

**Evading Capture:**  
**The Affective Movements of a Samurai Art**

*An Honors Thesis Written by*

*Aaron Goeser*

*Advised by Dr. Valerie Olson*

## Abstract

This essay investigates the affective dynamics underlying the contemporary practice and preservation of a centuries old samurai martial art called Takamura Shindo Yoshin Ryu (or *TSYR*) that has been displaced from its native Japan and is now carried on by an organization of largely American and other non-Japanese practitioners. This project is a product of a six month period of embodied ethnographic fieldwork in the Kenshinyokan dojo, the *TSYR* branch dojo in Los Angeles, that built off of a prior two years of training and initiation within this dojo. I theorize that this practice, both at the level of the bodies of its practitioners and at the level of the traditions situatedness within the larger context Western modernity, is a practice that escapes the explanatory mechanisms of conventional anthropological thought and must instead be understood in terms of *affect*. It is practice guided by a martial ethos defined by cultivation of the capacities needed for the evasion of affective capture by both the imagined opponent and by the forces of social regimes of modernity. Furthermore, I offer that the embodied wisdom of this esoteric tradition can provide needed conceptual disruptions and renew perspectives with regards to how we think about the body as a subject within a modern world.

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## Introduction

As a kid I dreamed of becoming a Jedi, just the same as every other kid since the 1977 release of *Star Wars*. However, while others managed to limit this aspiration to the healthy confines of childhood and go about their business of becoming adults, I couldn't. As I got older, I could never move on from this fantasy of being a Jedi nor forget George Lucas's deeply impactful mythos. Lucas' Jedi inspired me to believe that to be a hero meant the mastery of the self and the search for some mystical, otherworldly power necessary to fight for those you love and to discover a possible world beyond the predictability of the everyday and the machinic oppression of empire. My hopes for stumbling upon Old Ben Kenobi in a desert cave somewhere and learning the ways of the Force were, however, not high. So I turned to what I believed to be the closest thing in this world to Lucas' Jedi and what were largely responsible for his inspiration—the legendary samurai of ancient Japan.

For me, like many others who find it, the discovery of *koryu bujutsu*—the preserved classical systems of samurai combative arts—came as a joyful surprise as I finally found something I had believed no longer existed. I searched through countless books, videos, and online forums for traces of the lost ways of the samurai, looking for movements evocative of a legendary time and place. To my further surprise I found a notable koryu school with a private dojo in Southern California, just ten minutes from where I had grown up. When I first saw demonstrations by these martial artists the depth and sophistication of the practice encouraged me to imagine again what the body is capable of. It was a practice that I had been searching for for a long time, a practice

that inspired in me the same wonder that the movements of Jedi on the big screen had done years before.

This essay is based upon my experience as a student of the *Kenshinyokan dojo*, the Southern California TSYR branch dojo, in the first two years of college and my eventual theorization of our dojo as an ethnographic field site. The ideas presented in this thesis are a product of my convergent roles as both martial artist and ethnographer. Without the intimacy gained through initiation prior to fieldwork and the embodied experience of training, this project would be impossible. My own body has been the primary instrument of inquiry in my anthropological investigation of this site and its practice. Inspired by the auto-ethnographic method used by Julie Taylor in her experimental ethnography *Paper Tangos*, I have used my own aspirations, fears, pains, and fantasies as a guide in the process of thinking and writing about the complexities of this contemporary practice (Taylor 1998).

The theoretical aim of this essay is to use my novice experience with this esoteric combative practice to contribute to the expansion and development of anthropology's application of *affect theory*. My field site combines paradoxes between magic and reason; cosmological hybrids between East and West, modern and non-modern; and the formalization of body and practice. In my attempts to grapple with the wide variety of these issues I became increasingly disenfranchised with the conventions of anthropological analysis, finding them to be overly reductive and insufficient in accounting for the elements of my site that escape rational explanation. Recently within anthropology, affect theory has offered an alternative to the limitations of the traditional textual metaphor that has long characterized anthropological thought.

I argue that the *movements* of this site---from the movements of these martial artists' performance of kata to their movements in and out of the alien world of the dojo night after night to the movements of this samurai art, traveling from medieval Japan to contemporary California---are all movements guided by a line of flight toward what I call the *nomadic body*. The nomadic body, as I imagine it, is a body capable of evading capture by modern logics of formal and rational determination. Throughout this paper I

will theorize this idea of the nomadic body based upon insights from conceptualizations of the body in phenomenology and poststructuralism.

The following essay begins with a semi-fictionalized anecdotal prologue of my initial experience of entering the dojo and will serve as a representational introduction to the typical scene of training. The rest of the essay is made up of a series of short chapters organized into four parts, and a conclusion at the end. Altogether the narrative arch of the essay tells a story of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment, as both a story of my own experience of training and a story of the contemporary predicament of anthropology.

In part one, I introduce the history of the art, the space of the dojo, and the complex motivations behind such a practice, all within the context of Foucault and Deleuze's theorizations of the body within the spaces and temporalities of the modern world. Part two explores the hybridity of the language and practices of this contemporary martial art, examining the relationship between the viewpoint of the novice and the scientific and formalist tropes at play in the early stages of pedagogy. Part three functions as a reflective interlude where I consider anthropology's own conceptual and methodological limitations for engaging with the elements of this martial practice that lie beyond the scope of rational and symbolic explanation. In part four, I turn towards phenomenology and affect theory to theorize the ontology of combat and the relationship between affect and martial power. Lastly, in the conclusion I will attempt to bring all the themes of this essay together and insist upon the importance of anthropology taking affect theory seriously as a means for engaging with the dimensions of human experience that extend beyond the rational, from war to magic and spirituality.

In this ethnographic work, I have refused to trivialize my field site and the people that constitute it by attempting to map out its phenomenon in relation to social and symbolic economies of the surrounding world. This field site is a site of strangeness and paradox. It is a site whose *disrelation* to its surrounding world gives it its definition, not its relation. For this reason my investigative questions have always been ontological

rather than interpretive or critical. I have been driven by an endeavor to understand the nature of the forces at play behind the formal and visible phenomenon of this site. In Japanese thought there are two concepts called *omote* and *ura* which respectively refer to the visible surface of a thing and its hidden, underlying forces of meaning and causation. In koryu bujutsu every *kata*, or pedagogical form, has both an omote side and an ura side. This concept of omote and ura is a theme that will be active throughout the structure of this essay as I grapple with the limited ability of anthropology to only operate within the omote side of the epistemological field of symbol, form, and the world of appearance and its failure to seriously engage with the ura side of human experience as the ontological field of affect behind the world of appearance.

## *Descending to the Dojo: A Prologue*

I was eighteen when first contacted Rich and Johnny, two very accomplished martial artists that head the Kenshinyokan dojo. I inquired about becoming a student and after a short correspondence and an interview process I was invited to come to the dojo to see if the art was a good fit me, or as I later realized, to see if *I* was a good fit for the art.

I remember that first night on my way down to the dojo. I remember riding down the freeway that lay adjacent to the town I had grown up in, traveling towards something I had always imagined to find in some far off and exotic place, only now to discover it hidden within the mundane and all too familiar suburban scenery of my childhood. The dojo was nestled behind a modest house on an everyday street of an old neighborhood on the outskirts of Los Angeles. When I arrived I could see the lantern light of the dojo glowing behind a wooden gate. Beyond the gate there was a courtyard in a traditional Japanese style that led to the door of the dojo---an old garage now converted into a shrine and a house of training.

There I was welcomed by Rich and Johnny and a few of their students who all looked like a group of pirates, each with their own stories and backgrounds, with their beards and gruff demeanors, always tittering between a lightheartedness and a stern intensity. I was quickly schooled in dojo etiquette and procedure as we all prepared for the start of class---sweeping the matted floor clean, stripping down our normal clothes



and putting on gi and hakama, ceremonially lining up seated on our knees and bowing to the kamidana in unison as Rich chanted a shinto prayer. Class began with Rich, who is the head instructor of the dojo, seated in front of us all as he explained to me what was to be expected:

*"New guy. Here are some things you need to understand about we do here and how koryu works. Koryu isn't like the modern martial arts you're probably familiar with. Koryu doesn't care about you and what you want. It requires an ability that few Westerners have these days, which is to put one's ego aside and to serve the needs of the ryu above all else.*

*A koryu art is like a ship. Its practitioners are those that man it. And their job is simply to get the ship to its destination. For us that means its rigorous preservation, and passing it on to the next generation. If you can't pull your weight as a crew member, the ship doesn't need you. We can let you off board at any point. This practice takes patience, a keen eye for observation, and a deep commitment to training.*

*Tonight we'll go through a series of exercises and if you don't know something just try your best to keep up. Pay close attention, and follow my instructions exactly as I give them. Do you understand?-- 'Hai' --Any questions?--'No.'*

We started with these sequences of solo movements that looked like some kind of martial yoga. I tried my best to match and mimic these forms as the others performed the movements in tight synchrony but I quickly fell behind and stumbled over myself. Next, Rich had me walk naturally back and forth across the dojo to observe my posture and stride. He explained, *"This practice will change your body, it will change how you move, how you walk down the street, how you move through a crowd"*.

Then he had us pair up and face one another with our right hands crossing each other while extended in front of our bodies. *"All of jujutsu is about connecting to the center of the opponent and learning how to move from your own center."* From this position we practiced connecting our hands to our centers and trying to feel the center of gravity of the other as we pushed into each other walking back and forth across the mat.

