sections, I describe in greater detail and the rationale for their methodological choices.

Site

The site for my study is a practice hall, or dojo, located in a large metropolis in the southwestern part of the United States. My motivation for choosing such a site and phenomenon for the study was a combination of scholarly interest, personal need, and serendipity. I joined the Aikido dojo as a full-time practicing member and openly stated to the gatekeepers that my interest was to undertake research on the practice of the martial art. The dojo Shining Energy (a pseudonym) opened over twenty years ago and its members operate two other Aikido classes affiliated with colleges and/or universities in the area. It occupies office space divided into a small front office space and a much larger anterior garage-like space where daily practice takes place. It is also part of a large active network of Aikido dojos around the country that regularly organizes one major summer camp and seasonal regional camp(s) most always presided by the association's master practitioner from Japan to instruct, practice and conduct exams. By its affiliation with the headquarter practice hall in Japan, the dojo forms a larger worldwide Aikido community, namely in Japan, Australia, Canada, and Israel.

The actual size of the Shining energy community cannot be verified easily, but the number of practitioners who regularly attend the evening practice times at the dojo count over 25 people. Two *senseis*, or master-instructors, serve as anchors for the Shining Energy. The majority of Shining Energy's members had been men. Recently, however, increasing number of women had joined the dojo, the latest count of which was eleven, comprising 44% of regular attendees. The majority are working professionals. The ethnic identity or background of the dojo

community is noticeably multicultural. Generally speaking, 17 practitioners out of 25 regular attendees are from North America. At least six of these have sojourned to East Asia, with three members who can speak proficiently in Chinese or Japanese. Four are from Southeast Asia, three from East Asia, one from South America, and one from South Asia.

The First Moment

The preliminary study, which serves as the first moment of this project, aimed to explore how the dojo community sustains a particular form of embodied mastery. I focused mainly on how a “foreign” martial art takes on local meaning and significance, but also how and why it is practiced. The research question that guided the exploration of the phenomenon were,

RQ1: How do practitioners understand their martial art practice?

RQ2: How do practitioners perceive mastery in martial art?

RQ3: How is the martial art practice sustained?

I was a full participant-observer and took part in the full one-hour practice for 11 days spread across three weeks between September and October of 2010. This generated 35 pages of single spaced journal-type fieldnotes which were never written during practice but only afterwards. Aside from my own memory, no other recording device was ever used to facilitate the fieldnote-taking process. In other words, my fieldnotes were based solely on *headnotes*. Although some colleagues suggested running to the bathroom to jot down *scratchnotes*, I decided to forego such obtrusive form of research method since practitioners rarely excused themselves during practice. Only on two occasions did I ask to observe

the training session from the bench to take notes, which produced 6 pages of single spaced conventional fieldnotes. Most of the notes focused on my observation and perception about my own bodily movements and snippets of interaction that caught my attention. With increasing familiarity over time, I began to notice structural patterns in the training as well as the personalities and styles among the practitioners. I intentionally kept myself away from any martial arts books and materials that may prematurely influence my interpretations and used journaling to explore my own experience of the practice. This served as my “spring” (Gonzalez, 2000), a time to feel the pulse and boundary of the lifeworld I entered.

Once I received approval from both the gatekeepers and the IRB, I threw myself into the “summer” phase (Gonzales, 2000) of my work. I openly recruited participants (18 years-old and above) for the interview on a voluntary basis. Six participants who finally agreed to be interviewed were informed of the process in greater detail; confidentiality of participants was ensured by the use of pseudonyms and removing distinct markers traceable to the individual from the field notes and transcriptions. The interviews were audio-taped and lasted an average of 70-minutes, which totaled 7 hours that generated 103 pages of single-spaced typewritten transcripts. I tried to achieve a balanced representation among the three groups of practitioners – two sensei-masters, two teacher-in-training black-belters, and two color-belt practitioners – in order to capture the phenomenon from several vantage points. I generated one interview guide (see Appendix 1) to help explore the subjective world of my participants. My

understanding from just two months of Aikido practice would have been insufficient to effectively prod the breadth and depth of knowledge and experience of the two *senseis*. So, I intentionally scheduled the interviews so that the two dojo masters would be the last ones to be interviewed for whom unstructured interview was the most appropriate (Douglas, 1985).

The types of interviews the study used were ethnographic interviews and respondent interviews. As a full participant-observer, ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) were an unobtrusive form of investigation (Lee, 2000). They were used to further my own understanding of the practice and its culture whenever the need arose. To understand the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of individual martial arts practitioner (chapter 7 in Tracy, in press), on the other hand, respondent interviews were used when interviewing the participants. Once the interviews were adequately transcribed, the participants were asked to read over their interview so as to approve of the data for my analysis. At participant request, removal or changes were made to segments in their respective interview transcripts.

Finally in terms of data analysis, computer-assisted data analysis tool, NVivo, was used to help with this part of the study. Grounded theory, which “gives priority to the studied *phenomenon* or *process* – rather than to a description of a setting” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 22), served as the basic approach and participant interviews were used as the primary data. Interview data were sieved through and chunks of phrases and segments were identified and categorized through opening coding (see Table 1 below). The codes used a combination of two key words to

mark their possible relationality to other emerging codes: the first to mark the broader context the specific data segment is referring to and then a second word to

Table 1

Open coding from the preliminary study

<u>Aikido_art</u>	<u>dojo_social relationships</u>	<u>personal_disposition</u>
<u>Aikido_challenge</u>	<u>dojo_space</u>	<u>personal_meaning</u>
<u>Aikido_compare martial</u>	<u>gendered</u>	<u>personal_obstacles</u>
<u>Aikido_mindbody</u>	<u>incident_turning point</u>	<u>physical pain</u>
<u>Aikido_principles</u>	<u>instructing_custom tailored</u>	<u>physical traits</u>
<u>Aikido_values promoted</u>	<u>instructing_diff from training</u>	<u>posture vs muscle</u>
<u>application_real life</u>	<u>instructing_know how</u>	<u>posture vs strength</u>
<u>appropriate responsiveness</u>	<u>instructing_pleasures</u>	<u>practice_attitude</u>
<u>artifacts</u>	<u>instructing_styles</u>	<u>practice_benefit</u>
<u>artifacts_clothing</u>	<u>ki_energy</u>	<u>practice_challenge</u>
<u>artifacts_Japanese language</u>	<u>language_heuristic</u>	<u>practice_escape</u>
<u>artifacts_rituals</u>	<u>language_limits</u>	<u>practice_eval own</u>
<u>attitude_Aikido</u>	<u>leadership</u>	<u>practice_focus</u>
<u>belt_rank system</u>	<u>left_right balance</u>	<u>practice_overview</u>
<u>contextual learning</u>	<u>mastery_art</u>	<u>practice_pleasures</u>
<u>counterintuitive(s)</u>	<u>mastery_art_openendedness</u>	<u>practice_safety</u>
<u>diffusion_essence</u>	<u>mastery_distinction</u>	<u>practice_unintended continuation</u>
<u>diffusion_structural</u>	<u>metaphor</u>	<u>praxis vs theoria</u>
<u>diffusion_technique</u>	<u>motiv_change</u>	<u>presence</u>
<u>dojo_access</u>	<u>motiv_future</u>	<u>technique_execution</u>
<u>dojo_community</u>	<u>motiv_initial</u>	<u>technique_one-point</u>
<u>dojo_running</u>	<u>mutuality_reciprocity_respect</u>	<u>tradition_respect</u>
<u>dojo_senseis</u>	<u>myths</u>	
<u>dojo_social learning</u>	<u>performance vs understanding</u>	

indicate the specific dimension of the particular example, if any. So, for example, the code with the first word “diffusion” (first inspired by Roger Everett’s 1962 work on *The Diffusion of Innovations*) refers to the transmission process of the martial art techniques. The second pair word, such as “essence”, “structure”, or “technique” nuances “diffusion” along aspects of a core idea or principle undergirding the learning/teaching of the art form, the role of the dojo’s social structure, or the specific technique respectively. The NVivo data display and data

management tools facilitated what can often be an unwieldy coding process. Through the built-in iterative process by its display window, I was able to work on coding, then compare, or skim through the excerpts as often as I needed. Trying to break up data into codes (first-level analysis) and generate from it focused coding (2nd level analysis) and then identify linkages between (sub)categories into themes (3rd level analysis) is a multi-layered sense-making process. The data coding and analysis process requires a combination of linear and holistic thinking so that the researcher can juggle the seemingly separate parts that are ultimately linked in a web of associations. The themes for the preliminary study were drawn, however, from the density count of coding (see Table 2 below)

Table 2

Coding density from the preliminary study

mastery_art	18
practice_challenge	17
mastery_art_openendedness	14
Aikido_art	11
ki_energy	11
mastery_distinction	11
practice_attitude	10
Aikido_principles	9
metaphor	9
praxis_vs_theoria	9
practice_safety	9
motiv_initial	8
leadership	8
instructing_styles	8
diffusion_structural	8
dojo_running	8

rather than axial coding or theoretical saturation. In other words, although the “properties” of the themes sought imbrications as its mode of presentation, it was nevertheless a linear presentation. The write up consisted of the contextualization

and interpretation of the themes by a *bricolage* of coded interview data. Lastly, thematic analysis and their interpretations were presented to the participants of the study for member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I undertook member-checking of the draft of my paper, and then provided those who I had interviewed the revised version of the paper I submitted for NCA's ethnography division.

Findings & analysis. Three major themes emerged, namely practice, *ki*, and mastery, which exemplified the member perception and understanding of their Aikido practice. They helped shed light on the meaning the participants bring to their activity and engagement. The first theme, practice, encompasses many dimensions of activity at Shining Energy. The operation and upkeep of the dojo and regular attendance of daily training sessions was central to the participants' perception of practice. The benefit of engaging in physical activity - such as reduced stress levels, and improved sleep, mood, muscle tone, and flexibility for its practitioners - was another major factor that motivated the members to persist in their training. Another aspect of practice parallels what Wacquant (2004) describes as body pedagogies in boxing: "the function of pedagogical work is to replace the savage body...with a body 'habituated,' that is temporally structured and kinetically remodeled according to the specific demands of the field" (p. 60). Regular training helps to not only mold and condition posture and specific groups of muscles so that minimal bodily movement could produce greatest effect, but the movement skill had to be honed through countless practice sessions until it becomes the new baseline for how the practitioners moved.

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was the concept of *ki*, which serves as a cornerstone for understanding and practicing the art. Conventionally understood as vital energy, the practitioners at the dojo revealed a rich and complex understanding of *ki* and how it manifests and informs their martial art practice. Their descriptions ranged from elixir, a *gestalt* for overall functioning of bodies, to the integration of body/mind/life force as in the responsiveness of “water”. The foreignness of the word helps practitioners to open up to new perception and understanding of the link between one’s body, mind, and life force. Yet, at the same time, the intended empowerment of the concept of *ki* to open people to learning and regarding teachers as a map instead closes up minds and debilitates some practitioners from taking ownership of their practice.

The third and last theme that emerged from the data was the notion of mastery, the ability to demonstrate through self-defense movements the four principles undergirding Aikido while seamlessly and aesthetically responding to each moment in the combat encounter. Through repeated experience of “tearing down” and building up of one’s “technique,” the practitioner is deepening his or her understanding of the four pillars of Aikido practice. The more junior practitioners at Shining Energy all perceived mastery in martial arts as an endeavor without a final destination. Energy sensei referred to the concept of “Zeno’s paradox” to describe a destination that one never reaches, but only approaches. However, rather than discouraging the participants, the open-ended process of the martial art practice appeals to the members of Shining Energy. It is

the “way” to discovering something that he or she had not known, realized, or experienced before, and still on the way. To this, the earlier idea of developing one’s “style” and their performance as “art” suggests a creative dimension to the martial art mastery. The challenge of the practice and mastery of *ki*, or Aikido lies in mastering life’s ceaseless vitality in oneself, in others, and in our interactions.

Discussions. Needless to say, when I completed my preliminary study, I was exhausted from the data collection, their analysis and synthesis. It was not just the hyperconsciousness I had brought to my Aikido practice in order to transfer my observations into fieldnotes, but the fact that I had underestimated the challenges exploring the embodied skill of the martial art practice. First, as a *human instrument* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the habits and embodied feeling of culture not only influenced me, but also shaped how I was “physically, socioeconomically, rationally, and spiritually – ‘collecting data’” (Gonzalez, 2000, p. 635) even while in the “natural” setting. I had participated in the regular weekly practice assuming that my body would immediately register the mechanics and the principles of the Aikido techniques and come to a reasonable understanding of the practice in two months’ time. But I slowly came to the realization that the rich kinesthetic sensations that overwhelmed my body was tangled up with the process of becoming aware of the “necessarily self-effacing” (Leder, 1990, p. 69) corporeal experience in the context of my own bodily habits and dispositions. My assumption that putting on the *gi*, coming to the dojo, taking part in the practice sessions, and executing the movements over time would somehow reveal what

makes a movement Aikido-like from other ordinary motions no longer became tenable.

The challenge of studying embodiment as “an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world” (Csordas, 1994) lies in the fact that I, the researcher, cannot effectively explore or probe embodied understandings and their implications without first confronting and becoming aware of my own embodiment and feeling of culture. The following is an account by the anthropologist Jackson (1989), who writes,

Until I was in my mid-thirties, my awareness extended into my body only to the extent that I grew hungry, experienced lust, felt pain or weariness, and did not resemble the somatotype of popular advertising. My body passed into and out of my awareness like a stranger; whole areas of my physical being and potentiality were dead to me, like locked rooms. [...] When I took courses in *hatha* yoga ... it was like unpicking the locks of a cage. I began to live my body in full awareness for the first time, feeling the breath, under my conscious control, fill my lungs, experiencing through extensions and *asanas* the embodied character of my will and consciousness.

... this transformed awareness brought me up against the full force of habit, of set attitudes and ingrained dispositions. It quickly became clear to me that dystonic habits of body use cannot be changed by desiring to act in different ways. The mind is not separate from the body, and it is pure

superstition to think that one can 'straighten oneself out' by some kind of 'psychical manipulation without reference to the distortions of sensation and perception which are due to bad bodily sets'.... Habits cannot be changed at will because we are the habits: 'in any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will'... To change a body of habits, physical or cultural, can never be a matter of wishful thinking and trying; it depends on learning and practice new techniques. (p. 119)

Yet, one's bodymind cannot be approached in any other medium than in the one that gives rise to the experience - by engaging the body over an extended period of time. I was in no position to resolve the ontological problem of projecting my own habituated corporeal understanding throughout the data collection and interpretation process during my preliminary study.

The second challenge I faced was that my analysis was predicated on an over-determined individual whose motivation and persistence in the practice of the martial art form was achieving skilled performance and technical virtuosity, like that of a craftsman (e.g. Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). This was at odds with how the more experienced practitioners described mastery, such as active denial of its completion or perfectibility: "The art is greater than me!" Why was the mastery of the martial art form described as "formless" and its path "endless" when highly skilled and master practitioners already had a style of their own? More crucially was, why did the more experienced practitioners repeatedly say "each day is a new day" or "each time you do a technique, it's never the same" when they were practicing technique forms that did not vary significantly, at least

in their key features? The range of techniques that were practiced at the Shining Energy dojo were far less than those presented in Tohei's compendium, *This is Aikido* (1968). The irony was that the dojo is led by two of the most skilled practitioners alive in the U.S. As long as I obsessed over the meaning and representation of the martial art practice, the best my study could do was to present them as paradoxes.

The final challenge came from the fact that under the current president of the Aikido Kokikai association, the martial art community I was studying and practicing actively discouraged public dissemination of its evolving art form, such as writings, videos, and photographs. This presented an ethical dilemma for me as a researcher whose *raison d'être* depended on documenting knowledge and making it public. Even though the gatekeepers had approved of my research, the more I practiced Aikido the more I began to understand why such drastic measure was taken by the martial art association. One particular incident left a lasting impression on me.

As part of member-checking process, I provided my interviewees a transcript of their interview. Shining-sensei's interview was particular vexing to transcribe due to the background noise of the café near the dojo where I had conducted the interview. We had sat near the entrance where the door hinges squeaked with each customer entering and leaving the shop. Upon seeing that I had left out words or had filled the indecipherable parts with my best guess, Shining-sensei asked me for a chance to listen to his hour long interview recording. With vivid red earphone caps over his ears and listening intently to the

recording, he corrected every misspelling and missing words in my transcription. Without a doubt it was an excruciating moment for me where my credibility as a research was put to a test by the most important gatekeeper for this project. He graciously returned the printout with his handwritten corrections and remarked how the background noise must have been difficult for me to make out his words. At the same time, witnessing the care with which Shining-sensei checked over the words made me realize early in my research project the gravity with which the Shining Energy community regarded the documentation of their social life.

Any documentation risks not only embalming the art form and hinder its evolution, but the consumption of it can fixate unnecessary conceptions in people's heads. Even though the likelihood of a writing produced by a practitioner who has less than two years of practice being taken seriously by committed martial art practitioners is remote, I nevertheless had to think about how to navigate this serious ethical problem. However much martial artists dismiss theorists who do not have the embodied authority (Farrer & Whalen-Bridge, 2011), I had to consider about what consequences my research writing might have on the community and its practice. All these challenges pushed me to re-examine my research design and approach.

The Second Moment

The second moment of my ethnographic study builds on the first moment, but with significant changes in its approach and design that emerged and took shape slowly over time. Between December, 2010 until early October, 2011 when I applied for IRB for the “second phase” of the work, I added on another 120

hours of participation with the Aikido practice in the meantime, including attending an intensive summer camp in August of 2011. Except for 16 pages of single spaced recording of scenes or quotes that stood out - such as learning breathing technique, massage experimentations, receiving and giving *ki*-therapy, and vignettes from the summer camp and testing - I did not, however, engage in any intensive fieldnote writing or journaling activity. The interviews had revealed that no matter how intensely and rigorously I might collect “data” and analyze them, without developing my own embodied “feel” of the art’s practice and four principles on which to anchor the basis for my analysis and interpretation, my analysis would end up in 1) the uncritical adoption of participants’ views, 2) lengthy unfocused forays into the field setting, 3) superficial and random data collection, and/or 4) reliance on stock disciplinary categories.

Without first developing my own Aikido *habitus* and “feel” (whatever such may be), I would not be able to overcome my assumptions and implicit categories that seeped into my fieldnote writing and interview analysis. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain, everyday language is filled with conceptual metaphors we may not always notice but nonetheless shape the way we think and act. I sought for a way to achieve ontological synchrony with my participants through immersion in everyday practice of Aikido, in other words, a kind of *radical empiricism* (Jackson, 1989)

A radically empirical method includes the experience of the observer and defines the experiential field as one of interactions and intersubjectivity. Accordingly, we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our

experiences as primary data. Experience, in this sense, becomes a mode of experimentation, of testing and exploring the ways in which our experiences conjoin or connect us with others, rather than the ways they set us apart. (Jackson, 1989, p. 4)

This stresses the ethnographic researcher to not just to take theories and methods out to the “natural” settings of the dojo activity to understand the behaviors and meanings of its community members in their own contexts characteristic of *naturalistic inquiry* (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 15), but also to “look with” those he or she is studying that urges the researcher to use the practical, personal, and participatory experience gained from immersive practice in the field to re-examine both his or her theories and methods as well as detached observations.

So, one of the first things I did was to seize the practice of writing out fieldnotes from *headnotes* which I had done after the practice and release myself from one of the key knowledge practices of an ethnographic researcher. In its place, my intuition urged me to immerse my corporeal subjectivity in reckless listening, to let my body “listen recklessly” (Chuang Tzu, in Watson, 1968, p. 47) and exploit the body’s autopoietic processes (Maturana & Varela, 1987). The learning and teaching of Aikido at the dojo involved “an embodied and multisensorial way of knowing that is inextricable from our sensorial and material engagements with the environment and is as such an emplaced knowing” (Pink, 2009, p. 34). My ethnographic study in this sense is also an experiment with “*expanded empiricism*” (Adkins & Lury, 2009 original emphasis) that recognizes that meaning does not emerge from *res cognitans* alone, but in the post-human

ontology of matter – of affect and intensities, of sensations of the ‘unexperience’ below and beyond the reaches of meaning. Although I did not exactly know how this would take shape and emerge in my subsequent fieldnote-taking and analysis, it was an attempt on my part to carry out an analytic and interpretive framework that applied the principles of non-representational theory that accounted for the background, practice, and affect (Thrift, 2007).

Summary of data collected. Aside from the non-contemplative data that my body was “collecting” in the course of approximately 120 hours of practice, the conventional forms of data I resumed gathering included participant-observation, interviews, and journaling based on approximately 20 hours of participant-observation in pursuant to IRB approval. Journaling and observational fieldnotes after the practice totaled 58 single-space typewritten pages and 7 pages of hand-drawn diagrams and scribbles. I openly recruited 6 “new” participants (who were 18 years-old and above) at various level of martial mastery for (semi-) structured interviews on a voluntary basis (see Appendix 2 for the interview guide). The sensitizing questions that guided the formulation of the interview questions were as follows:

RQ1: What does the transculturation of Aikido at the dojo look like?

RQ2: How does the practice bind the dojo community?

RQ3: How does Aikido help cultivate an embodied dialogic practice?

Some of the questions aimed to explore how the asymmetric structure of social participation facilitated the teaching and learning of martial art skill. Another set of questions to pose questions about how participants viewed the “exotic” and

“foreign” cultural elements used in their daily practice. Other questions tried to explore the modality of knowledge or skill transmission that practitioners developed in the course of their Aikido practice. Even though interviews are poor tools for negotiating the difference between the knowledge practices of the participants and the researcher (Lee, 2000; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966), they can provide a chance to listen to the participant stories, the motivations and insights about their Aikido practice.

Confidentiality of participants was assured by the use of pseudonyms and removing distinct markers traceable to the individual from the field notes and transcriptions. Interviews were audio-taped and lasted an average of 90-minutes per interviewee, which totaled 9 hours. I tried to achieve a balanced representation between seniors and juniors – three teacher-in-training black-belters, and three color-belt practitioners – in order to capture the perspectives from several vantage points. Similar to the first moment, the original plan was to transcribe the interviews in full and to provide the text to the participants for member-checking. However, due to the unanticipated change in the study’s evolving methodology, which I now describe as the second moment, the recorded interviews were given a different treatment. I listened carefully to the interviews from beginning to end. Only those segments that demonstrate, enrich, or further the analysis were noted and from them, only those data displayed in the ethnographic text were transcribed. I informed the six participants of the change in the member reflection (Tracy, 2010) arrangement: rather than providing the fully transcribed interview text, a thick description chapter and the two ethnographic analysis chapters would

instead be provided for their feedback and comments. To this they agreed.

Approval was sought for all of the data displays and their interpretations. Any that failed to get participant approval were removed or rephrased in accordance with his/her wish. Although this risked the possibility of censorship, it provided an opportunity for my research to gain the credibility of my participants as well as an opportunity to engage my participants in my interpretation and to verify its accuracy. The eight initial interviews I had conducted for the preliminary phase of my study , as well as on the spot ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) along the way, were also included in my analysis and synthesis.

Method of data analysis & synthesis. The method of data analysis and synthesis that I recount in this section emerged as I was “doing” them and will undoubtedly be read as if they had been resolved, but which are in fact still held in tension even as I write. Upon reflection, the process can be best described as a struggle against existing categories that not only my head carries, but that are lodged in every muscle fiber of my body and ooze out of my (sensory) organs. It was not the partiality(s) (Goodall, 2000; Strathern, 2004) that was paralyzing but seeing no alternative than to helplessly stand by and watch this rampage of disciplinary and habituated categories. The tension that I am referring to is the jarring gap between one’s epistemological tools and the ontological realities that I slowly became aware of during my initial probing: “the often unrecognized, vague and fuzzy spaces in between forms of reality, knowledge and practice” (S. D. Brown & Stenner, 2009, p. 39). The “accumulation” of Aikido *habitus* following the period of “reckless listening” did not resolve the tension, but made

the disconnect all the more obvious and impossible to ignore. When I resumed data collection process after the IRB approval, I still saw my disciplinary training and habituated ways of perceiving and interpreting life cast their shadows on my fieldnotes and interview questions (see Appendix 2). Since I had never once questioned the objectivity of gravity and space, any experience I had where I felt I had to put myself in a different universe with a different gravitation force to execute a move I dismissed as a fleeting fanciful thought. It never occurred to me to pick up on such cue to explore how practitioners at Shining Energy might be feeling or relating to gravity or space.

It was only when I began writing my version of Geertz's "thick description", a reconstruction of the social life of the dojo, as a dissertation chapter that I began to see glimpses of the "ethnographic moment" (Strathern, 1999) for my project. Strathern explains this moment as "a moment of knowledge or insight" from "the effect of engaging the fields together", that is, through "a relation between immersement and movement" (p. 6). In a similar vein, Tracy (2012) also writes,

As a creative and interpretive art, inductive qualitative data analysis is less amenable to formalization than deductive research and, by design, unique to the scene and researcher(s). As such, these practices are impossible to neatly replicate—at another time or by another (set of) researcher(s). Even when qualitative scholars diligently learn and follow best practices of rigor, the ephemeral moments that periodically characterize data analysis are nearly impossible to put in words. (p. 123)

While combing through the details in my descriptive rendering, to my surprise, the feel of my Aikido *habitus* was guiding me to keep closely to the details of not only movements and the arrangement of the practice, but also their interaction with the architectural arrangements which would otherwise have faded into the background. It did not replace the way I perceive the social world in any revolutionary sense, but it provided a concrete grounding to prevent me from being swept away by the varying portrayals of martial art and their practices in popular press and scholarly discussions. These writing privileged either an individual sealed off in their skins and minds or the art form with self-contained properties and characteristics as their main explanatory unit of analysis. My embodied understanding pointed out that they had overlooked the central role of the dyad and repetition played in martial art movement practice.

The realization of the viability of this embodied feel prompted me to use it as an axis in re-examining the epistemological challenge facing me. First was the temporal and thematic orientation in my analysis. To the extent that my preliminary analysis followed the temporal flow of practice sessions and their accumulative effects on embodied skill and knowledge level of the practitioners over time, my analysis was predicated on the assumption that the practice of the martial art form was achieving technical virtuosity. Mastery in the art form aims for skilled performance; however, at the heart of seemingly repetitive practice is cultivating the capacity to *respond fluently* - to keep on going, to be open and responsive to continually changing environmental conditions of an indeterminable, emergent present and unknowable future.

