

A CRITICAL SURVEY OF MARTIAL ARTS AND ACADEMIA

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In this essay, I present a survey of academic literature on the martial arts. I begin with early work on the martial arts in general including, for example, the popular Korean practice taekwondo, as well as *kendo* ('sword way', or Japanese fencing), and karate. My focus is on aikido and I present that analysis in the latter half. Material is presented from the disciplines of sociology, history, anthropology and very briefly psychology. For reflexive and contextual purposes I should note that I have 37 years of experience in Asian martial arts including a Korean art called *tang soo do*, Japanese karate, kendo and *kyudo* (Japanese archery). For the last 27 years I have trained with the same teacher in aikido and karate.

Martial Arts as Culture

Among the important works that have outlined broad trends in the development of Japanese martial arts is that of the late Donn Draeger, self-defined "hoplogist" (scholar of combative arts) and martial artist. His 1978 paper presented at the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play conference stands as a landmark, as apparently the first-ever anthropological analysis of Japanese martial arts. Draeger (1978: 69) asks why anthropologists have heretofore given so little attention to this conspicuous and important subject". He asserts that combative cultures represent deep and significant human expressions, the study of

such disciplines reveals certain depths of man, areas of emotion that are equally as significant to the understanding of man as are his arts and emotions of peace” (Draeger 1978: 70). This is a sweeping statement, which he supports by arguing that martial culture represents a culturally located ethos that has influenced other areas such as music, philosophy and religion (Draeger 1978: 70-71).

Draeger published prolifically during a time when there was very little scholarly work done on the martial arts in the West. His three-volume study *The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan* (1973, 1974) is now a classic text for both general and academic readers. Still, he has been challenged by more recent and focused academic works. Karl Friday (1997: 167), takes Draeger to task for his division of the Japanese martial traditions into tactical (*jutsu*, ‘technique’) and spiritual (*do*, ‘way’) categories and argues that such dualism does an injustice to traditional Japanese thought. Further, he argues that Draeger exaggerates the influence of Zen in these traditions (1997: 153). Hall (1997), another practitioner of classical Japanese martial arts, argues similarly that earlier scholars (such as Cleary 1991, Suzuki 1959) promoted over-generalized theories based on secondary sources rather than first-hand knowledge of historical documents and training.

Friday and Hall, along with Meik Skoss (1997), John Stevens (1985) Stanley Pranin (editor of *Aikido Journal Online*), and Ellis Amdur (1997, 2000) represent a new generation of Western writers able to combine martial arts know-how of one sort or another with Japanese language expertise. Friday, for example, is a university lecturer in Japanese history and teaches classical Japanese martial arts, while Stevens is a professor of Buddhist studies and aikido teacher. As translators, they provide published material accessible to non-Japanese on historical records, philosophical treatises and interviews with senior teachers. Their work

opens new and sometimes critical avenues questioning staid Orientalist notions in some cases or challenging the auras of supernatural power that is associated with martial arts in the West. However, it is important to note that while they each have expertise of varying sorts, only Draeger (an anthropologist at the University of Hawai'i's East West Center) was a trained social scientist, and even his work is primarily historic and lacking in explicit theoretical foundation. His understanding and application of anthropology seems have been very much a taxonomic or classificatory one focused on grouping martial arts according to his developmental model of *jutsu* and *do*, for example. The result is a broad cross-section of martial traditions, glossed in Zen, rather than analyses of critical questions and in-depth interpretation.

Martial arts, generally, became popular and began to assume a more conspicuous place in Western popular culture during the 1970s. This had much to do with the burgeoning martial arts presentations in film and television, starring artists such as Bruce Lee, David Carradine and Chuck Norris. Zarilli (1995), Donohue (1994, 2002) and Skidmore (1991) have written insightful analyses of the role of the film industry in the international martial arts boom. Taken collectively, they argue that these conspicuously violent and dramatized examples of Asian martial arts helped to establish the stereotype of the mysterious and invincible Eastern warrior myth that fired the imaginations of the public and inspired numerous hasty enrolments in martial arts schools. In my home as a child, Saturday afternoon "Black Belt Theatre" ended at 3pm, and by 3:30 someone among my brothers and friends had pulled a muscle or blackened an eye amidst the adolescent cacophony of exaggerated Bruce Lee style cries and clumsy mimesis. Suddenly, as the song goes, everybody was kung fu fighting... and not just at my house.