After this, Rich had me show him my rolls and break falls. *"Ukemi is central. Before you can learn to make someone else fall you have to learn to fall yourself."* He

demonstrated how safe and effective ukemi is about not resisting the fall but relaxing into it and knowing the limits of your balance.

Next, we moved on to a jujutsu *kata*---a formalized sequence of movements that were explained to teach principles of body mechanics rather than technical applications. The *kata* required a precision of movement that I had never experienced, requiring me to move my body and coordinate all its parts in what felt like such unnatural ways in order to perform the *kata* correctly. "*No, left hand not the right...pull with the legs...relax your shoulders...don't move the point of contact...don't lift your elbow...you're lifting...stop lifting...no you don't understand...don't add shit that I'm not telling you to do...bend your knees...leave that hip in place.*" Rich delighted in using knives and other sharp objects to draw out my movements along the correct lines of motion and form, deterring me from moving part of my body in one direction versus another and from coming up while rolling when I needed to stay low.

Then Rich moved into a type of free form so that he could demonstrate where the *kata* and the principles of movement. Despite me being a bit overwhelmed, frustrated, and exhausted, I was astounded by the things that he could do. He could throw and flip over a man with such grace and such little effort. He could touch you softly and you would fall down. I would of thought that the wildest things that he was demonstrating were fake if I had not felt them done do me, if I had not learned what it feels like to be dropped on the floor like a child and have no idea what had just happened. Rich explained, "*Looks like magic don't it. But it's not, it's just physics. It's principles and mathematics.*" He explained that everything is guided by basic principles and works like a science.

By the end of class it was clear to me that I had found something unique. I was captivated by the strangeness of the place and its people, by the undeniable tension and paradox between the normal and the extraordinary that was taking place there. Once class had ended Rich told me that I was welcome to return if I so desired.

Later that week I told Rich that I *wouldn't* be coming back. In so many ways I had finally found what I had been looking for, but once I had found it I didn't know what to

do with it. I remember finding so many reasons why not to train, why not step aboard this ship and embark on its voyage. I remember trying to convince myself that this thing wasn't for me, that I didn't have what it took. Ultimately, I was struggling to commit to something that I didn't fully comprehend, to something that led to a place beyond sight and rational understanding.

It was difficult to face the unknown. It was a time in my life when I needed a tangible reason for doing anything. But fantastical desire had always preceded my capacity for explanation. A few weeks went by and I decided that despite my uncertainty I knew I had to take the chance and see where this road would take me. I knew I would always regret it otherwise. I reached out to Rich with little expectation of a second chance. He was gracious enough to invite me back.

## Part I

### Nomadic Movements

## 1

*Imagining the Nomadic Body*

From its inception, this project has in part been a meditation on the body. The body in combat, the body in motion, the body of the samurai, the magical body, the imagined body. The body is a guiding theme throughout this essay and in order to theorize the body as an anthropologist I've turned primarily to the writings and ideas of the French theorists Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. It is in the writings of these thinkers and what I see as the dialogue between them that I have found the most relevant conceptual tools to grapple with the theoretical challenges presented by this field site and this theme of the body.

Therefore, it is through the lens of the ideas of Foucault and Deleuze that I formulate my questions and construct my analysis. I use Foucault's concepts of heterotopias and the docile body of the state and Deleuze's concepts of the war machine, line of flight, and the nomadic in order to understand what the practice and preservation of this samurai art offers this conversation about what the body is capable of (Foucault 2008; Foucault 2012; Deleuze & Guattari 1988). I argue that the preservation of this samurai art is the preservation of a type of nomadic science, a nomadic science that can produce what I call *nomadic bodies*, bodies capable of traversing the logics and limits of regimes of language, of evading the forces and powers of empire. Throughout this essay I will use this concept of the nomadic body as a *speculative concept* rather than a categorizing or descriptive one. The ontology of the nomadic body can only be expressed in terms of *affect*, which I will theorize in the part four of this essay.

## 2

*A War Machine in Exile*

Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu is a tradition in exile, far from the land and era that gave birth to it. In order to understand its contemporary practice and preservation one must investigate the context of its creation. Who were these samurai that built it and in what world did they live?

First, it is important to understand how exactly koryu as a combative practice is distinguished from other contemporary but distinctly modern combative practices such as judo, karate, aikido, etc. and the practices and philosophies of modern state militaries. Unlike forms of modern martial arts, koryu is a military science created by an elite warrior class with the assumption of mortal combat; it is not a practice intended solely for competition, self-defense for non-military citizens, spiritual or personal development, or exercise, such as in karate, judo, aikido, etc. Unlike the modern military science and practice of the State, the knowledge and philosophies of koryu traditions originated before the formation of the modern Japanese State and are defined by their traditionalism and classicism, their instance upon the esoteric preservation of pre-modern philosophies and practices, and their refusal to conform to modern logics. It is this division between the ways of koryu and the logics of modernity, and the State power that enforces such logics, that is key to understanding the nature of koryu tradition.

The bands of samurai that forged these various military sciences were an exceptional example of what Deleuze theorizes as the *war machine* (Deleuze & Guattari 1988). The war machine is a concept Deleuze employs to describe an assemblage of organizational forms, methods, and orientations to the world, invented and embodied by bands of warriors, that stand in counterposition to the practices and structures of the

State apparatus. Where the State legislates and codifies, orders and stratifies, captures and binds, builds structures and draws borders of empire, the war machine betrays, speaks in secrets and riddles, strategizes and strikes, evades capture, and wanders along lines of trajectory across open and unmarked spaces. Deleuze posits that the war machine is an invention of nomads---groups always in motion operating on the margins of ordered, State society---warrior classes, Mongols, pirates, Bedouins, Israelites, peoples always in prolonged exile, states of war, on the frontier beyond the territorializing reach of empire. Deleuze explains that the nomad does not necessarily equate to the migrant; instead the nomad is defined by its capacity to evade the capture and codification by the stratified, static, and sedentary life of the state.

The samurai responsible for the invention and refinement of much of the martial philosophies and techniques still preserved today in TSYR lived during the Edo period of Japan, a pivotal time between ages---a time between the medieval age of clan warfare and the age of Western modernization. These samurai were witnessing a slow process of their own demilitarization as the power of the State grew following the rise of the Tokugawa Shogunate and furthermore with the Meiji Restoration two hundred years later. The arrival of the Meiji Restoration signaled an irreversible move into modernity as, after a long period of isolation, the doors of Japan were finally opened to the forces of the West. The samurai that worked to keep these traditions alive were representative of the few samurai that refused to accept the State's inevitable seizure of the right to violence and committed themselves to the protection of the ancient knowledge that these arts possess, by all means necessary.

Yukiyoshi Takamura, who brought his inherited line of koryu bujutsu---Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu---to the West, was groomed his entire life for the task of carrying on and protecting the martial traditions of his ancestors. When the Japanese mainland started to be bombed by American forces, Takamura was sent away from Japan such that he and the martial tradition of his family might survive the war. As a young man now exiled in a foreign land far from his home, Takamura was tasked with the preservation of the ways of the war machine. He lived in many places across

Western world, teaching his art to students along the way. Eventually he settled in San Jose, CA where he established a small group of dedicated American students. Just before his death Takamura passed on the art to a young martial artist from Texas and his top student, Tobin Threadgill.



## 3

*The Construction of a Heterotopia*

My first encounter with this war machine tradition in exile began with my entrance into the space of the dojo---a space of strange paradoxes and inconsistencies. When I started training at the Kenshinyokan dojo I was largely ignorant of the knowledge and history that was housed there. The dojo was built from an old garage hidden behind a house in a suburban neighborhood of Los Angeles County that couldn't be any more every day and unassuming. How did a place such as this, a place so contrary to the world that this war machine tradition came from, end up as a site of its refuge? My project begins with my entrance into this dojo. Understanding the strangeness of this field site as a space is central to understanding the adoption and preservation of this exiled Japanese war machine tradition by my interlocutors---ordinary 21st century middle class men in California.

Stepping through the front gate of the dojo always feels like stepping into another era in a far off place whose rules and logics have little to do with that of the surrounding world. The martial artists that trained there meticulously craft an authentic and consistent world within the dojo, from the careful placement and arrangement of swords, scrolls and tengu masks along its walls to the faithful recreation of the archaic practices that it aims to preserve. From the raw materials and ornaments of its construction to the sweat left on the mat to the rules and etiquette that dictate behavior to the rituals and rites that sanctify it, the dojo is a space meticulously maintained to be a suitable shelter for this exiled tradition of martial practices. The dojo is a museum of archaic movements; it is a vessel housing the knowledge and practices of this samurai that have no apparent place and function in the world beyond its walls.

Michel Foucault explained his notion of the heterotopia as a space in logical opposition to its surrounding world, with its own rules and sense of time---'a place without a place' (Foucault 2008). The dojo is undeniably a heterotopia. Modeled after the the sacred spaces of the traditional samurai houses of training, the dojo and its surrounding garden elements are symbolically laid out and arranged as a microcosmos. As a museum and a martial laboratory, the dojo breaks within the temporalities of the outer world. Foucault's ultimate example of a heterotopia is a ship, and like a ship the dojo is always in transit, always floating in a place neither here nor there, always driving towards treasures beyond the scope of our everyday world.