At stake was more than the issue of interiority of embodied experience and exteriority of their forms, but incongruity in the temporal orientation between the Aikido practitioners who maintained a forward-looking perspective and viewed their embodied skill and knowledge as perpetually incomplete, and the retrospective perspective I as an ethnographer deployed in transmuting their embodied skill and practice into “knowledge”. Synchronizing the temporal incongruity is, of course, impossible. Sense-making, however rigorous, is retrospective in nature (Weick, 1995). Miyazaki (2004), who devised *a method of hope* as a means to overcome temporal asynchrony in his ethnography on Suvavou rituals in Fiji, explains his method as “a modality of ethnographic engagement that is predicated not so much on objectification in the sense of analysis or critique, as on reception and response” (p. 7). In other words, rather than regarding hope as his *subject* of knowledge, Miyazaki approached hope as a *method* to construct an analytical framework for apprehending the concrete moments of the “not-yet” (pp. 11-12). Similar to Miyazaki’s solution of re-orienting knowledge, the methodological strategy I have adopted to close the gap between the ontological and epistemological terrain - as a way to shift my ethnographic gaze from its “*look at*” to the “*look with*” mode – is to “co-produce” the world (Thrift, 2000, p. 5) by “performing” Aikido in my synthesizing approach.

Second was as long as the aim of my study was in representation and meaning, no matter how elaborate my “resonance” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844) coding scheme, my retrospective perspective would never convey with a certain fidelity

my subjects' prospective perspective in how I describe, namely to sketch out an ontology that captures their lifeworld. This prompted me to re-examine the underlying assumptions of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to see how it could be re-fitted for the tension that stood in front of my study. In effect, it was at odds with the aim of my study, which was no longer the theorization of the practice of martial art and its transculturation process, but to "locate the making of meaning and signification in the 'manifold of actions and interactions' rather than in a supplementary dimension such as that of discourse, ideology or symbolic order" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 2). In this sense, the role of coding and categorization was kept minimal:

Coding schemes can become very elaborate and quite difficult to work with. There is always the danger that the more that analysts are concerned with the structures of coding, the further they drift away from the lived realities of what they study. Sometimes, a simpler set of codes, designed only to navigate the data more easily, is the better way to proceed. All qualitative analysts would do well from time to time to recall that "The map is not the territory." Translation: the code (map) is not the interpretation. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 222)

Rather than working towards filling out categories and their properties to reach theoretical saturation – to borrow the language of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), – the tactical adjustment came from the way I metaphorically "re-read" the codes and their initial categorizations by juxtaposing them against 'backgrounds', bodies and Aikido performances at the dojo. It is a method that "extends the

generation of knowledge beyond “pure” data acquisition and evaluation” (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008).

In writing out my synthesis, I chose to instead actively use the frame of the dissertation chapters as *sites* of performative ‘presentations’, ‘showings’ and ‘manifestation’ (Thrift, 1997) of Aikido response. This orientation functions similar to an axial coding that sorts, synthesizes and organizes large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways (Charmaz, 2006). An Aikido response is predicated on being presented with an 1) *attack* or a challenge from without, after which it unfolds with 2) an *evasion* to receive the challenge rather than to confront the attack and move along with its multiple flows, then 3) *centralization*, finding an opening and a safe position from which one can operate in full control, and then, 4) *neutralization*, where one uses the connection with the vectors of the attack to transform the dynamic by displacing the other’s assertion with one’s own control, either by immobilizing or “throwing off” the attack completely (Westbrook, 2001).

Transposing the above onto my ethnographic writing translates into an analytical framework that performs an Aikido response textually, that is “by adding [new forms of script] that allow other descriptions of the world to become possible” (Thrift, 2011, p. 22). Except for the first synthesis chapter which provides a straightforward “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) as “A Day in the Life of a *Dojo*”, a text is presented at the beginning as the “attack” or challenge to set the stage for my response, the analytical and descriptive findings. The descriptive interpretation begins by “evasion” to further clarify the strands or

points in the attack. This is followed by “centralization” where I succinctly lay out the basis of the approach I take for my ensuing interpretive response. Then in the “neutralization” segment, the strands and points identified during the “evasion” is displaced (Strathern, 1988) as a result of my ethnographic interpretation.

Displacement, which overthrows the arrangements of previous analytical categories, extends the previous position rather than refuting it. This, Strathern (1988) states, “build[s] up the conditions from which the world can be apprehended anew” (p. 19). Lastly, reprise the displacement undertaken in the chapter. I then go back to the beginning to insert a box that describes an Aikido technique that best captures the kind ethnographic displacement that the chapter performs. In sum, although the initial challenge has been obviated by the Aikido response that takes the reader through scenes from social life of the dojo in its investigation, the final ethnographic representation remains incomplete and open-ended.

CHAPTER 4

A Day in the Life of a *Dojo*

For most of the day, the Aikido practice hall remains silent, lifeless, and dark. Located in the deep corner of a modest two-storied business complex, a wandering passerby would see through its squeezeed office window and past the large white letterings “Aikido Kokikai” and “合氣道 光氣会”, a shallow and sparsely furnished room. It is not the desk, the worn out bookshelf, the water dispenser or the two file cabinets, and certainly not the handful of white plastic chairs that catch the eyes of an observant onlooker. They are quite un-extraordinary. It is rather the numerous black-and-white photographs covering the office walls, and the tidiness with which tiniest of office items have been arranged, creating an air of calmness, discipline, and detailed care permeating through all corners of the office that impress the onlooker. No trace of dust can be found on the meticulously lined photograph frames. The plastic chairs have been fitted with blue cushions to soften people’s seating. White binders, a stack of brochures and a telephone sit neatly around the edge of a navy blue cloth covered desk. Across the wooden parquet floor, a printed bluish cloth hangs half-way down an inner doorway to artfully cover the space beyond from curious eyes. Peering in from the outside, the office resembles a museum display removed in time and cocooned from the pervasive dust, copperish hue, and parched landscape of its environs. It is only during the few hours in the late afternoon that the practice hall becomes a hub and lives up to the name members call it by, “*dojo*”.

The term *dojo* (道場) originally refers to the ground or place for practicing martial arts. Comprised of two *kanji* (or ‘the Han letters’ in Japanese) characters, *do* (道) means the path and *jo* (場), a (open) ground for activities. Instead of practicing martial arts on packed-down and sun-baked earth as in the ancient past, the daily Aikido practice takes place on khaki green *tatami*-like mats (mats with straw-woven feel) held together by wooden frames in the large garage-like space lit by fluorescent ceiling lamps. The running joke at the *dojo* is that the mat panels are the only things worth any value to interested burglars. Aside from the monetary value of these “Made in Germany” mats, however, the value of the mats as the ground for practice can be observed through care and respect they are treated in the flow of activities at the *dojo*. Not only do people have to take off shoes before stepping onto the mat, their feet have to be clean as well. More than any other equipment at the *dojo*, these mats are regularly mopped before practice. Blood stains, though infrequent, are wiped off immediately with hydrogen peroxide, and any inadvertent streaks from either nail or toe polish are removed with nail polish removers. During the year-end day of great cleaning, *soji* (meaning the sweeping and cleaning of grounds), the mat panels are carefully carried outside so that each are aired and wiped with wet cloth to remove any lumps of dust bunnies, fungus growth, or grime. Moreover, a novice quickly notices that the *senseis* (meaning ‘the life ahead’ in reference to anyone who guides a person about living in the world) and most of the seniors, the *hakama* (black pleated pants pulled over regular cotton uniform) wearing instructors-in-training, bow toward the practice ground when they first enter and leave the hall

for the day. Even though stories float around of how *senseis'* own teacher had made his apprentices execute fly-rolls over large spare tires on asphalt, the daily practice at the *dojo* is unimaginable without the textured surface these mats provide.

As the ground for activities, the *dojo* comes to life when one of the several key-bearing senior members arrives shortly before practice time to unlock the front door and switch on the lights. Members trickle in and head for the changing room in the more spacious rectangular training hall beyond the inner doorway. The greenish panel mats cover nearly the entire floor of the practice hall. Except for a narrow walkway and a bench, the practice hall is designed for barefooted occupancy. Above the bench hangs two *kanji* brushworks: the first reads “合氣道” (pronounced ai-ki-dō, meaning “the way of unifying *ki*”), and the second, “光氣会” (pronounced ko-ki-kai, meaning “the association of shining *ki*”). A careful eye can discern that they were done by hand, yet by a hand that does not make a living from writing calligraphy. Next to them hangs a portrait of the current president of the association. Across this is the main wall, or *shōmen* (meaning ‘proper face’), where the *kanji* character “氣” hangs in the center. The character, central to the practice of Aikido, refers to some motion or force that cannot be seen by the naked eye but is perceptible through the four senses - hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting – and the mind. Next to this is another frame with four key principles written out in English: 1) Keep one-point to develop calmness, 2) Relax progressively to your strongest state, 3) Find correct posture in everything, and 4) Develop your positive mind. At each end of the

hall's *shōmen* hangs a weapons rack holding *tandō* (wooden daggers), *bokken* (wooden practice swords) and *jo* (staffs). The furthest wall of the practice hall is a roll-up corrugated garage door which is partially kept open to let in cool breeze and fresh air during the cooler months of the year. When the weather becomes too cold or too hot, however, central heating/cooling system injects tempered air into the garage-like space.

Practitioners change into their white cotton uniform, *gi*, in either the male or female changing rooms. *Gi* is the preferred outfit for its durability: its denim-like fabric can withstand falls, grabs, sweat and innumerable washings better than other loose-fitting clothing. Aside from its purely functional purpose, the wearing of *gi* subdues the marked physiological differences among members while spotlighting the color of belts. No two people of the same belt-color execute a technique or move the same. The belt-colors merely provide a rough indicator of the length of practice, skill level, and responsibility – one's rank. Unlike the *gi*, however, a belt never touches water no matter how soiled it becomes, because washing removes its stiffness. At the same time, belts, especially black-belts, are not only an indicator of skill, but also evidence of one's tenacity. When a tethered black-belt falls apart of its own accord, it is taken as a sign of luck.

Once *dojo* members step out of the changing room, they hobble along the walkway in their slippers past the bench to the deeper part of the hall and reach the full-length mirrors. There they turn around with their backs to the mats and make sure that the heel-side of their slippers touches the wooden frame. Practitioners bend over, place a bottle of water next to their shoes, then slip out of

their footwear and step onto the mats barefoot. On the mat, some exchange small talk, some stretch, and others just sit on the mat in *seiza* (meaning ‘proper sitting’, where one sits on the floor with legs folded under one’s buttocks). One by one each eventually finds a spot on the mat along an invisible line and settles in *seiza* facing the *shōmen*. By the time the clock’s minute hand in the corner of the hall reaches the scheduled time, all are sitting in a single file projecting unified preparedness. *Sensei* walks up to the side of the mat closest to the doorway, turns around, removes his or her slippers, and gets on the mat and walks to the front wall, *shōmen*. *Sensei* takes a seat below “氣” facing the line of practitioners. *Sensei* observes if everyone’s posture and breathing is composed, then swirls on his or her knees to face the *shōmen* and bows. The practitioners follow *sensei* and bow to the *shōmen* in unison. *Sensei* then swirls back to face the group and exchange bows to open the practice session.

Practice

Warm-up. Generally, the daily practice session has three discernible segments which together last for about an hour. The first is the warm-up, where muscles, joints, and bones are stretched starting from the feet, legs and worked up to the torso and then to arms, hands, and wrists. It lasts for ten to fifteen minutes, where the *sensei*, or whoever leads the warm-up, calls out directions and counts to synchronize all bodily movement on the mat. It is the most galaxy-like in its formation. For the first stretch, *sensei* calls out “Please stretch your legs!” and everyone turns to face the garage door and opens their legs wide apart. We stretch the large and small muscle groups in our thighs, calves, ankles and feet by folding

our right leg first and putting our upper body over it and bounce while the left leg is extended out. Some people whose leg muscles are not flexible or have bad knees do this near standing. At “Switch!” we switch and bounce our torso over the left foot to change the direction of the muscles being stretched. The shifting of our torso happen a few more times until *sensei* calls out “Hai!” to signal the end of this particular stretch and to signal the transition to the next set of stretches.

Sensei calls out “Bend forward!” at which everyone stands up to face the front wall to bend forward to his or her count. When ten frequencies of bending forward are done, then *sensei* calls out “Bend back!” and at *sensei*’s count everyone stretches their arms up high, looks up at the ceiling and bends backwards. After these are completed, *sensei* calls out “All around!” The upper torso makes as large of a circle by bending forward and then bending back in one direction and then in the other until *sensei* calls out “Now twist!” With legs still shoulder length apart, arms are thrown to the right to twist the torso all the way so that the head spots the back wall. Then the arms untwist and are swung around to the left to twist the trunk in the reverse direction. Sometimes the flailing hands and arms hit those of their neighbors’ if not enough distance is given between one person to the next. The warm-up movements are not a test of one’s flexibility, but to stretch stiffened muscles and joints, especially from sitting and disjointed use of limbs during the day, and to loosen them up for the ensuing dyadic and group technique phase of the practice. The carefully sequenced warm-up sequence also prevents and minimizes injury.

At “Sit down and roll back and stay!” we sit cross legged on the mat and at “One!” we rock our torso and pull the legs over our heads and stay in a curled up position until we hear the next cue. Most practitioners hold the legs up in the air or over their heads, but for some with a large protruding belly or a bad back, they simply refrain from bending their trunks and just lift their legs several inches off the mat. At “Two!” we drop our legs to roll ourselves back into the cross legged sitting position, and then roll the trunks back and stay with legs over our heads. We do two more of rolling back and staying on our backs. When I had first joined the practice, this particular technique was executed towards the end of lower limb stretches. When the *senseis* returned from the annual Fall Camp in November of 2011, they made some changes in the warm-up sequence and flexion frequencies in accordance with the president’s latest prescription. These slight changes caused a bit of confusion among those who led the warm-ups for a few weeks, but the new sequence eventually replaced the previous one.

When we return to our sitting position for the next move, *sensei* calls out “Left leg out!” The left leg is stretched out to isolate the muscles running down the back side of our buttocks, thighs and calves, and the right leg left to fold. At *sensei’s* count, we bring our trunks over the left leg until we feel the discomfort from the stretch. When the count comes to an end, in anticipation of the next stretch, as *sensei* calls out “Right leg out!” we stretch out our right legs and leave the left leg bent. At *sensei’s* count we try to touch the right leg thigh with our stomach. If the rhythm of the group’s flexing becomes scattered or off-beat, *sensei* sometimes stops counting. Without the call outs and counting by the person

leading, members cannot proceed on their own. We have to stop and wait. *Sensei* then explains that everyone should try to move at the leader's count, however slow or fast it may be. This emphasis on synchronizing rhythmic motion among multiple bodies has less to do with conformity than listening attentively and moving oneself to the count. When *sensei* resumes counting, the group synchronization is better.

After completing the individual leg muscle group stretches, *sensei* cries out "Now, both legs!" We gather our legs before us and at *sensei's* count, we bring our torso close to our thighs. After completing four sets of five frequencies, *sensei* calls out "Open your legs wide!" We all turn on our buttock and face the corrugated garage door with our legs split as wide apart as possible. Shining-*sensei* tends to call out the name of the most senior person and prompts him/her to count. At the count, we bend over each of the legs, and then place our torso in the middle and bend towards the mat. As I move my body to the rhythm of the count, some days I listen carefully to the vocal qualities of whoever is counting.

The sounds the two *senseis* make, for example, are each distinctive, as each of the vocal sounds we make are distinct. With each successive hearing over time, however, I am able to sense that they share similarities in that their sound not only shoots out from the throat but also from the frame of their bodies which together produce sound with multi-layered tonality. The higher pitch shoots out into the hall past our bodies reaching beyond the walls while the deeper tone penetrates through our bodies and encircles the room, that when the vocalization of the count ends, there still remains sonorous vibration emitting into the air.

These effects create a wave-like undulation in their counts that carry rhythmicity which, except for one or two other practitioners, members are not yet able to produce. With each subsequent set of warm-up motions, Shining-*sensei* calls on the next person down the seniority rank. Shining-*sensei* more than any other person at this particular *dojo* uses the belt-colors and the day members joined to rank seniority that is crucial in organizing bodies throughout the duration of the day's training.

Once the musculature in the lower limbs is thoroughly stretched, the muscles and bones in the chest area is the focus of the next sets of warm-up moves. As the bodies position themselves to stretch the sides of their torso, *sensei* bows to invite a tardy member who is sitting in *seiza* in the designated corner of the mat. People scoot to make room so that the late comer can insert him/herself in the line. Before commencing with the next stretch, *sensei* reminds us that for women, the palms of their hand reaching over their heads should be facing the wall, and for men, turned downward to maximize the stretching of the muscles and bones in and around the ribcage. The shape and position of the shoulder blade and its relation to surrounding bones, *sensei* explains, is different for men and women. Although I am better able to sense the muscle groups comprising my torso over time, much of it still feels like one single lump of flesh more than anything else. Nonetheless, I follow *sensei's* suggestion as we begin the stretch.

After we complete the sequence of upper body flexions, we then do warm-up techniques that involve the whole body as one assemblage that works our lower abdomen to strengthen our core and 'one-point', which roughly

corresponds to our center-of-gravity. First among them is to sit cross-legged back on the mat, and at *sensei*'s count, we roll back and then forth back into the sitting position quickly. We then stand up for the next set. At the caller's count, we fold our legs from the standing position to move smoothly into a sitting position and then roll on our backs, switch legs in mid-air, then use the momentum to roll our torso forward again into the sitting position and continue the propulsion to prop our torso over the bent legs which are then straightened to push ourselves up back into the original erect position. This prepares us not only to take falls for the ensuing technique practice, but also to help develop stamina of the core. Although our body is the figure and gravity the ground throughout the practice session, this set of warm-up move develops our bodily coordination to work efficiently with gravity. More than any other movement practitioners execute during practice, it is the innumerable falling down and rolling oneself back up on one's feet that break sweat and make practitioners lose breath. The various warm-up motions progress from isolated parts of the body to more complex coordination of bodily assemblages which simultaneously demand greater sense of motion and balance, in other words, proprioception.

In addition to the above, another crucial element in the warm-up exercise is stimulating '*ki*' flow throughout the body from feet to hands. Explicit articulation of '*ki*' is avoided; instead *senseis* simply show what the movement should look like and what thought should undergird it. The understanding of '*ki*' is verified by having practitioners do "unbendable arm", especially during promotional exams, to assess how much he or she is able to use '*ki*' in

coordinating and generating appropriate effects. For “unbendable arm”, one stands with one foot forward and the other back and holds up the arm that is on the same side as the forward foot. A senior usually walks up to the side of the extended arm and tries to bend it. If the practitioner is coordinating the mind-body by extending ‘*ki*’ from the ground up through the legs and back to one’s arm and then project it out through the hand into the distant horizon, even though the arm is not stiff nor its muscles hardened, the senior cannot fold the arm. The *senseis* observe carefully for any hardening of muscles, rough breathing, or tenseness in the face which are all signs that the practitioners is faltering.

The procedure is the same as the earlier warm-up movements: *sensei* or whoever is leading calls out the motion and then helps the group synchronize execution by counting out loudly. The first of the ‘*ki*’ exercises is “*nikkyo*”, or technique number two, which means bending at the wrist by pressing the back of the left hand with the palm of the right hand so that the fingers of left hand are pointing down while moving the bent wrist up and down. At *sensei*’s call, everybody switches hands. The rest of the body remains standing in stable posture. The next is “*kotegaeshi*”, or wrist-twisting *undō* technique. The wrist is bent again, except the left hand wrist is bent with fingers pointing upward while the palm of the right hand wraps around the back of the left with fingers gripping the fleshy part of the base below the left hand thumb. This slight change engages a different set of muscles in the arm, shoulders, and the back. The bent wrist is held in front of one’s chest, then lowered to one’s bellybutton at each count, whereupon the nerve stimulation shoots from the wrist area. When the wrist is brought back up to

the chest, the tension eases. At the next count, the wrist is lowered and the stimulation is felt again, but is quickly brought back up for relief from the stimulation. When the set count is over, everyone switches hand positions to alternate the wrist-joint stimulation to the other hand. “*Sankyo*”, or technique number three, is the third as last wrist-stimulation exercise. At *sensei*’s “Sankyo!” most follow *sensei* and lift the left arm with palms facing out in front of their chest, and then grab with the right hand as if to do a handshake.

For new members, these wrist-stimulating holds are confusing to replicate and follow because the grabs are strange. It takes months of repetition to realize that another aspect of this warm-up technique is to self inflict stimulation. At “One!” the shaking hands are pushed away from the chest until the twisted left-hand wrist reaches tautness at which point a stimulating sensation electrifies all the way to the shoulder, and then it’s brought back to the chest to relieve the wrist-joint from over stimulation. As people push out and pull in their clasped hands at *sensei*’s count, some members are able to push out further than other, while others only just a few inches. Although *sensei* moves the hands without disturbing other part of the body, for the less experienced members isolating the movement just to the arm and the wrist takes time and repeated practice. For now, their shoulders round up, upper body sways, or the stimulation just sparks at the wrist-joint without wrapping around the arm and reach over one’s shoulders to the back. Getting down the details of the techniques is not important for the newcomers as having them take part in the flow and rhythm of the practice from the first day even if they fumble their way through. When the count comes to an

end, *sensei* calls out, “Please shake your wrists!” to loosen up any remaining stiffness in the muscles and joints of our upper limbs.

The next pair of ‘*ki*’ exercises is the “rowing exercise” and *shōmenuchi*. The movement for the rowing exercise would have been all too familiar and commonplace when galley-like ships were around. However, for us moderns who travel by car, train, and airplane, it is as foreign as yoga poses. With left foot forward and right foot back, the rowing exercise begins with both arms at the sides. Then when *sensei* calls out “One!” the upper trunk shifts forward onto the forward leg and foot and the two arms shoot out forward with a bend at the wrist and hands curled as if holding a paddle that one has to row through the sea water. At “Two!” the upper trunk is shifted back to the starting position, and simultaneously the curled hands are brought back to the side of our hip. *Sensei* calls out “One!” “Two!” a few more times and then “Three!” “Four!” to signal the end of rowing on that particular side. The feet swap positions and then the rowing motion is repeated again until *sensei* cries out “Three!” “Four!” which brings the set to a completion. Although the rowing motion can be executed by mirroring the leader’s silhouette, Shining-*sensei* in particular repeatedly explains that ‘*ki*’ must shoot out from the wrist like a “turbo jet” with added sound effects, and then at withdrawal to drop the hands to one’s side out of their “sheer heaviness”. *Sensei*’s explanation is an admixture of *manga* (a genre of Japanese comics) and physics. When he begins to count, some of the wrists thrust forward and drop back to the sides, some make a circle, and others swing back and forth like a pendulum. We don’t ask questions but move as best we can to keep up.

The next one, *shōmenuchi*, is similar to the rowing exercise where the two feet are kept in their positions, except rather than thrusting the wrists forward at the hip level, arms swing up to shoulder height. *Sensei's* body movement seems Mattel doll-ish. Save for the swiveling of the arm at the shoulders, no other limbs in the upper body change. The *shōmenuchi* arm swing is a foundational motion for head strikes either with empty hand or weapons, as well as for deflecting those very strikes. It is when the arm goes up to send 'ki' out from feet, through the back, and out the base of one's hand into the distant horizon that the swing is said to be effective in deflecting any strike, however heavy and fast. To use the *shōmenuchi* arm swing to strike heads, both gravity and back muscles have to work together to make the downward motion heavy without straining the muscles. On certain days without any announcement, *senseis* walk back and forth behind the line while the warm up leader leads the practice, and pushes with the blade of his or her hand on our lower backs to see whether the person maintains a stable center of gravity during the arm swings. No one in the line can tell whose center of gravity will be checked. We carry on to the rhythm of the leader's counts. Now and then, in the periphery of my eyes, I can see someone stumble in the line. Sometimes, that stumbling is myself. After a set of arm swings with the right foot forward and then with the left foot forward, body pivot is added to what is called *zengo undo*. At *sensei's* "One!" arms shoot up and then brought back down to my sides and pivot my trunk on the balls of my feet to face the back wall. At "Two!" I raise my arms again and then drop them back to the sides and pivot again to face the *shōmen*.

The next following exercises combine ‘*ki*’ projections and maintaining center of gravity while in motion. Since most of the defense techniques are quite complex, we often just do *tenkan* followed by *ukemis* (small and large rolls), to bring warm-up to an end. For *tenkan*, at the leader’s count, practitioners start with left foot forward and left hand held out as if to invite a handshake, take a step forward and pivot quickly around an imaginary pole with hand left undisturbed hand as if around an imaginary pole. Most of the time, the trimming and honing of this particular technique focus on what it should look like: the position and the shape of the hand, the spotting of eyes at the wall, the posture of the trunk and the foot on which one’s weight is to be placed at the end of the sequence. With each count, the line begins to break: strides can be shorter on the left than on the right, some simply have longer strides, and pivots vary. Sometimes, *sensei* pairs up people so that each takes turn attaching their body at the extended hand as sandbags. Doing *tenkan* with another body to provide augmented feedback helps to develop ‘feel’ for aligning limbs and coordinating weight shift in the body. When the hand projects ‘*ki*’ and is held not too far from one’s belly button the torque generated from the pivoting body propels the extra body to move and come around, so that the two bodies end up switching places. However, if the practitioner uses only muscles in the arm to tug at the arm of the attached body, the sandbag body only flinches and remains in place.

Finally, *sensei* calls out “*Ukemi* please!” which signals that the warm-up segment is nearing end. Everyone walks back to the invisible line, bows quickly, and then shuffles into a line around the very edge of the mat with whoever is

closest to the upper right-hand corner of the mat floor as the first to roll. *Sensei* walks away from the *shōmen* and stands nearby to observe each one roll. The idea for the *ukemi* is to form a wheel by rounding one's arm, head tucked in, back curled, and legs kept folded to roll one's bodily wheel across the surface of the mat panels. At a zoo, I had once seen a young Orangutan do exactly the same roll on the grass behind the thick glass window. The long arm was arched, with head tucked in, back curled and legs just trailing along; the baby Orangutan rolled him/herself like a self-propelled hula-hoop towards the monkey bars while the adult Orangutans were stretched out on grass taking their afternoon nap. These rolls pose considerable hesitation and difficulty for the newcomer, however. More than the rolls themselves, the fact that his or her presence is slowing down the pace of the warm-up and not being able to execute what others seem to do so effortlessly, especially the black-belters, heightens the newcomer's nervousness.