The growing variety of martial arts in the West eventually gained

the attention of academics in the sociology of sport. Much of this work is limited to karate, judo, and or taekwondo since these were the most available of the arts overseas at the time (Back and Kim 1984; Czarnecka 2001). In the United States, this particular set of emphases had much to do with the rotation of large numbers of soldiers through Korea and Japan during the conflicts on the Korean peninsula and later in Vietnam (Czarnecka 2001; Kauz 1977) and this may explain the very severe physical and disciplinary regimen that surrounded these competitive styles (Lohse 1999). Their burgeoning popularity during this period of rather bleak Asian-American political relations is ironic.

Among the articles by social scientists in the early 1980s, is a fascinating discussion of “The Social World of Karate-do” by sociologists James and Jones (1982). Their analysis of the ideology and value structure of an imported art provide interesting background material from which to view similar ones in place at other martial arts schools (*dojo*, in Japanese), such as the roles of etiquette and hierarchy. They discuss individual and social control, and conflicts among student expectations and pedagogy. These themes recur among students conceptualizations of practice in other *dojo* and other arts.

Martial arts students often become quickly disillusioned after an introductory period during which they find that their learning curves do not (indeed, cannot) match their expectations of attaining skills reminiscent of those stereotypical warrior fantasies (Donohue 1994, 2002; Van Horne 1996). These tensions between student expectations and the realities of training often have much to do with the goals of the various arts as systems. Aikido, for example, is usually presented by teachers and writers as being a life-long, rather than achievement based, practice (Donohue 2002; Forster 1986; James and Jones 1982). A black belt, for example, generally takes around three years to acquire. And while this is

commonly seen as a symbol of mastery in Western popular culture (Lohse 1999; Siegel 1993; Van Horne 1996), in most *dojo* a black belt is generally thought of as the point at which one really begins to learn. Indeed, *shodan* (first degree black belt) means 'beginners level'. The reality of investments of time, humility and pain, then, conflict with the quick fix of consumer culture and fantasies of power acquisition, accumulation and application (Donohue 1994, 2002; James and Jones 1982; Lohse 1999).

The majority of academic literature on the martial arts through the 1980s and 1990s has been psychological analyses. Fuller's (1988) review of psychological studies is a prominent example. Fuller echoes Draeger's concern about a lack of a "coherent theoretical base" for empirical research and the inability of standard approaches to cope with the variety of martial practices. He argues for longitudinal studies to assess motivation, effects on practitioners' self-image, and the psychotherapeutic potential of martial practices. Aikido features in the paper and he cites its interactive training style as encouraging collaboration, relaxation and empathy (Fuller 1988: 324-5).

Columbus and Rice (1991: 128, 134) criticize Fuller, arguing somewhat unusually, for a phenomenological, rather than empirical approach to a psychological understanding of the martial arts. Obviously, Jackson (1996) would take issue with their separation of phenomenology and empiricism, given that his own approach is of phenomenology as "radical empiricism". Still, Columbus and Rice make an interesting case for phenomenology as a useful theoretical tool for interpreting individual experiences in Asian cultural systems as they are assimilated in the West. They argue, for example, that phenomenological research methods are more suited to client-centered therapy and that what is needed is not more positivist oriented statistics, but an understanding of the relative and context-based experiences of individual practitioners (Columbus and Rice 1991: 134).