The paradox of the spatiality of the dojo comes from its position within a place like the suburbs of Los Angeles, a place that couldn't more clearly exemplify the formalized and machinic landscape of modern urban life, ordered by gridlines of freeway traffic and telephone wires that Foucault presents as the predominant form of space of our times. Foucault explains that "our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites"---our space is a systematized space for mechanistically minded times (Foucault 2008: 2). Often the ethnographic imperative can be to define and map out a field site by drawing its boundaries and lines of relation to its surrounding world. Instead, I follow Foucault's lead in taking an interest in *disrelation* over relation. The most illuminating aspects of this site, or maybe 'counter-site', are the ways in which it is a heterotopia---the ways in which it violently breaks from the logics and thresholds of the world that encompasses it.

The dojo is a vessel for the preservation of this samurai art, constructed, maintained, and propelled by those that man it. Its movements and its voyage tell a story about the shared desire for things beyond the reach of one's own world.

## 4

*A Line of Flight Beyond Modernity*

Although the tradition of TSYR may take shelter in the space of the dojo, it is the martial artists that inhabit this space that keep the tradition alive. But what drives these men to continually enter into and occupy this heterotopic space? What sense is there in the rigorous practice and preservation of archaic movements that have little to no practical function in one's everyday life?

As I conducted interviews and had conversations with my teachers and fellow students, it was important to me to not just listen for ways to easily explain away their participation in this practice. Everyone had their own story and their own reasons for how they ended up at this dojo, but it would be a trivial reduction to try to understand their involvement with this samurai art simply by theorizing the rational functions that this practice has in their lives or by interpreting their personal and psychological intentions---in short to reduce and reappropriate this practice back into the rational relations and exchanges of the everyday world.

What was more interesting was to consider not how this practice fulfilled a meaningful function within the regiment of our common world but rather how this practice emerged from the desire for something beyond its logical boundary. Deleuze calls this a *line a flight*---a line tangential and exterior to the borders of a body of relations, acting as a force of change and transformation, pulling and breaking apart the boundaries of this body beyond a horizon of perceptibility and possibility (Deleuze & Guattari 1988).

When I first joined this dojo it was made clear to me by my teacher that, unlike other contemporary practices combative or not, in koryu the practitioner does not choose the art; the art chooses the practitioner. It took me quite a while to understand

what he meant. If the art is beholden to the passing desires, fantasies, and egoistic intentions of the martial artist, the integrity of the art is put at risk of perversion and decay. A tradition like this requires members that are capable of putting their egos aside, suspending their assumptions and ideologies, and letting go of their fantasized images of what they want the art to be. If one isn't able to do this, one is either useless or harmful to the art.

My teacher had an infamously uncompromising and stubborn demeanor. This was merely his natural temperament, but it ultimately served the dojo well in creating an ideal culture of training where satisfaction was always short lived and mastery a thing unheard of. It was a culture characterized by a sense of unending challenge and failure. Techniques and kata were never things to be *learned*. They were only things to be *struggled* with. The dojo was never to be a place of arrival or stasis; it was a point of departure. The art calls its practitioners to embark on a *line of flight*, and those that are initiated into the tradition and keep it alive are those that are able to respond to this call and meet the demands of the journey.

But to where does this line of flight lead? Although a line of flight is defined as a trajectory that ultimately leads to a place unknown, it could be said that the potentiality of something that does not yet exist is what gives a line of flight its power. I argue that it is the imagination of and desire for what I call the *nomadic body* that draws these men routinely out of their everyday lives and into the heterotopic space of this koryu dojo. In part the nomadic body refers to the imagined body of the samurai that each martial artist endeavors to embody. But more than this the nomadic body refers to an abstracted species of body which the samurai's body exemplifies. The nomadic body is a body always in motion, a warlike body whose movements evade capture. It is a magical body that is always traveling beyond the territorializing reach of rationality. It is a body of mysterious power, a type of power distinct from the power of the State, institution, or technology.

The martial artists of this dojo are drawn towards this notion of the nomadic body from numerous points of origin. For some, the hunt for the nomadic body can take

the form of a vendetta against a world that has always marginalized them. It can be a rebellion against the stupidity and mediocrity of normal life. It can provide an opportunity to overcome one's fears or escape a sense of helplessness in a chaotic world. Its something that can make for an exciting adventure or a great story to tell or something for the mind to endlessly investigate. For others, the nomadic body can represent a means of bettering the self and even bettering the world. And then again, it may simply offer a cure for boredom, or some strange mix of all of these. But ultimately, the ways in which these martial artists relate this image of the nomadic body to their individual lives is secondary to art's potential for the cultivation of the nomadic body, a potential that draws a line of flight towards its own actualization and embodiment. And it is this line of flight that plots a course for this heterotopia in motion, guiding the story of these martial artists.

### *The Docile Body, the Body without Organs, and the Nomadic Body*

Why think about the nomadic body? Why is it important? Both Foucault and Deleuze were thinkers that were trying to grapple with the problematic relationships between the body as a subject and its possible determination by external and oppressive forces of power behind regimes of culture and language. Poststructural thought, as in that of Foucault and Deleuze, is famous for rigorously revealing the relativity of rational meaning in language and for describing the concerning condition of modernity whereby the modern space and the modern body is controlled, ordered, and territorialized by oppressive centers of power. However, in addition to this problematization of modernity, both Deleuze and Foucault worked to theorize and imagine alternatives to the current predicament of modernity through concepts like the heterotopia and the war machine.

I join up with Deleuze and Foucault in their meditations on the body that position it both as the site of enslavement to regimes of control and the site of the possibly transgressive invention of difference. Foucault famously theorized the docile body of the modern state as a bodied disciplined and determined by the logics of powerful institutions (Foucault 2012). But what of the transgressive body, the body of the heterotopia? What is the heterobody? Deleuze theorized the body without organs as a body deterritorialized and free from the mechanistic control of society, a body without function and predetermination (Deleuze & Guattari 1988). But the body without organs is only a deconstructed and open body of potentiality. It is not a revolutionary body. It has no science for the deconstruction and warding off of the state--the body without organs is catatonic and nascent. Deleuze theorizes the war machine and nomadology as an answer to this and as a type of revolutionary force against State power, but how then

should we understand the body of the nomad and the war machine? My response to this is the *nomadic body*. This project is about the search for the nomadic body as we seek to understand it, a nomadic body shaped by the nomadic science of a war machine in exile.

## 6

*An Esoteric Approach to Ethnography*

This first part has served to introduce the complexities of my field site and the theoretical questions that have guided my research. I have structured this essay around the same logic that guides training. TSYR is an esoteric practice which means that its knowledge is not freely given. In order to learn its ways and understand its wisdom, one must submit themselves to the embodied practice of training. Training is the only currency. One is only *initiated* by means of training.

The expectations of an ethnography can be that the text will provide the reader with some mapping of a space and/or an interpretation and translation of the secrets of some exotic site. To attempt such a thing for this project would only be to relate it to an already understood rational world, normalizing, reintegrating, and demystifying their essence, and thus betraying the war machine, its tradition, and the experience of my interlocutors.

This ethnography takes a different posture. Instead it aims to draw the reader in and to disrupt conventions of thought. Martial arts training is a transformative experience. Through writing I cannot not transform the body of the reader, but I might be able to change the way in which we think about the body. I ask the reader to step aboard this ship of the dojo with the tradition that it preserves and to become complicit in its line of flight. Ethnography should not be a presentation of knowledge or a sharing of secrets; it should inspire new desire, it should open up new lines of flight.



## Part II

### Formal Movements

*(Omote)*

## *A Method of Capture*

The story of this band of contemporary martial artists is a story told by the *movements* of training. Only through training can they motion towards the nomadic body. Training is an experience that binds them together; it is a language that enables them to communicate, to labor as a unit and a collective force. And like a language, training is a set of practices ordered and bound by patterns and principles---it is an assemblage of actions and gestures, of attitudes and ideas, of rules and philosophies.

In this dojo, the language of training is one presented as a scientific methodology in line with the Western tradition. Although this site acts as a shelter for the mysterious practices of a war machine, it is a place where the modes of science are valued over the spiritual or the occult. Nonetheless there certainly remains a space for magical and the mysterious in the dojo. Ultimately, the dojo is a site of the convergence between worlds and between ideologies. It is place of two faces, a place of the multiple, caught between East and West, between the forces of modernity and the forces beyond it. In this section I will analyze the ways in which this dojo's language of training is largely characterized by the translation of Japanese metaphors and methods into tropes of classical Western science. In the pursuit of its line of flight, the dojo invents a type of formal and scientific methodology that acts to rationalize and demystify the elusive practices of this samurai war machine---it is a methodology constructed for the capture of the nomadic body.

A common thing to hear from martial artists that get involved with TSYR is how appreciative they first were of the no-nonsense, plain-talkin' Texas style of Toby sensei's teaching that was also somehow so intelligently comprehensible with its scientific approach. He has an ability to take something that looks and feels either like magic or

some cheap trick and break it down into something simple, reliant only one's belief in basic physics and biomechanics. One might hear him say things like, "*Look, this isn't magic, there's no woo-woo stuff, no aiki powers...it's just gravity...it's just physics,*" as he launches someone into the air and across the mat effortlessly and with a grin on his face.

Toby's transparent and sober style of teaching can be refreshing to those more familiar with the tendencies of martial arts teachers to exaggerate their abilities and hide behind mystical obscurity. Scientifically oriented explanation has become an essential characteristic of TSYR pedagogy with its qualities of clarity and straightforwardness strongly appealing to its contemporary Western practitioners often skeptical of the occult elements of budo.