The regulars, however, wait patiently as *sensei* or one of the senior practitioners sits down next to the newcomer to explain and give directions. Most watch to assess the newcomer's bodily coordination. There is almost no talking. The only voice that is audible and discernible throughout is that of *sensei's* of the senior explaining to the newcomer. Usually, when the practitioner reaches mid-point of the mat floor, the next one in line begins his or her rolls. Depending on the height of the person, some are able to do four or more revolutions before reaching the opposite end, while most only complete three. When the practitioner reaches the corner, they stand up and run back to the end of the line. *Sensei* sometimes gives him or her a pointer. Aside from remembering to keep my arm

inside my knee before launching into my rolls or not letting my “wheel” shape collapse too early, I have not had any feedback for several months. Perhaps there is nothing to be said about it, or perhaps any improvement is not likely to happen any time soon.

While standing in line for the ‘big’ *ukemi*, practitioners watch others, shake off stiffness in their shoulders, backs, and arms, or just quietly shuffle along for their turn. Also, this is the time when practitioners, who were not able to greet each other before warm-ups, to exchange greetings as they stand in line with a smile, a nod, a poke in the shoulders, or a wave of the hand. The large *ukemis* are those where the person enters the roll by walking into it, as if one has tripped over a wire or stubbed one’s toe. The more experienced practitioners “dive” into it and frequently slap the mat as they come out of the roll. The loud slapping sound sometimes makes people jump in alarm. Generally, these warm-up sequences do not vary much, but certain techniques will be altered or replaced to shift emphasis, especially for the more complex combinations. When the last in line has finished with the large *ukemi*, everyone is back in line and in *seiza* ready to begin the second segment of the daily practice.

Technique practice. Lasting for about forty-five minutes, the technique practice occupies the largest segment of daily practice. In general, this portion of training session is choreographed so that there is a constant flow of movement from beginning to end, marked by short sitting spells in between to observe *sensei* demonstrate techniques. Each person gets to practice the move from the right-hand side and then the left-hand side as well as alternating in their roles as the

straw-(wo)man, *uke*, and as the person who attacks, *nage*. Likewise, when switching to the next technique or form, people are discouraged from working in the same group; new groups are assembled to ensure that everyone works with someone they had not practiced with that day. Usually three different techniques are practiced on average; sometimes, it can be two, but never just one technique. If however, only one or two practitioner-students show up, the practice turns into a private lesson where the more formalized practice ritual is set aside.

Sensei remains standing in front of the *shōmen* and calls on a name among those present. No one knows what technique will be demonstrated, not even the person who is called up to be the *uke*. At most, *sensei* will call out the type of an attack, which is simply “punch”, “strike”, or “grab” in Japanese. Sometimes, *sensei* stands a certain way without uttering a word and the *uke* must figure out what type of attack he or she must initiate. Of course, there is a general parameter that guides the selection of techniques. Depending on how many show up for the training, their skill levels, and the level of people’s energy in relation to the day’s temperature, techniques practiced differ from session to session. If participants are lethargic, a more active technique is applied. If the weather has been particularly hot, then techniques that require slower movement are practiced. If people are particularly boisterous and lively, explained an instructor-in-training, then a technique to temper their energy level is applied. Nevertheless, since there are countless defense responses to each attack, no one except the *sensei* knows what is to come. Everybody watches in suspense and in anticipation.

Without a single word spoken, the *uke* attacks and *sensei* responds. The movement has no name. It is just a flurry of motion. Even though everyone knows that *sensei*, or the *nage*, always comes out “on top”, how the attack is transformed by the *nage* is what keeps everyone in suspense. Often times, there is a look of surprise on the *uke*’s face as he or she is being pinned on the ground. The two stand up and swap positions to demonstrate the technique again from the other side: that is, start the attack from the left-hand if the very first attack has been from the right-hand, or vice versa. In the meantime, the rest in line observe attentively to figure out what *sensei* is doing before their eyes. After *sensei* completes the execution of the technique on both sides, the *uke* and *sensei* switch roles. No words are exchanged, yet it is the *uke*’s turn to replicate *sensei*’s move. After the *uke* repeats the technique *sensei* demonstrated, *sensei* goes over the technique again. Performed at a much slower speed and cut into segments to highlight key frames, *sensei* offers the rationale for the movement response over other possibilities, pulls up his or her *hakama* to show the footwork, or “replays” certain motions so that practitioner-students have reference points as they practice the techniques later on. The slow speed demonstration is done on both sides, so that practitioners at both ends of the line can watch without straining their necks or eyes. Afterwards, *sensei* and the *uke* sit in *seiza* facing each other. *Sensei* directs how people should group up for to practice the technique and then utters the name of the technique in Japanese - usually a chain of three terms starting with the category of attack, defense response, and the type of pinning. Then

together with *sensei*, everybody bows in *seiza*: *sensei* and the *uke* to each other, others in line toward the *sensei*, *uke* and the *shōmen*.

When each returns to an upright position, everyone stands up to loosen him/herself from the single galaxy formation to reassemble into smaller clusters. The more senior practitioners first spread out across the mat and take position with their backs to the *shōmen* ready to serve as the new gravitational center for each cluster. Junior members stand in place to look at the seniors and at each other. The seniors, who serve as the second layer of instruction in technique practice, either call out the name of the junior members, give a slight head nod or a look, or simply wait for juniors to attach themselves. In the meantime, *sensei* looks over how the groups emerge to make sure that the skill levels are mixed appropriately, that no lost soul wanders on the mat, and that the ratio between mat space, number of bodies per group, and number of groups on the mat is appropriate for the space needed for and difficulty of executing the technique. No novice is ever left to work together with another novice; they are always paired up with an upper-level practitioner. Once grouped up, the second highest ranking member goes up to “attack” the senior while others watch and finish arranging their turns based on seniority. *Sensei* becomes a “wandering star” roving freely from one cluster to the next or standing from a distance to observe each cluster as (s)he intervenes to provide detailed individual feedback and instruction.

In the particular practice session I describe, there were three groups of pairs spread across the mat practicing the first technique, ‘*katatori ikkyo tenkan*’, which roughly translates as “front grab - technique number one joint twist -

circling around”. *Shining sensei* was leading that day. He first went to stand near a pair of male practitioners, a lithe and tall practitioner in *hakama* and a shorter and more fleshed muscular blue-belter. *Sensei* observed carefully as the black-belter counter grabbed his *uke*’s hold, lifted the arm to slide to the side of the attacker’s trunk, and then lowered the attacker’s extended arm and pivoted around to make the *uke* fall towards the mat for the pinning. When they had finished, *sensei* asked the blue-belter to “attack” him while the black-belter stepped aside to watch. The two were moving through the technique at normal speed when *sensei* stopped at the transition point before the take down to show in slow motion how the black-belter can adjust the way he grabs and twirls so that the *uke* will fall down more smoothly. After completing the technique, the black-belter resumed his *nage* role while *sensei* stood by to watch. The *uke* attacked and *nage* responded as before. As the two went through the technique, *sensei* suddenly said, “Ah! Now I see.” When the two had finished going through the motion, *sensei* asked the black-belter to be the *uke*. The two started the chain of motion, but when they reached the point when *uke* bends over before the fall, *Shining-sensei* slowed down to tell the black-belter something. After showing how the hold could be adjusted to make the transition movement more fluid, *sensei* released the black-belter and the two got up. *Sensei* stepped aside. The blue-belter took his attack position and then lunged to grab the black-belter’s *gi* by the shoulder. As the technique unfolded, *Shining-sensei* carefully watched to see if the black-belter was able to apply the suggested change. Even before *sensei* signaled anything, the *hakama* wearing black-belter nodded as the *uke* fell down. *Sensei* moved on to the next pair.

In the next pairing, a shortish female orange-belter is practicing the technique on a taller female brown-belter. When the two finishes, *Shining-sensei* asks the orange belted practitioner to attack him. When she steps forward to grab *sensei's gi*, *Shining-sensei* swings his forearm which catches her hand as it continues to his belt. At the same time, he takes a step back which tips the orange-belter onto her front foot and unbalances her. He has her grab him again, and he pulls back as he grabs her hand to show that the distance cannot be too close or too far from the *uke's* reach. Finally he shows the foot work that accompanies this game of balance, where all of the *nage's* weight must be on the rear foot rather than on both feet. The seamless coordination between the hand grab and footwork is not easy for the orange-belter, but she tries to follow *sensei's* directions. Any sign of slight change, *sensei* spurs with “Yes! Much better!”

Shining-sensei returns to the male pair and observes the blue-belter this time. *Sensei* asks the blue-belter to initiate the attack on him. As he wants the latter to watch him carefully and to feel the movement from the position of the *uke*: hook on *uke's* hand as own forearm swings in the shape of a ‘C’”, then lift the arm in the ‘C’ shape, slide in next to *uke's* trunk, then step and twirl around. *Shining-sensei* explains, “It looks natural and less forced. Swing up then slide forward.” *Sensei* watches the blue-belter try the technique on the black-belter again. Even from afar, one can see that the blue-belter is trying to follow the instruction and has succeeded in drawing a ‘C’ as he swings the hold back up into air. He slides in to the side of the *uke*, but falters in coordinating the step and twirl. Onlookers who have never tried adjusting such complex movement, especially

involving the assemblage of two bodies, is puzzled why the blue-belter cannot reproduce the technique like his instructor. For practitioners, however, they are far more empathic and can see efforts being made even if there seems to be no noticeable change.

In the furthest end of the mat, another pair of women, one in black-belt and one in orange-belt, are taking turns being *uke* and *nage*. A private instruction is taking place between the two because the *hakama*-wearing practitioner is highest in seniority rank after the two *senseis*, and the orange-belter a near novice. Before heading there, Shining-*sensei* stops by the brown-belt and orange-belt pair working in the middle of the mat space. This time, he works with the brown-belter. He stands facing her with his right hand out and closing into a fist to signal that he is the *uke*, the attacker. He does not say anything, but just reacts to *nage*'s defense movement. After she finishes demonstrating the technique, Shining-*sensei* tells her that power of the motion must come from the center and that she must maintain connection through her grip with the *uke* throughout the flow of the technique. Brown-belter bows to Shining-*sensei*. *Sensei* reaches the third pair and watches the orange-belter respond to the *uke*'s attack. Before she completes the execution, Shining-*sensei* steps in and explains how to grab *uke*'s wrist. Even though there are many elements of her technique execution that need fixing, *senseis* selects just one milestone for the practitioner to work on – her footwork during retreat. After grabbing *uke*'s wrist, *sensei* explained, she must bring the hold near to the side of her hip, and her feet need to be together rather than astride to take her *uke* off balance. This pointer was essentially the same as the one *sensei*

had given to the previous orange-belter. *Shining-sensei* has the orange-belter execute the technique on her partner and watches to see changes in her footwork. Although she falters to stand with her feet together, at the other end of the connection, to everyone's satisfaction, the *uke* is standing on one foot rather than two. *Sensei* watches her finish the technique and then walks to the center of the mat and cries out, "Hai!" Everyone on the mat stops what they were doing and scurries to sit in *seiza* on the invisible line.

Sensei calls out the tall male black-belter for the second technique demonstration. He looks into the eye of the *uke* and says, "*shomenuchi*". From about two arms length away, the *uke* lifts his right arm above his head with palms open then slides in and swings down the hand and arm in full speed to strike the *sensei's* head. *Sensei* escapes the blow by sliding in deep past the striking arm to take position right next to the *uke's* torso. From the new position, *sensei* slips one hand on *uke's* extended arm then with the other on the *uke's* further shoulder drops both his arm to his side setting the *uke* to lose balance and falter around *sensei's* body to recover his footing. When the *uke* regains balance and tries to stand up again, *sensei* swings his arm up and around as if to embrace the *uke* around his neck which makes *uke* fall down on his back for good. *Shining sensei* and the *uke* switched sides to execute the defense technique for the left arm strike. The two swapped roles, and after the black-belter successfully replicated the technique on both sides from attack by *sensei*, the two men returned to the center of the *shōmen*. Motions were slowed down so that *Shining sensei* could take the time to explain those critical points in the technique. The key point was the

quality of contact on the *uke*'s striking arm after moving in to the safe spot next to the *uke*'s trunk. The contact, Shining-*sensei* explained, has to be “gentle” without using strength or to think about the arm at all to be effective. The hand on the *uke*'s extended arm and the hold on the shoulder was to move the *uke*'s torso and spine not his limbs. When *sensei* had completed the slow motion demonstration on the other side, both he and the black-belter straw-man sat down face to face in *seiza*. Shining-*sensei* called out, “We’ll practice all together. This is *shomenuchi kokyunage!*” (front face strike with timed throw). Everyone bowed in unison.

When everyone got back up, the black-belter took position at some center spot on the mat and the rest of the practitioners stood in one line near the doorway not too far from him. Shining-*sensei* stood by to observe and give further instruction. The first *uke* was the blue-belter who had practiced with the *nage* in the earlier technique. He looked at the *nage*'s foot position and placed his own feet to correspond and raised his arm for the strike. Even before his arm came down for the strike, *sensei* immediately approached him to correct the way the *uke* was holding up his arm. *Sensei* strode to the weapons rack gathered two wooden swords and came back to give one to the blue-belter and use the other for himself. The blue-belter looked puzzled and the rest in line looked on in wonder. With the sword in his grip, Shining-*sensei* lifted it above his head and swung it down in one full and clean stroke, “The sword moves as an extension of my back”. *Sensei* swung the sword a few more times and then he asked the blue-belter to have a try at swinging his. The blue-belter did as he was bid. His swing did not look any different. Shining-*sensei* turned to him and showed how he had swung. *Sensei*

lifted his sword over his head and at the top adjusted his grip which made the sword tip further over his head. Then he swung it down. The point still eluded the blue-belter.

Then *sensei* asked that they both swing their swords with their respective grips to see which reached the target faster. At *sensei*'s "Now!", both swung their swords down. The difference was imperceptible to untrained eyes. At this point, Shining-*sensei* may have wished that the practice ground had indeed been outdoors where the effects of the grip and arm extension on sword swing could be tested on plants and fruits. *Sensei*'s point, however, was not completely lost. The black-belter seemed to understand. *Sensei*'s sword strike would cut through an object, even a skull: even though the tip of the sword was slightly higher, the blade would come down as a whole and at the same time. In contrast, the greater curvature created by the blue-belter's grip would make the sword swing less likely to cut through a hard object in one stroke. Not only would the reach of the blade be shorter, the blade at the grip would reach down before the tip did, generating differential in the timing of the blade's contact. Such swing, therefore, would more likely push the target object away than to cut through it. With wooden swords back in the rack, Shining-*sensei* had the blue-belter swing his arm again and then sent him off to strike the *nage*.

No one in the line that day was taller than the black-belter. However, the difference in height, length of limbs, strides, and strength presented each *uke*'s attack as distinctive. The black-belter handled the first round of right arm strikes followed by another round of left arm strikes smoothly. When the last left arm

strike was completed, the black-belter stood straight, made eye contact with the blue-belter who was again the first in the line of *ukes*, and exchanged bows to signal role change. The blue-belter took over the place of the *nage*, and the black-belter joined the line of *ukes*. As the blue-belter responded to the *shomenuchi* strike, *sensei* first looked at the *nage*'s footwork. The blue-belter was able to respond to a succession of four attacks without getting stuck. However, when the black-belter attacked as the *uke*, he could not unbalance the *uke* from the safe spot to carry out the rest of the defense motion. Shining-*sensei* coached the blue-belter to place his hands on the arm and shoulder of the *uke* and to drop his arms as if “almost falling asleep” without the intention of throwing hard. When the blue-belter had completed his practice for both right-hand and left-hand strikes, he bowed to the female orange-belter to pass on the *nage* role.

The orange-belter stepped into the spot for the technique practice. Key point for her was once she stepped into the safe spot next to her *uke*, to look at the distance rather than at the *uke* before dropping her arms to her sides to swing the *uke* around her. As she went through succession of *ukes*, she forced herself to look at the garage door as if to purposely ignore the person before her. When the tall black-belter struck, the orange-belter quickly grabbed his arm and shoulder, but he would not budge. She stiffened herself even more and tried yanking him. Shining-*sensei* who was observing carefully, coaxed her the reverse, “soften, soften, soften.” Onlookers could see that her stiff arm began to relax and that her upper body had closed distance with that of her *uke*'s. At the same time, the upper torso of the black-belter was beginning to roll back and his chest opened up and

eventually he gave way to swerve around the *nage*. “There it is!” *sensei* exclaimed. There was, of course, a play of resistance and cooperation on the part of the black-belter who posed varying degrees of difficulty on practitioners. Had the *nage* been a newcomer, the black-belter would have gone through the motion with no resistance at all so that the white-belter could relax and become familiar with the overall flow of the bodily movements.

The next *nage* was a female brown-belter. After observing her first defense execution, Shining-*sensei* approached her to instruct how to time the sequence of her footwork, turn and her hand drop so that one followed the other rather than together as one single motion. In his demonstration, he slowed down the motion to help exaggerate how the force generated from the turn in the pelvis passed to his arms and hands to unbalance the *uke*. The brown-belter observed *sensei* as he moved and tried to replicate the movement sequences in her motion. Watching her try to separate her footwork from the turn, and the turn from the arm drop, so as to use the course of the force’s travel to coordinate her motion, Shining-*sensei* added in caution and assurance, “It’s going to feel like a whole new thing!” She took position to invite the attack. As she was going through the movement, her eyes were not just looking at the *uke* but had a distant look in them, as if she was focusing internally to sense her own motion.

When the brown-belter finished her rounds of practicing both right-handed and left-handed attacks, the senior female black-belter took position to defend. The tall male black-belter posed the most resistance and made it quite difficult for her to execute the technique. She could not unbalance him. *Sensei* who was

observing from a distance away walked towards the pair and invited the blue-belter for the attack. When *sensei* got around to the back of his *uke*, he tipped over the blue-belter such that the latter's upper torso arched back, "Now, his spine is mine again!" And then added, "It's a trick, or what we call technique." Then he let the blue-belt go and turned to the female senior to observe her attempt again. The second time, her hold was able to make her *uke* arch backward, but she wasn't able to exploit the momentary opening to make him swerve. *Sensei* instructed her to place her hand over her *uke*'s elbow, not his upper arm, and added, "It's torque!" When she had shifted her contact point, the movement unfolded rapidly and her uncooperative *uke* landed solidly on the mat. *Sensei*'s assessment of her effort and movement coordination followed, "That was honest!" She had pulled out from within herself her best effort.

The last to go was an orange-belter for whom Shining-*sensei* went over to the garage door and pointed towards a spot at the *nage*'s eye level. When the orange-belter took on her first *uke* and prepared to bring the *uke*'s body around her, instead of looking at the *uke*, she kept her eyes steadfast on the distant spot at the other end of the hall throughout her motion. Whether she realized or not, this seemed to make her bodily frame more stable in relation to the flux of movement the technique was generating in the *uke*. When she had completed her round, Shining-*sensei* took her place and invited everyone to take turns attacking him on alternating sides. He went through each *uke* rhythmically, who after being thrown gathered themselves up quickly and scurried to the side of the mat so as not to get hit by the next falling body.

When he had thrown the last in line, he invited further attack. The first in line was the male black-belter who took the bait and strode towards *sensei* to strike his head. Rather than sliding forward to the safe spot, as in the earlier technique, Shining-*sensei* took a step back as the *uke* strode in for the strike. With one hand on the wrist of the striking arm and the other holding the attacker's elbow, *sensei* continued to carry the *uke's* striking arm past his torso. He pulled the *uke's* elbow towards the knot of his belt while dropping his hand that was on the *uke's* wrist. The sudden drop made the *uke's* upper torso bend forward, making him curl into a roll to protect himself in the fall. *Sensei* switched the position of his foot and invited the next in line for the *shomenuchi* attack. With his left-arm raised up for the strike, the blue-belter stepped in for the strike only to be pulled into the retreat motion *sensei* generated which left him no choice but to continue along the trajectory of his strike and roll off at the end to save himself. By now, everyone in line had figured out what was going on and prepared to take turns in attacking *sensei*. When *sensei* had completed fending himself off from all those in the line, he exchanged bows with the next *nage*, the practitioner taking up the role of the defender.

The six practitioners each took turns as *nage* to practice the technique. The movement demanded the coordination of a series of motions: keeping eye on the moving *uke*, stepping back slightly off the striker's line of attack, making contact with *uke's* arm, turning of one's pelvis, and finally timing the drop of hand for the release of contact with the *uke*, all of which have to fall together to sustain a moving flow. Although each *nage* had areas to work on and improve, the main

concern for Shining-*sensei* was maintaining the momentum of the strike throughout the motion of *uke*'s defense response: "All the momentum comes from [the *uke*'s] step and [the *nage*'s] retreat, not the pull." Making the movement flow involves not just mechanical connection and sequencing, but to engage the bodies as "two bodies, one mind." When standing on the mat as the *nage*, however, the view that bodies are self-contained and separate and that the subjective experience of each is beyond the comprehension of the other is the *modus operandi* for the majority of the practitioners. Suddenly *sensei* cried out, "Hai!" to signal everyone to stop whatever they are doing, and "*Kokyudosa* please!"

Wrap-up. For the last and third segment of practice, everyone usually pairs up to practice a technique called *kokyudosa*. It is a technique where two people sit on the mat facing each other in *seiza*. The more senior practitioner invites the junior to grab his or her wrist and in turn through the connection unbalance the other's at his or her "one-point." Once unbalanced, the *uke*'s body is swiveled around to make him or her lie on their back for final pinning. The *uke* checks how firm and stable the pin down is by trying to get back up. The two then switch roles and continue taking turns at the last technique until *sensei* calls out, "Hai!" Everyone stops whatever they were doing and scrambles to the invisible line and sits in *seiza*. *Sensei* also walks towards the center of the *shōmen* and sits down in *seiza* facing the row of sitting bodies. *Sensei* turns around to face the *shōmen* as in the opening of the practice session. All the practitioners synchronize with *sensei* as (s)he bows to the front wall. After rising up from the bow, *sensei* turns back to face the line. Now, the *sensei* and the practitioners exchange bows to

formally close the practice. This time, however, everyone in line cries out in unison, “Thank you, *sensei!*” After thanking *sensei* (or the senior who led the practice session), everybody shifts their position to face the partner they practiced with last. Once the bodies have locked to give attention to the other, both bow to the ground - as they had done to the *shōmen* and *sensei* - and cry out “Thank you, [name of partner]-san!”

Taking Leave

A brief spell of casual and relaxed chatter ensues on the mat. Some walk up to the weapons rack and pick up either a *bokken* or *jo* to practice the *katas* (the fixed sequence of movement exercises) in front of the large mirrors. Some of the juniors ask the *hakama*-wearing seniors for clarification or demonstration of a technique, which often leads to private instruction. For those experiencing discomfort in their bodies, they would ask certain members who have experience with *ki*-based massage for some relief. Those who have other engagements after practice slip into their shoes and head straight for the changing room to put on their street cloths. There is no fixed time at which the *dojo* closes. While still on the mat, the *hakama*-wearing black-belters untie the elaborate strap-work of their pleated pants. Once they get out of their *hakama*, some find an open spot on the mat to lay out their pants for its elaborate folding. While the female *hakama* wearing members skip this altogether and simply hang theirs on hangers in the changing room, the male members huddle near each other to arrange the pleats of their black *hakama* one by one while using this somewhat time consuming ritual to chat after practice. Before leaving the front office, members who have

forgotten to log in their attendance, would stand in front of the office desk, open the white binder, flip pages to locate their individual sheet and circle the date. If any monthly membership fees are owed, the payment ranging from \$65 for students to \$100 for adults, is often given to one of the senior members who record the payment in the member fee book.

Although most do not spend any more time than necessary after practice, a few curious minds would browse through the bookcase to see if any new book had recently been added. Books on Aikido comprise the largest portion in the *dojo*'s small collection of printed materials. It includes those authored by Ueshiba, the Founder of Aikido, by Gaku Homma who writes for contemporary American audience, and by Westbrook & Ratti, whose 1960s study of Aikido techniques written under the tutelage of the Founder is still widely read today. The *dojo* also has a copy of Tohei-*sensei*'s 1968 book, titled "This is Aikido", one of the first to use multiple-shot photography to capture basic Aikido techniques. Classics, such as Lao-Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, Chuang-Tzu, and Musashi's *A Book of Five Rings* – a Japanese martial strategy classic comparable to Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War* – are also on the bookcase. Now and then, Shinnig-*sensei* verbally references these classics when he elaborates on some general understanding about martial arts, training, or self-understanding. There are a few books on *budo*, or the way of the warrior. Other books, such as *ki*-based daily health practices, managing sports injuries, and a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* frequently referenced during *ki*-based pressure massage can also be found. Then finally, there are a few VHS video-tape

recordings of “promotional exams” and a handful of Aikido magazines that has since stopped printing.

When everyone finishes changing and the last body exits the practice hall, the spacious hall becomes empty again. Except for the fine layer of dust accumulating in some remote corner of the hall, no sign can be found that bodies had been rolling, thrown, and sweating on the mat just a while ago. The hall looks no different than when the first person had stepped in that afternoon and turn on the lights. Once again, one of the seniors checks to see if the last of the members have left, makes sure that all is in neat order so that the *dojo* can finally be closed for the night. The lights in the practice hall are the first to be turned off. In the front office, the “OPEN” sign on the sill of the huge office window is pulled down, chairs and binders tidied up, and the temperature of the heating/cooling system set at minimum. Finally, the office lights are switched off. Before exiting, the senior turns at the doorway towards the practice hall to extend a final bow, then steps across the threshold and closes the door tight. The *dojo*, once again, becomes lifeless and dark.

CHAPTER 5

Framing Aikido Practice

Technique 32: Ushiro-tori Kokyu-nage

(back-grab with timed throw)

From behind, the *uke* wraps his/her arms around your upper torso including your arms. Keep your arms relaxed and let them hang straight down while maintaining a constant outflow of *ki*. Keeping your hands open and fingers together, turn the inner side of your arms outward, open them, and raise them both slightly forward into a semi-circular shape. Take a step forward on your right foot.

