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The Habituation of Movement, Active Intuition, and Japanese Swordsmanship

In the practice of bodily technique, practitioners must repeat movements to form habits and pay attention to their body to improve their movement. The present article considers the learning process of Japanese swordsmanship (剣術)—in particular that of the Yagyū Shinkage school (柳生新陰流)—within the philosophical framework provided by Nishida Kitarō in order to demonstrate the relationship between bodily techniques and one's perception of the world. By referring to *The Book of Family Traditions* (兵法家伝書), a text relevant to the school, and interviews conducted with the practitioners of this school, this paper will argue that habituation of movement and clear, conscious control of movement can be practiced simultaneously, and that both are interactively transformative. The paper will further attempt to show that both are developed and deepened with the help of positive and subjective bodily experience.

KEYWORDS: Habit—bodily movement—learning process—*kata*—*ki*—swordsmanship—Yagyū Shinkage school—middle voice—active intuition—Nishida Kitarō.

Practice, the only method to master bodily techniques such as dance, music, and martial arts, involves repetitive action and close attention to movement. Repetition makes a specific movement smoother and effortless, but making movement completely automatic[1] is not the goal of practice. One must keep attentive to what is going on in one's body. Otherwise, it is extremely difficult to take full advantage of a technique. The question is, how are these elements related in practice?

In the philosophical field, recent phenomenological studies have explored the learning process of bodily techniques.[2] Dreyfus has analyzed the transformation of mental representation and posited different levels for two cases: that of the automobile driver and that of the chess player.[3] Dreyfus focuses on an analysis of the mental representation of students who had already achieved a certain level of competence. Okui later argued for the need to consider how the learning *is* done rather than simply how it *was* done. In fieldwork conducted at a circus school, he showed that progress is made when the student's body remodels its way of relating to the world.[4] Indeed, as Polanyi and Gallagher have pointed out,[5] the body learns before the mind is able to acknowledge what has been learned. Therefore, as Okui observed, the relationship between the learner and the world is essential.

1. In this paper, I generally use the word "automatic" to describe that something works without direct human control, where the subject is passive. "Spontaneous" means that something emerges or exists as a settled practice or condition. The action in question is generated between activity and passivity. As for action and movement, I use the word "action" to indicate a movement with a particular intention and "movement" to simply refer to the process of moving.

2. On this phenomenological tendency, see Okui 2017a.

3. Dreyfus 2002.

4. Okui 2017b.

5. Polanyi 1966; Gallagher 2009.

How are we to be involved subjectively in a current movement? Although the body can somehow learn independently of the mind, we are not automatic learning machines, particularly when it comes to the learning processes involved in attaining bodily expertise. It is worth pointing here to research by Legrand and Ravn on the subjectivity of dancers, showing how they are consciously engaged with learning; dancers can perceive their own body without reifying it and can make use of it to modify their posture[6] (pre-reflective and performative bodily self-consciousness or, in other words, listening to the body with an eye on subjectivity).[7] Such studies on subjectivity concentrate on the moment of dancing, but, as Sheets-Johnstone has noted, dance is a "formed and performed art."[8]

At least implicitly, such studies include reflection on bodily learning and the experience of subjectivity. However, the relationship between the bodily learning process and subjective participation in the process has not been clearly discussed. The present essay aims to fill this gap by referring to the learning process of Japanese swordsmanship (剣術), especially that of the Yagyū Shinkage school (柳生新陰流), within the philosophical framework provided by Nishida Kitarō.

In his later years, Nishida became interested in Félix Ravaisson's work on habit and tried to integrate it, along with Maine de Biran's thought, into his own philosophy. As I have argued elsewhere,[9] the issue was how to integrate the continuity of habit with the moment of voluntary movement. Of course, Nishida admitted that both existed in what he called "active intuition" (行為的直観), but this begs the question of how the two are related.

To illustrate and clearly understand Nishida's statement, the Yagyū Shinkage school's practice proves particularly instructive insofar as it is carried out with *kata* practice (型稽古), which requires practitioners to distinguish and arrange their own learning by repeating a prearranged form. Here I shall make particular reference to *The Book of Family Traditions* (兵法家伝

6. Legrand and Ravn 2009

7. Ravn and Christensen 2013. Ravn's later redefinition states that "dancers dance at the cross point of their seeing and sensing the moving body" (Ravn 2017).

8. Sheets-Johnstone 2012.

9. Imono 2018.

書),[10] a text relevant to the school, and also draw on interviews conducted with practitioners of this school.[11]

The second part of this study introduces the philosophical framework provided by Nishida. After examining Nishida's statements, I will offer a provisional hypothesis to facilitate the argument. The third section comprises an analysis and discussion based on *The Book of Family Traditions* and interviews. This is followed by a general discussion and conclusions.

Philosophical context

Active intuition (habit)

We begin with an analysis of active intuition, an important notion in Nishida's philosophy, with the aim of clarifying the philosophical context in which I wish to set my main argument.

Nishida defines active intuition in his essay "The Standpoint of Active Intuition"[12] as follows:

> We see things on the basis of action (行為); the thing determines the self (我), and the self determines the thing. And that is active intuition.[13]

We are used to thinking of action and intuition as opposing concepts. Action, namely, how a person performs a specific movement, is considered active. Conversely, intuition, which concerns perception or immediate apprehension, is passive in the sense that it is something we only receive. Nishida tried to overcome this static understanding through his notion of active intuition.