The subtleties and sophistication of the techniques of TSYR can nevertheless be dumbfounding things to witness. It becomes easy to see how legendary samurai were once believed to possess magical powers when one witnesses this art whose movements appear to defy all rational explanation. I've seen my teachers take control of people's bodies and send them into the floor head first without strength or effort. I've been touched gently on the shoulder and made to fall down without a clue of what had just happened. I've felt the ghostly movements of my teacher disrupt things within my body that I couldn't even begin to explain.

Some of us that come to koryu bujutsu are drawn in by its mysteriousness and its esoterica dimensions. My one of my fellow students once remarked, magic is something "flirted with" but never really acknowledge nor accepted. Appeals to magic are often mocked or minimized in the dojo where science is held as the only sensible method for explaining the enigmas of the art. In the dojo, the use of scientific explanation performs an unveiling of the truth behind an illusion, it reveals the trick behind the sorcery. But yet in doing so, the use of scientific explanation performs its own type of sorcery. It can be deeply alluring as an initiate to be told that these techniques that look like magic can actually be explained and understood by principles of science and therefore learned by those daring enough to try.

This method of using scientific explanation for koryu practice largely originated with a man named Don Angier, an early teacher Rich and Johnny that taught a closely related samurai art called Yanagi ryu. Angier was an engineer from New York who had learned this art as a teenager from Yoshida Kenji, the exiled heir of the Yanagi ryu living in the US. Angier's training was never finished and he spent the rest of his life trying to fill in the pieces and recreate the art of his teacher. Having the mind of an engineer, he saw his art as a systematic methodology organized by laws and principles reliant on the following of procedure and a deep understanding of mechanics.

Angier's perspectives had a significant impact on Rich and Johnny's approach to teaching and theorizing these samurai arts, as well on Toby Sensei who, as a young martial artist, also trained with Angier. Much of the language of training is colored by these scientific tones. In the dojo, references to principles of Newtonian physics and the use of geometric formulas to explain technique are commonplace. Rich coined the term *anatomical physics* to describe his methodological approach to martial arts and to suggest its kinship to accepted scientific thought and practice.

The dojo has often been described to me as a type of scientific laboratory. Some see the movements of these samurai arts as the techniques and technologies of martial sciences constructed from both the knowledge earned from bloody trials of mortal combat and from the innovations created in the dojo---a site of research where combat is an object of both theorization and experimentation. However, the contemporary koryu dojo takes on a distinctly different character from that of the samurai dojos of old. Today the tactics of these martial arts are not subjected to the reality of battle in the ways that they were in the past.

Koryu bujutsu is now less an applied science of war as it is a historical and preservationist endeavor. The dojo now functions more as a site of archaeological excavation than a site of technological invention. But this shift in context and function doesn't minimize the scientific traits of the dojo. If anything this transition of the art into the context of its recreation and preservation within a modern Western world intensifies the scientific tropes at play in the space and practice of the dojo.

Toby Sensei has explained that the use of Western scientific explanations provides Western students with a means of learning the concepts of the art in a way that they understand. The old Japanese metaphors from Shinto and Buddhist philosophy that were originally used to explain the same concepts don't mean anything to a non-Japanese student that has no experience in those cultural and philosophical traditions. However, it is important to realize that the traditional pedagogy of arts like TSYR made ample use of various forms of abstraction to teach and learn principles of movement, even if they were forms of abstraction that came from Shinto and Buddhism mythology and philosophy.

The process of the contemporary archaeological excavation of these archaic, combative movements and philosophies is thus one of the interpretation and translation of one system of thought into another. The dojo houses both a type of science of combat, utilizing Western scientific metaphors in its embodied preservation of the ryu, and also a type of interpretive science, a hermeneutics, of the foreign and archaic science of combat of the ryu that they are preserving. These contemporary martial artists as archaeologists of combative movements end up doing the anthropological work of investigating the complexities of the historical and cultural contexts from which these movements originated in order to compensate for the cultural gap that separates them from their samurai predecessors.

The contemporary practice and preservation of koryu bujutsu in the West is thus a divided endeavor as it is one that necessitates the performance of two distinct roles. It must be at once both the living manifestation of a samurai art, authentically sustaining its unbroken lineage, and yet, because of inescapable circumstance, also be an enterprise by one culture to decipher and recreate a complex body of practices of another, interpreting and translating its movements and metaphors for contemporary Western minds and bodies.

What can be a great challenge for these practitioners is the potential for this necessary process of translation to jeopardize the first task of faithfully preserving the art. The act of translation always has the power to betray the thing it seeks to represent

by contributing to its deterioration through mistranslation or worse---the creation of something completely contrary to the original. The dojo is not a place with some pure and unitary discourse lacking any incongruity; it is a place where diverse histories and ideologies converge breeding both conflict and conversation. It is a place of multiple potentials, a place where the intersection of East and West can work to create a dialogue between different worlds or lead to the perversion and erasure of knowledge and history.

In the attempt to *capture* the nomadic body by means of the scientific method of explanation and appropriation, one risks destroying the very possibility of its realization. Or maybe the reverse---that like Captain Ahab and the White Whale, the attempt to capture the mysterious nomadic Leviathan, who has a terrible power to evade capture, only hastens the process of the inevitable oblivion of the methods and machines of this enterprise of capture.

### *The Formalization of Movement*

An example of the complicated relationship and entanglement of Eastern and Western thought in contemporary koryu practice is the use and understanding of the word *form*. The first stage of training in koryu bujutsu is almost entirely based on the learning of *kata*, a word often translated as form. *Kata*, in the pedagogy of traditional Japanese arts such as tea ceremony, calligraphy, or kabuki theater, are patterns and sequences of behavior that are learned and precisely imitated by beginners as a tool for acquiring the skills and styles of traditional practice. On the other hand, the word *form* in the Western tradition has its own distinct tradition of usage.

The concept of form in the Western tradition has a very important history and relationship to the development of classical scientific thought. Much of the scientific thought of the West is based on what might be called *formalism*, particularly as theorized by Aristotle. Formalism is a perspective that sees the world as a place constituted by matter that is organized into discrete entities defined and identified by form (a philosophical combination of old words meanings visible form, shape, appearance), whether it is the form of a logical statement or the form of the various parts of the human body. These two notions of form, *kata* and *morphos*, are in no way equivocal. Yet due to the inevitable process of translation and the pervasiveness of Western scientific thinking in the dojo, these concepts are often used interchangeably such that their means become enmeshed creating a composite variety of formalism, between the traditionally Japanese and the Aristotelian, fundamental to the understanding and performance of koryu bujutsu as a science of combat.

For this section, it is important to understand that the focus on *kata*, and therefore form, is something that is primarily characteristic only of the first stage of

training in koryu bujutsu. The aspects of training beyond the formalism of kata is a topic that will be discussed in following sections.

The formal sciences of the Western tradition are typically defined by the dimension of reality that they investigate and then analyze in terms of discrete formal units. If the methodology of what Rich refers to as anatomical physics is built upon and organized by the formalism of kata then what is the dimension of reality that it investigates? What is its object of analysis? A martial arts sees a world in motion, a world of speed and stillness, studying the patterns of dynamic intensities, of trajectories of force and lines of escape. The swordsman tracks the ticks and tensions of his opponent and must be swift and always in motion, to be neither here nor there, presenting movements of deception and concealing movements of attack. This practice is a science of *movement*, movement within a fluid field of the infinitely possible synthesis of dynamic gestures and kinetic blows deployed by combative bodies. But how is the undifferentiated field of movement observed and theorized into a science? The *formalism of movement*, is what I call the scientific process of the identification, replication, and exchange of imagined, discrete units of movement necessary for the analysis, organization, and theorization of combative movement.

Training involves the rigorous observation and theorization of movement in combination with the embodiment of the traditions of movement passed down by the art. Koryu bujutsu is not only a study of behavior; it is also a process of shaping one's own behavior. The student emulates the movements of the teacher and the teacher scrutinizes and shapes the movements of the student. Training partners trade and share knowledge through a kinetic language, communicating through embodied demonstration and theoretical analysis. The koryu dojo is the site of both the theorization of the body in motion and the kinetic embodiment of such theorization.

In the dojo, the traditional formal pedagogy of kata has been significantly influenced by the ideological formalism of Western thought. Rich and Johnny followed Don Angier's approach to kata which was to understand them as formal units of movement that could be compared and deconstructed in order to extrapolate the



principles and rules that organized the collection of kata into a cohesive and consistent system. This ability to identify grammars and logics that organize movement facilitates a higher order of understanding. It is this attribute of formalism that gives it a type of power, a power that enables the theoretical extrapolation of knowledge by means of analogy, making the possibilities of communication, pedagogy and experimental invention so much easier.

Although this engineer's-approach to training produces these helpful tools to translate and analyze the kata in order to make learning easier, the introduction of the Western scientific method of formalism into the dojo is accompanied by the introduction of normative values and mindsets that correspond to formalism. Formalism imagines a mechanical world of discrete units and bodies defined and determined by their essential function and valued by their efficacy---the extent to which they fulfill that function. For example, a spoken phrase is true to the extent that its form corresponds to the reality it represents. A wrench is useful to the extent that its form is effective in tightening bolts. Formalism in the dojo can lead to the perspective that the kata as ideals of movement are valued by the extent to which their form enables the execution of an effective technique, seeing the kata as merely techniques and technologies.