While keeping good posture, lower your right hand with fingers pointing to the ground and raise your left hand in the rear without collapsing the semi-circular shape so that your *uke* rises off the floor. As you continue to lean your upper torso forward, the *uke* will fall over forward. (adapted from Tohei, 1968, pp. 150-153)

The above side caption comes from a book by the late Tohei sensei, a renowned master of Aikido. The caption accompanies a series of black and white photographs in which Tohei sensei is being seized by a fellow Japanese martial artist from the back. Both the photographs and the caption work together to describe the defense move as a sequence of motions generated by moving one's limbs and torso in a step by step manner that successfully sheds the attacker off. Devoid of any emotion, context or details, Aikido is presented as a system of identifiable units of movement, the so-called techniques, executed for their utilitarian results. Techniques are labeled, catalogued, and portrayed as a chain of mechanical actions that obviate attacks. What lies beneath and beyond these techniques, however, is left out. This chapter presents how one can alternatively render and perform the 'back grab with timed throw' drawn from "a closer, more intimate 'worm's-eye' view" (Nayak & Chia, 2011, p. 284) of practice at Shining Energy.

Attack

American martial artists, whether they know it or not ... are seeking to ground themselves in both a metaphysical and social sense. That their method of doing so is somewhat exotic and esoteric heightens the sense of mystery and magic which surrounds the quest, and intensifies feelings of shared (and special) experience. Trainees persevere in the cultivation of these arts, and see them as something extraordinary, something both rooted in the world and yet, by dint of their mystical components, outside of everyday experience. They seek something which bridges the gap

between the mundane and the supernatural, and transports men and women to a special place where power, identity and purpose are as neatly intertwined and as seamlessly united as the choreographed steps of a martial dance performed in a dream. (Donohue, 1994, p. 16)

Evasion

In *Warrior Dreams: The Martial Arts and the American Imagination*, Donohue (1994) examines the explosive popularity of East Asian martial arts in the U.S. Using *karate* as his primary case study, Donohue argues that it is the psychic allure of the art's ritual process, the "emotional and aesthetic pull that the martial *arts* exert on students" (emphasis in original, p. 2), more than the acquisition of physical techniques and efficacy or any quaint effort to preserve a particular way of life, philosophy, or ideology of a cultural system, that compels the American trainees to persist in their martial art studies with tenacity and enthusiasm.

The allure of the martial art training, according to Donohue, lies in its re-enactment of mortality play, that draw upon fear, power, and death through their emotionally charged activities played out at training halls. The training regimen is a ritual process, similar to the rite of passage (Gennep, 1960), that alters the physical and psychological predisposition of participants and groups through the manipulation of explicit and implicit symbols. The décor of the *dojo*, clothing, the highly structured organization, the intensely physical engagement throughout the "long, arduous, and often boring" training and finally, the supernatural overtones that loom around *ki* interpenetrate in the training ritual that generate a heightened

sense of altered state. This liminal period (V. W. Turner, 1967) serves as means to transport men and women to a dream-like place to deal with central problematic questions - questions about power, the quest for control, the search for identity, and the relationship of the individual to the group - for contemporary Americans living in highly modern and differentiated urban environments.

“If culture is interpreted as a mental construct used to impose order on the world,” Donohue explains, “then the instances in which order breaks down and chaos threatens are precisely the places in which human beings, as active agents in the process of the construction of culture, intervene to reassert a type of control” (p. 122). The chaos is the overly complex world Americans find themselves in and the means through which they can affirm their individual power is by appropriating foreign symbols and rituals and projecting their warrior dreams. These arts, according to Donohue, have undergone change, adaptation and reinterpretation in ways that have outstripped them from their original concern with perpetuating a particular ethnic identity in face of social transformation. In the case of the U.S., Donohue concludes, “The martial arts have found such a lodgment in the popular imagination due to the fact that their outward appearance is so different, their underlying meaning so familiar, and their symbolic structure is flexible enough to be melded into a new, syncretic cultural entity” (p. 124).

Centralization

The premise from which I launch my re-examination of cultural appropriation of martial arts practice in response to Donohue’s (1994) study is

based on an approach that seeks to immerse itself in (embodied) practice of the everyday life at Shining Energy. The aesthetic and emotional pull of the martial arts is crucial: “One cannot speak adequately of ritual,” Bourdieu writes, “unless one understands that ritual is essentially behavior that is both ‘sensible’ and devoid of sense intention” (1990, p. 18). Yet, the practice of martial art is eminently a productive activity beyond the utilization of bodily ritual as a vehicle to serve the dreaming mind and to reestablish cultural order. The “profane” physical world, as Donohue (1994) takes for granted, is not ready-made with distinct recognizable features waiting patiently for our engagement. Aikido practitioners draw in objects, symbols, and corporeal assemblages as levers, rather than as ends in themselves, in the flux and flow of the connections and disconnections to compose their practice. Rather than seeking transcendent equilibrium or balance, the doing and making of Aikido practice immerses the practitioners in the thralls of unpredictable events through which the sinews of their body must cultivate the capacity to feel their way *in situ* and to keep moving along in face of blockages and impasse to find openness.

The immersion in the everyday practice at the Aikido dojo, therefore, invites a composition that is more horizontal than centralizing in scope. Such composition comprises a series of events along an axial movement-line through an imbrication of difference, where my rendering moves them out in many directions, penetrating and being penetrated by each other to reveal their uniqueness. Seeing and moving over time and space amidst the flow of the social life of an Aikido dojo in an on-going and evolving interactions in such fashion

produces an account that is dispersive and open-ended: “There is no telescopic vista, to let the visual rays pass through a large space, to hit a high façade, and to disclose dramatically a final center, a final ‘truth’” (Zhu, 2004, p. 242). Theory, in this light, is used not “to explain or represent but to provide a toolkit to engage and expand the world” (Cadman, 2009, p. 4).

Neutralization

Entrapping the practice of Aikido. At Shining Energy, a multiplicity of forms and formations frame the moving bodies and the moving bodies, in turn, shape and produce. Their positive forms stand out and catch the attention of visitors. Most notable cluster of practices that the moving bodies hold together are presenting techniques by senseis, practicing in dyads in pairs or groups, and correcting techniques by sensei and seniors in the flow of the daily practice session. They help delineate boundaries to construct, grab attention, and display (Grosz, 2005) body-based activities at the dojo. They are styled and scripted practices, constituting community knowledge whose authority hinges on proximity. These practices are also forms of attention-giving that demand nuanced coordination and execution based on corporeal (inter)subjectivity (Grosz, 1994) that assemble the heterogeneous elements of the body, senses and mind on which “coming to practice” is at stake.

The shape of Aikido movement forms take on unassuming fluidity where limbs of the performer are kept close to the ground compared to the more explosive combat styles, such as karate, taekwondo, judo, Wing Chun, kickboxing, and mixed martial arts. Whether the attack is initiated by a strike, punch, or grab,

the Aikido response avoids direct confrontation, locking in struggle, and delivering a counterstrike. Instead, the movement of a skilled martial artist integrates, however momentarily, with the planes of movement force of an oncoming attack to find a point of inflection to change the vector of the initial attack with dexterity and calmness.

For the first technique, Energy-*sensei* who was standing in front of the shōmen called up a senior black-belter as the *uke*, who immediately collected himself up from *seiza* and ran up to the front wall across from sensei. She said, “*yokomen-uchi*”, a swing-strike at the side of her face. The uke took a half step back while folding up his right arm next to his side, like drawing the string of a bow. With a placid smile on her face and eyes twinkling, she stood motionless with both arms resting at her side. Her posture was erect with ribs held out broadly. With his eyes fixed on sensei’s head, the uke lunged. While taking a large step forward with his right foot, his right arm began to unfold in air as his intention zeroed in on the left temple of sensei. The blade of his right hand extended out forward to strike the target. Without batting an eye, Energy sensei slid back half a step while turning slightly out of uke’s line of attack as his arm was nearing its full reach. She rotated her right forearm as if to shoo a fly buzzing near her face just as the uke’s strike reached his now empty target. This hooked her free hand on the wrist of uke’s striking arm, which remained hooked even as she brought her own hand down to the center line of her torso. The motion was smooth and nonchalant. Her facial

expression did not flinch and her posture remained unperturbed as if she were standing alone. “Does it look like I am doing martial arts?” she asked. The uke was teetering on his forward foot unable to retract his extended arm to recover his balance. While keeping him in that posture, sensei slid past the uke’s arm into the safe opening without losing either the grip or tension at their point of contact. Her torso turned towards the uke’s as she slid out of the his view and keeping his extended arm at her side. The uke remained off balance, but his torso began to rotate accordingly. “Does it look like I am doing martial arts?” she cried out again. The contour of her movement was one single solid line without any overt muscularity in her limbs or tension in her facial expression. Once she stood outside of the uke’s field of vision, she brought her hand that was holding his wrist slightly towards her chest. Then with both her hands clasped around his hand, and asked us who were sitting in seiza and watching, “Does it look like I am doing martial art?” I shook my head from side to side. With both hands now lightly clasping the uke’s hand, Energy sensei lifted it across her chest then brought it down to the side of her hip furthest away from the uke, making his arm stretch out and his upper torso arch back. No longer able to hold such a contorted posture, the uke crumpled into a back fall.

She then turned to us commenting how people perceive Aikido as being weak because the lack of flair in its movement forms. She added, that what she did was easy, not demanding much effort. “But making it easy,” she added, “takes

discipline.” The discipline she was referring to is focusing, taking posture and readying only those muscle fibers and limbs without fidgeting and launching into smooth response attuned to the uke’s intention and possible motions.

While observing sensei present and demonstrate the technique, I was trying to imagine how she may have reassembled her limbs and muscles underneath her skin to generate such solid line of force movement. The synchrony with which she moved with her uke and controlled both their bodies made me wonder if the two had practiced for the demonstration beforehand. Once physical contact was made, however small in contact surface or brief in time duration, her bodily collectivity coordinated the upper and the lower limbs while maintaining centeredness in her comportment so as not to inject unnecessary noise in the bodily dynamics between her and the uke.

She took her stance at the center of the shōmen again inviting the uke, who now stood back on his feet, to strike her for the second time. The uke took position then lunged in for his strike. Sensei withdrew as before while hooking her hand to uke’s wrist and brought it down to her side, setting the uke off balance. She slid to the safe opening next to the uke’s hip. As if someone had pressed the play back button, sensei suddenly traced her steps back to her initial position of evasion then let the uke’s wrist go. The uke remained in that position, or at least tried as best he could to stay in freeze frame. Sensei walked alongside his arm as a replay so that we could compare the two instances of her sliding in. Her motion looked the same as the earlier instance. She said, “Walk naturally”. She

then went back to her safe spot for the third time. The uke was still teetering in his freeze frame mode. Sensei grabbed the wrist of the uke to re-establish their contact then extended it out as if it were something dangerous then began to walk like a penguin: rocking from side to side with each step she took as her upper torso shifted in the same direction as her foot. “There is no need to re-invent the walk!” she exclaimed. All of us sitting in line and watching sensei walk laughed.

In addition to demonstrating the technique, Energy-sensei was reminding the practitioners what looks easy can sometimes be the most difficult thing to do and what we see in a technique and what we do when executing a technique are not the same. She was also partly parodying the tendency among eager practitioners during training to get so caught up in the idea of doing “martial art” that movements become absurdly unnatural, especially for those who cannot resist breaking down the technique into step one - step two - step three and follow their serial formula that they forget to attune not only to the movement of their uke, but also to their own walking!

In presenting techniques, senseis demonstrate the form multiple times at varying speeds, showing contrasts between a “wrong” and the “correct” move. Explanations to help highlight key footwork, pelviswork, handwork, or even mindwork are brief and never verbose. Shining sensei frequently contextualizes how a technique is to be executed by juxtaposing how movement effects can differ when relying solely on muscle strength without bodymind coordination from concentrating on ‘one-point’ and using *ki*. These methods of

contextualization are pedagogical framings to foreground and make perceptible the fact that mimicking a technique based on its appearance alone, or what we believe we see, often does not produce the desired effect on the uke. Reason being, heterogeneous elements assembled in corporeal motion that affect his or her uke can be astoundingly detailed and subtle, as Energy-sensei explains:

...how much the angle of a hip joint can alter the security of balance. How control of core muscles extended through the hand, into the hand of an attacker can engage their core muscles, so that with two fingers I can get control of their movement. But not understanding that until learning about what the lats would do and then learning the feel for it in myself and feel for it in someone else.

The scale of physiological features involved in generating effective movement control in face of the degrees of freedom problem (Rosenbaum, 2010) - the problem of having infinite number of options in combining muscles both small and large, limbs, joints, position and force of movement in space and time – can be mind-boggling. Moreover, the cumulative learning over time needed to cultivate the vivacity of the senses to feel those elements and their compensatory relationality not only alters one's capacity of movement control but affects the (mis)communicability of one's experience and understanding with others.

The nature of knowledge and skill of movement-based art is, therefore, not timeless but highly dependent on time and duration of one's martial art practice. At Shining Energy, communicating one's understanding becomes conditional, strategic and situational. Senseis are more than happy to demonstrate, but rarely

discuss the depth of detail or insights they have gained over their three decade long practice during regular training sessions. Many of the student-practitioners lag behind in terms of coordination, feel, and disciplined control, certainly. Yet, being showered with such discrete descriptions of movement coordination and their innumerable possibilities are discouraging because they become material concern for learners which often results in bogging down rather than facilitating their technique execution and practice. When senseis provide suggestions or corrections, they caution that what they say is not a writ; however insightful and effective their feedback, it is not to be carried over to the next day, practice, or person. James-san, who has been practicing under the two senseis for the last ten years, likens them to keepers of a map store whose role is not one of imparting knowledge or skill but providing maps to practitioners for their individual wayfinding journey. So, any gap in understanding between what practitioners observe during demonstration and experience and skill needed to produce technique movements that approach what senseis perform are not filled by explanations or discussions, but by practicing with partners - by the very medium where skill must reside, movement.

Asymmetric structure of participation. As a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Shining Energy is sustained by a co-dependent structure of responsibility and accountability that parallels the martial art skill of its practitioners, namely the sensei(s), seniors, and juniors. The two head instructors are, without a doubt, central figures at the dojo. They are accorded respect, authority, and even reverence because they outrank everyone else in terms of their

skill, knowledge and experience with the martial art techniques, breathing and *ki*-based exercises, *ki*-therapy, and meditation - the five pillars of the martial art. They also outrank in terms of their dedication to the art and its community. Each instructor alternates in taking turns leading weekly practice sessions that take place every day except Sunday, Labor Day, and Christmas and New Year holidays. They are rarely absent. They also attend as well as host seasonal camps that gather the more advanced practitioners from dojo around the U.S. to practice with, learn from, and be tested by the president of the Aikido Kokikai association who flies in from Japan for the two to three day intensive camp programs. The head instructors also organize regional weekend seminars held at the dojo and are, in turn, invited separately by other dojo to instruct special weekend seminars. Members of the dojo community call them “sensei” (先生 in *kanji*, which refers to a person who guides another about living in the world, like that of a teacher), a title to index the position of authority and respect they hold and are expected to hold at the dojo. Their first names are attached in front of the title – such as Shining-sensei and Energy-sensei – only to help distinguish one from the other.

The next group of practitioners whose form stands out is the seniors. Practitioners who fall in this group shift depending on the context because, unlike the title sensei, the label is a derivative of the Japanese ‘*senpai*’, a relational term rather than a positional one that calibrates seniority based on when the member entered the group life. At Shining Energy, however, the label generally refers to those black-belters wearing *hakama*, and at times includes brown-belters, all of who bear keys to the dojo. Only those who have earned a black belt are graded by

*dan*², a ranking system that marks their entry into the path of the art, can wear the dark pleated pants. When practicing techniques, the movement form, line, and rhythm that the bodies of seniors produce are significantly more fluid and efficient than the color belt juniors. As *nage* (the ‘defender’ who must work with the vector of an attack), their stance and facial expression exude confidence and readiness to confront the oncoming attack of the *uke* (the ‘attacker’ who injects the initial vector that elicits *nage*’s defense technique). Their time commitment is noteworthy but less stringent than the schedule the *senseis* command. The seniors assist the *senseis* and provide second layer of instruction and help socialize the juniors to role-based tasks, responsibilities, and etiquette at the dojo.

Although there are more than ten hakama-wearing seniors that I have seen in the course of my one and a half years of Aikido practice at the dojo, only seven actively attend the weekly practice sessions. Their age ranges from mid-twenties to mid-sixties and many of them have practiced Aikido for over ten years. Four out of the seven active seniors, that is, one female and three male seniors, help in instructing and leading additional classes for kids who are 4 years-old and up at the dojo and for college and university students at university sports club or physical education curriculum. Each senior are either in charge of leading one class session per week throughout the year at the dojo or two sessions per week at a school gym for the duration of regular school semester. The non-regular seniors whose presence on the mat is sporadic are also very skilled practitioners. Their bodies move upright in posture, unhesitatingly and deftly in relation to the oncoming attack. Yet despite their skillful form, some have stopped attending

practice. Family, economic, or time constraint was the main reason for some, while it was boredom with practice or frustration with the lack of progress in their art for others. However, when they do drop in the dojo like a comet, they slip into their *gi* (white denim-like cotton uniform) and hakama and take part in the practice session as if they had never been absent. Even though their bodily movements may have patterned away from their earlier agility and effectiveness, they will instruct and work with the less skillful members during technique practice.

The seniors, who are invariably eclipsed by the charisma and reverence accorded to the head instructors, serve a crucial function at the dojo. When a newcomer joins the dojo, the hakama-wearing senior will take turns attending the newcomer to ease him or her into the general features of practice, especially the warm-ups, technique forms, and most importantly the falls. The bodies of white-belters are considered to be “dangerous” and so senseis and seniors closely monitor and work with the newcomer until his or her limbs can coordinate into the backward fall smoothly and safely. The guidance includes demonstration for modeling, verbal directives, and sometimes straightforward adjustments of arm or foot position with their hands. Explanations or principles are offered by the senseis. The guidance from seniors, in contrast, are geared to getting the newcomer to move from point A to point B without overloading him or her with details that (s)he becomes too overwhelmed to follow.

Seniors also guide juniors in gaining familiarity with fundamental aspects of the social life at the dojo, be it the social structure of practice, movement coordination, or responsibilities to help keep an orderly and clean practice hall.

Like other practitioners, I was sitting on the mat in seiza waiting for the practice session to open. A black-belter, who finished tying up the four straps of his hakama nearby, took his seat in line and gestured with his hand to people on his left and right to line up their knees to his. A few moved as he bid, but I as an orange belt did not understand what he was doing. I was perhaps only an inch short of where his knees were and did not budge from my position annoyed at him for once again making an issue out of the oddest details. Then someone even more senior to him approached from behind and explained that on the mat, when people sit in a line, we must line up to the most senior person in that line. I then scooted, making sure that my knees in seiza were in line with the latter's knees.

Such social norms cannot be found in manuals, website, or taught overtly by senseis, but are instead reminded now and then by certain seniors who, at the risk of being perceived as fickle and annoyingly picky, find value in fostering a particular ethos and relational structure at the dojo. It is their engagement more than the senseis that increase the internal homogeneity of the dojo by making sure that routine associations are taught and acted upon.

The third and last group of practitioners is those wearing color belts - ranging from white, orange, blue to brown indicating novice to nearing black belt respectively. Skill at this level is differentiated not by *dan*, but by *kyu*, a

proficiency-based system used prior to *dan*. Not only do the corporeal contours vary, ranging from tall and lanky to stiff and short and even to very rotund figures, the lines of their movements vary as well, from angular, robotic, and light/heavy-footed to very elaborate. In executing techniques with an uke, the juniors inject more than necessary movements in shoulders, muscular exertion and thought that usually make their motions exaggerated, disjointed and less efficient. Their Aikido movements are in large part their habituated way of moving rearranged to mimic the motions of a technique. Their movements, therefore, stand separate in form and feel from their bodies, rather than emerge from the vectors and physiological characteristics their counterparts inject in their attack. Moreover, compared to the seniors who are able to fall backwards, forwards, or sideways abruptly and without injuring themselves, the juniors struggle to become proficient at falling. As juniors become more skillful, the more likely senior members will practice techniques with him or her at closer to normal speed. Some of the upper-ranking juniors are asked by sensei to lead warm-up segment of the practice. For the most part, however, the color belts follow the practice session as structured by the senseis and seniors and in turn participate on average three times a week.

Robert-san, who had once been a senior at Shining Energy, currently runs a dojo in a nearby suburb instructing Aikido to a group of beginners. He explains that without any seniors, “the cultural aspect is difficult.”

There [are] no seniors to teach them things that the instructor typically wouldn't teach. // And I'm telling them at the same time as I share this

with them, “Normally an instructor wouldn’t share this. Normally it is up to seniors to share this. But since there are no seniors, I am doing this.” Because I’m going to bring them at some point to the Shining Energy, they need to know this.

[...]

I’ve been fortunate when I started training at Shining Energy, I always had seniors to show [me] that...the expectations for juniors is always...take care of the things, the basic things of the dojo...the mats [and bathrooms] are always clean...folding your instructor’s hakama...so they don’t have to. //...because your instructor’s time is the most precious resource they have.

In effect, Robert-san is taking on a double role at the risk of undermining the authority that his position as the head instructor is supposed to command because he does not want his students feel estranged or out of place when they visit and join practice at another Aikido dojo. The difficulty with the cultural aspect that Robert-san is referring to underscores the fact that dojo is not an outcome of the one-on-one interaction between the instructor and his/her students, but a product of co-dependent yet asymmetric structure of social participation whose byproduct is skillfulness. His need to explicitly instruct his students about implicit obligations and responsibility in group life in place of seniors demonstrates that not only are the seniors crucial, the novice students, however untrained and unskilled, already participate in the process of producing the dojo, even if limited

in degrees and responsibilities, what Lave and Wenger call “legitimate peripheral participation” (1991, p. 102).

Territorializing the field. In addition to the key figures at the dojo, the wearing of *gi* (white cotton uniforms), the *tatami*-like mats and the walls at the practice hall are vital infrastructure in producing social and material relationships for movement exploration. The clear, definitive, and distinctive objects are material and semiotic resources which are actively appropriated (Rogers, 2006) by practitioners to generate the ritualized movement forms and the spatial and territorial planes that entrap the Aikido practice and bind the social life at Shining Energy. They help generate a *field*, an interactional context constituted by various social agents participating in “the major areas of practice” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170), on which the style of *habitus*, an agglomeration of tendencies and predispositions that individuals acquire (Bourdieu, 1990), that practitioners recognize as Aikido are stabilized and cultivated.

All practitioners wear *gi*, the denim-like cotton uniform. Like jeans, it withstands tough wear – the innumerable falls, grabs, pulls, and washings. But unlike jeans, it facilitates place-making (Ingold, 2011) of the dojo from the flow of everyday life. As Shining-sensei explains,

Coming through the door, into the dojo, stepping into the uniform, putting on the jacket, getting onto the mat, says this is an important time in your life. This is an important place in this world. And so people will focus in a way that would not happen if they did not make the break from the everyday.

Although material artifacts which grab the attention of visitors become diversionary minutiae for the regular practitioners overtime, they form an important frame for intercultural interaction, “a frame which” according to Roth (2001) “is only rarely an indifferent one” (p. 569). Wearing *gi* not only differentiates the practice from the everyday, but also subdues social markings, including gender distinction, that help loosen up close physical contact from the scrutiny of everyday social norms to open another field of corporeal possibilities for executing techniques.

“Hug me,” said the senior I was practicing *kokyunage* (timed throw) with. I was standing perpendicular to my uke with my right arm thrown across his chest and hand over his left shoulder. My left hand gripped tight at a fold of his uniform over his left shoulder blade. I pushed his chest with my right shoulder and arm while tugging hard with my other hand towards the ground. He did not budge. “Hug me,” he said again. “I am,” I replied even though I could not see how hugging could help when using my strength certainly didn’t. I continued pushing and pulling. He tapped my forearm. I stopped what I was doing. With both hands, he grabbed my arm that was across his chest. He repositioned it so that my arm wasn’t just thrown across his chest. He pressed my forearm onto the flat surface of his chest as if to glue as much of the surface of my arm to his chest. The readjustment pulled my torso into fuller contact with his side. At that very moment, I felt through the contact the fullness of my partner’s corporeality flash through my arms. His long-limbed stature took on voluminous

density for the first time. He said, “Hug me.” I was tickled and confused. How was I to fully hug a person I did not know well? I was relieved that there were several layers of “thick” clothing between the senior and me. I maintained the contact and then used its entire surface to push and tug. My partner began to sway back and then rolled onto his back.

The first few times were unnerving. But with repeated practice over many months, the “hug” became a stethoscope I use to fuzzily sense the feature of an uke’s built - his or her skeletal frame, the height and the density of their corporeality, and the tautness with which they hold their limbs together - in order to grope my way up their posture to their spine.

Even though the *gi* wraps around the body of the practitioners, more than any other material in the practice hall, the bodies of the practitioners are in constant contact with the mat. Free of slope and bumps, the texture of the mat panels helps to produce smoothness and consistency of practice ground critical “for the explorations of excesses of gravity and movement” (Grosz, 2005, p. 13). When doing *ukemi*, the small and large rolls that ukes execute to protect themselves when being thrown abruptly off balance, Energy-sensei often reminds practitioners, “Try to feel the surface of the mat with every inch of your body that comes into contact with it.” Rather than doing a roll by thinking roll, it is a roll that emerges from feeling surfaces intensely and even “sensuously”. The mat, in this sense, is not simply an interface between gravity and the body, but a membrane in deep physical contact with martial art bodies between which *ukemi* can be squeezed and smooshed out. Other times, the tentacles of one’s feet - the

five toes and the ball of one's foot – is ironed out onto the surface of the mat to stack up one's leg, pelvis, and spinal column securely as an axis around which the body of the uke is swung.