"Seeing things on the basis of action" means that action determines our intuition. This statement is rather comprehensive if we consider that turn-

10. Yagyū M. 1632a, 1632b.

11. To manage the qualitative research, I have referred to the works of Itō 2015, 2018; Ravn and Christensen 2013; and Murakami 2011.

12. Nishida 1935a, 1935b.

13. Nishida 1935a, 131; Nishida 1935b, 81. For the English translation of Nishida's article, I rely mainly on Haver's work, except for the word "action." Haver renders the term 行為 as "intentional action" to distinguish it from *hataraki* 働き, that is, "neither necessarily conscious nor even restricted to the animate" (Nishida 1935b, 195). I prefer to use "action" here for coherence with the notion of active intuition (行為的直観). When alluding to Nishida's notion of *hataraki*, I will include the term in parentheses. See also note 1.

ing one's head inevitably changes one's perspective, making it possible to see something new at the same time as what we were looking at before falls out of view. Furthermore, if we expand on the meaning of "seeing" (見る), we *see* that it relates not only to physical sight but also to mental comprehension, that is, how we understand the meaning of the things around us. How does action then determine our way of understanding?

It does so by means of habit. It is worth recalling Nishida's remark at the start of his essay that we always live in a time that links a before and an after.[14] We will return to this idea later to integrate it into our discussion of habit. Suffice it to say here that Nishida is not merely pointing in the abstract to the fact that an action occurs only once, but to the fact that all action is grounded in a certain concrete period of "lived" time. With such an understanding of action, it is easy to see that action forms habit and that habit consequently becomes a way of comprehension.

This sheds light on Nishida's statement that "the thing determines the self, and the self determines the thing." Things around us do not emerge into existence as if they had never existed before. A cup of coffee on the table may tempt me to take a sip. This feeling is the result of an existing relationship with coffee. Had I never tasted coffee before, I would not have had such a feeling. How things present themselves to me and how I treat them is more or less based on the history that I have with them. I can, of course, break with a habit if I wish, but this action will generate a new habit and be integrated into it. Habit is second-nature; it determines not only the way we understand but our very way of being.

Seen in this light, nothing is purely active or purely passive. Drinking coffee is the result of a continuous and interactive relationship between me and coffee, and, furthermore, between me and the surrounding world. In this sense, action and intuition are not contrary but interactive. Our way of being in the real world is always active-intuitive.[15]

14. Nishida 1935a, 107; Nishida 1935b, 64.

15. It is worth mentioning that active intuition is used by Nishida only as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb, but never as a verb. It is not an action that we either do or do not do but our state and way of being.

Habit and movement

It is not only in habit that we find active intuition. In a late unfinished work titled *Life* (『生命』), Nishida discussed habit in relationship to Ravaisson's essay *Of Habit*:[16]

> Here we can understand what I call active intuition. It not only appears at the culmination of the development of consciousness (意識発展の極致), but in fact also lies at the ground of the emergence of consciousness (意識発生の根源).[17]

In this passage, Nishida indicates two states where active intuition comes into play: the height of the development of consciousness and the ground of consciousness.

As Nishida goes on to explain, "the ground of the emergence of consciousness" refers to habit insofar as our consciousness arises from the continuous self-(re)production of habit. As we have already seen above, habit is second-nature for us and radically determines our way of being. Consciousness does not simply appear; it always belongs to someone, and this someone has their own habits which determines their way of being.

"The culmination of the development of consciousness" refers to a being that has become conscious of itself, not in an abstract but in a concrete manner.[18] As we have said, active intuition is our way of living through the interactive relationship between action and intuition. Nishida sees a decisive model of this interaction in the creative act (創造). When I create something, say a sculpture,[19] I do not create by will alone. Even before I pick up my chisel, the block of wood or stone in front of me determines how I go about my work. I cannot go against the grain; the smooth texture of the stone may arouse a sense of soft skin of someone in peaceful repose. During the process of sculpting, this secret dialogue with the object becomes more intense, more immediate and non-representational. What is discovered on the surface of the material I am working with may inspire the next stroke

16. Ravaisson 1838.

17. Nishida 1945, 366. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are my own.

18. "Active intuition must be the most radical and concrete way of our grasping reality consciously" (Nishida 1939, 193).

19. Nishida sees "active intuition" not only in artistic creation but also in any kind of perception of the real world. Still, we consider sculpting because it is a typical example

of the chisel or force me to change what I am doing.[20] Creating something is only possible through such interaction of active intuition. Otherwise it would be a mechanical production without any direct human intervention.

The role of active intuition in the formation of habits (which, in turn, form our way of being), also appears in the moment we become conscious of ourselves. But this leaves the question: How are we to understand the relationship between the formation of a habit (habituation) and becoming conscious of ourselves (creation)?

The threefold structure of self-awareness

The relationship between habituation and creation brings us to the question of consciousness and unconsciousness, or the reflective and pre-reflective dimensions of self-consciousness. In Nishida's terminology, clear consciousness is achieved at the moment of "self-awareness" (自覚), which occurs through action (働き).[21] Nishida defines this action (*hataraki*) as the mutual determination of two individuals (個物と個物との相互限定).[22] When something in front of me requires my action, I assume the role of an "I" (我) before this unique thing that I call "you" (汝). This is not a matter of simple juxtaposition. Like all entities in the world, these two entities bring their own lived history to the encounter, which in turn inevitably reshapes their being. Inasmuch as my encounter shapes the other, it also entails a reshaping of myself as the one who shapes an other. This mutual determination sends me back to myself in "self-awareness."