This perspective is reinforced through the successful performance of technique whose efficacy and power is attributed to the precision of this formal method and the embodied knowledge of the formal kata behind it. The performance of mechanical formalism in the dojo can furthermore create a mindset that necessitates the disciplined commensuration of movement and behavior justifying and introducing a new dimension to the dynamics of authority between senior and junior practitioners.

The translation of this samurai art into a formal and systematic science of combat in the style of classical Western thought provides a means of capturing and demystifying the ways of the war machine. It is a process by which its nomadic practices are commandeered by a regime of rationality as its mysteries are uncovered. Its archaic knowledge becomes something to be possessed and its elusive powers

something to be attained. The formalism of Western science invents the notion that power can be equated with the instantaneous possession of fact – that mastery is a state of control gained from certainties about the nature and structure of a static world.

In the dojo, kata are can often be interpreted as ideal forms of embodied knowledge offering the power to master one's own body and to control the bodies of others. This formalist perspective posits mechanical bodies positioned in a mechanical world in which all can be known and controlled. At the heart of this ontology, this view of the world, is a desire for a sense of certainty and control. It is a desire that necessitates static realities and immovable truths, betraying the kinetic, nomadic ethos of the war machine and committing an idolatry of the formal object.

### *The Crisis of Meaning in Formalism*

With this lengthy discussion of formalism I by no means have the intention to claim that the general contemporary practice of TSYR or my specific field site of the Kenshinyokan dojo or any particular practitioner is something *primarily or essentially* led by this formalist mindset. To the contrary, I see this formalism as one among multiple attitudes and perspectives at play in this contemporary practice. The scientific formalism that I have described is indeed a notable dimension of this practice. But more importantly, in its extreme form, it represents a potential path to follow as a practitioner at the beginning of the journey training, a path that is at first alluring but can ultimately be quite detrimental.

When I first started training in this dojo it was exhilarating for someone like myself who had a penchant for abstraction to encounter the ways in which my teachers incorporated scientific and systematic thought into the pedagogy of training. But over time the scientific formalism that I had originally embraced began to present me with perspectives that caused me to doubt the value of the practice itself and the meaning it had in my own life.

After training for almost two years, I became increasingly interested in the abstract and theoretical dimensions of this practice, an interest that eventually developed into this ethnographic project. For me, formal and systematic thinking was initially a means of gaining a deeper understanding of the art, but eventually this way of thinking ended up reducing the art to its technical forms. The problem with this is that if the art is simply the sum of its techniques, then the power and knowledge of the art is limited to the function and meaning of its techniques within a relative world. Function and meaning are determined by the relativities of time and place. The power of technique is

bound to the assumptions and rules of the game in which it finds itself. The forms and practices and techniques of this samurai art are far from the world and time that created them.

What then do the archaic remnants of this war machine have to the experience of contemporary Western subjects? What value is there in its artifacts? Is the contemporary practice of this samurai art merely an empty archaeological dance by which we escape into ourselves, interpreting and reenacting its forms, extracting meaning for our individual lives and fantasies? Is this practice only a means of refusing to participate in the outside world, lost in the nothingness and solipsism of hermeneutic circles, destined never to travel towards somewhere new? Worse than this, the preoccupation with the formal can become an idolatry of something arbitrary where one becomes obsessed with the disciplined perfection of technique, inventing formal systems of value simply to perform expertise for its own sake.

Questions and thoughts such as these forced me to really consider why I was involved with this strange practice in the first place. I was becoming perpetually disenfranchised from the art as the enchantment and mystery of my earlier days of training were fading away. It was a time of serious transition in my life. I had moved away from home and had just transferred to a new university. I decided to take a break from training. However, while studying at university I continued to ponder and theorize this samurai art, and strangely enough the rapid expansion of my theorization of this practice in the form of this ethnographic project is largely responsible for my return to the dojo and the rekindling of my dedication to the practice. My questions as a martial artist and as an ethnographer became intimately intertwined. My experience of returning to the dojo echoed the original experience coming to the dojo. Again, I was looking for traces of the extraordinary, traces of the magic of the Other, and again I encountered a demystifying force, but this time it did not come as the scientific formalism present in the dojo but rather the scientific formalism of my own modalities of anthropological thought.

## Part III

### From Form to Affect

### *Thinking Beyond the Formal*

Ethnography itself, in its modern form, is a formal practice. It takes as its object the artifacts of culture---a group's language, practices, beliefs, tools, laws, etc. Whether culture is seen as an assembly of tools used to adapt to one's environment or structures of meaning, anthropology takes the psychic, bodily, and artifactual movements of people and seeks to describe its organization by means of formalism. With the rise of what can be called postmodern anthropology, following Derrida and Foucault, attention is still given to form where forms are to be interpreted, deconstructed, or contextualized within histories of power. I could analyze the dojo as a set of practices or draw out a genealogy. Or I could relate these practices spatially to a larger world, mapping out the intersections of exchange and transfer that occur both within the dojo and between the dojo and the world around it. I could adopt a number of attitudes about the nature and meaning of the stories told in the dojo, from stories of contemporary masculinity to the inner politics of the dojo. But I think that all of these moves would reduce and trivialize this site and those that inhabit it.

As a novice martial artist, the formalism of training is what I have primarily experienced so far. However, at the higher levels of training the art presents knowledge that extends far beyond the initial appearance of and interaction with form. In TSYR, training is designed to progress through three stages: *shu*, *ha*, and *ri*---replicate the kata; deconstruct, analyze, and diverge from the kata; and finally discard the kata. It has always been apparent that there is so much more to training than the formalism of kata. TSYR is considered an internal martial art and much of its power comes from what is not perceptible. The kata are often presented in a sort of formal clarity and distinctness

such that the surface appearance of the kata work as a diversion from perceiving their true lessons by simpleminded and unwelcome eyes.

Classical samurai martial arts makes use of the concepts of *omote* and *ura*, *omote* referring to the formal surface and appearance of a thing and *ura* referring to the hidden and underlying forces that supports and gives rise to that appearance. What I came to realize is that the secrets and power of the art lie in what it is able to reveal about what exists beyond form. But what is this, what is the *ura* of this practice on a more general level? I realized that my discipline of anthropology did not equip me for trying to analyze and engage with the non-formal. Therefore, before we can continue, I must take stock of the conceptual equipment of anthropology in order to assess what sort of methods the tradition of anthropology and western theory can provide in grappling with this nomadic science.

### *The Dilemma of Formalism in Anthropology*

Much of this ethnographic project pivots around the predicaments of *formalism* as both a phenomenon encountered in my field site and as a dilemma for anthropological practice itself. These two manifestations of the problem of formalism run parallel to each other, and before I continue to navigate the narrative of my field site it is important to have a discussion about the *formal* within the context of the recent history of anthropological thought. This *dilemma of the formal* is akin to what George Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer called the *crisis of representation*---a reference to the wave of critiques inspired by French postmodern theory aimed at the problematic political and epistemological paradigms of the human sciences in the 1980's (Marcus & Fischer 1999).

This postmodern turn in anthropology was followed by a series of turns---the bodily, the emotional, the affective, the ontological, the material, the ethical, etc.---turns that I consider to be continuations of that original postmodern turn and its problematization of the formal. Though these turns sometimes hint at the emergence of a new paradigm, they descend from a postmodern tradition that strongly rejects paradigm altogether. Therefore this series of disciplinary turns cannot be understood as some sort of intentional paradigmatic progression. Instead these turns can either be seen as the movements of a discipline lost with no sense of direction or alternatively as movements along a type of line of flight---a trajectory, an escape route that slowly searches for a way beyond that which was originally critiqued during the Writing Culture moment of the 1980's (Clifford & Marcus 1986).

Although this history of disciplinary turns, from the postmodern to the bodily to the ontological and many more, indexes and encompasses far more than what the scope of what this paper intends to cover, I offer that this series of disciplinary turns



potentially draws a line that points to a horizon beyond the formalism and representationalism of modern and Enlightenment modalities of thought. And it is this imaginary line that I am interested in following.

In this section I will discuss how these many turns and developments in anthropology intersect on two intertwining fronts: first in the continued concern over the *crisis of representation* as the unfinished project of overcoming formalism, the textual metaphor and various other tropes of modernity; and second in the desire and imagination of what I have called the *nomadic body*, only in this case it is something sought after by anthropologists rather than by my interlocutors. Throughout this section I will use the body as a thematic motif, not as a normative suggestion of a *bodily* paradigm, but rather as a helpful site for thinking about the intersection of all of these theoretical dimensions at play. The body is a conceptual launch pad to think about ontology, ways of being in the world, affect, practice, and so much else.

First, a major characteristic of these post-Writing Culture developments and turns within anthropology has been their focus on overcoming the reductionism, limitations, and problematic politics of the the textual and linguistic metaphors so central to modern anthropology. Culture, anthropology's classic object of study, has a long history of being understood as a type of language---a sign system to be interpreted, translated, mapped out. Many of these post-Writing Culture turns in anthropology come as dissatisfactions with this culture-as-language perspective. Some argue that the study of culture as a semiotic system fails to address those aspects of human life that cannot be reduced to language or symbolic thought such as emotion and affect (Csordas 2002). Others argue that the preoccupation with the representation of ways of knowing allows one to simplify and ignore the reality of the diversity of ways of being (Holbraad & Pedersen 2017). That to only examine the symbols and structures of culture is to ignore the larger experience of bodies being-in-the-world---an experience from which culture is created and thus secondary to.