The numerous mat panels are held together by the wooden frame to provide uniform surface, but temperature change causes mats to sometimes shrink that result in enlarging cracks large enough for toes to get caught in. When a practitioner notices such a crack, even if in middle of technique practice, (s)he will ask those in the area to step aside and help push the mat panels around so that the crack disappears. Also, any jewelry, hairpins, or other small personal items are removed in the changing room before stepping onto the mat. Small objects can and have ended up between the body of the practitioner and the mat in ways that are more pernicious than innocuous. The story of a death of a particular practitioner of an unspecified dojo is told to newcomers who do not heed directions for proper attire on the mat. The practitioner had forgotten to remove his necklace and the one time he fell on his back, the tip of his cross-shaped pendant ended up penetrating between the two vertebrae in his neck.

In addition to the intimacy between the texture of the mat, bodies and gravity, the contours of the mat space is used to prod juniors to embody the 'martial' *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990), namely correct posture and one-point. When a junior is able to keep up with the pace and shape of the exercises, knows how to fall appropriately, and is receptive to suggestions and corrections from senseis and seniors, the seniors will collude to launch stealth checks on the junior. Shielded by anonymity other bodies on the mat provide, a senior maneuvers surreptitiously

to nudge or tug quietly at the limbs and backs of juniors to shape up their ‘martial’ disposition, namely keeping “one-point” and maintaining good posture.

One day, while standing in line waiting for my turn to do the *ukemi*, I felt a slight push at my lower back that forced me to take a step forward to keep my balance. In surprise, I turned my head at the direction of the push but all I found behind me was a line of bodies with innocent looks waiting for their turn to be the *uke* for the group practice. Another time, my wrist was lifted while I stood watching intently at a pair practice a technique. The checks interrupted my thought and called my attention back to my body. It was frustrating. Realizing that it was going to happen again without a means to stop it, the next time it happened, I gestured at the spot the hand had touched as if to swat an irritating insect. Seeing this, a senior nonchalantly told me, “Keep your one-point”. In the beginning, it was difficult to “divide” up my attention between maintaining awareness of my body and watching what others were doing on the mat. With the accumulation of my Aikido practice over time, the “trick” was not willful concentration but cultivating awareness and feeling for a comfortable arrangement among my limbs and muscles groups in the way they rested on my spinal column and balls of my feet. The stealth checks also become less frequent. Over time, I myself would develop an eye to identify those individual seniors who had been complicit in the stealth checks and look for the moment to nudge their lower backs in return when they were not maintaining their own centered focusedness.

One time, after closing the practice session with the last exchange of bows between the senior who had been my last practice partner and me, he told me to bow to him again. He sat in seiza and I thought he was picking on me again and was now using my bow as an excuse. I could not believe that he would be pulling ranks, a typical tactic used by seniors to haze juniors into subordination. The sitting bow where one's upper torso is bent over as if to touch the back of one's hands placed on the ground was reserved for special occasions in Korea. It was performed mainly to significant figures in one's life, especially to grandparents and ancestors. He was neither of them. But I bowed to play along to see what his intentions were.

I did my bow cursorily only because the senior had bid. He had been the very senior who had discouraged me when I bowed willingly to thank him! He directed me to do it again. I was exasperated. Shining-sensei stood nearby to observe the interaction. When I came out of the bow for the third, the senior told me not to lift my hands and fall into the bow, but instead slide my hands down my thighs and when it touched the ground to then go into a bow. The senior explained that I failed to maintain my center and made my posture vulnerable. He then mimicked my bow and then did the martial version as a comparison. Shining-sensei pulled at one of the senior's arm. The pyramid-like structure of his seiza did not crumble.

Even though the mismatch between what the senior sought in a bow and the relational significance that I imbued in the gesture was jarring, the point he made

came as a surprise. Begrudgingly I had to concede. I had never considered the possibility that there could be a material basis to such symbolic gesture which I had grown up doing. But to have an American, whose own everyday custom I deemed as being far less overtly ritualized than that of my own, actually teach me how to do a deep bow both offended me and at the same time struck an odd cord that brought flash backs of how I had been taught by my own parents. It took me years to understand and perform appropriately the divergent nuances in a bow to communicate the nature of the relationship and the occasion. Oblivious of a bow's rich expressivity, the senior brought to fore and focused solely on the martial dimension of a bow which I had never been shown or taught.

Inside the large practice hall, a calligraphy of the *kanji* character “氣” hangs at the center of the main wall, referred to as the *shōmen*. The idea of walls having “proper face” can be traced back to Buddhist and Taoist influence, where the layout of building structures, especially temples, was dictated by geomantic positioning (Dumoulin, 2005). It was often the case that the shrine was placed at the northern wall of the temples. The *shōmen* at the dojo aligns with its northern wall as well. The concern at the dojo, however, lies less in following the precepts of geomancy, than to have the *shōmen* fabricate a space in which material effects on its social relations can be produced: “The wall divides us from the world on one side, though it provides new connections, new relations, social and interpersonal relations, with those on its other side” (Grosz, 2005, p. 13). When entering the mat, the martial art practitioners take off their slippers and step onto the mat from the lower-left corner whereas the senseis enter from the upper-right

corner. On the mat, the sensei or the one who leads the practice that sits underneath the character “氣” while the rest sit on their knees in a single line across the mat facing the shōmen to open and close the daily practice session.

The shōmen serves as the compass that help organize the various bodily positioning and formations on the mat throughout the practice session. At the opening and closing of each practice session, all members turn and bow to the shōmen from their seiza. For the first opening bow of the practice, all bodies bend forward in unison toward the wall without uttering a sound to express gratitude to the founder and predecessors of the art who opened the path of cultivation. Then the sensei swivels on his or her knees to face the practitioners. As soon as the sensei settles in seiza, the line of bodies and the single personality exchange bows. When a session is being closed, however, loud voices accompany the second bow in varying pitch and tone, “Thank you, sensei!” When everyone returns to their upright sitting position, a third bow is added. Sensei says, “Please thank your last partner!” and each member turns to face their last practicing partner and bow. As each bows down to the mat, voices fill up the hall: “Thank you George-san!” “Thank you Jieyoung-san!” and “Thank you David-san!” Within the confines of the dojo walls, and especially when addressing practicing members while on the mat, the Japanese honorific suffix “-san” is attached to people’s names to signal respect to peers. When the practice is over, practitioners can lean on the shōmen and lounge and run on the mat as they please.

Becoming accustomed to bowing to the shōmen was not easy, for I did not wish to inadvertently participate in serving god(s), however insignificant or

obscure³. Many weeks had passed before anyone explained its significance which put my unease to rest. During promotional exams, the interplay between the walls, mat, and bodies in distinguishing seniority and bodily placement becomes even more formalized and elaborate. After opening the day's training session followed by a brief warm-up and technique practice, the senseis sit in front of the shōmen. From that position, they direct the hakama-wearing seniors to sit along the wall perpendicular to shōmen on their right beginning with the highest-ranking senior. On the opposite side of the mat from the shōmen, color-belters are asked to sit in one single file starting with the most senior in that group sitting nearest to the last black-belter all the way across the edge of the mat toward the doorway. Once the sitting arrangement is complete, senseis explain the etiquette expected from the examinees when each is called up for testing.

What is produced by having practitioners sit like a fence around the mat is a large rectangular space that reinforces the seniority-based status system at the dojo. Simultaneously, with all bodies and eyes turned toward the senseis and into the center of the rectangular frame, the bodily formation not only differentiates the occasion from daily practice sessions, but also injects intensity - a field (Bourdieu, 1990) charged with disposition and force, or what Jullien (1995) and Zhu (2004) describe as *shi* based on their examination of Sun Tzu's classic text, *The Art of War* – into the center. The examinee inhabits a field in which (s)he does not know *a priori* what (s)he may be required to perform. The indeterminacy is generated by executing moves called out to her by the senseis that must satisfy the basic features of the technique while maintaining the four principles of the art,

and the indeterminacy of her means in the form of *uke* of varying bodily and skill characteristics who are called up by the senseis throughout the duration of his or her test. Becoming the focus of everybody's attention and scrutiny heightens not only the examinee's self-consciousness, but all those who are called forth to serve as bodily extensions of the senseis in checking postures and movement techniques. Proximity also affords those present to not only bear witness to the event and observe the procedure of the exam, but also become constitutive elements of the flow of the exam. Such unfamiliar configuration of relationality that produces the ceremonial intensity is an "invisible" challenge that the examinee must learn to work with.

Even at seasonal camps, which draw in the more advanced Aikido practitioners from across the country, the territorializing of the practice ground is one of the key tasks that organizers face. Whether the training takes place inside a gym or in an open outdoors, a super-size mat is laid down to cover the existing ground surface.

In middle of an indoor basketball gym, a mega-large mat covering nearly the full length of the court has been prepared for the intensive camp program. Columns of foam rolls had been trucked in, unloaded, rolled out, and duct taped together on glistening hardwood covered with multiple layers of polyurethane lacquer. Sheets of bleached canvas were thrown over the foams to keep the mat surface dry from sweat and comfortable for the bare feet, creating a large rectangular ground in middle of the gym.

Of course, however careful an attention is given to setting up the mats, now and then injuries and accidents ensue. At one of the camps many years ago, Shining-sensei's large toe was not able to keep up with sudden turning on the balls of his foot due to the stickiness of the mat's surface. In addition to smoothing out the ground, walls are also created at camps.

A loud hum from the ventilator system roared in the background. One row of benches had been pulled out from the wall to provide seating for friends and family wanting to watch the training and testing. Men and women in gi walk through the gym doors with bags of all shapes and sizes slung over their shoulders and backs. They walked around looking for the most convenient spot from which they could access their gear. A large banner-like scroll with the kanji character “氣” also hung in a large wooden frame near the edge of the mat to indicate the shōmen.

The side of the mat closest to the hanging scroll was reserved for the president of the Aikido Kokikai association to enter and exit the mat. Although the practitioners did not sit in straight lines across the mat as they would back in their respective dojos, they nevertheless entered the mat from the opposite side from the shōmen and sat in rows of imperfect lines. The ceremonial bowing toward the shōmen to open and close practice was conducted at each of the training sessions interspersed from morning until late afternoon. The shōmen and the mat help produce the dojo on top of the pre-existing indoor basketball court that territorialize the corporeal co-existence (Cache, 1995, p. 23) to enable another spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991) to emerge, however temporary.

Due to the unperturbed and constant presence of the walls and the *tatami*-like mats as a backdrop that foregrounds bodily movements, it is easy to overlook their constitutive role in the practice of martial art until one must practice without them. In describing some of the challenges of running a practice group outdoors for four years, Robert-san explains, “[some students] think not having an indoor space...is difficult.” Even though Robert-san was careful to hold the practice according to the time of the day and weather conditions, displayed the character “氣” to mark the shōmen in open space, and made sure that his students wore protective clothing and footwear appropriate to train on surfaces of park greens, driveways, and backyards, such partitioning measures using existing contours of the outdoors could not make up for the need some students had for the more overt architectural partitionings: “Man’s feeling about being properly oriented in space runs deep” (Edward. T. Hall, 1966, p. 105).

The technique forms, the wearing of *gi*, the multiple bowings, the Japanese terminology used to label techniques and positional titles, and the décor that mark a particular spatial production are cultural elements that take part in the production of the dojo and the practice of Aikido. As traces, they can be gathered as evidence to claim that the U.S. practitioners are appropriating an art form that is Japanese in origin to satisfy the needs and interests divergent from the art’s original significance, thereby giving way to cultural syncretism (Donohue, 1994). In the relentless making of practice, the cultural products and artifacts express not so much themselves, but function as levers and pulleys mediating between objects and persons in an ongoing process beyond the constituent components. However,

the excess that is produced is not reclaimed by existing cultural unconscious, such as the American warrior dream as Donohue argues. Rather it is used to repossess the process, the making of the making of Aikido movement - “the opening of the field” (Cooper, 1976, p. 1007).

The making of the making of Aikido movements. The corporeal movements of practitioners ceaselessly form, disband, and form anew pair and group formations. Their bodies move to the structured clusters of activities. The warm-up, technique practice, and wrap-up to establish focus and calm comprise the group-level formations. The technique practice subsumes a set of distinct relational interactions: presenting technique by sensei, practicing technique in pairs or groups, and correcting techniques by sensei and seniors. These formations delineate a temporal and spatial process distinctive from the Euclidian metric space and the discrete units of clock time. They implicate not only the bodies of master-instructors and apprentice-practitioners, but the interspace between them, the latent field of relationships from which technique movements are drawn out, but also “a space of new possibilities; it intimates and reveals new ways of creating the world” (Cooper, 2007, p. 1554). They structure the flux and flow of movements and mediate the web of relationality between space, body and force that corporeal movements implicate so that when movements are launched across the mat, as Candice-san explained, their trajectories do not tangle up and turn the practice session into a circus.

The most fundamental relationality from which all Aikido defense techniques are spun out is the *nage-uke* dyad, the confrontational set-up where the

uke swiftly moves in the interactional field with the intention of capturing, immobilizing, or harming the body proper of the nage. In response, the nage must extricate him or herself from the oncoming attack either by running away or by engaging it. At Shining Energy, what is practiced is how to engage the oncoming bodymind assemblage and its moving flux without causing injury to both parties. It is such response, how to engage attacks, and its many variations that Tohei sensei's book (1968) documents.

I walked upto Alice-san, both of us orange belts, and looked at her foot to make sure that my striking hand mirrors the side of her forward foot. From about two steps away, I drew back my right arm, looked at my partner to make sure she was ready for me to attack. She was looking straight into my eyes, so I stepped forward with my right foot and brought my right hand around to strike at her left temple for the *yokomen-uchi*. Before my hand reached its target, she stepped away from her original position, making me strike at empty air. Alice-san got hold of my moving hand, prohibiting me from recovering my stance. She kept the weight of my balance tilting forward while she walked around my arm and then walked out of my view. Although I could have yanked my hand free from her hold as the pace of her motion was thoughtfully unhurried, I kept it where it was so that she could move through without interruption. I felt my arm and shoulder being stretched out and the forward tilt in my balance shifted towards my lower back and legs. From where she stood, she did something to my hand that made me want to fall back in order to protect it

from possible injury. After collapsing into a backward fall, I rocked myself back up and repositioned again as the uke for the left-hand attack. Following sensei's technique demonstration, multiple dyadic fields are unleashed across the mat at sensei's specification, such as in pairs, in threes, or in groups of so-and-so. Each pair of practitioners holds up con-frontational encounter from which the technique movement gets rolled out through the dyadic interplay. Technique practice is a cooperative venture between the nage and the uke where emphasis is placed on the nage to draw out the defense movement from beginning to its end and from one side and then the other, regardless of how well or poorly it is executed. Sometimes the dyadic combinations approach the surreal where a very tall, large-boned muscular black-belt male invites a much shorter light-boned white-belt female to come around for a back grab attack. Other times, a much weaker nage must practice an exacting joint stimulation on a strong and tough wristed uke, which, if it were to happen in the streets, the weaker nage would surely be smacked or beaten up. Primacy is on making movement flow.

Aikido movement, however, is not the simple displacement of space by a moving corporeality. The defense movements are not finished forms that are replicated from one instance to the next. The so-called techniques are a response to an onslaught, the characteristics of which are influenced by the physiological traits and habits of the uke, the vectors with which the uke flings the motion out in relation to the physiological features and capacity that (s)he perceives of the nage. In other words, the shape of an onslaught that emerges is a unique iteration which

can never be repeated. It is to this emerging onslaught that the defense technique responds.

It was my turn to attack with a *tsuki*, the punch. I walked up to the senior, looked at his foot to make sure I was clasping the fist to match the side he was inviting my punch. From about a step away, I withdrew my right arm and leg, took a step forward and aimed my fist at his stomach. My fist stopped short of punching the stomach. The nage had not budged. The nage told me to punch again. I repositioned and then took a step and thrust my fist out but soon found myself skidding it across his stomach. The senior just stood there grinning as if he knew all along I would not follow through with my punch. He exhorted, "Punch me!" For a moment, I stood there stunned, not knowing what to do. Although I had seen punches on screens, I did not know what the impact of a real punch felt like. Shining-sensei assured me that I could not possibly scathe the senior. He then continued describing in concrete detail how I should punch: aim for the spine behind the senior's stomach and if he gets hurt, it's his fault for not getting out of the way. It was not the first time I heard those words on the mat, but this time, they sunk in. My concern for consequences abated. I positioned in front of my partner as before, but now with sensei's sanction, I wanted to feel what a real punch felt like. I did not have time to look into the nage's face, but instead kept my focus on the imagined spine in his lower back. I had not even punched, but all I sensed were my knuckles, the thick layer of his flesh and his lower spinal column. I took a step and

released my fist in anticipation of jamming it into the nage's stomach. My punch jabbed at empty air. Before I could figure out what happened, the nage slipped past my arm and I was caught in a swirl of vectors and torques. I was not moving voluntarily but at the same time I could not locate the instigator that kept my body churning like a rubber ball left alone to bounce off invisible walls. I was thrust forward one moment, the next I was being pulled to the side, then stretched back and then before my thoughts could catch up, I was falling down on my back. I laughed. I did not know how I ended up on the mat but knew that the speed and intention in my punch had somehow helped lay down my own trap.

Simply having two practitioner take position in their respective roles, therefore, does not automatically transform the objective positive space into a confrontational set-up. Both the uke's appropriate preacceleration and the nage's prepared invitation generates a tendency in their dyadic interactional field, similar to drawing a crossbow, whose vector when released by the uke's attack is ready to be carried along the twists and turns in the ensuing movement pathway goaded by the nage to its finish. This is possible because motion carries along force that is not always under one's full control.

Preacceleration does not predict one displacement over another. It holds in abeyance openings, out of which shapes emerge, but control is not of the essence. Movement begins with a certain degree of open improvisation mixed with a certain degree of habit. Each step we take when we walk is a replaying of a habit. [...] Yet, each of these habits takes its shape from a

preacceleration that proposes openings toward different shades of movement. (Manning, 2009, p.19)

Movement itself is, therefore, neither a simple mechanical projection of its initial conditioning nor pure unpredictable novelty. Sensei and seniors work to prop up the stance, intention, and limbic motion of the practitioner, especially if they are juniors, to garner sufficient preacceleration in his or her corporeal disposition.

When a motion is released into the dyadic field, its energy is substantive enough for the nage to work with, a certain propensity in the emerging attack which (s)he can use to affect change in the movement flow. So, even though the martial art style of Aikido is defensive, for the defense movement to be practiced, how to attack with appropriate intention and motion is drilled into the ukes, especially the more hesitant and timid practitioners.

In imbuing sufficient tension, inadvertent collisions can and do occur. When injuries or accidents occur at Shining Energy, blame and responsibility travel upward first to the higher ranked practitioner, then to the senior closest by, and then finally sensei. Greater skill in the art comes with greater responsibility for any negative or injurious consequences of not only one's own but actions of others. The system of accountability as a practitioner moves along his or her level of participation in the community demands increasing attention to and vigilance on not only the positive form of movements, but also on their latent form, the field of practice as a whole. The practitioner begins to perceive not only the cloud of possibilities that surround any one person or movement, but the indirect and cumulative effects of plethora of actions initiated by the various practitioners on

the mat which are not attributable to any one or several deliberate motions or intentions. Moving along from peripheral to full participation at Shining Energy is paralleled by a deepening understanding of and increasing responsibility towards the implication of 'dojo', not only its architectural space populated by practitioners, but the cumulative effects of a collectivity.

Throughout the duration of technique practice, practitioners shuffle to form new pairs with different members where they once again alternate as uke and nage until sensei claps hand and bellows, "Hai!" Making connections and disconnections through technique practice are occasions in which the skillful coordination of perception, control, and action are honed by way of extending a web of relationality with 'others'. Even though the technique executed by each pair during the particular technique practice segment falls under one identifiable form, each practitioner brings to the encounter a distinctive assemblage of corporeal features and capacities, such as a tender shoulder or differential in skill level, that shape the parameter of the con-frontation and shade the movement potential.

With one foot in front of the other and arms hanging down my sides, I positioned myself like one of those Egyptian statues. The lithe six-foot plus tall practice partner walked up towards me and took position mirroring my stance only an arm-length away. At five-foot five, I felt small in comparison. I tried rolling the weight of my body on the balls of my feet and shot my eyes on his face to signal my readiness for his one-arm strike. The trick was to sling my forearm across the elbow of my

partner's striking arm when the movement gets initiated. I stood waiting. Suddenly the arm was being drawn back. I stepped quickly into the space in place of the withdrawn arm before it has a chance to gather momentum and force. While my forearm successfully stalled my partner's strike, I placed my other free arm across his chest and positioned the side of my hand on his collar bone. For a moment, the two of us stood like a pair of ballroom dancers standing hip-to-hip, arms locked, and each intent on leading the other in opposite directions. I took another step forward to continue through the movement's sequence. The movement comes to an end only when my partner is thrown on his back to the mat. I pushed my partner's striking arm with my forearm toward the heel of his foot and simultaneously applied a steady push over his collar with my other arm. Before I knew it, my shoulders were trying to muscle its way into my partner's shoulder. I could not mobilize any additional strength. My limbs and torso had lost their collectivity. My focus on creating the exterior form of the technique's movement overtook my "feel" of their connectivity. My partner's upper body was twisting away rather than towards the mat. I heaved harder and took another step. But to no avail. My partner was still on his feet and balanced. Sensei, who had been observing us, stepped in. My partner and I untangled ourselves. "Jieyoung-san," he explained, "after you sling your arm over his elbow, don't use strength. Relax. Just drop your arm as if all the weight of the earth is pulling it down." With a gentle grin on his face, he signaled my partner to strike him. Sensei was neither

taller nor heavier than me, but caught the oncoming strike effortlessly. Now looking at me, he said, “My arm is so heavy.” With that, he dropped his arm as if due to its extraordinary weight. That began a domino effect throughout the steely limbs of my lithe partner. The drop of my master’s arm extended my partner’s arm backward toward the mat, which pulled along the latter’s shoulder and torso, creating for a split second a bow-like bend before he had to give way and collapse onto the mat. With his breadth still even and body relaxed, sensei turned to me and said, “Now, you try.”

It is not the abstract ideal movement iteration, but the concrete iteration and the field of relationships implied in the dyadic con-frontation that sensei draws from. The authority of proximity on which Aikido practice rests on such intimate suggestions that sensei inserts as (s)he moves from one dyadic field to another to draw out movements from the dark. The immediacy and timeliness with which sensei intervenes, that is, when the memory of the particularities of movement is freshest and most concrete for both the nage and the uke, closes the temporal and spatial gap between learning by observation and learning by doing. It is not only demonstrating what will make the interaction flow more naturally in that particular instance, sensei also exemplifies how both practitioners can take control of their learning process.

As a practitioner gains familiarity with practice and movement over time, greater demand is placed on him or her to respond efficiently, quickly and intuitively. The change, however, does not arise from a vacuum or individual

action. The change takes shape in the con-frontational set-up, particularly in the form of ukes and promotional exams. Seniors, especially, either inject greater resistance in the trainee's movement execution or quicken up the pace of their attack to alter the tendency of the movement that can evolve from the dyadic encounter. During promotional exams, not only is (s)he expected to perform a more exacting and a wider variety of movement repertoires, his or her movement must exhibit greater fluidity. These seemingly indirect changes are effective in injecting sufficient difference in the practitioner's field of interactions to constrain his or her field of movement options whose only path through the tightening chokepoint is to be more exacting in exploiting the evolving path of the bodymind dynamic. Skill and experience, therefore, emerges from his or her actions to cope with such changes, changes which arise from the field of relationships that the community of practice can only provide.

Learning and practicing the martial art of Aikido is, therefore, not the internalization of its techniques, but instead growing into them through occurrences. The relational corporeal field - where the primary interactional unit is the *uke-nage* dyad regardless of pair-work or group-work - produces openings that invite one's actional response through attunement and improvisation.

Improvisation is relational, then, because it goes on along 'ways of life' that are as entangled and mutually responsive as are the paths of pedestrians on the street. And by the same token, the creativity it manifests is not distributed among all the individuals of a society as an agency that each is supposed to possess a priori – an internal capacity of mind to come

up with intentions and to act upon them, causing effects in the vicinity (Gell, 1999, pp. 16-17) – but rather lies in the dynamic potential of an entire field of relationships to bring forth the persons situated in it.

(Hallam & Ingold, 2007, p. 7)

In other words, more crucial than the expertise of individual practitioners is the meshwork (Ingold, 2007) of relational openings that each member participates in generating regardless of their skill level. Opening up spaces of dyadic confrontation is essential in generating occurrences that help movement response in each other to emerge. In this sense, each body is as decisive as the next. Each body present on the mat contributes equally to the quality of texture of the field of practice that day.

Transculturation of Aikido. For the practitioners of Shining Energy, who are immersed in the everyday life of the dojo, their reflective examination of the cultural elements negotiated in their Aikido practice revealed the difficulty in and the slippery nature of fixing and locating cultural difference. For some, the Japaneseness or its negation is derived by contrasting the cultural elements observed at the dojo to contemporary social life and practice in Japan. Alice-san, who had worked in Japan, describes the Japanese cultural elements used at the dojo as odd. Adding the “-san” suffix at the end of member’s name when addressing each other, she explains, is awkward, because in Japan, the honorific suffix is attached after family names. Sitting in seiza is, Alice-san explains, unlike how women in Japan are expected to sit on the floor, namely to sit with legs folded to the side of one’s buttocks similar to the landmark bronze statue, The

Little Mermaid, in the harbor of Copenhagen, Denmark. When reflecting back on her karate dojo several years ago, she described that even there when she sat in seiza: she kept her knees together rather than have them a shoulder width apart like at Shining Energy. Her conclusion was each dojo has its own prescribed variation of seiza.

George-san, who had spent a year studying abroad in Japan as a college student, recalls the senior-junior relationship at Japanese university dojo being “too hierarchical”. Seniors expected unquestioning obedience from their juniors which he found difficult to adjust to that he did not need to think twice about quitting the club while in Japan. In comparison, he unreservedly describes the social life at Shining Energy as being “American” and more egalitarian. In the case of Irene-san, who is native Japanese, she does not identify the ritualized behaviors at the dojo or the martial art of Aikido as Japanese. The Japanese labels for techniques, she explains, are too archaic even for a native Japanese-speaker like her to understand. Although Aikido was something that she had always wanted to pick up while in Japan, when she thinks of the martial art, Irene explains, she associates it with “a-i-k-i-d-o” not its *kanji* characters. It is her American senseis and practitioners she thinks of first than anyone or anything Japanese because her encounter with Aikido first took place in the U.S.

