

## CONTRIBUTOR

Augustin Lefebvre has a Ph.D. from Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3 University. Drawing on video recordings filmed in an aikido dojo in Tokyo, the work described aikido interactions by adapting analytical tools from Conversation Analysis, Ethnomethodology and Gesture Studies. It showed that aikido can be conceived as a communication system in which practitioners coordinate whole body movements. This communication system shares some properties with the speech-exchange system described by Conversation Analysis such as the possibility for practitioners to anticipate the next step of a contribution to the activity. My work focused on the interactions between skilled members and between skilled practitioners and beginners. In my post-doctoral research I collected other corpora in classroom and theatrical rehearsal, always focusing on the role of the body's behavior in the organization of social interaction.

# THE PACIFIC PHILOSOPHY OF AIKIDO

## AN INTERACTIONAL APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This paper engages with the question of the invention of martial arts by examining the case of the Japanese martial art *aikido*. Relying on existing schools of traditional martial arts, Morihei Ueshiba [1883-1969] created aikido with the goal of transforming techniques aiming at killing the opponent into techniques which could benefit both partners. Instead of becoming stronger than the opponent, the goal of aikido practice is to improve the individual's behaviour during their physical interaction with their partner. The question I examine in this paper is how practitioners manifest such philosophy during their practice and through their embodied conduct. I focus specifically on how practitioners simulate a situation of conflict through semiotic structures [Goodwin 2000] through which they construct a world of movement in which anticipating the attacker's movement becomes possible. Because practitioners are organized with such a framework, they can, through movements of the whole body, pacifically produce and resolve the situation of conflict. This study contributes to understanding how a practical philosophy is implemented within the practitioners' bodies and is manifested during social interaction.

Aikido is presented by its founder, Morihei Ueshiba [1883-1969], as a *way of harmony* and an art of peace [Ueshiba 2008]; it is a method to produce an 'appropriate response to a particular situation' [Stevens 2010: 126]. How do practitioners organize these 'appropriate' responses during their everyday practice? The aim of this paper is to answer this question by examining how aikido practice is concretely organized as a particular kind of *social interaction*.

The focus on social interaction here is motivated by the ethnomethodological idea that 'the objective reality of *social facts*' is an 'on-going accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life' [Garfinkel 1967: vii, my emphasis]. According to this view, face-to-face interaction is the *constitutive substrate* of any social phenomena:

Everything that matters socially – meanings, class, roles, emotions, guilt, aggression, and so forth and so on – is socially constructed. Theories about how such things are learned and experienced, and about how to study them, which are not built to the specifications that interaction requires are wrong. [Moerman 1988: 1]

This radical statement needs some explanation. Durkheim [1937: 4] defines a social fact as a way of acting, thinking, and feeling that exists outside of and constrains any given individual consciousness (sociology for Durkheim is thus the science of social facts). Ethnomethodology, meanwhile, builds off of Durkheim's empirical study of social facts by proposing that they be studied in the context of social interactions (i.e., in their specific and contingent times and places). The ethnomethodological approach does not deny that normative rules exist; however, ethnomethodology does seek to examine how normative rules are organized, mobilized, and negotiated during social interactions. From this perspective, the goal of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis [Sacks et al. 1974] is to build 'a bridge from microphenomena such as discourse or social interaction to macronotions such as occupational careers, social indicators, dominant cultural values, and patterns of inequality in a population' [Cicourel quoted in Moerman 1988: 1].

The statements that aikido is a way of harmony, an art of peace, a method to produce appropriate responses to new situations – these contribute to the *macronotion* of aikido. However, this does not explain how aikido practitioners develop appropriate responses nor does it explain how they coordinate whole body movements without talking in each particular situation. In this paper, employing an empirical approach, I will endeavour to explain these elements of aikido practice by analysing the practical logic of practitioners engaged in aikido interactions.