As continuations of the postmodern thread within anthropology, these turns away from the perspective of culture as language follow French poststructuralists like

Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze in not only critiquing the formalist and representational modalities of modern thought as epistemologically flawed but also as politically problematic. The reduction of the body, and therefore the experiential and the ontological, to the forces and rationalities of the system of language within which the body participates seriously complicates the imagination of human freedom.

Secondly, I then suggest that the line of flight of these post-Writing Culture turns in anthropology move beyond the critique of the representationalism and formalism of modern anthropological thought towards the imagination of what I have described as the *nomadic body*. A fundamental element of the dilemma of formalism or the crisis of representation is the inability to imagine and theorize the body as something capable of operating beyond the laws and logics of historical language. The imagination of the nomadic body provides the beginnings of an alternative to the predicament of modernity as the fulfillment of the postmodern project.

### *Perspectives from Martial Arts Studies*

How then might the theorization of the bodies of these contemporary martial artists escape the legacy of formalism and the textual metaphor? The newly inaugurated *Martial Arts Studies Journal* has opened up space for the serious academic scholarship of martial arts, bringing together a wide array of ethnographers and scholars of martial arts from a variety of disciplines under the umbrella of a new discipline of *martial arts studies* that has been richly theorized by Douglas Farrer, Paul Bowman, and others (Farrer & Whalen-Bridge 2011; Bowman 2015). Martial arts studies makes use of a host of theoretical perspectives from poststructuralism, postcolonialism, phenomenology, and practice theory. There has been a strong current in martial arts studies that follows Loïc Wacquant's seminal work *Body and Soul* (2004) and its utilization of the practice theory of Bourdieu (García & Spencer 2013). However, I argue that Bourdieu's practice theory and theorization of *habitus* is merely another iteration of formalism and only provides a different way of textualizing the body and its practices.

Alternatively Greg Downey, in his book *Learning Capoeira*, who applies phenomenological perspectives of pre-figurative experience of the formation of the body in the training of capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian form of dance, music, and fighting, is an example of an anthropologist of martial arts that avoids these tropes of focusing on the structural or symbolic elements of bodily practice (Downey 2005). Although I will follow Downey in his application of phenomenological perspectives to the study of martial arts, the questions of this paper are primarily ontological rather than experiential.

I am interested in considering what ontologically lies beyond the formal, and in order to do this I turn towards the affect theory of Deleuze. Einat Bar-On Cohen and

Douglas Farrer are two great examples of anthropologists within martial arts studies that have turned to Deleuzian theory to engage with the aspects of martial arts practice beyond the rational, semiotic, and formal in their investigations of the esoteric and mystical dimensions of Malay and Japanese martial arts, respectively (Bar-On Cohen 2006; Farrer 2011). Following Downey, Bar-On Cohen, and Farrer, I will use a combination of notions from phenomenology and affect theory in order to address the elements of my own martial practice that evade the imaginative boundaries of the formal. The *affective* will be central to my theorization of the ontology of combat in the context of this samurai martial art, and I will draw out my own understanding of the affective, primarily based the phenomenology of Samuel Todes.

### *Phenomenology and Affect*

For me, in order to understand affect one must become familiar with the *reduction* or *bracketing* of the field of phenomenon, or what I would call the formal, within the tradition of phenomenology. This reduction of the phenomenal enables an important ontological orientation that I would call the *secondariness of the formal*. The secondariness of the formal refers to the perspective that the perceptible dimension of human behavior, from the structures of ideology to the movements of a dancing body to the rituals of a community, is the aftermath and effect of a more fundamental process of being in the world and therefore secondary to this process. This perspective has been developed by many voices in various ways. Notably, Nietzsche theorized the phenomenal world as a world shaped by an unseen play and contest of forces and the will to power (Deleuze 2006). Following Nietzsche, phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger describe the ways in which the consciousness of the phenomenal world of objects is guided by pre-conscious forces of intention and care (Husserl 2012; Heidegger 2010).

This phenomenological perspective of *the secondariness of the formal* is further developed by Francisco Varela, a Chilean biologist and philosopher that combines insights from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and the systems theory of Heinz von Foerster and Gregory Bateson to describe how the ever changing structural surface of the organism (ie. the formal) is regulated by internal forces of self-maintenance. Varela, together with his mentor Humberto Maturana, developed the theory of autopoiesis which describes the organism as a self-creating and self-regulating machine whose ontogeny, the history of its structural changes, is ordered and regulated by internal forces of maintenance rather than by external forces (Maturana & Varela 1991).

Every structural change, or behavior, is seen as an internally processed compensation for an external perturbation---a reaction to an external action defined by a constant process of maintaining the internal organization of the organism. In simpler terms, the theory of autopoiesis and the reduction of ontogeny (or the formal) to internal forces of self-organization is an elaboration of that perspective that comes from performance studies and poststructuralism that situates the structures of human behavior, or the text, within the context of the performance of the self. Varela's work helps to frame this set of questions in more precise terms.

My understanding of affect is based upon this phenomenological sense of the secondariness of the formal. Thinking about affect is the beginning of thinking about what lies beyond the horizon of the formal. Anthropologists have increasingly been taking interest in affect theory as a way to engage with dimensions of the field that cannot be reduced to the semiotic or the formal. The problem however has been the difficulty in agreeing on the meaning of affect as a term that is often used refer to things without concrete definition. The affective turn that has swept through the human sciences has come as a rejection of the paradigm of representation, instead turning to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and their translator Brian Massumi who has helped to further elucidate the meaning and use of this term of affect (Gregg & Seigworth 2010). My aim is to both utilize affect theory in the analysis of this martial arts practice. By locating affect within the phenomenological model of Samuel Todes and the cybernetic model of Varela's biological ontology, my aim is to elucidate a clear application of affect theory to the anthropology of the body and to offer a means of theorizing the nomadic body as an alternative to the dilemma of the formal.

## Part IV

### Affective Movements

## 14

*Abstracting Combat*

In this section I will theorize and attempt to clarify my concept of the *nomadic body* through a larger phenomenological abstraction of the scene of combat. Combat, as a cognitive and communicative process, uniquely demonstrates the dynamics of power at play in the interaction between social bodies. I am interested in an abstract analysis both of how power can be exerted upon bodies and how bodies can exert power in the first place. My suspicion is that combat, as a kind of conversation, is not a mere exchange of bodily information but rather a deep play of forces---forces that can only be understood within the phenomenological process of the body being in the world.

The abstraction of combat is actually something that can already be found in the dojo. The practice of *kata*, as a type of embodied abstraction, simulates the imagined event of real combat and abstracts the movements of the combative body. With *kata*, the experience and kinetic material of real combat is brought into slow time, abstracted, analyzed, dissected, recombined, and eventually integrated into the body of the practitioner. In training, the *kata* function as formalized abstractions of combat intended to guide embodied and reflective meditations on the principles of combative movement---a meditational practice akin to the methodologies of phenomenological analysis. The *kata* are like stories or puzzles that one repetitively returns to again and again in order to learn something about combative movement beyond what one could learn from an experience of combat in real time.

My own abstraction of combat has grown out of the familiar meditative practice of studying and performing *kata*. *Kata* almost always involve an abstracted narrative of a dual between two combatants, the *uke* (the *receiver* of the technique) and the *shite* (the *doer* of the technique). In one *kata* the *uke* might draw a knife and go for the throat of



the shite who then evades the attack, passing the attacking arm and entering in close to the outside of the opponents shoulder while delivering a strike to the lower ribs, the shite then applies a joint lock to the uke's extended arm bringing him into an unbalanced and weakened position where then the shite folds the uke over and steps through to the uke's weak line with a quick drop sending the uke flipping over frontwards and falling on his back, where finally the shite breaks the captured arm, steps away and the kata is over. Now this is not a real kata and a written description like this probably doesn't even make sense, but the point is that nearly every kata is arranged as a dual consisting of a series of interactions between two combatants with the shite representing the victor. In the following section I will draw from the principles and lessons learned from the kata in order to sketch out a phenomenological abstraction of combat using the generic scene of the dual as my object of analysis.

### *A Phenomenology of Affect in the Scene of Combat*

My goal in this section is to elucidate the foundations for a general theory of affect by means of a phenomenological abstraction of combat. This abstraction of combat will be extrapolated from a meditational exploration of the narrative scene of the dual as presented in kata. First, I will sketch out principles and theories of combat that directly come out of my training in the dojo. Then, I will use the conceptual milieu of training as a basis to draw out a theory of affect and its role in the combative interaction.

The sword was the primary weapon of the samurai. However, as professional warriors the samurai would be trained to use a variety of weapons---short sword, knife, spear, halbert, bow, projectiles, etc.---and to fight in a variety of circumstances. To prepare for the possible case of being attacked while unarmed, the samurai trained in *jujutsu*, a form of empty-handed combat that translates to the *technique or art of softness*. In TSYR, the first phases of training focus heavily on jujutsu, as it is much easier to feel and connect to the body of the opponent hand to hand rather than through a sword or staff. That being said, the way in which hand to hand combat is approached in TSYR is all based in the context of sword work which requires a sophisticated level of subtly and softness. I will focus primarily on the techniques of jujutsu in my abstraction of combat because, just like in training, jujutsu most clearly illustrates the dynamics at play in combat that are often more hidden in weapons work.