Back and Kim (1984) took a sociological approach to examining the changes underway in various combative arts in the United States. Although primarily a discussion of the Korean art, taekwondo, they highlight some of the broader themes of transition for martial arts in general as they have spread across the globe. Karate, judo and taekwondo, for example, have been so heavily commercialized, that their practitioners often refer to them as martial sports, rather than arts. For Back and Kim, the loss of traditional values encapsulated in meditative and aesthetic practices threatens the “essential nature” (1984: 9) of martial arts. They struggle with the issue of whether to preserve traditions or to “change to accommodate multinational settings and the changing desires of students” (1984: 8). Among the transformations they mention are beginning students’ impatience to learn advanced techniques early, a growing emphasis in schools on sparring and tournaments, and movement away from the more “profound aspects” including artistic expression and spiritual practices (1984: 8-13). These profound and traditional practices are argued to be the basis of authenticity and to preserve something of greater value than competitive sporting (Back and Kim 1984).

Back and Kim’s point about profound/authentic aspects and their potential friction with the desires of students who bring a quick and easy modern consumption mindset is important for teachers as well, especially in commercial martial arts schools. While a teacher may be hoping to preserve and foster a potentially ancient tradition, having to suit the needs/wants of one’s students (i.e. clients) can be a source of friction.

While Back and Kim (1984) show a keen awareness of trends and areas of contention within the martial arts as practices in “non-traditional” settings, their arguments lack conceptual clarity. Their attempt to explore change is summed in the sentence, “[t]he key is essential

differentiation” (Back and Kim 1984: 9). Unfortunately, they struggle to provide any clear definition of this term, or of “traditional”, or “spiritual”, but use them throughout as if these words were commonly understood in terms of the martial arts.

Such usage tends to reify stereotypes rather than ask critical questions. Handler and Linnekin (1984) have demonstrated the dangers of these sorts of value-laden terms in the West. Concepts like tradition, essence, preservation, and national character, key terms in Back and Kim’s analysis, are all constructs of socio-political discourse (Handler and Linnekin 1984). Tradition, for example, is presumed in the West to be “an unchanging core of ideas and customs ... handed down to us from the past (1984: 273). They analyze the ramifications of such romantic and naturalistic constructs around “entities” and demonstrate the misleading impressions they give “as bounded... made up of constituent parts that are themselves bounded” and as “entities having an essence apart from our interpretation of them” (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 273). Thus, one must ask of Back and Kim to what their use of traditional refers? What is “traditional” in terms of these martial arts, now that there are several generations of established teachers and practitioners in countries like the US, France and the UK (indeed taekwondo as an Olympic event is a truly international practice, and therefore widely varied)? And was there ever an “essential” nature, or core to their subject?

Another problem with Back and Kim’s work is their vagueness about their own relationship to the martial arts. The majority of authors on this subject (mostly sociological, historical, or psychological) do not indicate their level of involvement with, or actual training experience in, the martial art(s) they discuss. This is not to suggest that only practitioners can do accurate analyses of martial arts, given that they too bring biases to their analyses. Rather, there is a need for clearer

disclosure of the analyst's position vis-à-vis the martial arts field, and their relationship to the students they discuss so that readers can make assessments of their own about accuracy and reflexivity. Dann, author of the second half of Draeger's 1978 paper, for example, gives no indication other than an authoritative tone about his personal experience in kendo. This strikes me as particularly ironic considering Draeger's insistence and emphasis in the first half of the article that martial arts researchers should be "trained in a wide variety of combative disciplines", because "all combative culture is based upon experiential models of learning (1978: 70). Draeger's concern for an insider perspective is problematic in itself, as if only Catholics can do worthwhile studies of Catholicism, but alongside Dann's lack of positioning about his subject matter it is highlighted even more.