"I" and "you" do not, however, encounter each other in empty space. They are already in the real world with a historical formation of its own. For Nishida, this world consists of countless anonymous "hes" (彼). Thus, what becomes "I" and what becomes "you" initially belong to this world of "he." The self-formation of the world consists of the mutual transformation of countless "hes." This is what Nishida calls the movement "from what is created to what is created" (作られたものから作られたものへ). The spontaneous formation of the world means that we continue along the way in

20. As for the interactive determination of action and intuition in artistic creation, we can find a detailed study in Morita 2013.

21. Nishida 1935c, 54.

22. Nishida 1935c, 55.

which we have been created. But when a will strong enough to break this continuity arises, two individuals appear from among these anonymous "hes" to enter into an active encounter, and through this encounter become an "I" and a "you." Nishida calls this a movement "from what is created to what creates" (作られたものから作るものへ). It is here that "self-awareness" is achieved.

In Nishida's *Life*, active intuition is said to consist of the transformation of numerous "hes" (habitual self-formation) and the arrival at self-awareness (clear consciousness). In the former, we see spontaneous continuity occurring at the unconscious or pre-reflective level, whereas self-awareness, of course takes place at the conscious level. How do these two levels affect one another?

I would like to pose this question in a practical context, namely, the process of learning bodily techniques. The choice is not arbitrary. Nishida himself argued that consciousness never exists apart from the body.[23] To apply a distinction from Legrand,[24] Nishida does not posit an *embodied self* (a mental self "put into" the body) but a *bodily self* (a self that is a part of the body). A transformation of the body is also a transformation of one's (un) consciousness or even of one's being. Furthermore, inasmuch as Nishida acknowledges the body as a "thing,"[25] it is reasonable to expect creativity in voluntary bodily movement. My body is something I can work on and also something that influences me. In this case, will and body interact, and the result is bodily movement.[26]

It is from this perspective that I propose to consider the effect that habit has in the learning of bodily techniques. If the goal of practice is not automatic movement, how does the practitioner keep their attention on the movement? How can pre-reflective bodily self-consciousness coexist with the accurate control of movement? Examining the process of learning bodily techniques will offer a suitable example of the full reach of Nishida's active intuition.

23. "What forms the body is what forms the conscious self; what forms the conscious self is what forms the body" (Nishida 1935a, 180–1; 1935b, 118).

24. Legrand 2006.

25. "Thus, even what we call the body is a thing" (Nishida 1935a, 178; 1935b, 116).

26. This is consistent with Nishida's interpretation of Maine de Biran. See Imono 2018.

As a point of departure, I propose the following hypothesis:

> At first, the practitioner concentrates on the habituation of movement. Once repetition of the movement occurs easily and of its own accord, the practitioner is at liberty to reflect on their movement.

Analysis and Discussion

To follow the line of argument suggested above, let us look at the process of learning the bodily techniques of Japanese swordsmanship, with particular attention to the Yagyū Shinkage school. Hypothetically at least, swordsmanship suggests a duel to the death.[27] The Yagyū Shinkage school pursues what is called *kata* practice (型稽古), in which practitioners are led to distinguish the elements of what they are learning and arrange them through the repetition of prearranged forms. Study of the learning process enables one to identify the relationship between forming a habit and becoming conscious of oneself. How does this take place in practice? To answer that question, we begin with a look at the school's manual, *The Book of Family Traditions*. From there, we will consider the concrete execution of the practice by analyzing interviews with a number of current practitioners.

The Book of Family Traditions

The Book of Family Traditions was written in 1632 by Yagyū Munenori 柳生宗矩 (1571–1646), a sword master employed by several shogun, among them Tokugawa Hidetada and Tokugawa Iemitsu (the second and third shogun of the Edo period). The early Edo period in which Munenori wrote the book may be characterized as the beginning of a time of relative peace, a time when the samurai had little need to draw a sword, as had been necessary in the Sengoku period. Munenori's intention was to expound the secret teachings of his school.[28] In general, scholars agree[29] that Noh theater and Zen thought, particularly as taught by Takuan Sōhō (沢庵宗彭), influenced his writing.

27. cf. Bennett 2013.

28. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore one important goal of this book, namely, to demonstrate that skill with the sword is vital to the achievement of peace, a function of a shogun's sword.

29. Nakabayashi 1971; Maebayashi and Watanabe 1988; Katō 1999.

Still, Maebayashi and Watanabe (1988) remark that Takuan is not the only source of inspiration for Munenori. Additionally, Nakabayashi (1971) and Katō (1999) point out that

Progress from the elementary to the advanced level. Let us now examine in some detail the transition from the elementary level (初重) of practice to the advanced level (後重), in order better to understand habituation (the formation of habits) as described in *The Book of Family Traditions*.

From the start, Munenori insists that one should avoid the intention to win. As he writes: "to be obsessed even with winning is sickness.... To fix the mind obsessively on anything is considered sickness."[30] If we think only of winning, our mind is held captive; we cannot see anything that is not directly instrumental to winning. Our mind is no longer open to what else surrounds us. Insofar as how we act is determined by what we see or pay attention to, the fixation on winning impedes the making of balanced decisions, with the result that our bodily capacity is impaired.