For others, the cultural significance of ritual elements at Shining Energy is captured by juxtaposing them against the main stream American culture. Mike-san who had studied intercultural communication in college, used the term sub-culture to describe how he viewed the incorporation of cultural practices at the

dojo, implying that even though the cultural elements are drawn from both Japanese and American culture, the cultural practice at the dojo has become coherent and greater than its parts that subsuming it under the mainstream cultures of either the U.S. or Japan become impossible. For Robert-san, the relational rituals and expectations expressed at Shining Energy are characteristically Japanese in contrast to the more business-like approach taken by other martial art practice halls in the U.S. In the case of the latter, instructors are perceived as proprietors who provide service to practitioners seeking martial art training: a less conducive arrangement for fostering a community of practice with sufficiently variegated levels of responsibilities, expectations and obligations for peripheral to full participation. As such, Robert-san explains that it is, therefore, important for practitioners to know where the cultural elements came from and reasons for certain conduct. So, any decision to change parts of current practice, he cautions, must be well thought out so that the outcome outweighs what is shed.

For the two senseis, the purpose in appropriating cultural elements lies less in their symbolic content than in their concrete and pragmatic effects on the practitioners and their practice. The motivation for appropriating the martial art's traditional elements, as explained by Energy-sensei and subsequently by Shining-sensei below, does not come from a desire to preserve the tradition or aspire to be Japanese-like, but from being strategic.

...the Japanese terms are useful in that they disassociate, they help remind people that they don't really know what something means. It opens them to learning. So if you say, timing throw instead of *kokyu-nage*, people go,

“Oh, timing throw” and snap shot and close (*slapping her palms together*) the book. When we say *kokyu-nage*, “Kokyu-nage?” (*expressing a puzzled look on her face*). It’s different. So it keeps the book open a little bit longer.

Although practitioners struggle to memorize the exotic terms, especially when preparing for their promotional exams, the purpose of utilizing archaic Japanese when categorizing techniques during practice sessions is, from Energy-sensei stance, to create semantic discontinuity or void when a movement form is shown. The ritual elements, such as bowing and relational terms, on the other hand, are useful for mediating interaction on the mat.

Any ritual helps, ritual objects of ritual actions help organize the interaction a little bit and make a certain fraction of it expected. [...] you need them in organizing interaction. If it’s using correct fork, it’s organizing the interaction a little bit. People get way too attached to them, which is crazy!...Americans get just a little bit too enamored with the Japaneseness and the exoticness, and we are like, whatever (*laughs*).

Although identification with and appropriation of cultural forms vary even among Aikido dojos, the exotic cultural elements serve as a means to regulate social interaction, the usefulness of which pertains not only to the individual dojo but extends out to the Aikido martial art culture at large. Shining-sensei explains.

So do people need to learn the Japanese to practice Aikido? No. Do they need to learn Japanese history? Or modern Japanese culture? No. You don’t even need to wear the uniform or bow to each other. But doing those

things makes it possible for people to feel that they are part of a community that is international, in a way that getting together in blue jeans in somebody's garage does not.

For Shining-sensei, the practice of Aikido does not necessarily need the Japanese cultural paraphernalia to produce corporeal intensities. Its effects can be entrapped in jeans and garage space. But the one effect that becomes difficult to replicate and produce when the art's visibly traditional forms - such as the bowings that mark the beginning and end of an activity and that signal role changes, the wearing of uniforms and the hakama, and the incorporation of Japanese terminology - are set aside is cohering performatively with a contemporary *communitas* (V. W. Turner, 1969), that is, belonging (Castles & Davidson, 2000) to an international Aikido community.

Reprise

The forms of tradition are maintained not necessarily to preserve symbolic order and correspondence to the art's originating culture, namely Japanese. They are a resource to be used for connecting and disconnecting than for contemplation. Moving bodies assemble with other bodies and objects to extend their effects (Cooper, 2007). The expressive properties of the traditional cultural elements – encompassing the rite, gesturality, vocal forms, and the objects at the dojo - facilitate linking and interaction with member practitioners and existing assemblages of the martial art bodies that connect back to Japan and sideways to dojos in the U.S., but also to the innumerable other such Aikido communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) around the world⁴. As Rogers argues, culture is

transcultural, a process of ever changing network of relations rather than an entity where tracing cultural elements to its imagined owner or source only leads to discovering their hybrid origin: “cultural practices, including appropriation, are both constituted by and constitutive of culture (in general) as a realm of relationships” (p. 499). As Rogers argues, the essentialist view of culture as a bounded entity – bounded to a way life of a group of people inhabiting a geographical territory made artificially still in time - has kept the understanding of cultural appropriation narrow and retrospective in scope.

Forms, motivations and effects of cultural appropriation vary; “The active "making one’s own" of another culture’s elements occurs, however, in various ways, under a variety of conditions, and with varying functions and outcomes. The degree and scope of voluntariness (individually or culturally), the symmetry or asymmetry of power relations, the appropriation’s role in domination and/or resistance, the nature of the cultural boundaries involved, and other factors shape, and are shaped by, acts of cultural appropriation” (Rogers, 2006, p. 475). The discussion over its nature and ethical appropriateness has, however, been driven by an understanding that culture and its elements are the property of a historical group of people. The property of the Japanese cultural elements used by practitioners at Shining Energy is not one of ownership or genealogy, whether of others or one’s own, but things to be used and connected with in an ongoing enactive process of ‘world-making’ (Chia, 2003). The opening anew of the inert and empty space that lies between the nage and the uke at their moment of encounter holds key to the practice of Aikido. The opening is imbricated in the

objective space where movement is often viewed as the displacement of that space. At the same time, it is also an opening of the relational field produced by the nage-uke dyad generating opportunities for improvisation and invites actional response through attunement. The relational field transfigures the objective space where the nage-uke con-frontation gives way to new extensions in space towards openness. The dyadic con-frontation between the nage-uke is the opening up of a “plane of immanence” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that is not predetermined by meaning, law, or any other authority, but charged with incipient action. The dyadic configuration is ready to become actual and ready to allow new assemblage between their heterogeneous elements to become actualized where they can form a new connection or a new attunement to create new passageways for vectors of movement to pass through space.

Current debates on cultural exchange and hybridization in an era of globalization (e.g. Kraidy, 2002; Rogers, 2006) have focused largely on the political-economic differential above other possible differentials in explaining the dynamics of cultural appropriation. They overlook issues of strategic appropriation of cultural resource to participate more fully in the process of everyday making, such as the case of Aikido practice at Shining Energy. The corporeal, material and semiotic components coexist and connect and disconnect ‘as a frame within a frame within a frame’ (Grosz, 2005) to make an abundance of moving relationalities at the dojo. The various constellations that moving bodies form in the course of a practice session generate a field of relationships that open up (inter)actional opportunities for response. What effectiveness practitioners

claim of their art pertain to the venerability of the tradition – the ethos and style of defense techniques, honed over years, taught in apprenticeship, by worthy teachers. Together, they produce the repertoire of resources and a dynamic propensity (Jullien, 1995), or what Ingold (1996) describes as the “rich structured environment”, that enable the development of martial art skill and social life at the dojo.

CHAPTER 6

Feeling Relationalities through Movement

Technique 36: Kokyu-dosa (*breath throw*)

This set of moves is designed both to strengthen your hips and to help you generate a greater flow of *ki* from the single spot in the lower abdomen. Relying on strength alone will get you nowhere against an opponent who understand how to use *ki*. To master the proper use of *ki*, you must understand the correct postures and spiritual attitudes requisite for maintaining a constant outward flow of this vital force.

The following should explain what I mean.

Your partner, kneeling as you, grips your wrists. With elbows down, fingertips turned slightly upwards, kneel with your knees the width of two or three fists apart and with the big toe of one foot rests on the big toe of the other. No matter how hard your partner resists, you must pay no attention to him, but calm your spirit in the single spot in the lower abdomen and maintain a strong outpouring of *ki*. When you then lean forward, he will lean backward and lose his balance. This move will force your partner to thrust his legs out behind him as he rolls over on his back, where you can easily pin him.

(adapted from Tohei, 1968, p. 162)

The rationale for the breath throw technique, according to the late Tohei, is to hone one's skillful use of *ki* for situations when one meets a counterpart who has mastered its use. He explains that the principle of the technique lies in calmness of spirit, correct posture and focus on the spot on one's lower abdomen to maintain constant outpouring of *ki* as one leans forward to make the partner lose balance and give in. Reading the rest of the passage and studying the series of photographs the caption accompanies, however, does no more to help one understand how these elements are to be integrated and used in the actual movement execution than help one understand how not paying attention to one's partner will topple him/her. This chapter presents a more intimate and messier rendering, which Tohei's 'how to' compendium leaves out, of how practitioners at Shining Energy submit themselves to the imperceptible challenges in their practice of Aikido.

Attack

Practitioners of *aikido* – and most Japanese philosophers insist that bodymind unity is our natural state, but we have forgotten this and have learned to treat the two as separate. We must keep in mind a distinction between the ego (the everyday mind) and the deeper self (the “true” self) which represents who we really are. At this deeper level, body and mind are one, but at the level of the ego, which is the reasoning self, we conceive of the material world as separate from us. Our bodies, as part of the material world, come to be thought of as “tools,” associated with but no longer an inseparable aspect of who we are. The body, we are often

told, is corrupt, a hindrance, something to be endured. It is the arts and the martial arts, as well as Zen Buddhism in particular among the religions, however, that are best equipped to remind us of this deeper, natural state of being, and to help us return to that state through diligent practice. Thus, practice can be viewed as the process by which we come to know who we really are. (Carter, 2008, p. 23)

Evasion

In Japanese tradition, transformation and enlightenment is possible even through the practice of martial ways, *bushido*, Carter explains. Like tea ceremony, gardening, pottery work, and flower arranging, Aikido is a self-cultivation practice the religio-philosophical underpinnings of which provides a general methodology for living one's life. By recovering the legitimacy of the body as an integral part of one's selfhood, the martial art practice of Aikido provides ethical teaching about how one should relate to other people, to nature, and to the cosmos through the body as well as the spirit. Carter quotes Yuasa (1993):

The goal of Japanese artistry and the *bushi* way is for the competitor or performer to discipline one's spirit, by using one's body. And by transforming one's mind, a flower blossoms, whereby one achieves the state of "no-mind." The self ascends to the height at which it is no longer one's self, but is the self which harmonizes and accommodates others; it becomes one with the world and with the universe. (p. 35)

Even a warrior or a martial strategist, through diligent practice of self-cultivation, can climb the heights of selflessness and attain omniscience and omnipresence.

Through breath focus, meditation, control of the emotions, and advancement toward sudden intuitive enlightenment, participation in sports and martial art training can be used as a “moving meditative” path (as in the character 道 of *dō* in Japanese and *dao* in Chinese) that opens a doorway between the conscious and the unconscious and brings the body and mind into unity, so that one lives life more mindfully with centeredness and vigilance. In other words, they provide the process by which one comes to know who one really is, one’s “true” essence, and to live in natural spontaneity with the world – enlightenment!

Centralization

I rely on Jullien’s (2004) insight between model-based and process-based approaches to displace Carter’s view of Aikido as disciplinary methodology that lead to enlightenment. Carter presents a contrast between the self-cultivating practices of Japanese artistic ways and its non-existing Western counterpart in art, philosophy, and religion on the basis of means-end equation. Carter’s mode of classification forms a sum of homogenized separates, Japanese practice-based ethics versus Western contemporary ethics, where difference is derived by juxtaposing Japanese concepts (such as ‘no-self’ and *satori*) with the familiar Western ones (the authentic self and enlightenment) and treats them as equally concerned with seeking the good and the right. As a result, not only is the difference in the content of the particulars preempted by the difference at the level of gross categories – Japanese versus Western - the valence of the higher moral and ethical ground implied in Western notions transfers over to the Japanese ones in the process. When the cultivation practices are freed from such method of

categorization and viewed processually, the artistic practice of Aikido is not a model-based program where the process is closed and its result - peace, harmony, and unity with man, nature, and cosmos – is implicit in its evolution.

The practice of Aikido may not be a program of self-transformation or ethical teaching that stem from a different cosmological worldview. From a process-based approach, causal elements that lead to enlightenment are not inherent in the practice itself. The relationship may be one between situations and consequences, where the causal system is open and complex with infinite number of combinations. This chapter draws from the everyday practice at Shining Energy to demonstrate how practitioners of Aikido are simply learning to bind themselves to the particularities of the situation, in other words, to harmonize with the course of things so as to loosen reality from inertia to open it up to possibilities. Cultivating oneness of self and others, of body and mind, and peace and harmony is not what is sought but what is exploited. Crudely put, the practice of cultivating oneness and harmonization is no more likely to produce enlightened warriors than sadistic ones. Training in martial arts is just as likely to develop one's capacity to threaten, harm, and injure others. Knowledge of meridians and acu-points, for example, are not only healing and life-saving points, but also killing points (Yuasa, 1993). Whether the training and practice leads to *satori* (Japanese word for intuitive enlightening that strikes like a lightning), aggression, or spectacles such as the mixed martial arts, they are merely hints of contexts yet to come.

Neutralization

The practice of Aikido and its processes at Shining Energy cultivates a negative or latent form of coping strategy. Practitioners learn to cope with and flourish in midst of hostile situations while maintaining their own presence and identity throughout. Such strategy is not conveyed explicitly in discrete, isolatable ideas or as a program of action where the challenge of an indeterminable attack gets treated as a problem of realizing ever more refined human purposes and design. Practitioners do not roam the streets or bar scenes to test the reliability of the techniques they are studying or to polish their understanding about combat and aggression. A situation, an attack or otherwise, is an emergent happening that is in perpetual state of flux whose infinite complexity escapes one's understanding. Its actualization depends upon chance factors from a mosaic of possibilities. Prescience is, therefore, impossible. For the practitioner, the task nonetheless remains of how to alleviate the immediate pressing problem, such as a hold-up or confrontation, that one cannot extricate oneself from but with which one must carry on despite its indecipherable tangled nature.

At Shining Energy, practitioners forgo deliberate conscious design and heroic acts. It is by developing complex feeling and the meticulous use of the sinews of one's body⁵, its senses and neural pathways where "perception becomes both a seeing and a feeling through the organs, enabling perception and actions to run together in the "flash of lightning" that needs no reflecting intelligence" (Cooper, 1976, p. 1014). The more one concentrates attention on the course of things in which one finds oneself involved in to detect configurations and their factors, the more one can discern "the discriminating moment that will

imperceptibly incline the situation in a particular direction” (Jullien, 2004, p. 67).

The direction in which knowledge, capacity and skill in Aikido grows cannot be one that takes the shortest route to the top, therefore, but laterally, like

knowledge that doesn't move forward like an arrow in flight, but expands sideways, like an arrow enlarging in flight, or like the archer, discovering that although he has hit the bull's-eye and won the prize, his head is on a pillow and the sun is coming through the window. Lateral knowledge is knowledge that's from a wholly unexpected direction, from a direction that's not even understood as a direction until the knowledge forces itself upon one. (Pirsig, 2005[1974], p. 120)

It is by persisting in the submission of oneself to follow every step of the development of a situation that an appropriate coping action manifests, such as a strike at the right moment. The strategy is a non-strategy, which is achieved obliquely through indirect action (Chia & Holt, 2009). There is no deliberate plan or action or even the idea of fighting back or throwing to achieve a goal.

Unlike ordinary sports, aikido cares nothing for the idea of winning or losing. Our aim is to discipline ourselves so that through discipline we may master the laws of nature and, by obeying them, perfect ourselves. Morihei Ueshiba always said that true victory is conquering one's self.

[...] We think less of throwing or being thrown than of using our opponent as a whetstone on which to polish ourselves. (Tohei, 1968, p. 10)

The method, or *techné*, is disciplining self to dissolve the dualistic distinction in confrontation between the self and the other(s). There is no thought or action, a

telos, to win the struggle. The effect, however, is victory. The negation of the centric subject better enables the practitioner to engage with the emergent situation at all possible points and not lose any of its active content through laziness or acts of prior selection. The practice is to get in there, in the heart of the unfolding process, and stay there!

At Shining Energy, two dissimilar contexts draw the practitioners to engage ever more fully into their respective particularities. The first is the emphasis on ‘feel’, developing feeling, and learning how to use one’s feel to guide one’s perception, action, and control not only to discern difference in the mappable, knowable world of the divided, finite forms but also in the “pre-world of undividedness and infinitude” (Cooper, 2007, p. 1556). Shining-sensei explains,

People move in ways that feel, would feel good if they were attacking themselves. I attack you and this is my punch. But you move in a way that would be appropriate to your punch at the beginning, because that’s how you understand what the punch is, from your own experience. And as your experience grows, you stop thinking of it as a punch. And I know what a punch is from the feeling in my body. And you start just feeling it as it happens.

The modality shifts from acting deliberately to feeling the processes, that is, feeling the configuration beneath one’s own skinned self and its relationality to configurations beyond the positive figures without, from which action takes shape on its own accord. The second is strategically exploiting the structure of practice session and its processes which on the one hand, impose constraints that give little

room for practitioners to exit the unfolding event, and on the other, augment the thrownness of the situation and its contingent nature. This provides the context in which the experience of individual practitioners “grows”. Caught between the two contexts, practitioners bind themselves to the course of things to open it up to fluidity and infinite number of possibilities. It is such binding that radiates out laterally to spontaneous coping action. To borrow once again Shining-sensei’s words, “One of the things that make it possible for us to continue to train at this age is that we are more and more clearly perceiving what’s happening and responding enough, not too much and not too little.”

Feeling the “virtues”. Feel and feeling comprise a key axis around which the (il)logic of movement is conveyed and understood at Shining Energy. The range of feel deepened and exploited through the practice of the art includes the simple registration of raw sensations (e.g. touch in Montagu, 1971), the emotions and thoughts deemed private and contained within the skinned individual (e.g. Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004), and even energy emitted by a living organism (Lowen, 1976). Awareness of feel and feeling also goes beyond their individuating bounded forms to encompass the complex processes, where one can sense instantaneously without recourse to cognition the possibilities of incipient action which has yet to unravel in a visible form. It demands an appreciation of (dis)similar relationships among differences one perceives.

Shining-sensei called up Irene-san to the *shōmen*. He told her “*yokomen-uchi*”, the side strike attack. She took a step back and pulled her right arm up. At the very moment she was about to take her lunge, sensei told her,

“Stop.” She stood in freeze. He then began talking to himself, but intending for us sitting in seiza to overhear him. He stared at the empty space as if to measure the lengths of various points from his body to hers. “Hmm...the distance between her arm and my head must be over three feet, but when she takes a step, about a foot and a half, and extends her arm, which is about another two feet, her hand will reach about here (*circling the air near his temple*). Ah, well, then I should move myself here.” He took a forward step to his right. He then continued his self-talk, “Well, perhaps not. I will be within reach of her left-hand strike.” Then he went back to his original spot and scratched his head. “Ah, if I go here,” taking a side step to his right, “then I should be safe.” He then turned to look at us, “As you can see, this takes too long. You have to feel instead.” He went back to his original spot then signaled to Irene-san to continue with her attack. He evaded her strike by throwing one of his arms up as a protective shield and raking her strike into his other hand while simultaneously taking half a step beyond her intended target. With her hand now snared in his, he twirled his way on the outside of her extended arm and came to a stop behind her shoulder, making her arm curl up and around her shoulder. He added a finishing tuck and pull through the point of contact, making Irene-san fall on her back. The technique we were going to practice was a *yokomen-uchi shihonage*.

Using feel to sense oneself and one’s counterpart relationally and to anticipate the quality of the confrontation is neither a replacement nor a supplement to one’s

field of vision. It is the primary modality, subsuming visual perception, with which practitioners at Shining Energy must engage oneself and their ever-changing environment. Feel does not simply absorb and take in the world, it can be cultivated to perceive and act in one breath. The kind of feel and feeling that practitioners at Shining Energy cultivate does overlap in part with Bennett and Castiglioni's (2004) conceptualization of "embodied feeling of culture" where feeling mediates thought and action. But they also diverge. Whereas Bennett and Castiglioni link thought, feeling, and action only to deploy it in world and self that is static and stable, practitioners at Shining Energy cultivate complex feelings to not only open the inert and static reality to process, but also make their presence and identity in the world mobile. It gets exploited as the key modality to cultivate "a facility to stay among and weave together the dissimilar and conflicting contexts of the wider field" (1976, p. 1014) without committing oneself unduly to particular outcomes, as epitomized by *kime* (see p. 13) and *aiki* (see p.19).

Practitioners at the dojo train to perceive, control, and act not simply to take in the world through feel, but to connect and disconnect relationalities in their movement with fluidity and mobility. Practitioners strive to keep their attention poised at all times and all angles and not lose any of its active content – that is, to grasp the "globality of processes".

The sage/general has made his conscious mind accessible to everything, because he has dissolved all the focal points to which ideal forms and plans inevitably lead, and he has freed it from the particular obsessions that, through a lack of flexibility, it is liable to foster. In this way, he has

liberated it from both the partiality and the rigidity in which any individual point of view, once it has become exclusive, becomes trapped. In other words, ...he has allowed his conscious mind to take in the entire globality of processes, and he keeps it in a state that is as mobile and fluid – ever-evolving – as the course of reality itself. (Jullien, 2004, p. 72)

It is merging with the conditions implied in the situation through feeling and staying with it at all (or as many) possible points that Shining sensei inflects the individuating relationship between the attacker and the attacked that produces harmonization. At no point in his response did he obstruct the uke's movement by applying a counterforce or blockage. At no point in his movement did he go against the physiology of his uke. It is by removing distinction by merging with the course of things that sensei, the nage, can open up the confrontation into process to take part in the making of uke's movement to discern the moment to effect change to his favor without his uke ever feeling the change of hands taking place.

Such practice begins by exercising kinesthetic sensuousness rather than defaulting on one's skin as basis of various relationalities both toward oneself and towards others and the world. Energy-sensei prods practitioners again and again to position themselves in *hanmi* (a stance of readiness where one foot points forward and rear foot placed approximately perpendicular to it) without looking down at one's own feet. Without having to switch off the practice hall lights, it is one small but effective means to keep in abeyance the web of relationality one's eyes spin busily to and from the skinned corporeality to the physical surrounding

and in its place solely use one's intrinsic sense of locus and kinesthetic sensuousness to organize presence and sense of identity.

At Shining Energy, the boundless pre-world of feeling is not, however, developed for its own sake. Guiding principles, exemplified by two frames hanging at the shōmen, mark what qualities of feeling are to be pursued in Aikido practice. In the first frame hangs “氣”, or ki, as in the second syllable of ai-ki-do. The character is most often translated as vital energy in English. The concept refers not so much to the measurable energy and force of Newtonian physics, but the imperceptible and latent impulse that drives ceaseless transformation and change throughout the universe (Chung, 2008; Tohei, 1968). It designates the central symbol and concept of Aikido, the ideal process of which is making “aiki”, harmonizing with ki. The second frame contains four disciplinary principles that practitioners at Shining Energy strive to embody not only when moving, but at all times: 1) Keep one point to develop calmness, 2) Relax progressively, 3) Find correct posture in everything, 4) Develop your positive mind. Notions such as “one-point”, “posture” and “ki”, along with the motto “minimum effort and maximum effect” are used by senseis and seniors to help direct the attention of practitioners to cultivate their kinesthetic awareness.

These guiding principles are not metaphysical rules or principles that stand separate from individual practitioners, nor are they qualities contained within the deeply private unconscious subjectivities of individuated corporeality. They are “virtues” (e.g. Jullien, 2004, p. 93) that relate not to how practitioners ought to hold themselves in conflict and battlefields, but to qualities of self-feeling that can

engender particular effects or that are conducive to producing them. They are fulcrums for practitioners to discover through movement new ways of relating with their bodies through feel but also how (s)he binds and unbinds with non-bodies: in other words, how to organize one's presence and relationalities in the world, both with positive and definitive forms, as well as with the less clear and indefinite ones, in order to open reality to processes. They undergird and permeate through all (inter)corporeal conduct as Shining Energy.

Feeling 'one-point'. The concept of "one-point" enjoys widest usage among its practitioners at Shining Energy. It corresponds roughly to one's center of gravity, and is one of the four key principles hanging at the *shōmen*, "keep one-point to develop calmness".

I was sitting in *seiza* in my usual spot on the mat near the inner doorway. Shining-sensei turned around slipped out of his slippers and stepped onto the mat. He strode lightly across. I was expecting to catch from the corner of my eyes his form take position in front of the *shōmen* to start the day's practice. I turned my head and saw Shining-sensei walk up to a practitioner on the further end of the hall to check 'one-point'. A silent siren went off in my head. My attention immediately began to scan my body to make sure feeling was running up and down my trunk and through my limbs. Most important was to resuscitate my attention to feel the lower part of my abdomen and place a part of my thought there. At the same time, I squeezed my two shoulder blades down in an attempt to stretch out my ribs and hopefully loosen up my always very tense neck and shoulders.

I lifted my buttocks off from the heels of my feet to shift my seiza into a pyramidal structure and rocked my tucked my chin in slightly to line it with my neck and spine. I threw my sight forward - at first staring at the front wall and then throwing my vision even further into a far distant horizon. I wanted to prepare my posture and attention as best I could so that I pass the one-point check on first check. I was wishing that a hole had been drilled in the wall so that my eyes could automatically latch onto an identifiable form in the far distant horizon. I could sense my vision zoom back into the hall and latch at the wall again rather than out into the imagined horizon. I went through the process again and tried to hold my sight, feeling, and thought still. I saw sensei's black pants hover in front of the person sitting next to me now. Blotch him out! He's actually NOT here. It's just me on the mat. I saw sensei take a step back and stand still. My attention shifted back to the wall and my posture. It stayed quiet. I saw the black pleated pants approach me. I was expecting sensei to place each of his fistful hands on my shoulder. But instead, he stepped back and said, "Don't pay attention to me. Look straight ahead (*pointing his index finger into the front wall behind him*)." Did my eyes give it away? My eyes duly followed his index finger into the far distance and somehow kept itself steady in the distance. I barely noticed him step in for the check and move on.