Dann presents an intriguing idea about a *kendo* (Japanese fencing) continuum, bounded by "classical" and sports", and placing cultural *kendo* in between (Dann 1978: 78), a category that echoes Back and Kim's language on taekwondo. It is not clearly defined other than as an "adaptation of traditional values and techniques... [that is those found in classical *kendo*]...to the modernizing needs of the new nation state" (Dann 1978: 79). This form of fencing was less combative than its forerunner and less sport-oriented than sports *kendo*. However, rather than a discussion of individual *dojo* as sitting somewhere along a continuum within a model, Dann presents a rigid classificatory approach with a series of unqualified and over-generalized statements. For example, he claims that in classical *kendo* "...the symbolic and expressive training procedures derived from the traditional martial culture will also be included" (Dann 1978: 78). What traditional means in relation to classical *kendo* is never explained and remains unclear. Beyond this, however, is the sweeping inclusion of all classical *kendo dojo* as if they

were homogeneous and uninflected by the perspectives and practices of different teachers. He offers another example of presumptive generalization in regard to the presence of a Shinto altar in classical *kendo dojo*. Based on the presence of this simple wooden box, typically hung on a wall overhead, Dann asserts that “members will maintain a deep relationship with the native Shinto religion” (Dann 1978: 78). He offers no evidence of this deep relationship or its manifestation other than noting “participation of members in shrine festivals”, or what it may mean to Buddhist, not to mention atheistic, members of *dojo*. It would have been far more interesting and more realistic (though not quite so tidy as his model) to mention that there are high degrees of variation relative to local conditions and individual meaning making, rather than collapsing the variety of practices of numerous *kendo dojo* into homogeneous, bounded entities and presenting them as capable of being easily classified by sweeping generalizations.

Dann (1978: 80) approaches meaning-making through what he calls *shin shin tanren*, which he translates as “forging process” and from which, he claims, “all Japanese spiritual disciplines derive”. I assume that there was a typing error and that he means *sei shin tanren*, or ‘spiritual forging’, an idea commonly used in Japanese arts influenced by Zen. This implies that before Zen was introduced into Japan there were no spiritual disciplines, or that they were subsumed by it. This elides the complex history of Japanese Shinto and Buddhism, each of which influenced martial arts (Friday 1997, Hall 1997, Harrison 1914) long before the late 12th century arrival of Zen (Earhart 1982: 98). Instead, Dann presents these older religions as not having made spiritual contributions, an idea easily refuted by the literature (Earhart 1982; Friday 1997; Hall 1997; Izutsu 1981; Suzuki 1959).

The result is not a continuum, but a simplified scheme of polarized

black and white (classical and sports) with a single grey in between, cultural *kendo*. Added to this problem, these various sorts are never located geographically. The word “native” in terms of religion as used in the quotation above suggests Japan, but dojo outside Japan often have Shinto altars as well (Crawford 1992; Donohue 1991).

Dann’s application of a potentially viable idea ultimately reads as over-simplistic and poorly supported by social research. From a Saidian perspective, though, Dann’s work, and by the implication of co-authorship Draeger’s, seems reductionist and Orientalist. Reliance on unsupported generalizations about a distant other, which the author knows, but the reader presumably does not (Said 1995), encourage and maintain Western fantasies about the inscrutable East, and, as we have seen in many other works so far, its mysterious warrior traditions.

Gary B. Jackson’s (1978) article, “The Conveyance of Social Beliefs and Values Through Aesthetic Sport: The Case of Kendo” appears alongside Draeger’s and Dann’s in the Proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play. Jackson stresses a functional role for martial arts, in general, and of *kendo*, in particular, in preserving and encoding social values. *Kendo*, he argues, resembles religion and art in that it “plays a significant role in the transmission of social beliefs and values”(1978: 91, 83-84). This generalization is offered as a functionalist explanation for what he claims would otherwise have become an anachronistic martial practice of feudal warriors. In its transition from battlefield necessity to combative sport kendo has preserved artistic principles heavily influenced by Zen, as evinced its emphasis on disciplined mastery of style and technique as a path toward individual expression (Jackson 1978).