The practical problem faced by aikido practitioners while interacting is to understand what the other is doing and to respond appropriately. We enter then into a problem which is common to any participant in any social interaction, viz. how to come to a shared agreement or a common understanding with one another [Garfinkel 1967: 30; Schegloff 1992: 1299]. Interestingly, while studies on intersubjectivity always rely on data containing speech [Garfinkel 1967; Schegloff 1992; Barnes 2014], aikido interactions allow us to observe the interactional management of intersubjectivity through whole body movements. Indeed, as a non-competitive martial art, the practice of aikido requires a common understanding be shared between participants.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, understanding Ueshiba's invention of a martial arts practice of peace and harmony requires an examination of *naturally occurring interactions* [Heritage and Atkinson 1984] of aikido practice.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the coordination of participants refers exclusively to bodily coordination. For a consideration of the coordination of aikido movements with weapons, see Lefebvre [2016].

## ONE THE PHILOSOPHY OF AIKIDO FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF ITS INVENTOR

The founder of the Japanese martial art aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, is known to have been a great connoisseur and practitioner of Shinto and Buddhism as well as a variety of different martial arts [Ueshiba 2008; Stevens 1997]. Buddhism and the military elite have been connected throughout most of Japanese history [Cleary 1991] and the link between martial art practice and spirituality was not new when Ueshiba invented the word and the practice of aikido. The originality of Ueshiba's contribution is rather to conceive martial arts practice as a method to improve social relationships (i.e., an art of peace). Relying on lectures given by Ueshiba [2010], Stevens proposes the following definition of aikido:

**Aikido includes the techniques ... actually practiced in aikido training halls. In a wider sense, however, aikido is a way of harmony, an art of peace that includes how we relate to the people around us, to society as whole, and how we deal with nature. In this case, aikido means 'appropriate response to a particular situation'. [Stevens 2010: 126]**

One consequence of conceiving martial arts practice as a way of harmony is that, in the community of aikido practitioners, even nowadays, no competition is organized. Self-improvement is often mentioned by practitioners to explain why they do not organize and participate in competition. While competitors prepare for a competition day and therefore establish a pyramidal hierarchy from the strongest to the weakest, aikido practitioners emphasize the importance of organizing collaboratively the improvement of each individual. This point is stressed by Ueshiba in one of his lectures:

**True *budō* is not a fighting technique based on a rash use of force against another in order to determine who is stronger or who can win in a contest; rather, it is a path centered on daily training with other kindred souls, mutually working together to polish their individual characters. [Ueshiba 2010: 15]**

However, if competition is not a relevant way of *working together*, non-competitive practice emerges as central. In one lecture, Ueshiba points out the centrality of *practice*: 'I can explain and explain aikido, but in order to understand what I am saying, a person needs to practice, to experience aikido. Practice first, and then listen to explanations' [Ueshiba 2010: 96].

Aikido cannot be reduced to an abstract discourse or philosophy about practice. Rather, we can assume that the organization of aikido practice will have specificities that are linked to the philosophy that practitioners embody, or manifest through their behaviour.

In the following sections, I address the question of how aikido practitioners manifest mutually the ability to produce appropriate responses to particular situations while interacting through nonverbal embodied conduct. How can they understand and perceive the embodied conduct their partner is performing even if they are practicing together for the first time? Through which forms of social organization do they secure a systematic coordination between their whole body movements while interacting?

Answering these questions requires us first to conceptualise how social knowledge is implemented in the body of practitioners. This paper relies on and contributes to the paradigm of research concerned by *action and embodiment within situated human interaction* [Goodwin 2000]. This approach focuses on the role of the body in the *organization of human interaction*, it 'investigates how multiple participants take each other's bodies into account as they build relevant action in concert with each other' [Goodwin 2003: 2]. This field of study follows a naturalistic perspective inspired by ethnomethodology [Garfinkel 1967] in which the analysed actions are contextualized in their social and interactional setting. As Goodwin remarks, 'human bodies, and the actions they are visibly performing, are situated within consequential settings. The positioning, actions, and orientation of the body in the environment are crucial to how participants understand what is happening and build action together' [Goodwin 2003].

### *The Body in Social Interaction: Transactional Segment and Interactional Space*

Current research about the role of the human body in the organization of social interaction has been greatly influenced by Goffman who distinguishes between unfocused and focused interactions [Goffman 1963]. While unfocused interaction has to do with 'the management of sheer and mere copresence' [Goffman 1963: 24], focused interaction concerns a cluster of individuals who share a mutual focus of attention and collaboratively accomplish an activity; it comprises 'all those instances of two or more participants in a situation joining each other openly in maintaining a single focus of cognitive and visual attention – what is sensed as a single mutual activity entailing preferential communication rights' [Goffman 1963: 89]. During the accomplishment of this mutual activity, each individual's body is a central resource for exchanging consequential information such as gaze directions, postures of the whole body, facial expressions, and gestures.