To eliminate these obsessions of the mind, Munenori proposes two levels of practice. At the elementary level, one seeks to replace one sickness with another. He remarks that to " think of getting rid of sickness is fixation on sickness, but if you use that fixation to get rid of sickness, the fixation will not remain."[31] The goal is to become conscious of one's obsession with winning and to recognize it as an obstacle.

Further practice brings one to the advanced level, at which "letting sickness be, while living in the midst of sickness is to be rid of sickness."[32] Those who reach this level are truly strong. "Whatever they do," Munenori writes, " is done freely and independently, stopping where it naturally should."[33] How is that possible? How can one make sickness disappear? The explanation is given a few pages later:

> At this point [advanced level], you don't even know yourself. When your body, feet, and hands act without your doing anything in your mind, ten times out of ten, you don't miss.[34]

This passage describes spontaneous movement; by letting the body move of its own accord, one is no longer obsessed with sickness. In other words,

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Munenori had his own interpretation of Zen.

30. Yagyū M. 1632a, 51; Yagyū M. 1632b, 46.

31. Yagyū M. 1632a, 52; Yagyū M. 1632b, 47.

32. Yagyū M. 1632a, 53; Yagyū M. 1632b, 47.

33. Yagyū M. 1632a, 54; Yagyū M. 1632b; 48.

34. Yagyū M. 1632a, 58; Yagyū M. 1632b, 50.

spontaneity of movement attained through repetitive movement elicits freedom from obsession.[35]

The vanguard of the moment. *The Book of Family Traditions* also highlights the importance of reacting suitably to particular situations. The the notion of *ki* comes into play here.

Munenori understands *ki* by way of two distinct glyphs, 気 (energy) and 機 (potential, the dynamics of movement), both of which have to do with the same thing.[36] Generally, the notion of 気 (energy) is drawn from Chinese philosophy, where it refers to the vital energy that encompasses the entire universe from its first beginnings.[37] This view was taken over by the Japanese as part of the broad influence of Chinese culture. In *The Book of Family Traditions*, however, the use of *ki* seems to be more strictly limited. Munenori writes that "mind with a specific inward attitude and intensive concentration of thought is called will (志). Will begins within; what emanates outwardly is called energy."[38] Thus, *ki* is an *expression* of the will from within to without.

Munenori does not stop there but also describes those of "great potential and great function' (大機大用) as persons who have mastered *ki*. They are always alert to what is going on, and "because this potential (機 *ki*) is always there within, when it is natural, extraordinary speed occurs."[39] The editor of the Japanese version comments that "when it is natural" in this passage should be understood as "in accord with the situation, spontaneously."[40]

Moreover, this *ki* can have a profound effect in a given situation: "Once you're glanced at by the eyes of someone with great potential, you'll be so captivated by the look, you'll forget to draw your sword, just standing there doing nothing."[41] Thus, for Munenori, when *ki* functions fully, an ideal

35. As for the mental transformation called no-mind (無心) in the learning process, see Nishihira 2019.

36. Yagyū M. 1632a, 34; "機 (potential) is 気 (energy)."

37. Cheng 1997; Gu 2017.

38. Yagyū M. 1632a, 31; Yagyū M. 1632b, 26.

39. Yagyū M. 1632a, 104; Yagyū M. 1632b, 89.

40. Yagyū M. 1632a, 104.

41. Yagyū M. 1632a, 105; Yagyū M. 1632b, 90.

within is realized through control of an external situation. Just how is this accomplished?

Here we need to have recourse to Munenori's understanding of 機前 *kizen* (the vanguard of the moment). *Kizen* is "to observe an opponent's energy carefully and act to counter it in advance of the energy."[42] Munenori specifically advises not to act in advance of an opponent's *action* but in advance of their *energy*.[43] Since swordsmanship involves a duel between two persons, to anticipate an opponent's energy is crucial. To realize *kizen*, Munenori details techniques in both the aggressive mode (懸 *ken*) and the passive mode (待 *tai*).[44] He further explains that mixing the two can confound one's opponent. When my mind is in the passive mode and my body in the aggressive mode, an opponent is likely to think that my movements are backed up by an aggressive state of mind—in other words, that I intend to kill them—and this leads them to react by attacking. But insofar as my opponent's action is prompted not by an inner intention of their own but as a natural reaction to what they assume my intentions to be, their energy is not fully present in their action. This may disclose an "opening" in their body, which is precisely what my mind, in its passive mode, was waiting for. I am then able to attack with my full energy, with the result that my movement will no doubt prove superior to my opponent's. This is movement in *kizen*, the provocation of uncontrolled movement in the opponent's will that creates the right moment for attack. This technique is realized naturally in those of great potential and great function.

Up to this point we have only examined *The Book of Family Traditions* for its description of habituation and the conscious control of movement, the former in the transition from the elementary to the advanced level, the latter in the use of *ki*. To be sure, both these aspects of practice are thought to occur within a fixed period of time, but we have yet to consider how they are connected to the actual learning process. To this end, I will turn next to the interviews conducted with practitioners of the Yagyū Shinkage school.