Jackson’s work provides a valuable outline of a theory of martial arts as preserving broader cultural values and ideals. According to this

theory, Japanese martial arts are functional, yet flexible and adaptive to the particularities of changing social needs. Frugality, duty, loyalty, discipline and self-cultivation are all found in both Zen and modern Japanese martial arts and add to Jackson's hypothesis of flexible functionality since these traits retain value in Japanese society today (Donohue 1991b, 1997; Earhart 1982; Izutsu 1981). The continued emphasis on these values, however, should not suggest that contemporary martial arts practices are the same as those the samurai so famously pursued. Rather, the recognition of a long and turbulent past for these arts is vital for an understanding of how they may continue to change and be adapted by modern trainees. As social constructs martial arts are liable to flux and innovation, especially as they have become global phenomena.

Jackson goes too far, however, with his sweeping assertion that the social and artistic values expressed in *kendo*, are those upon which "Japanese society is predicated" (Jackson 1978: 98). He may have been inspired by a fantasy not uncommon among many practitioners, about maintaining an elusive link with a romanticized past (Bowman 2011, Farrer 2011).

While I have concentrated on problematic features of Jackson's article his attempt to reveal dynamic, processual themes is noteworthy in that it appeared much earlier than those of other writers and contrasts with more static models like Draeger's. But to collapse Japanese history into a single combative sport (arguably artistic) and present this as conservator of the Japanese experience" (as if there were only one!) is highly problematic and misleading. He fails to move beyond a partial reading of Japanese cultural development or to challenge pervasive notions of Orientalism that often permeate Western views of the martial arts as mysterious institutions based on East Asian esoterica, thereby encouraging these views.

Ashley Carruthers (1998) offers a more theoretically grounded analysis of cultural values and their socialization through martial arts.

She provides an ethnographic approach to the Vovinam Overseas Vietnamese Martial Arts School in Sydney. Vovinam, a syncretic modern martial art combining Vietnamese, Chinese, and Japanese styles, originated in Vietnam but was introduced to Australia and the U.S. by Vietnamese immigrants. Carruthers' portrays Vovinam as a key distillation of Vietnamese cultural values. Immigrants see it as an effective method for socializing children in the values and etiquette of their "home culture" (Carruthers 1998: 2). The socializing aspect is similar to Jackson's analysis of kendo as an effective medium for instilling values and beliefs. Carruthers describes the difficulties of this socializing process in a different cultural environment as "a symbolic battle... fought out entirely over the bodies of the young" (Carruthers 1998: 2).

Bodies take a key role in Carruthers' discussion of the habitus as a contested zone. "'Bodywork', both physical and symbolic," is ascribed "values and schemas... [with]...generative functions" (Carruthers 1998: 2). This role of the martial arts as an acculturative and strategic pedagogic sphere demonstrates linkage between membership, physical practice and habitus. Like Carruthers, I believe that Bourdieu's concept of habitus is helpful for understanding how the tensions, similarly noted by James and Jones (1982) and Czarnecka (2001), between sometimes subtly, sometimes flagrantly, conflicting values play out in the social relations of a *dojo* experience. Etiquette, space and the "harmony of non-competitive hierarchical relations" come to have a significant bearing on the lives of participants in the face of a difficult and fast-paced world (Carruthers 1998: 6). These same themes appear time and again, clothed as respect, compassion, separation, and escapism in the stories of martial arts students across the globe.

So far several authors I have considered have emphasized cultural values in their analyses of participation in martial arts. This is an area

not to be ignored. Why might the values of frugality, duty, loyalty, discipline and self-cultivation attract Western practitioners to martial arts? Do they only matter to the students who persist in their training? Here, I turn to Min's (1979) analysis of "Martial Arts in the American Educational Setting".

Min argues that East Asian martial arts ideals are very different from those found in popular Western sports, especially team-oriented ones:

Oriental philosophy and arts offer the student an alternative experience which stresses *self*knowledge, *self*control, and *unity* with nature instead of self-satisfaction and assertive attempts to control nature: peacefulness and serenity instead of violence and aggression (Min 1979: 102, emphasis in original).