The empirical study of the function of the body in the organization of focused interactions has been pursued by Kendon [1990: 2004] who emphasizes *spatial management and the construction of space by the human body*. In order to describe this spatial management in any activity, Kendon proposes the notion of a *transactional segment* defined as 'a space extending in front of a person which is the space he is currently using in whatever his current activity may be ... created and maintained by the individual's behavior' [Kendon 1990: 210]. When two or more individuals accomplish a mutual activity, they join their transactional segments, creating what Kendon calls an *F-formation* defined as 'the space between the interactants over which they agree to maintain joint jurisdiction and control' [Kendon 1990: 211]. The notions of *participation framework* by Goffman [1981] and Goodwin and Goodwin [2004] or of *interactional space* by Mondada [2009, 2013] all refer to a similar phenomenon, viz. the cooperative accomplishment of an activity organized within a space by/between participants via bodily interaction.

To understand how aikido practitioners manifest or accomplish their art of harmony through their bodies, studies focusing on the role of the body in the organization of social interactions provide crucial methodological tools. With reference to the notion of a transactional segment, the nature of the transactional segments organized by the body and the *frame* that it produces during aikido interactions must be specified. Kendon defines the limitations of the location and orientation of the transactional segment by 'how the individual places his body, how he orients it and spreads his limbs'; the position of the body thus serves as 'a frame, limiting the space to which the individual has immediate access and within which he carries out his current line of activity' [Kendon 1990: 211].

The specificity of aikido practitioners' transactional segments, then, is that they are *mobile*. The mobile transactional segments frame an activity which consists in organizing a space related to the moving transactional segment of the other partner. When interacting, aikido practitioners, as practitioners of any martial art, coordinate movements of the whole body creating an interactional space. But from this conceptualization, more questions emerge. What are the properties of this interactional space? How it is built and how does it become a resource for organizing aikido practice? Which are the spatial and temporal specificities of the interactional space they produce between their bodies?

### *Semiotic Structures in Human Interaction*

Any such study needs to consider the resources that practitioners rely on to organize their embodied activity. In describing action and embodiment in human interaction, Goodwin underlines the role of semiotic structures as resources that participants to a setting rely on to organize their contributions to the shared activity. In analysing children playing hopscotch, Goodwin shows the importance of the painted grid as a semiotic structure:

**[It] provides crucial frameworks for the building of action that could not exist without it such as successful jumps, outs, fouls, etc. The actions that make up the game are impossible in a hypothetical 'natural environment' unstructured by human practice ... Simultaneously, the game is just as impossible without embodiment of the semiotic structure provided by the grid in a medium that can be actually jumped on. [Goodwin 2000: 1505]**

The semiotic structures that aikido practitioners rely on to build transactional segments and interactional space are implemented in their bodies as 'techniques du corps' [Maus 1934]. Indeed, aikido practitioners rely on a repertoire of techniques – i.e., ways of moving the body and manipulating another body – the learning of which not only allows them to build transactional segments but also distinguishes skilled practitioners from beginners or outsiders. More importantly, these techniques are intrinsically cooperative, they imply the coordination of whole body movements between at least two practitioners.

## TWO THE AIKIDO MOVEMENT EVENT AND ITS SEMIOTIC STRUCTURES

As a consequence of organizing a non-competitive system of training, aikido practitioners rely on known-in-common semiotic structures that afford them resources to coordinate whole body movements. The event they build while relying on those semiotic structures is known in the Japanese martial art tradition as a kata. From an anthropological perspective, a kata can be defined as a movement event similar to Hymes' explication of a 'speech event' [Hymes 1972: 56]. A kata can then be defined as an *activity directly governed by rules or norms for the use of whole body movements*. As practitioners themselves often mention, the role of a kata is to simulate a martial situation. A simulation, as a mock-up, keeps some essential features of the original, 'real' version, while eliminating other elements [Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 363]. A kata is then a sequence of movements which re-produce some aspects of 'real' situations. Note that the literal translation of 'kata' is *mould* or *model*. The specificity of any kata is the specialization of each partner with respect to a particular task – generally attacking and counter-attacking – which is accomplished by relying on semiotic structures.