42. Yagyū M. 1632a, 34; Yagyū M. 1632b, 30.
43. Yagyū M. 1632a, 34; Yagyū M. 1632b, 30.
44. Yagyū M. 1632a, 35–7; Yagyū M. 1632b, 33.

Interviews

Four persons were interviewed for the purposes of my research: Mr. Yagyū, Mr. Nagata, Mr. K, and Mr. Nomura. Mr. Yagyū is the twenty-second headmaster of the school. Mr. Nagata has been practicing in the school for more than forty years, while Mr. Nomura and Mr. K have been practicing for more than thirty years. The interviews were held between October and November of 2019 in Osaka (Mr. Yagyū, Mr. K, and Mr. Nomura) and Tokyo (Mr. Nagata).[45] I also had the opportunity on two different occasions in November of 2019 to observe the three of them at practice.

Practice at the school is carried out through *kata*. Practitioners are always divided into pairs: the one with the higher level of skill (*uchidachi* 打太刀) initiates the attack; the other, less skilled practitioner (*shidachi* 使太刀) is on the receiving end of the attack. The technique used in the *uchidachi* attack is strictly determined, as is that adopted by the *shidachi* to ward off the advances of the *uchidachi*. By repeating the process over and over, the *shidachi* learns how to move correctly and respond promptly to even the most rapid attack. This method of learning through the repetition of a specific sequence of movements is called *kata geiko* (*kata* practice).

Minamoto[46] observed that *kata geiko* allows one both to master the physical technique and to attain the requisite mental maturity. As we have seen in *The Book of Family Traditions*, the practitioner needs such maturity to use *ki* quickly. The achievement of mental maturity is not, of course, an automatic consequence of having mastered bodily technique, as Yokoyama[47] and Umewaka[48] note. It requires practitioners to distinguish the various elements of what they are learning and arrange them in order of priority. In other words, one must avoid giving in to spontaneous movement in the course of acquiring the necessary habituation of movement. I asked the practitioners to define what this risk meant to them.

45. Each time I conducted an interview, I explained the aim of the interview and received their written consent for the use of their remarks in my published research.

46. Minamoto 1989.

47. Yokoyama points out that Minamoto believes, under Nishida's influence, in the improvement of bodily technique leading almost automatically to mental maturity. cf. Yokoyama 2005.

48. Umewaka claims, figuratively, that *kata* is not a ticket for free admission to the mental world (2003, 94.

The purpose of kata practice. What is the purpose of *kata* practice? Mr. Yagyū and Mr. Nagata both talked about the energic function (活き *hataraki*): "What we learn from *kata* is not a form (*katachi*), but an energic function (*hataraki*)" (Mr. Nagata); "The *katachi* is a result. I do not see the *katachi*, only the *hataraki*" (Mr. Yagyū). Although the character 活 is generally not used for the word *hataraki* (function, operation), they prefer it for its connotation of "liveliness" and the implication that what is at work is a matter of vital energy and not the merely mechanical operation of a form.[49]

Both men discussed *hataraki* in contrast to *katachi*, noting that whereas *katachi* refers to an objective and externally visible form, *hataraki* points to an inner working that cannot be seen from the outside. Mr. Yagyū offered a fitting example of what there is to learn from *kata* practice:

> When we were demonstrating our practice,[50] an *uchidachi* inadvertently made a wrong attacking movement, against which the *shidachi*, just as inadvertent ly, was able to defend himself. The techniques were deeply seated in their bodies. This is the final goal of *kata* practice.... By repeating the same movement again and again and allowing *kata* to settle in one's inner recesses, these things can happen. This is what we seek.

Both the *uchidachi* and the *shidachi* in the demonstration were mistaken in their execution of the order of their movements. But Mr. Yagyū did not see a problem because both succeeded in reacting competently, that is, they moved spontaneously in a manner suited to the situation and in conformity with the technique of the school. It is the full exercise of the energic function, *hataraki*, that makes this kind of adjustment possible. In a word, the purpose of *kata* practice is not to imitate a form but to learn the principle of how to receive or to react so that one's body is best able to reflect the movements of the form.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that it is through patterned practice that practitioners are able to learn the techniques of the school. Each school has its own *kata* for holding the sword, positioning one's feet, and so forth. By repeating these *kata*, practitioners learn to replicate movements coincident with the teachings of their particular school and to prepare

49. Cf. Nagata 2019.

50. This school often gives demonstrations outdoors at shrines.

themselves for the exercise of those movements in their own lives—even in the most unexpected situations.

The Hase. What do practitioners actually do to achieve their goal? All those I interviewed highlighted the importance of using the *hase* (腹背). Anatomically, the *hase* refers to the abdomen, the inner part of the body between the belly and the back and proceeding from the navel. Mr. Yagyū observed that "moving your body with the *hase* as a center point, moving your body on the basis of this point—that is what we have to make our body learn." During the practice sessions I attended, even practitioners at the beginner level were told to "see carefully" both their surroundings and the alignment of their bodies. The *hase* is central to this kind of proprioception.

The example of Mr. K is instructive here. At the invitation of a colleague, he began practicing in the Yagyū Shinkage school. At first, he was not particularly motivated. As he put it, "Sweating is of course fun, but there wasn't really anything beyond that that excited me." After two or three years, his attitude had changed. "There came a time when [moving] my body became very easy. Then I noticed the practice getting interesting." The turning point for Mr. K was the use of the *hase*. As he learned how to align his movement with it, he found that the practice became less tiring and more interesting. He had already been told early on about the use of the *hase*, but he did not really understand it until he had practiced for some time and began to notice his body moving with the *hase*.