Jujutsu is a grappling art mainly composed of joint locks, throws, takedowns, and pins that was developed in the context of fighting unarmed against an opponent wearing armor. For this reason, striking (i.e. punching, kicking, etc.), which is not very effective with armor, was used only as a secondary measure to disrupt and destabilize

the opponent. The primary object of jujutsu is to defeat the opponent by taking his balance and putting him in a compromised position in order to immobilize him by a number of means---submission, binding, bone fracture, strangulation, deploying a weapon, etc.

Jujutsu technique is taught through kata which each present a type of scenario of hand to hand combat, each being composed of a series of movements---footwork, strikes, blends, locks, throws, etc.---that map out a story from an initial attack from the uke through to the final defeat of the uke by the shite in the form of a throw or submission. Although each kata begins with a certain context---left hand being grabbed by the other's right, being grabbed by both hands, being attacked from behind, etc.---the kata are not formulaic; they are not a series of procedures to be enacted in situation A or situation B and so forth. The kata are not *practical* forms that would actually be used in real combat. They are more like abstracted narratives of movement that teach a variety of principles of combat and body dynamics on a number of different levels and dimensions all at once.

Kata, as these abstracted narratives, theorizes the flash of combat as a type of micro narrative with its own plot sequence. There are many ways one could breakdown this sequence. For example, in judo, which comes from old jujutsu, they breakdown the sequence of a throw into *kuzushi* (unbalancing), *tsukuri* (entering/set up), and *kake* (execution). Ultimately, the way one breaks down this sequence isn't very important. What is important is that the overall arch of the narrative of a grappling dual is characterized by a progressive attempt to connect to the structure of the opponent's body, disrupt its balance and base and thus its foundation of power, and then manipulate the opponent's body into a seriously compromised position, finishing off with a variety of combative conclusions---submission, breaking the body, death, etc. In jujutsu training, *kuzushi* is a fundamental concept. Without *kuzushi* there can be no takedown or throw as one cannot bring an opponent to the ground if the opponent's body is balanced, aligned, and in a powerful position. Ultimately, jujutsu is a game of

balance. In order to overcome the opponent one must initiate and maintain kuzushi within the other's body while not losing one's own structure and balance.

While training in jujutsu, the martial artist learns a variety of forms, footwork, strikes, strange ways of moving the body, pins, throws, traps, escapes, etc., but ultimately all of these forms are secondary to the principle of kuzushi. Kuzushi is largely about balance, but it also indexes concepts of alignment and structure in the sense that balance relates to the alignment of the structure of the body with the ground and gravity. Kuzushi can be understood as the gravitational misalignment of the body in relationship to the earth. When the body is misaligned, either in a state of falling or in a state of trying not to fall, it has virtually no power. For example the power of a punch comes from a structural alignment from the ground up through the feet, through the body, to the fist. One can throw a punch while falling, but there will be little force behind it. In a more general sense, the capacity to execute any movement with any sort of power and control, from footwork to arm bars, is all dependent upon and secondary to one's ability to maintain gravitational alignment.

Another fundamental concept in our form of jujutsu is *connection*. In order to create and maintain kuzushi within the body of the opponent, one must create and maintain a connection to the structure of the opponent's body. Connection refers to something more complicated than contact from appendage to appendage in strike or a grab. To manipulate or attack the *parts* of the opponent's body is not enough to bring him to the ground. The objective of jujutsu is to somehow control the opponent's *center*, which is essentially his center of gravity. The body's center is something that can never be grasped nor controlled directly. The martial artist creates a connection to the opponent's center through an external point of contact, whether through a hard or soft connection. These connections to the opponent's center is generally done through bone locks and/or muscular tension, as well as by more subtle and more complicated means. Jujutsu, as this game of kuzushi is played out through this struggle to capture and control the center of the opponent while avoiding the capture of one's own center.

Jujutsu illustrates something about combat and about the body that otherwise is very difficult to perceive. And here is where the abstraction truly begins. What I might call the formal elements of fighting---the distance between two opponents, the positions and angles of the hands and the feet and all the parts of the body, the force exchanged in a violent blow, the speed of a kick, the size and weight of one's torso---all these elements of form and movement lie within a horizontal field of physical interaction within space and time. In other words these elements represent the formal and perceptible surface of the scene of combat. What jujutsu reveals is the importance of the internal processes of self-regulation along an imagined vertical field of gravity. The dramatic scene of combat can appear as a series of actions and reactions, of maneuvers and evasions played out on a checker board as an exchange of formal moves and replies, though in real time and in three dimensional space. However, this model fails to account for the secondariness and relativity of the synthesis of formal, perceptible movement to the internal alignment of the body's center within a vertical field.

The work of the phenomenologist Samuel Todes concisely captures this vertical dimension of the body's experience in the world. Todes carries on the phenomenological project of describing the non-conceptual dimensions of perception and cognition in his theorization of the body's experience of *balance* and *poise* (Todes 2001). Balance refers the body's orientation within a vertical field. Poise refers to the body's "capacity to cope effectively with circumstantial objects" within the horizontal field of perceptual experience (Todes 2001: 124). Here there is a "...phenomenological priority of balance over poise; that is, the priority of our capacity for proper vertical orientation, in the world, over our capacity for effective orientation toward objects in our horizontal field of experience in the world" (124). The perception and conceptual interaction with the world is relative to the body's poise, therefore the overall apparatus of cognition of the body being in the world---its capacity to draw a sword, its capacity to perceive the movements of an opponent---is secondary to the balance of the body within the vertical field which is the basis for poise.

Todes imagines "an inexhaustible spring of effective energy" that can be tapped into from the heavens above and "flow down through us as through a pipe" as long as we remain in a upright position, and that "we seem in our poised movements merely to direct this flow of effective energy upon the things about us in the horizontal field" (125). In TSYR we similarly discuss what is called the *seichusen*, an imagined vertical line from heaven to earth that runs through the center of the body through which *ki*, the vital force, flows. All ideal and poised movement should rotate in balance around the *seichusen* and all power should originate from this center line.

Here I want to draw out a way in which Todes' phenomenology of balance and poise can converge with perspectives from second-order cybernetics of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and from affect theory. Maturana and Varela's theory of autopoiesis posits the organism as an autonomous, self-creating machine whose constructive process of structural synthesis, of both bodily structures and structures of cognition, is shaped by an internal maintenance of its central organization through a self-regulative process of producing compensations for environmental perturbations (Maturana & Varela 1991). The body is imagined to be in a continual process of becoming that is regulated by the internal maintenance of its *organization* as a prefigured way of being in the world. The functionality and meaning of the formal elements of the body---bone structure, gesture, idea, etc.---are secondary to these internal forces of self-regulation. I call these internal forces of the body that contextualize and make meaningful its formal elements within the situated experience of being in the world *affective forces*.

There have been many different theorization of *affect*, but here I will follow the Deleuzian tradition of thinking about affect as continued by Brian Massumi. Affect has never been a term with a clear denotation. Instead it invites a host of interrelated evocations and references to a variety of experiences that evade the reduction to the representational, the conceptual, and the formal. In general terms, affect is "the ability to affect and to be affected" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988), it is an intensity, a potentiality, a change of state, it is related to feeling and emotion yet ultimately describes something

far more abstract. Massumi describes affect as the two-sided coin of emergence lying between the virtual and the actual as seen from the perspective and experience of the actual body (Massumi 1995). Affect, because of its participation in the realm of the virtual, remains open ended as it precedes the concretization of the actual body.

For me, affect refers to the internal, pre-conceptual forces of the body that work to regulate, reposition, and balance the body within the vertical field of being in the world as the convergence of the worlds of virtuality and actuality, of heaven and earth. The experience of affect is an indicator of our vertical alignment and misalignment. Affectivity is a directional spectrum of experience of balance and unbalance, desire and fear, joy and sorrow, meaning and nihilism. The affective force towards balance and alignment is the vital force towards life. To be upside down within the vertical field is to be without life and power, and within a virtual and spiritual place of death. The tension and fear experienced in a state of *kuzushi* is an example of negative affect. Combat as a play of life and death is a serious game of affect. The techniques and formalisms of combat are secondary to this internal affective struggle.

I have illustrated the dynamic of the dual largely in terms of the body moving in space, but in jujutsu, along with really any form of combat, the game of balance is equally mental as it is physical. The inseparability of mind and body is something that is overly apparent in training, but it is not something I will elaborate on here given how much has already been said regarding the unity of mind and body in recent literature. The techniques of mind and spirit at play in this samurai art are for the most part relegated to more esoteric levels of training far above my pay grade. However, the sequence of training is built upon the parallelisms between the dynamics of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. One might imagine that the sorcery of combat lies in the ability to hack into the affective center of the opponent's body-mind with little to no physical contact. At the higher levels of ability the dual is likely won by the sheer power of a balanced and unwavering mind coupled with an integrated body and spirit.

Combat can be seen as a kind of conversation. But it is a conversation, like all communicative interactions I argue, whose dramatic scene of formal exchanges represent only the phenomenal surface of a deep play of affective relations between bodies. Beneath the wrist grabs, the cross steps, the open hand strikes, the shoulder throws, and all the formal elements of fighting, is an affective game between center and center. The discipline of the martial artist in a tradition like TSYR is to develop the capacity to feel the tensions and intentions of the opponent in order to control their center and to learn to conceal one's own center. So much of training is occupied with learning how to move and manipulate the opponent without tension, without the use of blatant muscular force, and without giving the opponent any connection to one's own center. TSYR is considered to be what is called an *internal* martial art because it is based on the cultivation of *soft connections* which are a means of manipulating the opponent through a sensitivity to and control of the opponent's affectivity, or in martial arts terms his spirit, mind, breath, or *ki* (vital energy). Jujutsu classically embodies the now popular martial arts notion of using softness over hardness to defeat an opponent---of using the opponent's own strength and force against him. This applies to the basics of body mechanics as well as to the subtleties of internal, affective dynamics.