The theme of "self" is quite strong here and Min attributes this to the influence of Zen and its focus on self-cultivation. It might also reflect American *dojo* as geared to appeal to Western cultural obsessions with concepts of self and its connotations with individualism, and suggest that this may not be the case in Asian and Zen conceptualizations of the self. The need for self-awareness and discipline in Zen are well noted and documented, but Min does not mention that these are closely linked with concerns for style, harmony and compassion, all ideals taught and enacted in the interactive social space of *dojo* (Donohue 1991a, 1997a; Hamada 2000; Hannon 1998; Lohse 1999; Zarilli 1994, 1995).

The advantages of pursuing self-oriented values through martial arts, rather than on one's own, or through Western sports, are said to include mental and physical health, greater confidence, respect and control of the self, overall mental discipline and self-defense (Min 1979). Min asserts that as students advance in their training they become

more confident, so that “an attack - physical, psychological, or social - upon his/her person becomes less of a threat” (1979: 103). These are aspects commonly attributed to martial training in general by writers on the subject. However, as I noted above, Fuller (1988) and Columbus and Rice (1991, 1998) highlighted the broad variety of psychological affects on practitioners according to a school’s style, individual teacher pedagogic approaches and trainees’ motives.

Min adds a social element to his analysis, arguing that the values inscribed in the individual provide a sense of security in what at the time was seen as “increasing instability in American society” (Min 1979: 103). While somewhat dated and geographically/socially bound, this theme of martial arts functioning as a counteractive to the pace and stress of modern life is highlighted by other studies as well (Amdur 2000; Donohue 1991b, 1997a; Forster 1986; Grandon 1995; Rothman 2000).

The motives of trainees and teachers, the stylistic variance between arts, and the intricacies of socio-cultural context makes generalizations about Asian martial arts problematic. Even so, the above review of academic literature on the martial arts has highlighted a number of key themes, such as socialization, connections through a sense of community membership, and self-development. This complexity highlights the value of using the concept of *habitus* as an interpretive frame for understanding the experiences of martial artists. Further, the consistent portrayal of martial arts as dynamically developing institutions adapting to local cultural patterns demonstrates their role as locales wherein bodies and minds change in ways according to ideational schema embodied in membership, which are seen as a primary draw for trainees. In the following section I review academic literature on aikido – the focus of my study. I have already approached some of the primary themes in the above review, but I now return to them in an aikido-specific context.

Aikido and Academia

The following review is not concerned with the martial or technical aspects of aikido per se. I have not included more general material written by and for *aikidoka*. Rather, I focus on ideological, social, pedagogical, and religious features. In turn, I demonstrate the relationship between these features and habitus and what I call embodied membership, i.e. membership as learned, demonstrated and communicated through the social re-construction of bodily practices.

The relative scarcity of academic literature on aikido echoes Draeger's earlier comment about the lack of attention social scientists have given to the topic. As aikido has become a global phenomenon, however, there has been a noticeable and growing increase in the number of studies. As demonstrated above, perceptions of martial arts training as contributing to a sense of meaning in life are common in martial arts literature (Carruthers 1998; Deshimaru 1982; Donohue 1991b, 1997a, 2002; Forster 1986; Fuller 1988; Hamada 2000; Lohse 1999; Rauch 1995). In aikido literature, however, including several recent MA and PhD theses, there is even greater emphasis on and exploration of spiritual, i.e. psychological and philosophic themes (Crawford 1992; Donohue 1991b; Drengson 1992; Grandon 1995; Hannon 1998; Janman 2002; Ueno 1995; Watson 1996).