Following such cues, at first, is no different from groping one's way in the dark, unable to distinguish one sensation from the next. On some days, I would feel my

shoulder blades sway indicating a disconnect between my lower and upper parts of the torso, or feel the muscles in my lower abdomen get slightly taut. Other days, I would notice his slight push merge into my spine.

Even though I had a vague understanding of one-point (*tanden* in Japanese, ‘丹田’, translated as ‘the red field’ to mean the source of a person’s *élan vital*) prior to joining Shining Energy, I had always assumed it as a static quasi-organ that was tucked away in one’s belly. However, hearing expressions, such as “keep your one-point”, “one-point is too high”, “make one-point low” or even “pick up one-point” challenged my preconceptions about the notion. It presented one-point as something fantastical that could be wielded at one’s whim. However, when Shining-sensei reflected back my silent probes in real-time with “Your one-point is too close to the surface. Push your one-point to the back, closer to your spine.” and then chime in, “Good.” just as I was trying to feel my sense of centeredness toward my spine, I could no longer dismiss its feel however vague and formless. Other times, Shining-sensei would stand back and look at a practitioner sitting in *seiza*. He would then say, “Make your one-point smaller,” then sensei would wait a second or two for the person’s feel to follow his cue, to which he would add, “Even smaller (*his thumb wrapped around his now curled index finger*) and smaller. Condense it until you can’t make it any smaller and then let radiate out like a beam of ray (*shooting his index finger forward*).” None of these exchanges and events clarified what one-point is, except that it could be perceived and examined.

Feeling ki. Ki is an important yet nebulous and mysterious concept for many of the practitioners of Aikido. Its meaning is ill-understood that often distorted by American practitioners as transcendent spiritual power, according to Energy-sensei. Nonetheless, many exercises incorporate the feel of ki so that practitioners, regardless of its proper comprehension or not, can experience its use. The ki-test stands out as the most effective practice through which both perceiving and exploiting the feel of ki is made available for community scrutiny. During promotional exams, seniors are called forward to help senseis conduct various ki tests on the examinee prior to technique demonstrations. While the examinee sits or stands or executes warm-up exercises, seniors insert their hand on prescribed points, which injects slight external perturbation to the examinee's system of motion, to check whether the examinee's motion and corporeal collectivity is able to sustain it and continue unperturbed. Whether ki indeed exists is less of a concern than its use. The feel of ki flowing through the body helps practitioners maintain awareness of bodily collectivity throughout, as well as using the feeling to actively embed oneself with his or her environment. The effect of holding such feeling alters the way one organizes movement, as George-san pointed out. It is a method to encourage the examinee to use feeling to connect rather than bound him or herself into skinned cocoon from his or her environment. When one does not extend ki from center out into the environment or retrieves feeling of one's limbs and treats them as a bag of flesh, it is described as a "dead" arm, a "dead" kick. In other words, one's presence and identity becomes absent despite the presence of one's positive form.

Strengthening the “virtues”. Various movement exercises and interactions not only show the complex network of active connections between one’s feelings and exterior world that one’s sense of balance and presence sustains, but also how one-point and posture can be exploited to open up the rather static sense of balance and presence to make not only practitioners more mobile, but the surrounding itself mobile as well. *Happo-undo* is one such movement exercise, an eight direction movement technique. Communicating the idea of diffusion in East Asia is expressed as “in eight directions”, the four cardinal and the four ordinal directions. Before starting, Shining-sensei would tell the group to first send ki from one-point in all ten directions. He adds two more to the eight, “up into space” and “down into the earth”, making the idea of projecting ki from one-point not simply multi-directional but all pervasive. Shining-sensei would gesture with his hands in which direction one should project ki - from one’s lower belly in ten directions at all times when moving or still. At the leader’s count, we would go through the sequence of step-arm swing-turn 180 degrees-step with opposite foot-arm swing and repeat the sequence in all eight directions – hitting east, west, south, and north and then west-south, east-north, west-north, and east-south - first slowly then gradually picking up speed. For those who fail to keep part of their attention inward to their one-point and use the feel of the eight beams and instead depend on sighting to guide their movement’s directionality, the exercise successfully scatters their attention making them dizzy, miss a step, or turn to a different direction from the rest of the pack. Practitioners essentially must disregard visual cues and instead feel beneath their skinned

encasing to exploit the inner sense of locus and kinesthesia as the baseline of their movement.

Another exercise, the twirling from one end of the mat to the other and then twirling back in the opposite direction like those of whirling dervishes, uses one-point in a different set of relationalities from *happo-undo*. The exercise is an effective way to organize movement around the feeling of a vertical pole running through one's body up into the sky and down into the earth with pelvis as the motor and feet and stretched out arms to help keep the momentum going. When reaching the edge of mat, however, practitioners must hold him/herself in *zanshin* (a momentary stillness when nage looks on the thrown body of the uke), which is particularly difficult because of the sudden shift from all motion to none. The exercise provides a good indication of whether the practitioner used his or her one-point, proper spotting and footwork, and not overly rely on the eyes as the main mode of orientation in space. Except for sensei and very few seniors, most practitioners twirl at irregular speed across the mat drawing a squiggly line or turn like a doll whose battery is reaching its end, and then stagger when trying to gather their limbs for *zanshin*.

These are not easy exercises where successful execution is only a matter of following the steps. They reveal one's over-attachment to and over-reliance on positive forms to determine one's sense of positionality and balance in space. Through these exercises, practitioners have no choice but eventually exploit his or her perceptual sensations to reorganize focus and sense of center while moving furiously around in order to get through the self-generated turbulence without

becoming a victim to its dizzying side effects. At the same time, these exercises demonstrate that one's sense of centeredness is not a given, but something that has been achieved by our organs in conjunction with the external world unbeknownst to us. One-point is a condensation of how our sensory organs organize sensations and perception to locate one's presence in the vast unboundedness we conveniently call surrounding.

Through such movement practice, the sense of centeredness can be disentangled from positive figures around the practitioner to be mantled anew and made mobile through the virtues. In other words, rather than having gravity and sense of balance reside outside oneself, practitioners can generate the very axis around which the world moves. So, rather than falling onto the mat as one rolls across the mat, practitioners must make their virtues strong and reliable to serve as an axis for new mobile relationality so that it is the mat that comes and wraps itself around his or her body. When asked about his feeling of gravity, Shining-sensei explained that if a large hole were to appear suddenly and he walked into it, instead of falling in, he would be suspended in air. His relationship to Newtonian gravity is no longer the same. His sense of one-point prevails not only the objectified form of gravity, but also its feel. The relationality between him and the external world is no longer defined and mapped by the ready-made positive forms we see, but is instead held undivided, unmapped, and in infinity by the feel of one-point where forms and objects no longer have specific location in space but only ceaseless continuity in which one-point is central.

Attending to particularities in movement. One of the trickiest aspects of technique practice is the gap between senseis' seemingly effortless executions and the effortfulness that practice demands. Newcomers and juniors often misperceive the technique executions as a matter of mastering mechanical interaction between two bodies, when in fact, it is the meticulous use of sinews, senses and organs to attend to the particularities through the movement process. Scott-san explains,

...you should do it lighter and lighter, like water. You put the rock into the water, right? You put it ten different ways the water handles the rock. So the direction of the rock, the force of the rock, when you put it in, the distance, so every different time that you put the rock into the water, the water would handle it differently. That's the challenge. If people don't pay attention then you will become easily bored of Aikido, and give up easily.

And not move to the next level.

It is not the movement form per se that is the focus of care in Aikido practice, but the challenge of integrating the virtues and binding oneself to inexhaustible details, such as breathing, limbic and muscle coordination, the idiosyncrasies of one's counterpart, that practitioners face. Cohen (2007) writes, it takes martial art practitioners years of training: "They experiment with their muscles and senses, relearning their bodies' capabilities and uses, as well as discovering new ways of interacting with their bodies—of understanding them and what they encompass—and how to decipher them. [...] A karateka (karate student or students) who fails to recognize these signs will also fail to react to his or her opponent's attack with the correct timing." (pp. 1-2).

Master practitioners, such as Shining and Energy senseis, are able to weave complex appreciation of systemic relationships among particularities into his or her submission to the conditions implied in the situation they encounter that produce water-like action. For most of the practitioners the process is a grueling one. Practitioners depend on senseis and seniors as models to show various ways to grasp the imperceptible latency in the movement process. While practitioners are busily taking turns as nage and uke to practice the technique with their partners, sensei floats freely from one group to another to observe and intervene with correctives and suggestions. Unlike the practitioners struggling to unfold one smooth rhythmic movement path from an attack, sensei works with incipience that the eyes of practitioners have yet to witness in form.

Energy-sensei who had been watching me and Alice-san from the sideline stepped in and signaled my partner to attack. I stood not too far from the pair. My partner initiated the temple strike, which sensei caught in one effortless sweep. Sensei let her hand go and told her to strike again and then spoke while in motion. “Most people are too busy looking at the hand of the uke. And so when they catch, they do this.” She caught the uke’s hand near her head and then brought it down to the knot of her belt in two distinct trajectories. Sensei gave Alice-san her hand back and then said, “The connection needs to be made much earlier.” Energy-sensei explained that she looks not at the hand but the muscle at the base of the striking arm on the uke’s back. She posed to invite another *yokomen-uchi* strike from my partner. Alice-san took a step and brought her arm around to strike at

sensei's temple. By the time sensei got a hold of the uke's hand and brought it to her center, I could not discern at which point the control of the motion had changed hands from uke's to sensei's. The projectile was one single smooth sweep. Energy-sensei then let go of uke's hand. Alice-san collected herself and stood in stand by. Meanwhile, sensei continued elaborating, "I sometimes use this approach. The peak point of the strike does not happen when the strike reaches its target but actually about here." She held up her hands in air between herself and Alice-san and then began to pull at what seemed like an invisible cloud of tangled strings. "Then I start to pull it out from the air." I nodded in agreement and inscribed the feel of the idea into my body – draw the strike out from the strings in the air there! She then yielded the nage's spot to me and said, "Try it!" I held on to the feel of the image and took my stance inviting the uke to initiate attack. I kept my sight intent on the trunk and shoulders of Alice-san. She moved in. As she took her step I sensed her back muscle release for the *yokomen-uchi* and then at that moment I stretched my hand out in what felt like midpoint in air to extract from it uke's strike, just as sensei had demonstrated seconds ago. Before I knew what had happened, my two hands had secured the uke's striking palm in its clasp and was resting on the side of my orange belt. Grinning, Energy-sensei said, "That's it!" Turning to my partner, she asked, "How did it feel?" Alice-san replied, "It felt smooth." Sensei turned to me, "It seems that this kind of explanation

works for you. Others need a break down into step one, two, and three.”

She then walked away to attend another pair.

Keeping up with the grain of movement process for me was following the positive figure of my uke’s moving body. For Energy-sensei, it was perceiving and following the relationship between musculature and motion not only of the uke to discern the optimal point at which to clasp the uke’s strike.

The defense motion can never be a real-time response when it responds to the aggregate of positive forms. To deflect an attack without direct confrontation, the nage’s response has to affect the process of the evolving movement pathway, not the form itself. That is, rather than attending only to the surface-level of the uke’s moving body, senseis demonstrate how to attend to the not-yet tendencies that lie beneath and beyond the movement’s skinned forms, without having practitioners think in those terms. Rather than closing the gap with an exposition, Energy-sensei conjured up a non-existent cloud of strings to prod me to enact the smooth and spontaneous clasping without experiencing any jerks to either me or to the uke. In subsequent iterations on my own were not as efficient and smooth. Nonetheless, both the feel of the clasping and the point of contact provided a point of entry for me to follow and use one of the many points along the movement process to integrate my motion with that of my uke’s.

Sensei’s interventions are demonstrations of how the particular practitioner can use one of the several points along the movement that was just executed so that a practitioner can respond more reliably and parsimoniously in his/her future executions. It is not only senseis who give immediate feedback that

assists practitioners to train and explore the details of generating appropriate action. Seniors are just as keen and perceptive, especially when practicing *kokyudosa*, the “breath-throw” technique done usually in *seiza* where the nage invites the uke to grab around his/her wrist and breathes one’s way through the resistance.

George-san sat in *seiza* and I placed my knees across from his to slide into mine. I tried to feel for my posture so that the stretch from my lower back to my head stacked up in one single line. I held out my chest and then swiveled up my arm to offer my curled wrist for his grabbing. He said, “Look up!” My eyes shot up and tried to look past his bluish eyes, mustached face and shaved head. I began to apply steady pressure towards his chest and shoulders. Gosh, I can’t move him! George-san had a grin on his face tracing the silent shifts and muscle alignments that I was attempting underneath my skin. He said, “Don’t use your shoulders.” I pulled them back, and then concentrated instead on coordinating the muscles on my back to keep my torso together while continuing to lean forward. He said, “Breathe!” I began to exhale between my lips which helped engage muscles in my lower abdomen. He approved, “Yes.” Now having finally found the right combination with his feedback, I continued on. He began to lean back.

The particulars of a situation and its process that one needs to pay attention to includes not only those clear, definite, singular forms and objects, but also those that remain comparatively eclipsed, such as one’s breathing, primal feelings and

sensing that hold the body, the nervous system and the external forms in a continuum unbeknownst to us.

Another approach that Energy sensei takes to convey the globality of feel is constructing a practitioner's bodily postures in such a way that there is no choice for the practitioner but to feel how virtues and particularities can be integrated as movement unravels. When doing *kokyudosa*, especially when my partners are seniors, Energy sensei comes around and sculpts my posture before I invite them. More effective than words, she puts her weight to press down my shoulders to lengthen the distance between my neck and shoulders and to engage my lower back muscles.

While keeping my shoulders down, like a spring, then lean herself just enough on my back so that my chest curves out into a convex all the while telling me to keep my neck aligned with my spine rather than bent upward and to scrunch up my thigh muscles. As she uses her own body to manually sculpt mine, I can feel pressure build up in the fold of my seat. She then goes on telling me to lift my arm without lifting my shoulders. Trying to be a mannequin, I swivel my arms up very slowly afraid to disturb any detail of the sculpted form Energy-sensei had shaped out of my body. My partner wraps his hands around the wrist. And then she lets go as she would a wound up spring and tells me to simply pass along "the heavy pan of roasted turkey" onto my partner's lap. I keep hold of the feel, the mass of a huge ocean, and meticulously pass it to my partner.

The senior, who would normally have resisted and given me a hard time, gives his way rather smoothly without me sensing how it had happened. The movement form had followed the feel, without any awareness that I had to do *kokyudosa*. My attention had been focused on the various pressures being squeezed into my posture. She would add, “You see the smile on his face? That means he’s surprised.” Without having to refer to any of the four principles hung at the *shōmen*, Energy-sensei had inserted me in a moment, however ephemeral and fleeting, from which to feel the moment when the particularities condensed into my posture rather than me having to chase after them. She would add, “You can forget what I said, but I want you to remember the feel.” Energy-sensei had effectively presented feel first before words or images from which I could explore and play with its entanglement between particularities beneath my skinned form and those of my partner.

In each of movement launches, the practitioner themselves are not only trying to feel as much of the active content of particularities of the dyadic encounter, but also exploiting the process at different points along the way.

Kate-san, a white-belt, who was of similar stature as me, grabbed my left wrist with both her hands for the *ryote-mochi kokyunage* (two hand grab timed throw). Recalling what Energy sensei had showed Scott-san several weeks about maintaining connection while stepping in to stand perpendicular to one’s uke, I turned my wrist so that the palm faced skyward as I transferred the weight of my body from the front foot to the other so as not to lose the feel of the initial tension in the uke’s grab as I

stepped in. Now looking to corrugated door, I lifted up my left arm letting the tension run all the way down my back, my right thighs, and calf to the ball of my right foot, the main axis of my posture in that particular instance. I tried to curl my left arm without losing any of the tension as if to scratch my nose with my left hand, as Energy sensei explained. Kate-san was still holding onto her two hand grab around my left wrist, yet a plane of force that stood between me and my uke had alleviated. I did not let go of the collectivity that ran through the ball of my right foot, thigh, back, through the left arm to the point of connection between my uke and I. As I unwound the curled up left arm along the same plane as my chest maintaining tension throughout the cable-like stretch, which effected distortion in my partner's posture, making her fall away.

The effectiveness of the technique was driven by a feel for tension that flooded throughout my bodily collectedness, rather than the thought of motion. It was turning my own posture into the central axis to pull in my uke's own posture and balance and finding an open and unarmed plane in the dyadic system to lead the system of compensation into a process. In order to keep the tension moving to my advantage and to the disadvantage of my uke, I had to coordinate where my eyes were thrown (to the corrugated door) as I was repositioning my feet to secure my posture as a central axis from which my limbic motions could exploit the uke's grab to deliver effects to her skeletal arrangements to alter her posture.

When the blue-belt Fred-san stepped in as the uke for the same technique throw, I went through the initial set of movement as before. But when I

reached the point where I was about to curl my left arm up as if to scratch my nose, Energy-sensei stood in front of the two of us and coaxed me to hit her with my elbow. I could not believe my ears and let the tension that had built up unravel. Seeing that I had stopped the motion, Energy-sensei said, “Hit me like this!” while motioning the sudden lift of her elbow jabbing through the air. I jumped back in surprise. Both Fred-san and I went back to our initial positions to start the motion from the beginning. When I reached the same point of transitioning from stepping into curling up my left arm, I jabbed my elbow into the air as if to jab Energy-sensei who was standing not too far away. The feeling of block that came from Fred-san had given way into something more pliable.

It was only after the fact that I understood why Energy-sensei wanted me to lift my arm with the feeling of hitting her with my elbow. The motion generated a larger swoop in my left arm which was necessary to open up Fred’s chest and ribs, because unlike Kate-san, he stood taller and larger than me. I uncurled my left arm out to shed the uke off. The feel described above cannot be characterized as intuitive, but the first sign that my motions was beginning to move away from thought-generated one into a feeling-led one. How to maintain my posture, centeredness and limbic collectivity was beginning to coalesce. Being attentive to feel and feeling in my submission to the conditions of the encounter made the process continuously available for further unfolding with the least amount of resistance.

Increasing appreciation of feel and feeling to not only take in the world, but also move in the world, brings about a shift in the way practitioners approach technique practice. A senior who would execute a technique and then look up at the ceiling and scratch his chin, would proclaim with a frown on his face, “That did not feel right”. Another senior would latch onto and stretch the tensional feel between the nage and the uke producing a very slow motion in the technique movement to not only feel the relationalities of the intercorporeal system of compensation shift, but also manipulate the tension to effect subtle change in the entangled system. Other times, seniors would simply unravel through a technique, as if to mindlessly let free a tension that was waiting to express itself in any shape or form. In such instances, ukes are taken on a surprise roller-coaster ride by the swiftness of the torque that the unleashing generates in the dyadic interaction.

The more skilled the nage becomes, the more the unfolding of his or her technique feels on the uke as one unified flow of motion from the attack’s initiation until its neutralization. How the uke feels when one, as the nage, is occupied with the task of extricating oneself from the fast approaching corporeal dynamic does not arise from some extraordinary individual aptitude nor obligation in exercising empathy (e.g. Bennett, 1998). Rather, an individual practitioner alternates being the nage and the uke multiple times even when practicing one technique. Switching roles in the dyadic unit provides two vantage points from which to attend to the feeling of the movement dynamic. The oscillation between the two vantage points furnishes an axis for attuning one’s perception, feeling, and motion in relation to the dyadic partner so as to stitch

both positions and their movement assemblage into one integrated system of compensation: so that, keeping one-point for one means losing one-point for the other, and maintaining posture for one translates as losing posture for the other.

The threshing floor. Closely tied to the above mentioned practices that foreground feel and feeling as the primary modality for movement practice at Shining Energy is generating contexts in which practitioners must exploit it to engage with the concrete particularities of their situation to open it up into a process. This is done by strategically tapping into the various processes of technique practice and training which on the one hand, present constraints that give little room for practitioners to exit a situation and, on the other, augment the thrownness of situations and their contingent nature. The two elements work in tandem permeating through all events and activities that practitioners encounter at Shining Energy in which they must submit themselves to proceed.

No exit. The first is executing the defense technique itself. Each technique has a beginning and an end, which according to Shining-sensei is meant to be executed over the duration of single exhalation of one's breath. The defense techniques that are practiced regularly, the nage-uke dyad, are the fundamental unit in a series of compositional events, which starts with an attack and ends with neutralization. Each act whether a punch or a turn is never a stand alone event. It connects to another act. An attack calls defense into existence, and one's defense becomes another's attack, especially in the conflict-ridden world that all martial arts presupposes. Over time, skilled practitioner learns that even when (s)he

reaches an end, (s)he should be ready for the next beginning: in other words, not to seek terminal satisfaction in completeness.

The training of a practitioner to be jump in and stay in open-ended processes without giving up begins with the dyadic exercise. What keeps the practitioners from giving up or exiting the technique execution mid-way is they are responsible for making the very movement on which their partner's training depends. More importantly are the eyes of his or her fellow practitioners on the mat. When practicing a technique, a nage who may have realized that (s)he has entered the attacked on the wrong side and wants to start from scratch will often be prodded by nearby seniors and senseis to "Finish! Finish! First finish the technique!" If the practitioner is feeling nervous and unsure about whether (s)he can execute it, everyone in the group waits for however long it takes while one of the seniors or sensei takes them by the hand until it is executed. Key mottos at Shining Energy are "Don't give up!" and "Keep going!", however badly one may be faltering. Whether the technique is executed poorly or well, whether one is stuck in middle of a turn and forgot the following sequence of moves, giving up and not completing a technique execution once (s)he has committed to it is reprimanded by the senseis.

So, a practitioner has to execute a technique and devise her own means to open up the confrontation into a dynamic process as best (s)he knows how. The sitting position of *kokyudosa* (breath throw) already eliminates much of movement options, thereby making the task of finding an opening through the use

of four virtues rather than muscling one's way through the confrontational set-up rather artful.

My partner and I seated ourselves in seiza for the *kokyudosa*. I looked down at our knees to make sure that the distance between them was no further than one fist length apart. I let my eyes hover around her neck and mouth, lest they travel up and be captivated by her face and their features. I lifted my buttocks slightly off from the heels of my feet underneath and lowered my shoulders and stretch my spine and held the position of the chest with my lats. I swiveled my arms up to invite her wrist grab and raised my eyes toward her forehead. Our faces were only a foot length apart and whether I willed or not, my optic nerves were feasting on the features before my eyes. Though I tried to will my eyes to zoom out to look beyond the object before me into the far distant imaginary horizon beyond the dojo walls. Something was assembling the features into their everyday familiarity – the reddish hair, the ears, the eyebrows, and the eyes which pulled together the disparate features into a whole form in which a person resided. Once my thought held a personality before me, I began entertaining thoughts that I could not stop - what is she thinking? Where is she focusing her resistance? Is she scanning over the details of my face as I am hers? Such close proximity to another person's face placed me in the house of mirrors. My thought energies flickered between assembling the familiar forms into a person and then trying to disconnect from its pull to look beyond and to feel down my back. At the same time,

the feel of her grip around my wrist and the feel of connection into her palms and up her arms shifted my attention to a parallel universe of pressure and force. In that world, there no longer existed familiar visual boundaries that help delineate where one entity ends and the next begins. For a split second I was suspended in vacuum unable to sense familiar textures of difference for my attention to grip onto. Although a shell of a body sat in front of me, what my sinews sensed was a flat impasse with no perspective or shape. I needed to somehow push through this formless, faceless coagulation. Without my knowing, my shoulders were muscling their way in as I could feel the strain on their joints. I so badly wanted to collapse the form before me! I tried to focus my attention back again to the formless world. I tightened my thighs and focused on my lats and continued transfer the weight to my partner. Then I goaded myself to imagine opening an expanding horizon before me, as Thomas-san had so often tried to inculcate in me. Suddenly the impasse flung open like a door with no trace or sign of earlier resistance. My back heaved and my lung exhaled. I swung my partner around to my side for the pinning finish.

Learning to feel and using it to guide me through the technique prompted me to devise a parallel universe as running alongside the form-based one that I was only too familiar with. Part of the difficulty lied in untethering my attachment to the familiar relationalities between positive forms I had relied upon to make sense of my presence in the world, and then try to organize relationalities through feel. The greater challenge came from their juxtaposition, especially when doing *kokyudosa*,

which made my attention flicker, hesitant, and indecisive. It kept reverting to the overly familiar mode of operating in a world of positive forms and objects where feeling remained bounded within surfaces and skins. It certainly did not help when seniors teased with a smirk or a word who knowingly distracted my attempt at focus by drawing attention to the form-based world. I had to prod myself to hold attention to the tension and somehow figure out how to muster the four virtues in a world where there is no recognizable target.

Changing partners. By practicing the same technique with different partners, the conditions with which one has to work with changes. The differential between their physiological characteristics (such as height, weight, length of limbs, agility, and skill), right- or left-hand sidedness, the speed and angle at which the two practitioners engage sets the conditions of the con-frontational situation. But how these conditions will connect and disconnect through movement cannot be fully understood in advance. It is only through repeated practice, that one can begin to feel the variations that are possible in “doing *kokyudosa*”. When taking the position of the uke, some nages would inadvertently end up making my position stronger by focusing their pressure to my one-point in my lower belly. Others would direct force near my shoulders, my weakest spot of resistance, where I have no choice but to give in. Some seniors simply charge through my collectedness and one-point like a piece of crumpled piece of paper, making me look around to see what huge hole I had left unattended in my posture and one-point. Some others do not even make connection through their wrist and

just push at my form, making the encounter very not only uninteresting but distasteful.

With Shining-sensei, I could not sense the usual mass of tension through the connection even though a physical form was sitting before me, but I would find my collectedness no longer able to hold its fortress together and open up scattering my one-point, posture, and limbs in different directions. When we reversed roles, I would find myself trying to direct my force ever more closely to his lower belly in an attempt to locate a point of friction from which to amass tension so that I can move his one-point out of the way. I would not only slip and slide away again and again and losing strength with each attempt, but also forget to breathe. With seniors, I am given no slack to meander my way to establish my sense of feel. By the time I adjust to the particulars of the contact, similar to walking in and adjusting one's eyes to the relative darkness of a room compared to the glaring brightness of form-based universe, they have in the meantime created what I call the Great Wall, an impenetrable verticality or encirclement in which any attempt to pulsate forward, up or sideways is immobilized. Each iteration is a unique realization among several possibilities that become available once the nage loosens the dyadic confrontational situation into a process for the course of things to unravel.