### Participation Categories: The Attacker [uke] and the Counter-attacker [nage]

Crucial to understanding how practitioners rely on semiotic structures to build a *movement event* is their orientation towards a standardized pair of *membership categories* [Sacks 1992: 40] on the basis of which aikido practitioners 'confront a world that is eminently coherent and intelligible' [Clayman and Maynard 1995: 4]. They create a social world in which the counter-attacker can project and therefore anticipate the unfolding movement of the attacker.

### Some Aikido Semiotic Structures

Aikido semiotic structures provide practitioners with frameworks in which to make decisions regarding how, when, and where to move their limbs when facing their partner at any given moment in their interaction. An important semiotic structure available in aikido *membership knowledge* [ten Have 2002] is related to the position of the whole body when in a standing position. Historically, this structure comes from the practice with weapons: the *bushis* used to stand in profile relative to their opponent in order to reduce the surface of their body. In various Japanese martial arts, including aikido, this way of standing is referred to with the Japanese word *Han-mi*. *Han* (半) means the half and *Mi* (身) means the body. *Han-mi* (半身) then means to expose the opponent to only half the surface of the body. To stand in

*Han-mi* involves positioning one foot before the other (this is the case also, again indicating the importance of weapons here, in fencing).

This structure creates two possibilities when practitioners stand face-to-face. The first possibility, which is called *Ai-han-mi* (相半身 same half body), corresponds to a situation in which both partners have extended the same foot in front of them (left-left or right-right). The second possibility is called *Gyaku-han-mi* (opposite *Han-mi*), a situation in which both partners have extended the opposite foot in front of them (left-right).

This semiotic structure offers a basis to another semiotic structure which concerns the actions of the arm/hand segments. In this paper I will only consider the movement of grasping one wrist with one hand, which is known as *katate-dori* (*katate* 片手 for one hand, *dori* 取り for seizure). The combination of those two semiotic structures is then *Ai-hanmi-katate-dori*, where one practitioner (the attacker) grasps the *right* wrist of the other practitioner (the counter-attacker) with his *right* hand (or vice-versa). *Gyaku-hanmi-katate-dori*, meanwhile, would constitute a different semiotic structure where the attacker grasps the *right* wrist of the counter-attacker with his *left* hand (or vice-versa).

### Entering the Body [Irimi] and Receiving the Unbalancing [Ukemi]

Once the bodies are in contact, aikido practitioners rely on other kinds of complementary semiotic structures that are specifically designed to be mobilized at the moment of contact. Here again, each structure is designed to be accomplished specifically by one partner.

The first structure is initiated by the counter-attacker in order to unbalance and throw the attacker. *Irimi* (入り身) means to *enter the body* with an offensive movement. Rather than moving backwards and *away* from the attacker's movement, the martial principle of *irimi* consists of the counter-attacker moving forwards and *into* the attacker's movement in order to take a position at the attacker's back while making bodily contact with their hands or arms.

*Ukemi* (受け身), on the other hand, means to receive the counter-attack movement while protecting oneself. To take the *ukemi* implies an acceptance of being unbalanced by the other partner but implies at the same time a reception of the other's movement by protecting oneself. It is then a voluntary movement: when a practitioner falls, they fall not because they were 'defeated' but because they are responding to an embodied communication with the counter-attacker. Moreover, the specific form of the attacker's embodied response is contingent on the semiotic structure selected based on how they interpret the movement of the counter-attacker.

The aikido *movement event*, the kata, is then organized around the collaborative structures which allow practitioners to shape their whole body actions and articulate them in time and space. In the next section, relying on video analysis, I show how two practitioners concretely organize some katas relying on those semiotic structures. The structure *Ai-hanmi Katate-dori* provides resources to practitioners to organize the kata leading up to the point of contact (extracts 1-6). When they make contact, the structure *Irimi Ukemi* provides resources to organize their bodily contact until the separation of their bodies (extracts 7-8).