Academics have described the religious connotations of the martial arts in a variety of ways. Hamada (1990, 2000) uses the term spirit throughout his work and in reference to aikido and other budo ('martial ways'). However, he uses it in the sense of a worldview, encapsulated in the creed of "the spirit of never give up", rather than as some sort of mystical construct. For Hamada the grueling training in a *dojo* strengthens discipline and will-power (Hamada 2000). Donohue (1991b) and Jackson (1978) refer to this formative process using the Japanese phrase *seishin tanren* and locate this as the ideological core of modern Japanese martial

arts, such as aikido, judo and *kendo*. These perspectives illuminate an approach whereby “the purpose of training is to tighten up the slack, toughen the body and polish the spirit” (Ueshiba 1992: 55).

A number of anthropologists have analyzed the sources of ideas about spirituality in aikido. Donohue (1991b, 1997a: 20-21), Janman (2002), Ueno (1995), and Crawford (1992) traced the ideological foundations of aikido to the personal inclinations of Morihei Ueshiba as evidenced by his direct involvement with Omoto-kyo (a Shinto sect). The ritual trappings in aikido are attributed to more standard Japanese dojo practices such as bowing, kneeling, lining up according to rank at commencement and closure of training, added to which are the more esoteric practices such as clapping when bowing at the beginning of class to get the attention of protective deities or the use of *kototama*, a type of chanted meditation (Crawford 1992, Donohue 1991b, Janman 2002).

Some have suggested that understanding the philosophical connotations of aikido practice is essential for explaining its growing popularity around the world (DeMarco 2000; Pieter 1994; Twemlow et al. 1996). Columbus and Rice (1998: 22) have shown that, among other motivations, martial arts “participants were engaged toward ‘finding’, ‘understanding’ and ‘perfecting’ themselves, and achieving a subjective sense of balance, centeredness, and wholeness. As such, martial arts training is experienced as more than a mere physical fitness program” (Columbus and Rice 1998: 22). Crawford (1998) and Donohue (1991a, 1991b) investigated parallels of structure and types of relationships between martial arts schools and religious institutions. Crawford, for example, highlights the prevalent role of ritual practices in aikido *dojo* in the U.S. He points to their origin as ascetic practices borrowed from Omoto-kyo and mystic Shintoism, which were thoroughly integrated in aikido practice following the retirement of aikido’s founder, Morihei

Ueshiba, from a busy teaching life in Tokyo to the secluded town of Iwama. Crawford's ethnographic snapshot portrays the sensei of an aikido school as far more than a transmitter of physical techniques. Teachers are also ritual experts. They teach, initiate and guide symbolic activities through verbal explication, but more commonly by serving as an example to students.

Donohue (1991a) takes a more detailed look at student-teacher relationships in his article, "The Dimensions of Discipleship: Organizational Paradigm, Mystical Transmission, Vested Interest and Identity in the Japanese Martial Arts". He highlights the similarities between discipleship among teachers and students and those found in Zen and neo-Confucianism, wherein a strict hierarchy, power, and control maintain students' perceptions of teachers as mediators and gatekeepers of secret knowledge (1991a), an argument supported by the analyses of Friday (1995) and Worden and Dahlquist (1997). His use of "disciple" articulates with the translation of *deshi* as "apprentice", a common term for students in Japanese and Japanese-style *dojo*. Stone and Meyer (1995) use similar labels when referring to different generations of aikido teachers in the U.S. Those who trained with Ueshiba are called the "Disciples". The next generation are labelled the "Teachers" and their students are the "Innovators" (Stone and Meyer 1995: 14-17). Codified references for hierarchical positions, whether within a single dojo or cross-generationally, is a strong signifier of social identity, status and membership in a group (Carruthers 1998; Donohue 1991a; Rauch 1995: 165).

Janman's (2002) study of Aikido of Auckland pursued analyses of pedagogy of the body and meanings of training in terms of agency, creativity and resistance to hegemonic discourses. References to spirituality feature highly in his approach to contexts of creativity and aesthetics, although, paradoxically, he found students reluctant

to discuss training as spiritual practice, but suggested this was an avoidance of “stigmatized discourses about ‘spirituality’” (2002: 89). This reads as if he thought there was spirituality there, but he could not find it in his interviewees. Perhaps this has much to do with the prevalence of spiritual discussions in popular literature on aikido. I have found the spirituality issue a difficult one due to the lack of conceptual clarity about it in both practitioners and popular aikido literature.