The convention of changing partners after each set of technique practice and practicing together regardless of skill levels or sex is indicative of priority Shining Energy places on attending to the particulars of all possible movement interaction rather than narrow down the active content through prior selection.

The making of movements with partners of different physiological types and skill levels - as the instructor, as the student, as a senior, as a junior, as a woman, as a man, as a short and light-footed person, as a taller and slower-footed person, and so on – provides multiplicity of vantage points from which the practitioner can see, feel, and move through their technique execution. This convention does risk slowing down movement execution and their range for the more skilled practitioners, some of who have confessed their preference for working with those of their skill level than juniors and newcomers. At the same time, a newcomer’s corporeal assemblage is valued and appreciated as it brings to the dojo a set of unique characteristics and elements to the group interactional dynamic and potential. Yet, the participation of the newcomer affords practitioners to feel a new difference from which to learn and explore the physiological characteristics, not only for itself, but relationally through movement practice. The authority of “coming to practice” rests on its intersubjective approach where the practitioner immerses him/herself “in a space of dispersion, with an extending net of relations with ‘others’, that is, with nature and with other human subjects” (Zhu, 2004, p. 242).

Embedding unpredictability. In addition to the inevitable difference that individual physiological characteristics brings to the dyadic encounter, the senses actively make use of structural features of practice and its processes to augment uncertainty and even induce disorder to suspend the mind’s tendency to locate pattern and impose that image to the environment. Exploiting unpredictability helps to highlight the contingent nature of even something as mundane and

repetitive as a practice routine to enhance awareness of the grain and reveal the inexhaustible particulars of practice. Senseis will sometimes call up individual practitioners, especially seniors, to either lead warm-ups or help in the counting to pace the exercise. But exactly which senior will step in is not known in advance. Moreover, even the more junior practitioners have been called up to the shōmen unannounced to open practice and lead warm-ups. This alerts all those present on the mat to be ready for contingencies.

Once a practitioner assumes the position as the leader of warm-up, (s)he tries to be mindful to orchestrate the warm-up. At the same time, the pace at which frequencies are counted will never be identical to the senseis or to anyone else. Exact replication is not expected or even encouraged. Sometimes the frequencies of each exercise will be faster or slower, shorter or longer in duration depending on the practitioner, and even certain parts will be inadvertently skipped altogether. In turn, everyone present is expected to follow and submit themselves to the rhythm and movements of the warm-up regardless of how well or poorly (s)he leads. If there is any sign of resistance, senseis will reprimand him or her for not following properly. So although the overall structure of the warm-up session remains the same, the particular relationality of its grains become different, thereby revising the experience of the warm-up.

The second feature that is exploited to ensure contingent nature of practice is the choice of techniques to be practiced. No one, not even the senseis, has an exact plan of which of the many techniques and their variations will be practiced that day. Sometimes, when attendance at the dojo is small in number, the session

becomes a weapons practice - in the form of wooden swords, daggers, and staffs. The presence of weapons and learning to wield them adds a very different grain to the confrontational encounter and movement dynamic. Practitioners are not simply acting on weapons, even if they are wooden pieces at that, but are constituted in turn by such objects and methods used. Because the weapons are so foreign to contemporary practitioners, Shining-sensei often spends significant length of time demonstrating their use in dyadic interaction. His swordsmanship is so keen that the wooden sword transforms into a gleaming steel blade, transporting the practitioners into the merciless battlefield of Japan's Edo era where his slight imperceptible nick at the neck is good enough to make one's opponent bleed to death. His performance and demonstration often charges the air with an edge and intentness that weapons-free technique practice does not always replicate. Other times, it is dynamic attacks with longer projected throws that consume more mat space that is practiced. And then there are those practices where seemingly innocuous techniques are used to focus on the feel of tension, muscle coordination, posture and weight placement on balls of one's feet. The challenge for the practitioner is to become aware of the many particulars and try to generate flow and smoothness in their technique execution.

Sometimes, it is not techniques themselves, but simply studying how to hold one's attention and create (ar)rhythmicity with a group.

Energy-sensei and five practicing members formed a circle on one side of the rectangular mat at the dojo, while Shining-sensei and another five formed another circle on the other side of the mat. All of us gripped a

bokken, a wooden sword. Shining-sensei gave us directions to stand in *hanmi*, a forward foot position, facing the open space between two practitioners on the opposite side of the group's circle. The exercise is to swing down the sword at whoever swings first. We all stood with our swords clasped above our heads looking into the empty center of the circle and waiting. A hakama-wearing gentleman to my left swung. Two others had already swung their swords down at him. I veered and swung mine down as quickly and firmly as possible. We took our swords back up and repositioned ourselves. Energy-sensei, who was standing to my right struck her sword down. I veered towards her and tried to catch up with others who had already pointed their swords at her. After about several more swings, my arms were getting tired and my hands numb. I could not keep my concentration to all the bodies in the circle as I was trying to explore how to clasp the sword more efficiently. Another gentleman across the circle swung his sword. I swung the *bokken* down. As I pulled my sword back into ready position, I decided to initiate the next swing. As soon as everyone had finished collecting their swords above their heads, I swung my sword down and swords in the circle swung to me. Energy-sensei told us to make our swings irregular as we were falling into a pattern. I felt myself even more alert: eyes looking out and peripherally to be alert to any motion, while my head calculated whether it was too soon to swing my sword or not, and muscles in my hands, arms, and trunk trying to stay collected so that both my body and sword stood still like a

statue. It was a relief when someone swung their sword. It was easier to be moving than standing poised and on full alert.

The exercise had not lasted more than fifteen minutes, at the end of which my senses had gone numb from over-concentration. The pace of the exercise was never under the control of any single person, generating a very bizarre context where one could neither impose a pattern to make some slack for oneself nor ask to be excused when my senses and sinews could no longer keep up.

Seizing chaos. Third and last, promotional exams comprise another situational challenge in which the practitioner must assert his or her presence and identity by conducting oneself through the four virtues. More than any other segment of the promotional exam, the freestyle, which in Japanese is referred to as *randori* (seizing chaos), epitomizes what the community of Aikido practitioners aspires to attain in their art form. A junior practitioner is placed in a high-pressure situation for a minute or two where (s)he must face an onslaught of free-form attacks from a senior(s) called up by the senseis. Except for the rule of not injuring the other's body, in which case the examinee fails the exam, there is no parameter limiting the uke's attack nor nage's techniques as long as (s)he reveals through her performance the art's four principles – positive mind, relax progressively, keeping one-point, and finding correct posture throughout. The examinee is discouraged, however, from running around the mat to avoid the uke as a strategy. (S)He must face the uke and deflect the attacks.

The freestyle portion of the promotional exams is a device to throw the practitioner in a situation which rejects all restrictions of prior structures and

purposes, the challenge of which is multiplied by not only the number of ukes one must confront relative to the level (s)he is being tested for, but also the clamor of shouting and hand clappings of those sitting around the mat space to augment distraction. With each promotional exam, the junior must freestyle against one more uke than the last, which eventually maxes at five. Even though it is just one more body on the mat, the interactional dynamic with each additional bodily presence multiplies its effects which, in general, cannot be deduced from one's experience with each individual uke. Attention must instead be poised at all times and all angles while skillfully deploying perception, control and action as one in his or her movement response. It is not the examinee's Aikido form per se that is measured and assessed, but whether the examinee is able to flourish and cope in "chaos" by maintaining four principles throughout his or her movement conduct. The freestyle test highlights both individual and community achievement. Yet, it is the one situational set-up that is never practiced at Shining Energy. Preparing for it defeats the purpose of freestyle - grabbing chaos. Part of the reason may lie in the fact that preparation serves no useful purpose. Given the innumerable situations that practitioners can encounter, the forms and their versions that can be improvised become exponential. Shining-sensei often quotes Sensei as having said, "Aikido has no form" or "I still don't know what Aikido is". More importantly is, of course, preparation would remove the brute exigencies of induced disorder, no longer making it an effective means to elicit pure coping action uncontaminated by prior experience to reveal what is latent in the examinee.

More crucially, however, preparation undermines the eventfulness of freestyle as a major means of personal and interpersonal growth.

Reprise

Motivations propelling individual practitioners to cross the threshold to take part in the ritual flow and training at Shining Energy vary widely. They range from a desire to attain self mastery and control, a means to find a sense of identity outside one's family and friends, a need to exercise regularly to keep one's diabetic count low and limbs supple, a need to find solace in Asian exoticness from the material driven urban life, a commitment to spreading the gift of the art, a way to sustain full corporeal mobility from the effects of stroke, a love and passion for the art, a curiosity to see what happens, to a means to study Americans practicing an "Eastern movement form" (D. Brown & Leledaki, 2010). These divergent reasons entangle the disparate individual lifepaths on the mat, who willingly submit themselves to the demands of "coming to practice". Practitioners willingly participate in the making and moving of Aikido practice which on the one hand generates clusters of practices that compose the dojo (as demonstrated in the earlier chapter), and on the other, exploits the grain of the very interactional movement process to further submit themselves to conditions implied in it (the focus of this chapter). Taking part in the double-layered process enables the body to reach out to the external environment to feel itself in radically revised version of the world.

The cultivation practice of Aikido is not a program that leads to enlightenment, as Carter argues, unless attending to details and harmonizing with

their process leads one to be “a human being that is capable of the highest interpersonal ideals, while at the same time living a life of personal joy and fulfillment” (2008, p. 18). The practice of Aikido cultivates a coping strategy where practitioners develop feel and feeling to bind themselves not simply to the world, but to the heart of chaos without losing either flexibility nor one’s presence and identity. In such a world, differences cannot be located or contained in objects. It is not regular, divisible, analyzable nor available for control. It is a world where one can only be alert and be supple, both in mind and body. It is a world where practitioners face a ceaseless onslaught of attacks and attack-like challenges. But one is always ready and prepared for the next. It is for such *longue durée* that the efficiency of the latent form of coping strategy cultivated at Shining Energy becomes prominent. The practice is to stay there, in the heart of the unfolding process!

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The ethnographic rendering presented in this work juxtaposes different texts to “do” and “show” Aikido. The account first presents a relatively traditional “thick description” rendition of martial art practice at Shining Energy. It then textually performs Aikido techniques by using the presentation of details of the practice and social life at Shining Energy to displace the core position of the “attack” texts. At the same time, the ethnographic accounts of each of chapters five and six are framed as a technique demonstration of those drawn from the late Tohei’s book on Aikido (1968). The juxtaposition not only reveals what each author privileges and leaves out in the process – in other words, their partiality - but also locates gaps and cracks from which to tackle “philosophical” questions, as Raffles had once said (Feb. 17, 2012), without losing the details of everyday life. It is an ethnographic tactic as a whole that seeks to “add to the world rather than extract stable representations from it” (Cadman, 2009, p. 1). So, what is effectively being added?

The model-based and the means-end approach that Donohue (1994) and Carter (2008) have uses in presenting their view and stance on the martial arts practice of karate and Aikido respectively serve as a foil to perform a process-based approach in recounting the social life at Shining Energy. The juxtaposition of texts helps to create the tension necessary to loosen the predetermining grip the specific nature and meaning of the martial art and their positive forms and objects have on over-determining not only the mental activities but physical movements

of the martial art practitioners appropriating the cultural resource in practicing their martial art tradition and style. It is not the displacement for its own sake that this ethnographic work seeks to add to the world, but to use the displacement to direct attention to those dimensions of cultural and social practices that are often overlooked, underappreciated, and simply failed to be recognized – the opening of the field (Cooper, 1976) and the opening of inert reality to process (Jullien, 2004). In other words, practitioners at Shining Energy persist in the practice of Aikido not necessarily to replicate and perfect the movement forms or to contribute to transmitting Japanese culture, but to use them as markers and fulcrums to produce excess that “point to a space and time in which everything is unfinished, infinite, permanently suspended in a state of kaleidoscopic variability” (Cooper, 2005, p. 1691). The work not only argues that bodies are “the seat of motility and praxis” (Leder, 1990, p. 30), but aims to show and demonstrate that cultivating their sinews and, senses and the neural pathways is what loosens up the moment or a situation to the process of an open field that is not predetermined by meaning, law, or any other authority.

The practice of Aikido at Shining Energy is primarily a process of transculturation, a process of ever changing network of relations than an proprietary entity (Rogers, 2006). The appropriation of an “Eastern movement form” (D. Brown & Leledaki, 2010) enable multiple bundles of relations that not only produce various practices and processes but also get at what lies beneath and beyond the mechanical, symbolic and ritualistic aspects of a martial art practice. First, the corporeal, material and semiotic components coexist to connect and

disconnect “as a frame within a frame within a frame” (Grosz, 2005) to produce an abundance of both positive and latent relationalities at the dojo. The mat and the shōmen are levers that connect and disconnect human and material resources to territorialize the dojo for the exploration of excesses of gravity and movement on the one hand, and the field(s) charged with relational intensities from which the ‘martial’ *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) is prodded on the other. The wearing of gi and hakamas, the colored belts, multiple bowings to mark events and encounters, the technique movements, Japanese terminology, and the placement of shōmen for example, reflect not so much the specific nature and meaning of the forms and objects themselves but regulate the co-dependent yet asymmetric structure of roles, responsibility and accountability paralleling the martial art skill and dedication of its practitioners necessary to open the field for practice at Shining Energy (i.e. the full meaning of dojo, 道場) on the one hand, as well as necessary to belong to an international *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) on the other.

Second, the relationalities on which authority of “coming to practice” rests on – namely presenting techniques by sensei, practicing techniques in dyads, and correcting techniques by sensei - not only that construct, grab attention, and display body-based activities, but implicate the space between them so crucial in the production of practice. An Aikido technique takes shape through the potential in the uke-nage dyadic con-frontation, that is, by binding oneself to the conditions and possibilities implied in the interspace, not in replicating the movement’s displacements. The various relational fields, that the moving bodies form in the

course of warm-ups, technique practices and corrections, produce interactional opportunities that beckon a movement response. Learning and practicing Aikido takes place not through the internal capacities of self-contained individuals acting with intentions, nor from the specific nature and meaning of the positive forms and objects that serve to direct the practice of Aikido. Rather, practitioners grow into skillfulness through the dojo's "rich structured environment" (Ingold, 1996), that is, occurrences generated by the meshwork of relational openings more crucial than the expertise of individual practitioners that each member participates regardless of their skill level.

Third and last, practitioners at Shining Energy submit themselves to the rigors of practice not necessarily to re-establish a cultural order through syncretism that Donohue (1994) argues, or to seek enlightenment, as Carter (2008) does. Practitioners persist in the practice of Aikido spanning years that go beyond achieving technical virtuosity to develop complex feelings and the meticulous use of the sinews of their body, its senses and neural pathways. They submit to themselves to the processes of practice to cultivate the skillful use of perception, control and action into one fluid response like a "flash of lightning". It is not the displaced movement forms practitioners at Shining Energy practice so hard to perfect, but using them to harmonize with its process at all possible points and not lose any of its active content to discern the discriminating moment to effect change. They are, in other words, cultivating a latent form of coping strategy (Chia & Holt, 2009), a lateral approach (Pirsig, 2005[1974]) to resolving the problem of how to alleviate the hostile situation they cannot extricate

themselves, but in which they must maintain presence and identity in order to carry on. It is not by tailoring their response to positive forms, for the world is always becoming and in flux. So rather than being led by the idea of fighting or throwing, practitioners instead engage ever more in the connecting and disconnecting with particularities implied in the situation to open its inertness to process. By fortifying the four principles in their corporeal conduct, 1) keep one point to develop calmness, 2) relax progressively, 3) find correct posture in everything, and 4) develop positive mind, practitioners learn to make not only their own presence and identity mobile, but the world in which they find themselves as well.

The transculturation of Aikido practice at Shining Energy shows that the appropriation of the art's *technique du corps* (Mauss, 1973[1931]) and its attendant cultural elements involves the mutually constituting movement of relationships between things rather than external objects that support the needs and purposes of its practitioners. Its many practices and props, including notions as 'one point' and 'posture', not only serve as levers of corporeal movement at Shining Energy, but also transform the sentience of its practitioners as well as themselves into a continuum between corporeality, movements, feelings, and the external world. The new sense of collectedness and connectedness that the practice of Aikido cultivates points to a space and time beyond the movement forms to intimate and reveal new ways of not only moving in the world, but also moving the world! Shining Energy, in this respect, is a successful example of a transformational communicative space where relationalities across multiple lines

of difference are negotiated through what can be described as embodied dialogic practice.

If communication is a project to reconcile the self and the other, as Peters (1999) contends, communication must work not at making the signs that elicit divergent meanings agree or harmonize. It must work at the conditions that uphold the dualistic distinctions, such as mind and matter, flesh and spirit, dream and reality, so as to give way in the emergence of the relative event and its dense intermeshing of their relationships. So attitudes and feelings, such as empathy (Bennett, 1998), relational empathy (Broome, 1991), embodied feeling of culture (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004) which aim at overcoming and bridging differences are to be exploited, not pursued as ends in themselves, to open static reality into processes. In his proposal for a “materialist, transhuman, dialogic theory of communication”, Rogers (1998) asks how communication can be imagined beyond the information model to include the natural and material world in communication processes, to include non-dominant and nonhuman voices in the meaning and policy making processes, acknowledge the embodied and the embeddedness of humans in the world, and deconstruct binaries into continuums.

First, such process can only be gotten through the particulars, not through structures and systems. Second, a bundle of relationalities across multiple lines of differences must produce the very dialogic practices and processes that will engage the sinews, sense and neural paths of individuals to bind him or herself to the particulars of the conditions implied in the situation to produce a variety of excess. Third, the approach, if at all taken, cannot be a model-base or a means-end

type, but a lateral one so that attention is poised at all times and all angles to take in the world of particulars without losing any of its active content through laziness or acts of prior selection. Fourth, participants must not only follow the unfolding process, but also maintain their sense of presence and pre-objective identity throughout. Fifth and last, the situation which people face must have qualities of thrownness and unpredictability on the one hand and a sense of “no exit” on the other so that individuals improvise and “grow”. If any of these descriptors seem familiar, it is no other than methodologies of cultivation, similar to the coping strategy cultivated at Shining Energy. In other words, communication processes and practices must be made to resemble methodologies of cultivation practices.

In closing, the limitations, implications, and future directions of this ethnographic research are as follows. Despite the study’s experimentation with transculturation as its methodology and presentation of its findings as a tactic to embrace both uncertainty and ambiguities of everyday processes and practices to understand and describe its complex social phenomenon, the study cannot recreate or provide for the readers the actual feeling of doing Aikido. However well crafted an ethnographic research maybe, there can be no substitute to closing the gap between the interpretations of and the act of moving and feeling except by moving and feeling. This, however, does not give grounds to dismiss ethnographic research altogether, because it affords opportunities to experiment with ways of understanding for creative thinking as scholars, researchers, and practitioners grapple in their respective ways to open fields and spaces anew.

The implication of this study is two fold. The first is on grasping and theorizing what is emergent yet uncertain. The ethnographic study is an attempt to render knowledge practice in a particular way to index what is dynamic and emergent, the opening field, while keeping in abeyance certainty on the one hand, and maintaining the integrity of latency of its emergent process on the other. As such, it serves as a useful map for examining complex social phenomena that escapes the framework of research design and well established data collection techniques. The study devised principled improvisation by applying “aiki”, harmonizing the ontological and epistemological mismatch, by importing into the research process principles found in real life practices of the Aikido community, transforming research space itself as an example of transculturation. The second is its methodological implication on teaching and educating research and its processes in order to further knowledge. It begins by acknowledging the usefulness and limits of any research design and well established data collection techniques in the context of understanding social phenomenon. It demands knowing not only how to wield research tools and their limitation in actual research practice, but also how to engage with the chaos of one’s phenomenon of study at as many possible points and not lose any of its active content through laziness or prior selection. Finally, in looking to the future, the next follow up of this research is to explore how the practice of Aikido and its “virtues” impact the lives of practitioners beyond the dojo.

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APPENDIX 1
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

(The First Moment)

General Warm-up Questions (*non-directive questions*)

(memorable tour question)

1. Can you tell me the story of how you started martial arts practice?

(time-line question)

2. How long have you been practicing the art?

(directive question)

3. Did your background (be it professional, prior experience, or others) have any influence on your decision to persist in this practice?

4. What do you like or enjoy about your martial arts practice?

5. What is the challenging part of your practice?

6. At this point in time, what do you hope to attain through your practice?

RQ3

(experience questions)

7. What motivates you to attend practice regularly?

(experience questions)

8. Has your motivation towards your martial arts practice changed since you started?

(experience questions)

9. What are you getting out of your practice?

(grand tour question)

10. Can you describe for me what a typical practice looks like?

11. What are your feelings like when you come to practice?

RQ2

(structural question)

12. What does it take to become good at Aikido?

(compare-contrast question)

13. How do you tell when someone has mastered the art from someone who hasn't?

(native language, native understanding questions)

14. I noticed that articles of clothing, such as colored belts and dark pants, are used to distinguish levels and roles.

a. To what extent are these distinctions important for the practice?

(native language, native understanding questions)

15. I noticed certain etiquette, such as bowing. I also noticed that Japanese terms are used to name moves and movements.

a. To what extent are they helping the practice?

(native language, native understanding questions)

16. On the center of the front wall, there is the character "chi."

a. How does this relate to the practice?

b. Can you give me an example that helps to describe "chi"?

(native language, native understanding questions)

17. Next to that hangs a frame with four basic principles.

a. How do they relate to the practice?

b. How meaningful are they for you?

RQ1

(emergent idea question)

18. To what extent have you mastered the art?

a. What aspects of the practice do you find easy to master?

1) What helps you to master them?

b. What aspects of the practice do you find challenging to master?

1) What makes them so challenging?

(memorable tour question)

19. Can you describe the time or incident that helped to take your practice to move to the next level?

20. How has your understanding of the martial arts practice deepened?

a. How do you know or how can you tell?

21. What aspects of the practice do you find challenging or difficult to access?

a. What may be some of the things that can be done to resolve them or help it make more accessible?

Closing

(loose-ends question)

22. Are there any other parts of the practice that you consider just as meaningful and important as the weekly scheduled practices?

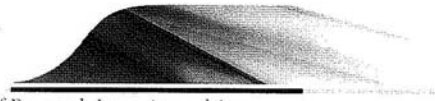
23. How would you describe or explain your martial arts practice to someone who doesn't know much about it?

(loose-ends question)

24. Is there anything else about the practice that you'd like to add?

Balancing Questions:

- You mentioned _____, what did you mean by that?
- Tell me more about _____.



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Benjamin Broome
STAUF

From:  Mark Roosa, Chair
Soc Beh IRB

Date:  10/07/2010

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 10/07/2010

IRB Protocol #: 1009005556

Study Title: Creating Mastery in Martial Arts

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX 2
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

(The Second Moment)

General Warm-up Questions (*non-directive questions*)

(memorable tour question)

1. Tell me the story of how or who you started Aikido.

(time-line question)

2. How long have you been practicing this style of martial art?

(experience question)

3. What does practicing Aikido mean for you?

4. What is the most enjoyable part of Aikido?

5. What is the most challenging part of Aikido?

6. What are some of things that fascinate you about Aikido?

RQ2

(structural question)

7. What does making progress in Aikido mean for you?

(experience question)

8. In what ways has practicing Aikido made a difference in other areas of your life?

RQ1

(native language, native understanding question)

9. What do you think about keeping certain etiquettes on the mat?

(native language, native understanding question)

10. What do you think about the use of Japanese in the training?

(native language, native understanding question)

11. How meaningful is it for you that Aikido came from Japan or that it is an Asian tradition?

RQ3

(experience question)

12. What do you think about training together with diverse group of people and skill levels?

(directive question)

13. What do you watch/listen/feel for to help you get a good grasp of how to execute a technique? (ask for demonstration)

(directive question)

14. (instructors) What are the instructional points you provide for the less skilled practitioners? What do you draw attention to and at the same time what do you ignore?

(native language, native understanding question)

15. Can you explain or show how you understand the four principles of Aikido? (ask for demonstration)

(memorable tour question)

16. What are some of the understandings or insights you have discovered through your practice that an outsider would not know?

Closing


(loose-ends question)

17. Is there anything else about the practice that you'd like to add?

Balancing Questions

- You mentioned _____, what did you mean by that?
- Tell me more about _____.

To: Benjamin Broome STAUF

From: Mark Roosa, Chair Soc Beh IRB 

Date: 12/05/2011

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 12/05/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1112007162

Study Title: International Dialogue Practice Through Martial Arts

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Recent studies found rich neural system in the ‘second brain’(Gershon, 1999), or ‘belly brain’ (Schleip, 2003) that is independent of the cortical brain. Nine times as many neurons are involved in processes where the ‘belly brain’ tells the cortical brain what to do compared to the neurons involved in the top-down direction.

² The *dan*-based rank system is not unique to the martial arts world, however. It has been used by various art traditions in East Asia to measure and mark qualities of mastery, most notable of which are Go (the grid board game of white and black stone pieces), calligraphy, and the martial arts. The Founder of Aikido, Ueshiba, is said to have conferred the rank of 10th *dan* to only three people in his life – to the martial artist Tohei, a calligrapher for the brushwork and a flute player whose performance captured the spirit of Aikido (from personal communication with Shining-sensei).

³ Bowing is rich and heavy with symbolism for many people around the world. One time over lunch following a Saturday practice, Shining sensei recounted a story of one Muslim man who had attended practice for sometime until he had to stop because of the dilemma the gesture caused. He could not reconcile the competing two demands between taking part in the daily practice ritual and the prescriptions of his faith, where bowing one’s head to the ground is reserved for Allah only.

⁴ This is not to claim that there is no difference in the way that non-natives have altered the practice to better suit their needs. I have heard through one advanced female practitioner I met at summer camp 2011 who had first-hand experience practicing Aikido at the “headquarter” *dojo* in Nagoya, Japan, where men and women practiced separately. Of great interest for future research is to examine how martial arts are practiced in Muslim countries.

⁵ Schleip (2003) writes, “...our richest and *largest sensory organ* is not the eyes, ears, skin, or vestibular system but is in fact our muscles with their related fascia. Our central nervous system receives its greatest amount of sensory nerves from our myofascial tissues” (italics original).