### THREE DATA AND METHODS

In this paper, I examine the aikido interaction following an empirical perspective inspired by ethnomethodology [Garfinkel 1967; Clayman and Maynard 1995]. I describe the aikido movements as they are performed from the practitioners' point of view in *naturally occurring interaction* [Heritage and Atkinson 1984], relying on *video recordings* [Sacks 1984: 26] analyzed through sets of screenshots.<sup>2</sup>

All the extracts examined in this paper are taken from a video corpus recorded in Japan in 2007. The extracts detail techniques performed by aikido master Tada Hiroshi (born 1929), a direct student of Morihei Ueshiba. In these extracts, Hiroshi is shown with a partner interacted in the same semiotic structure, the structure introduced previously as *Aihan-mi Katate-dori Irimi Nage*. While Hiroshi repeats the same semiotic structure eleven times in fifty seconds, both he and his partner actually introduce small variations each time which I will highlight in my analysis. Interestingly, these extracts show how a single semiotic structure provides a resource to *organize variation*. If we remember that the definition of aikido implies producing an *appropriate response to each particular situation*, we can understand why it is important to be able to create variation. If each situation is different, then the response appropriate to each situation will be different in each interaction.

#### *Observation of Naturally-Occurring Aikido Interactions*

Aikido semiotic structures imply the presence of two practitioners and the movement of one toward the other. They imply further an elaboration *in situ*: one practitioner needs to choose *when to initiate* the structure while the other needs to identify when to *complete* it. Those structures reflexively offer a framework to interpret the position of the partner's body before and during contact between the bodies. For aikido practitioners, the semiotic framework *Aihan-mi Katate-dori Irimi Nage* provides a resource to organize the movement of one toward the other until the contact between their bodies.

The numbers above the screen shots refer to the timing at which the image has been shot. Below the screen shots of every extract, the letter A indicates the Attacker (*Uke*) and the letter C indicates the Counter-attacker (*nage*) while the lines following each letter indicates their observable movements.

<sup>2</sup> For more in-depth considerations of the theoretical and methodological implications of video analysis, see Mondada [2006] and Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff [2010].

**Extract 1** (below)

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.

In 3.15, both practitioners are walking one towards the other, while their arms are relaxed at their sides. While being in movement one toward the other, their practical problem is to identify the appropriate moment to initiate the production of the shared semiotic structure. The semiotic structure provides a task to accomplish for the attacker: to seize the counter-attacker's wrist. However, the semiotic structure leaves open to the counter-attacker the choice of which wrist he will present first to the attacker to complete the action [to seize with the hand of the same side] and when he will do that.

From 3.15, the counter-attacker *shapes his transactional segment* by

3.15



C: moves left foot one step forward and raises right hand  
A: moves left foot forward one large step and raises his right hand

3.45



3.7



C: keeps right hand raised while moving right foot one step forward  
A: moves left foot forward one large step and raises his right hand

3.9



raising his right hand in front of him in the direction of the attacker. We can observe the complete extension of the counter-attacker's arm in 3.7. By this movement, the counter-attacker initiates the semiotic structure and transforms the interactional space between both practitioners. As the counter-attacker's hand passes above his hip level (3.45-3.7), the arm's movement becomes recognizable for the attacker as a *solicitation*: a first action of the counter-attacker's whole body that calls for the attacker to *accelerate the rhythm of his walking* by taking a big step with his left foot and to raise his right hand toward the hand that has presented by the counter-attacker (3.7-3.9).

The attacker's *interpretation* of the counter-attacker's solicitation, his way of responding to it by a large step, is possible only with reference to the semiotic structure to which both practitioners have oriented themselves; that is to say, the counter-attacker's hand movement *becomes meaningful* when understood as part of a specific semiotic structure, viz. *seize with the same side's hand*. The attacker shapes his transactional segment by responding to the first part of the semiotic structure initiated by the counter-attacker.

Importantly, we can observe that the semiotic structure is being reconstructed *dynamically*. In other words, it becomes a resource to structure each partner's transactional segment and to organize an interactional space in which both practitioners are moving one towards the other.

In the next extract, where the spatial positioning is quite different compared with their positioning at the beginning of the first extract, we can observe that both partners rely on the same semiotic structure to organize a dynamic interactional space.

#### **Extract 2** (*opposite*)

The sign '> 20.6' symbolizes the fact that the described movement continues until the screen shot which corresponds to 20.6 seconds.

The attacker, A, is on the left. The counter-attacker, C, is on the right.