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*Power and Affect: The Sorcery of the Samurai Ethos*

So what does jujutsu reveal about the nature of power? What can it tell us about how bodies can manipulate and control other bodies and how bodies can be manipulated and controlled? My argument is that power primarily operates at the level of affect and not at the level of form. This is contrary to the conventional notion that power lies within the technologies of the body and the mind, that concepts and tools themselves have power and that to wield them is to possess power. This view places an ontological primacy onto the level of the formal. The formal, as both symbolic and functional, is often imagined to be the stage upon which relations of power are played out. This is repeated in the structuralist imagination of the formation of the body or the subject through their situated interaction within the formal economies of the symbolic. To see the codes of language and genetics as the great determiner of the subject is an error of ontology.

In Claude Levi-Strauss' classic essay, "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (1949), he theorizes the functionality of symbolic form through an analysis of the healing power of a Cuna shaman's mythological song sung as an aid to a mother in childbirth. In this essay, Levi-Strauss aims to demonstrate how this mythological singing of the shaman, which would traditionally be placed into the category of *magical* practice and therefore denied true ontological and functional merit, actually has an embodied effect within the physiology of the mother. He argues that there is a functional correspondence and interlocking of the order of symbolic idea and the order of biology (imagine the human organism as a stack of various levels of homologous structures, from "organic processes,

the unconscious mind, the rational thought" (Levi-Strauss 1949), where a shift at one level effects the other levels in a corresponding manner) such that the symbolic structure of the performed song can manipulate the structures of the body's organs by the power of analogy. Here, power *over* the body lies in the symbolic order's analogical coding of the body. Levi-Strauss works to demystify what had seemed to be an instance of magic, and in the process posits a flat ontology of various interacting economies of form, i.e. the symbolic, the organic, etc.

I don't think that structuralists nor the post-structuralists ever really laid out a clear ontology of power. However, their theorizations of the relation between the symbolic (as the formal) and power have given rise to the misconceptions that power is somehow ontologically located at the level of the formal, i.e. *knowledge is power, power is knowledge*. A more appropriate reading of Foucault for example is that discourse (or the symbolic/the formal) is both the evidence for and instrument of relations of power, not power itself. Furthermore, the symbolic encoding of discourse upon the body may be a limiting force of the body's action but it is in no way the determining horizon of the body's capacity for action itself. Ultimately, in order to theorize power both ontologically and politically one must look past the formal and towards the affective.

The discipline of TSYR's *bujutsu* (or systematic art of war), like all war practices, is primarily the cultivation of affective capacities. This is counter to the contemporary perspective that war is about the possession of knowledge, skill, strength, and ultimately technology. In TSYR, the practice of the martial artist is the practice of first becoming aware of one's own center within the vertical field and the relativity of all bodily movement to one's center and thus becoming aware of one's own affectivity. Then one must become aware of and sensitive to the affectivity of the opponent. In order to do this the martial artist must become soft, must become a body without tension, in order to establish a deep connection to the other, linking one's own center to the center of the other. Only once this connection is established can the martial artist use the power granted by his superior vertical and affective alignment to misalign,

manipulate and overcome the opponent. This martial utilization of the dynamics of affect is the true sorcery behind internal martial arts and related practices.

War, as a large scale field of combat, is fundamentally a struggle of affect. And politics, as an extension of warfare, is then also based upon these affective dynamics that enable and give logic to the perceptible surface of social discourse. Affectivity as the basis of bodies being in the world is present in all social and biological interaction. It is basis of the power dynamics beneath every conversation or relationship, whether it be a relationship of combat or of friendship. The sociality of affect can always be both antagonistic or collaborative, aggressively misaligning or mutually stabilizing.

The ethos of this samurai tradition is based in learning how both to *capture the other* and to *evade capture by the other*. Yes, in training the student learns how to move, how to step lightly, how to wield a sword and a host of other weapons, how to avoid an attack, how to remember the names of the kata, how to bow to the kamidana, how to fold one's hakama, and variety of other movements and formalisms---all bits of habitus and schema. But all of this is secondary to the art's underlying ethos of cultivating the capacity of capturing the affective center of the other and evading the capture of one's own affective center by the other. This ethos of affective capture is characterizes both the logic of the art's pedagogical curriculum as wells as the logic of the participation of individual in this martial tradition in the first place. Here the desire to evade capture refers to everything from the capture by a single combatant to the capture by the state or any other social and discursive entity of power. This desire to evade capture is at the heart of the mythos of what I have called the *nomadic body*. And here we come full circle.

The narrative of this project---just the same as the story of how these martial artists have been drawn towards this archaic samurai art---began with the desire for the *nomadic body*. In both cases the nomadic body is something desired before it can even be understood. In the initial encounter, the nomadic body is characterized by its very ability to evade understanding altogether. The nomadic body, as evoked by the movements of the body of the samurai, is an imagined body capable of evading the capture and codification by the formal and discursive regimes of the modern state,

traversing its logics and limitations. And now, after a phenomenological analysis of this art's strategies of combat, I suggest that the magic and power of the nomadic body of the samurai arises from its affective capacity to capture and evade capture---a capacity imparted upon it by the embodied knowledge of affect of the art as a nomadic science. Thus what characterizes a nomadic science, or nomadic art, is the way in which it embraces the affective, not limiting its gaze to the horizon of the formal. This affective power of the nomadic body is what enables it to move beyond the parameters of the symbolic and the determination by the social order.

Ultimately, my point is that all bodies, all subjects, have the potential to be nomadic, to be free, to move unpredictably beyond the capture of social regimes of power. In this sense, it is not a matter of which bodies are nomadic and which are not, but rather it is a question of to what *extent* is a body nomadic, to what extent does it have the discipline to maintain control of its own affective center and course in the world and to not be *disciplined* into placing one's affectivity within the hands of others. That being said, the affective capacity of the nomadic body should not be thought of as an invitation to imagine an absolute freedom of the body. The body is still in the world and subject to the serious limitations of its contents. Nomadicism is about the discipline of moving through the openings and cracks in the perceived horizon of possible action and imagination.

## *The Magic of the Affective: A Conclusion*

Before I conclude I want to give a quick word on *magic*. One of the great challenges throughout the course of this project for me has been the question of what to do with magic? In the dojo we almost never discuss magic with a straight face. Magic is always referenced in either a joking manner or to playfully describe the elements of the practice that escape our understanding and explanation.

Nonetheless, magic, whether literally or symbolically, plays an integral role in the workings of this practice. The logics and analogies that we use in the fundamentals of basic body movement are situated within a Shinto cosmology that posits a world where the realms of heaven and earth, spirit and matter, converge in our own human experience of being in the world. The practice of this martial art is a constant process of transformation and multiple levels of the self, a process that in its samurai mythology involves the increasing identification of the martial artist with the *tengu*---birdlike Shinto spirits that dwell in mountain forests believed to have trained legendary samurai in the art of the sword.

Issues of magic and sorcery have always been at the center of anthropology, but have continually presented epistemological and ontological problems for the discipline. Bruce Kapferer concisely describes anthropology's contemporary relationship magic in the introduction to his edited volume *Beyond Rationalism* (2002). Kapferer refuse to reduce the magical to rationalist paradigms and looks to the Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the *virtual* as an ontological reality unto itself as the setting for magical practice. My own analysis of magic within this martial practice is based in this notion of

the virtual and well as what I have elaborated on as the experience of affect as a type encounter with the space where the virtual and the actual converge.

I follow a long line of anthropologists and romantics that have gone on a quest looking for magic as a response to the conditions of the modern world. The emergence and development of a vital affective anthropology is something important to take seriously. The phenomenological turn towards affect is ultimately an ontological and epistemological turn towards the virtual. The turn towards the virtual returns us to a serious encounter with the magical, an encounter that is totally necessary in order to understand and challenge the sorcery of the social regimes of modernity. To be truly postmodern, to be heterotopian or even utopian, anthropology must take seriously the integration of the magical, the virtual, and the affective within the theory and practice of the discipline.

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The martial artists of this art are drawn to the dojo night after night to embody and preserve the nomadic knowledge of this exiled samurai war machine. Their construction, maintenance, and inhabitation of the dojo has created a heterotopia as a site out of time and out of place. This enterprise is one that follows a line of flight beyond the everyday logics of their contemporary world. It is a line of flight emerging from their collective desire for the magic of the nomadic body. It would be far too reductive to see the dojo and the practice which it houses as a rational and predictable product of their surrounding formal geography. It is not *relation* to the surrounding world that defines this site but rather *disrelation*. Its heterotopianism is based upon these practitioners' desire for an experience and reality beyond the allowances and limitations of their contemporary world at hand. This desire is *itself* an experience of the affective.

These martial artists, in their nomadic travel beyond the realm of the everyday, in the end, return to the common world renewed and revitalized having encountered the affective magic in the embodied traditions of the samurai. Their endeavors as both

traditionalists and recreationists are a hopeful case of a surviving impulse to protect traditional knowledge from modern encroachments and capture---an impulse desperately needed in order to both remember and reimagine alternatives to the modern.

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