Janman borrows from Kohn’s (2001) anthropological analysis of aikido in northern England, and they share concerns with class. Kohn includes the statement from one of her informants that “the job you have is the last thing people find out about. Aikido is a great leveler” (Kohn 2001: 166). She argues that this demonstrates the separation of the *dojo* from everyday life and the suppression of class differences. Kohn criticizes Bourdieu’s (1990b: 157) analysis of aikido as the new sport of the petite bourgeoisie. She argues that this may be true for France, but is not for northern England, since the members of the *dojo* in which she trains are working class (2001: 165-66). Bourdieu has always been the first to point out that his work was specifically based on French data, but that the theoretical approach and implications have wider applicability (1984, 1990a). Hence, it is not an *a priori* content of symbols that matters to Bourdieu, but the ability of classes to arbitrarily mark themselves in distinction to others (1984). Kohn’s narrow reading of class as based solely on occupation leaves out other aspects such as social power, background and education – all key features in Bourdieu’s argument (1990a). Ignoring these points allows Kohn to assert that in the purportedly classless community of the aikido *dojo*, individuals “may happily traverse ‘paths’ of their own creation” (Kohn 2001: 176). And indeed they do.

In the fine print of her endnotes there is a brief mention of the internecine political wrangling in aikido at large and, more specifically

of the splitting of the school where she trains as “the big *dojo* was taken over by senior students who abandoned their teacher (Kohn 2001: 177). This political in-fighting and the splitting of schools detracts from the overall suggestion of a benevolent, aikido community with its excursions to the pub for pizza and curry and warm feelings of welcome among practitioners from different schools.

My own experience supports the idea of a perception among practitioners of a clear separation between their *dojo* lives and their “outside” lives, and that these are entangled with a variety of fantasies about power and agency. However, I cannot agree with Janman’s and Kohn’s suggestions of aikido *dojo* as being rarefied pockets of resistance and creativity that allow freedom in the lives of their members. Membership implies conforming and behaving according to rules. And the discipline of martial artists is legendary! But to proceed as if this scripted behavior with its incentives (rank advancement) and punishments (failure, exclusion from pizza and curry night), were “spiritual” or forms of “alternity... which frees the body and creates... social fluidity” (Janman 2002: 89) through some sort of liberating “community” seems naive. I am left wondering if Kohn and Janman have not been seduced by the same fantasy of secret power that entangled Jackson in the 1970s with *kendo* and enticed me through Saturday afternoon’s Black Belt Theatre. Jackson thought he was a samurai. Perhaps Kohn does as well given that she ponders why working-class folks are “treading on the elite Samurai path” (2001: 165). Janman and Kohn are enraptured with freedom and creativity in the very belly of modernity’s Leviathan - subverting with their aikido the social discourses and hegemonies that threaten diffusion, subversion...digestion!

Janman’s statement above about the stigma attached to spiritual discourse along with Kohn’s fine print aside on the splitting of her aikido

dojo stand as ample evidence of the entanglements of aikido practice with larger social dynamics. I agree with ideas of aikido challenging standard cultural discourses, but in the more limited sense of providing alternatives to standard pedagogical styles and socialized reactions to hostility.

This review has presented some of the primary themes in academic analyses of aikido. The ideological bases and ritual aspects are prevalent, but ultimately fail to convincingly integrate the voices of *aikidoka* on their effects. The portrayal of aikido as a spiritual martial art is common, but due to a lack of conceptual clarity it remains a slippery topic. The emphasis on social relationships in *dojo* is clear, however, as is its organization in hierarchical relationships with the *sensei* as leader and ritual specialist.

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