In 20.22, though the attacker has just finished rolling, he is already gazing at the counter-attacker which indicates his *reciprocity* [Heath 1986: 45]. The counter-attacker interprets the attacker's posture as an opening to extend his left arm in solicitation; that is, as initiating the first movement of a new semiotic structure. The counter-attacker's solicitation makes it appropriate for the attacker to get back to his feet and seize the wrist that has been presented to him by the counter-attacker (from 20.48).

Although the initial spatial position of both partners is quite different between extracts 1 and 2, the same sequence of initiation of movement to reconstruct in situ the semiotic structure becomes a resource for organizing the movement of one towards the other. Importantly, we observe that it is the counter-attacker, by presenting a hand to seize, who initiates the first movement to reconstruct the semiotic structure. As soon as he identifies which hand he should seize, the attacker initiates the movement towards the counter-attacker, raising his hand on the same side. From this moment on, both practitioners move *simultaneously*, one towards the other, but the counter-attacker moves as the *initiator*, choosing on which side the attacker should come. The attacker moves second, as the *responder*, aiming at a target designated by the counter-attacker. This organization in sequence has consequences that we observe in the next section.

#### *Initiating the Counter-attack*

In the following extracts, while both practitioners are physically moving simultaneously one towards the other, we can observe that the counter-attacker is able to project what will be the next position of the attacker, and to use that possibility of projection for appropriately positioning his own body in preparation for accomplishing the semiotic structure *entering the body* in the attacker's movement.

In extract 3, the counter-attacker stepping forward with his left foot (3.9-4.2) constitutes a projection because it begins at the moment when the future position of the attacker – the complementary position to which the counter-attacker is stepping (3.9-4.2) – has not yet been reached by the attacker.



20.38

20.48



A: orients gaze toward C and keeps gazing toward him  
C: moves forward with his left foot and extends his left arm > 20.6  
A: stands up > 20.73

20.6

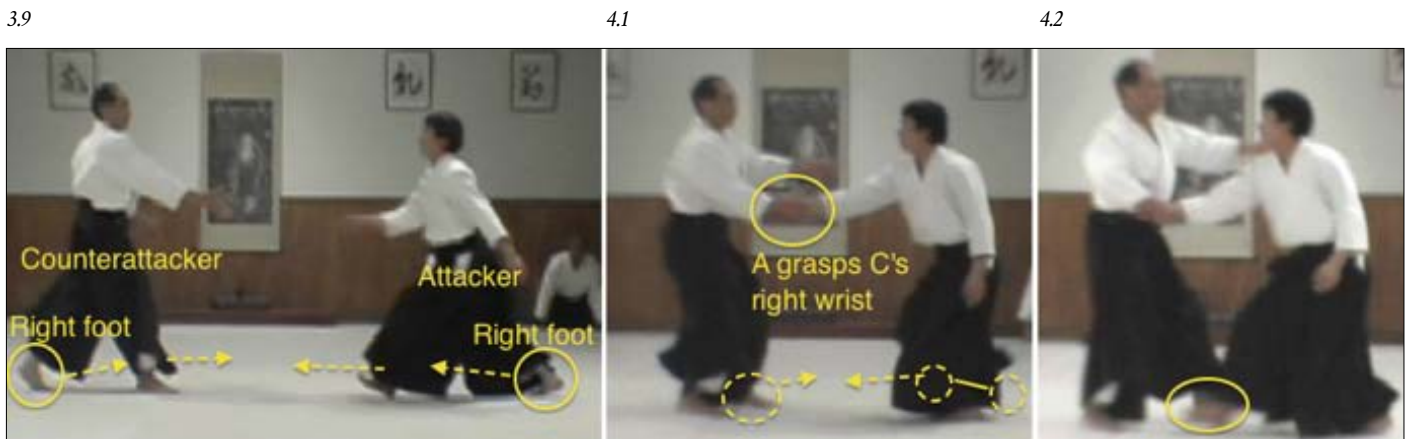
20.73



C: keep his left arm extended  
A: moves forward with his left foot and raises his left hand

**Extract 3** (below)

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.