This kind of insight is not speculative, Mr. Yagyū explained, but bodily. Once the body had learned it—although with no manifest intention on the part of the practitioner himself—Mr. K discovered that he was able to recover the correct state of mind at will:

> Now if someone tells me to concentrate on my *hase*, I can easily straighten my back, and it becomes very easy to move.... I need only intensify this point and leave my hands and feet to move freely.

Having achieved the proper bodily coordination, the *hase* served like a switch. Through repetition of the prescribed movements, his spine, which was perfectly straight at the beginning of the class, may have become slightly bent. As soon as someone pointed this out to him or when he observed it

for himself in a mirror,[51] he was able to restore the connection to *hase* that gave him the freedom to move about easily. Concentration on the functions of *hase* was enough to trigger his return to the "correct" position. All he needed was to reestablish the bond and the rest fell into place on its own. This is what is mean by the free movement of the body, without the intervention of will but also without the need to exile consciousness completely from one's bodily movement.

Moving without thinking. Mr. K's description of what it feels like for his body to move without him thinking is curious: "Somehow the body moves (*ugoichau*) in a trice" (なんとなくぱあって動いちゃう) and "leads me to move any which way without having to think" (何も考えずに動けるっていうところにつながっていく). The verbal expression *ugoichau* is an oral form of *ugoite-shimau*. The verb *ugoku* means "to move," and the form *-te shimau* here means "moving without intending to"—in this sentence, spontaneously. The other, *ugokeru*, is the potential form of *ugoku* that describes the status of the body as "being able to move." Both *ugoichau* and *ugokeru* imply little intervention by Mr. K's will. It is Mr. K who does the moving, but his conscious control is barely present.

Mr. Nomura used the image of "a perfect sphere that has fallen atop a mountain"[52] to explain his goal. When a round object falls from atop a mountain, it rolls naturally down the surface of the mountain side. No matter if the terrain be rugged or gently sloping, the act of falling belongs to the object. If Mr. Nomura's body were out of balance, or if he decided to act of his own will, the sphere would be uneven and no longer fall smoothly. Achieving ideal movement means adjusting to the situation by seeing it for what it is and letting one's body react spontaneously.

Mr. Yagyū and Mr. Nagata both remarked on the uselessness of thinking as well. "When you think," Mr. Nagata said, "the movement comes to a standstill. The mind has to be transparent." Mr. Yagyū added that "a duel is

51. There was a large mirror at the place of practice. Some of the practitioners used it to adjust their posture.

52. This image most certainly comes from the school's instructions on *Marobashi*. See Shimizu 1996, 198ff. Yagyū K. 2011, 82ff.

not something you engage in by thinking about it. You have to move before your words do."

What are we to make of this claim of "moving without thinking" or "before your words"? Words materialize when we attribute a name to something we perceive. No sooner do we categorize what is going on by saying *partner*, *moves*, *forward* or what have you, and even if the verbalization takes no longer than the blink of an eye, we have interrupted the very moment that is most crucial in swordsmanship.[53] Moving without thinking means moving before any form of representation is allowed to take place.

Movement without thinking is inseparable from the ability to "see" a situation clearly, but this seeing is not "sickened" by any will or purpose or ulterior intention. Its intentionality, such as it is, consists of seeing clearly the surroundings in which one finds oneself. This takes discipline and training. In the context, Mr. Nomura highlighted the importance of eliminating affectivity, and Mr. Nagata noted that "the mind *has to be* transparent." Their statement suggest how difficult it is to see a given situation with clarity in order to avoid giving way to an automated response or being waylaid by the misplaced will to win.

Winning without the will to win. Mr. Nagata confided to me me that ridding oneself of the intention to win is "very difficult." As *The Book of Family Traditions* insists, the effort spent in trying to to win narrows the mind. Accordingly, practitioners do their best to forget about winning or losing, a mark of having arrived at the advanced level. Mr. Yagyū added:

> What I hope to bring about is a situation in which my partner sees an opening in my movement and thinks "Got him!" as he prepares to strike. This is the kind of scene I want to set up.

Here we see the strategy of the aggressive mode (*ken*) and the passive mode (*tai*) at work. If I am aware of the strategy of my partner, I will realize that what I perceived as an opening in their defense may be a trap and that it would be dangerous to leap to action.

So how does one win? Without forsaking *kata* altogether, advanced prac-

53. What is more, the words have a certain artificiality that blocks them from describing the situation in its entirety and runs the risk of overlooking important elements.

titioners may practice without being assigned the role of *uchidachi* or *shidachi*. Mr. Nomura told me that in such cases, where the winner is not decided in advance, he would try to synchronize his movements with his partner's. When executing a technique in the passive mode (*tai*), for example, he observes:

> I do not wish to show myself as weak so as to make my partner strike at me. I wish only to be as I am while I try to provoke him into striking. I want him to strike me any way he wants and, as a result, to admit voluntarily to having lost.

Instead of showing oneself as petty, Mr. Nomura insisted, "the important thing is how I am connected to my partner and how I affect his feeling." It is "not about winning or losing, but whether my energic function (*hataraki*) comes to the fore or not."[54] Simply to state that he imitates his partner's movements would be insufficient. That is a matter of form. Still, we want to know, how can he win without the intention of winning?

We may get some hints from a consideration of the grammatical form of the "middle voice." Through discipline, the practitioner develops the ability to detect a chink or "opening" (隙) in the body of the opponent, a point that is not well defended. One initiates an attack on an opponent when one recognizes an opening in the opponent's bodily movements. Gradually the practitioner comes to recognize the revelation of this opening in one's opponent by first recognizing it in one's own body. By learning to make one's own openings imperceptible, one's movements become stronger in martial terms and at the same time alerts them to openings in the bodies of others that signal the correct point of attack. Thus, as Inaga explains,[55] through this syn-

54. Neither force nor speed is important here. In competitive sports, vanquishing a physically stronger and faster opponent is challenging. Athletes also have to contend with age, as it becomes harder to win as one gets older. In swordsmanship, one is able to make progress despite one's age precisely because one does not contend with force. By taking control of the situation, advanced practitioners are able to overcome those who are physically their superior.

According to Mr. Nomura, even though there is a limit to progress if learning begins at an advanced age, it is possible to make better progress than the young at taking control of the situation because of a greater life experience and the diminished likelihood of being mentally outwitted. However, this takes us beyond the question of spontaneity, which this essay has set out to clarify.

55. Inaga 2017.

chronization of movement the practitioner is able to see the gap between themselves and their opponent if it occurs within the space that they make with their partner, and there is a natural tendency for them to fill the gap created. Nonetheless, one's movement should be dictated neither by thinking, "I will move my body" (activity) nor by being forced to move (passivity). To move with a clear intention of winning is to rupture the synchronization; to be forced to move already puts one under control of one's opponent. The proper way of moving, then, should be neither active nor passive but rather in the "way of the middle voice."

Grammatically speaking, the middle voice is neither active nor passive,[56] because the action denoted by the verb is neither voluntary nor forced. It is close to what we observe in reflective verbs in French (*se produire*: to produce itself, to happen) or German (*sich zeigen*: to show itself, i.e., to appear) or other languages that have a way of indicating actions that arise in the natural course of events.[57]

What does this have to do with the encounter of two advanced practitioners? According to Mr. Yagyū, at the higher levels, practitioners vie for control of the situation. This is why Mr. K and Mr. Nomura spoke of the difficulty of initiating a strike against an opponent at a level more advanced than their own. They had the sense that if they did strike then and there, they would be forced into a story of their partner's making.

Referring to the metaphor of the sphere, Mr. Nomura remarked that there is a difference in the size of their respective spheres. Even if the shape of the globe is identical, one cannot take control of the situation if one's partner's sphere is larger than one's own. The shape of the globe governs the ability to move properly through achieving a proper balance between activity and passivity and liberating oneself of the will to win. At the same time, one need to recognize that size affects one's ability to control the situation as one wishes, even though this desire does not appear clearly in the mind.

This control of the situation, as we noted in reference to persons of great

56. Benveniste 1966.

57. There is a considerable body of philosophical research on the middle voice. Kimura 2010; Morita 2013; Kokubun 2017.

As for the middle voice in a martial art, cf. Inaga 2018. Mr. Nomura's expression "whether my energic function comes to the fore or not" may be classified as belonging to the middle voice: he is neither in a commanding position nor waiting passively as if in a daze.

potential and great function (see Figure 1), is achieved by balancing the two modes (aggressive, *ken*, and passive, *tai*) so that they appear as an extension of the way of movement in the middle voice. Once this level has been attained, one is able to create a situation in which the opponent reveals an "opening."

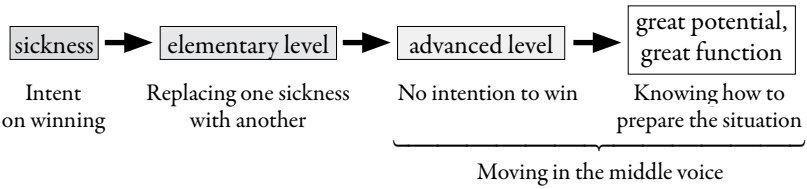

FIGURE 1

Paying attention, creating movement, and being conscious of a situation not covered by habituation are no longer a matter of whether one does or does not move one's body at a specific moment. Rather, they consist of being connected to one's body at the point of the *hase*, seeing the given situation clearly (with no intention of winning), moving according to what has been seen, and attempting to take control of the situation so that one's opponent cannot help moving.[58]

General discussion

In light of the previous analysis, we must now modify our working hypothesis. The adepts of the Yagyū Shinkage school are able to move freely between activity and passivity by means of their relationship to the *hase*. The *hase* thus offers an instance of what Legrand and Ravn refer to phenomenologically as the "non-reifying form" of bodily experience.[59] Mr. K's reference to the *hase* is not objectified; it is a subjective and pre-reflective experience. Still, this is not the same as the automatic predis-

58. Uchida, referring to Damasio's somatic marker hypothesis, points out that a master of martial arts aims—at times unconsciously—at a situation favorable to them. See Uchida 2010, Damasio 1994.

59. Cf. Legrand and Ravn 2009. On the "pre-reflective performative dimension" of self-consciousness, see Ravn and Christensen 2013.

position of the body Merleau-Ponty speaks of.[60] Neither can it be said to refer to something that appears in consciousness only in the presence of an obstacle.[61] On his own account, it was by relating positively to his *hase* without reifying it that Mr. K was able to achieve a proper sense of *hase*.