C: keeps his right arm extended > 4.1 and steps with his left foot to the outside in order to position himself at the approaching attacker's back > 4.2.  
A: steps forward with his right foot > 4.1 and uses his right hand to grasp C's right wrist

**Extract 4** (below)

The attacker, A, is on the left. The counter-attacker, C, is on the right.



C: keeps his left hand extended > 20.98  
A: moves forward with his left foot and raises his left hand to grasp C's left wrist > 20.98  
C: puts his right foot on A's left side before the attacker puts his left foot on the mat > 20.98

In extract 3, by accomplishing his step forward with left foot (3.9-4.2), the counter-attacker repositions his body from the front of the attacker to his back. The position the counter-attacker reaches in 4.2 is relevant because it is on the outside of the attacker's right foot, that is, to the attacker's back. But more interestingly here, the position the counter-attacker reaches in 4.2 is relevant according to the position the attacker reaches in 4.2, while the counter-attacker's step begins in 3.9, at a moment at which the attacker is not in the same position as he is in 4.2. This means that the counter-attacker can project in 3.9 the position the attacker will reach in 4.2. The same phenomenon is observable in extract 4.

In 20.73, the counter-attacker begins a step that will become relevant only according to the position the attacker will reach in 20.98. How is the counter-attacker able to anticipate the position the attacker will reach? What are the features of the interaction between both practitioners at that moment?

In extracts 3 and 4, the counter-attacker, by keeping his solicitation arm continually extended, produces a situation that makes it appropriate for the attacker to come and grasp his wrist. The counter-attacker's left hand works then as a landmark so that the attacker can identify the point of arrival for his grasping movement and complete the structure of soliciting/grasping. Extracts 3 and 4 allow us to understand that the condition that allows the attacker to accomplish the second movement of the pair (the movement of grasping) is the maintenance of the counter-attacker's solicitation until the contact of bodies.

Simultaneously, the attacker's movement of coming and grasping produces a situation that makes relevant another movement for the counter-attacker: the outside step that allows him to take the attacker's back. For the attacker, the expected point of arrival of his grasping movement is at the level of the hands of the counter-attacker. Reaching that point requires the attacker to move his legs. And for the counter-attacker, the movement of the attacker's legs is a crucial landmark for choosing the direction for his own next step. The organization of the opening of aikido interaction relies then on the crucial fact that the counter-attacker produces a fixed point of arrival for the attacker's movement of coming and grasping. The counter-attacker *responds* to the attacker's movement of coming and grasping with his legs. In other words, the counter-attacker's solicitation produces a situation that makes it appropriate for the attacker to come and grasp, while the attacker's movement of coming and grasping makes it appropriate for the counter-attacker to move to the attacker's back.

In this interactional organization, in anticipating the point of arrival of the attacker's movement, the counter-attacker relies on the fact that the attacker will not stop moving toward the solicitation hand. The next section shows that an expectancy available in the attacker's category is: *pursuing the movement toward the counter-attacker's solicitation hand even when his solicitation hand is moving* (extract 5) or when the counter-attacker produces unexpected perturbations (extract 6).

In extract 5 overleaf, the counter-attacker changes at the final moment the position of his soliciting hand. In such situations, in producing his movement of coming and grasping, the attacker manifests the expectancy 'accomplishing movements without stopping'.

**Extract 5** (below)

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.



C: raises his right hand

A: raises his right hand toward the counter-attacker

C: makes a quick up and down cutting gesture

In 24.15, the counter-attacker accomplishes a solicitation in the direction of the attacker. The attacker answers as soon as possible with a movement of coming and grasping in the direction of the counter-attacker (from 24.15). But this time, as the attacker's hand is approaching, the counter-attacker does not maintain the solicitation hand in a fixed position: he raises his right hand and symbolizes a cut of the attacker's right arm. Nevertheless, the change in the counter-attacker's hand position is not interpreted by the attacker as problematic: he pursues his movement of coming and grasping in the same direction. The twist of the attacker's hand (24.4-24.5) shows furthermore that he is trying to grasp the counter-attacker's solicitation hand.

Extract 6 opposite shows another kind of possible perturbation the counter-attacker can produce in accomplishing the first movement of the same semiotic structure. Generally, the counter-attacker alternates the solicitation hand in a regular rhythm: once on the left, once on the right, and so on. In extract 6, however, the counter-attacker solicits with his right hand even though he had just previously solicited with his right hand.