In addition to reinforcing the role of the *hase*, it is important not to accumulate too much tension in the rest of the body. Achieving a near relaxation of the body is part and parcel of many bodily techniques, but many beginners find it difficult to relieve tension. Rather than give straightforward advice to relax, Mr. K explained that he prefers to direct attention to the *hase*. This helps keep beginners from shifting force to other parts of their bodies. With repetition, the focus on the *hase* deepens, one's movements become smoother, and the capacity for spontaneous movements is enhanced. Furthermore, in learning to move with the *hase* and commit their movements to the it, practitioners enlist the energic function emitted from this region. The deeper their connection to their *hase*, the more freely can they move.[62]

Learning about the *hase* goes hand in hand with learning to read a situation. In practice, one's movements follow predetermined *kata*, but the speed and execution of the attack is always different. This is why *shidachi* always need to pay attention to the particularities of each situation. The search for just the right movement in given circumstances is conscious at first, but, through practice, comes to take place unconsciously. By keeping in touch with their *hase*, they are able to maintain continuity with situations encountered previously and the specific bodily movement suited to them.

In time, this connection with the *hase* enables a transition into the way of the middle voice. The correct use of the *hase* involves a well-balanced posture that does not lean forward or backward. This sense of balance helps keep them in the way of the middle voice, neither too active nor too passive in their movements. By sharpening their awareness of the *hase* and learning to take advantage of it, practitioners are able to hone the skills that bodily habituation and the ability to see—and also control—the situation make possible.

60. Merleau-Ponty 1962.

61. Gallagher 2005.

62. Many martial arts in Eastern Asia report the importance of using this part of the body (丹田).

As practice advances, then, three elements work ever more closely in unity: spontaneous movement in a relaxed body (pre-reflective bodily coordination), seeing the given situation (object-directed consciousness), and concentration on the *hase* (pre-reflective performative self-consciousness).[63] It is not "first movement, then seeing," but "movement and seeing at the same time." This is where concentration on the *hase* leads.

This level is not achieved without taking into account the creativity of *kata* practice. At first, practitioners try to reproduce the movements designated by *kata*. As the repetition of these movements accumulate in the body, they become spontaneous. At the same time, in order to be alert to the particularity of each situation and to verify the *hase*, one needs to take control of the situation, even if unconsciously, and carefully choose one's movements. This creativity results in new movements that are both suited to the situation and conform to the school's principles.

To summarize, making one's movements smoother through habituation and functioning creatively in the middle voice way share a common orientation. Both can be pursued *simultaneously*. It would be wrong to read our working hypothesis as implying a temporal causality between the habituation of movement (cause) and seeing the world (effect). However, if we understand the two to occur simultaneously and see the specific use of the body as creating a mutual causality between the two, the hypothesis stands.[64]

Let us return to the question we posed to Nishida's theory of active intuition regarding the relationship between the formation of a habit and becoming conscious of ourselves. In light of what we have seen in the process of learning bodily techniques, the two can take place at the same time and can be mutually transformative. It is not enough to think of a vague state of unconsciousness awakening into clear consciousness. Rather, pre-reflective habituation and a precise accurate control of movement are developed and deepened through positive and subjective bodily experience. As a result, the deepening of "self-awareness" (自覚) does not stop at the clarification of self-

63. Legrand 2006; Legrand and Ravn 2009; Ravn and Christensen 2013; Ravn 2017.

64. Of course, this transformation does not take place automatically. It requires the conscious participation of the partner, which may result in differences between practitioners of the same school. On this point, Hōjō analyzes different levels of participation among those learning a martial art from a master. cf. Kōno and Hōjō 2020.

consciousness. One has also to know oneself and awaken to one's own role in shaping the entirety of a given situation in order to understand practically what one can and cannot do. In executing this role, the individual arrives at "self-awareness," but this is not separate from a change in the situation and the effect one has had on it. "Self-awareness" needs to be seen both in a specific temporal setting and in relationship with habituation.

What we have here is a sound example of what Izutsu called "supra-consciousness" in his discussion of the consciousness of a musical virtuoso: "Paradoxical as it may sound, he is so fully conscious of himself as identified with music that he is not 'conscious' of his act of playing in any ordinary sense of the word."[65] Izutsu called this "supra-consciousness" to distinguish it from "consciousness" and "unconsciousness."

Conclusion

The particular example of swordsmanship was used to illustrate the argument summarized above because it involved a process that unfolded through discipline. Beginning practitioners are focused on a single action. As they advance, their attention shifts to an action over a given period of time. At the advanced level, they may still be incapable of taking full control of their situation, but they have learned to adjust to it, that is, to maintain a proper balance between their movements and the situation in which they find themselves. Once at the level of great potential and great function, they achieve control through insight into the relationship between movement and situation. In Nishida's words, the more we understand our practical position in a given situation, the more "self-awareness" deepens.

It is possible, therefore, to pursue "the culmination of the development of consciousness" and "the ground of the emergence of consciousness" together. By pursuing both simultaneously, the sublime ideal of being able to form habits—as a natural response to one's circumstances—can occur in full self-consciousness.

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65. Izutsu 1969, 90.

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