From 16.9, the attacker, by raising his left hand, manifests that he is mobilizing the expectancy *alternating the solicitation hand* for choosing the hand he will use for *coming and grasping*. According to that expectation, the attacker expects at this moment that the counter-attacker will raise his left hand. The attacker is here anticipating the

next solicitation of the counter-attacker, as is shown in 17: the attacker's left hand reaches the same level as the counter-attacker's right hand at the same time. At this moment, the possibility for the attacker to react with great speed to the counter-attacker's solicitation depends on his relying on the *solicitation hand alternation expectancy* rather than on the observation of what the counter-attacker is doing.

From the moment observable at 17, maintenance of mutual intelligibility is threatened: the attacker makes accountable the expectancy of the *hands alternation* while the counter-attacker makes accountable the fact that he is entitled to choose freely which hand of solicitation he will present to the attacker. The result is that the attacker cannot appropriately complete the counter-attacker's first movement. How do practitioners manage to maintain the mutual intelligibility of their activity?

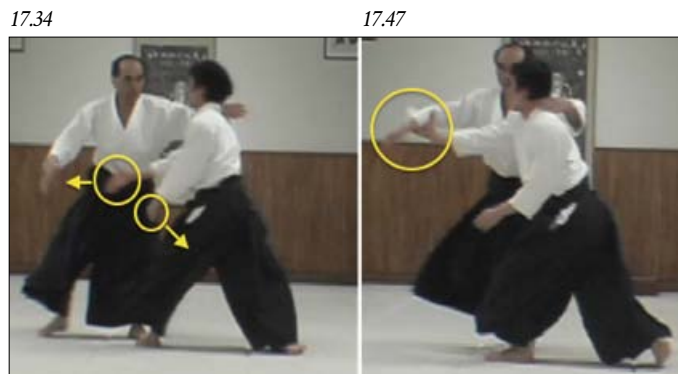
With the screen captures 17.34-17.47 we can observe that the attacker relaxes his left hand and raises his right hand. He shifts then from the hand which manifests the hand alternation expectancy to the expectancy according to which, as a responder completing the semiotic structure initiated by the counter-attacker's solicitation, he is supposed to adapt his movement to that of the counter-attacker. By changing the hand he will use for answering the counter-attacker's solicitation, the attacker maintains the interactional order at this moment: the counter-attacker can choose the hand of solicitation even if his choice does not match with the expectancy of right/left alternation.

**Extract 6** (below)

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.



C: raises his right hand and keeps it raised  
A: raises his left hand



A: relaxes his left hand while he raises his right hand

In next section, I examine how practitioners organize their interaction during the contact between their bodies when the semiotic structure seizing the counter-attacker's hand with same side's hand has been completed.

**Organizing Contact between Bodies**

The semiotic structure *entering the body* consists for the counter-attacker to position his whole body at the attacker's back while maintaining the attacker's head against his seized arm. On his side, the attacker receives the counter-attacker's movement by bending his whole body and pivoting it in order to roll on the mat.

Extract 7 (below)

The attacker, A, is on the right. The counter-attacker, C, is on the left.



A: keeps on seizing; 4.44: stops seizing, puts his right foot on the floor, and keeps his left foot directly behind his right foot.

C: puts his left foot on the mat > 4.2; steps forward with his right foot behind the attacker's back > 5.3; moves his right arm towards the attacker's face until making contact > 5.3

A: bends his body back > 5.1; his right foot extends out and he reaches back with his right hand to execute a fall > 5.3.

As soon as the attacker seizes the counter-attacker's wrist (from 4.2), he stops moving his feet: he puts his right foot on the mat and keeps his left foot behind, maintaining a position of half body. By locking his whole body's posture, the attacker completes the previous semiotic structure: he is seizing the counter-attacker's wrist with his right hand and with his right foot forward.

On his side, from this moment on, the counter-attacker initiates the semiotic structure *entering the body*. The counter-attacker moves his right foot in the attacker's back and coordinates the forward movement of his right foot with a semi-circle movement of the right arm, making contact with the attacker's face in 4.7. This movement of the counter-attacker's whole body lasts until 5.3. To interpret the counter-attacker's *entering the body* movement, the attacker relies on the semiotic structure *receiving with the body*. The attacker does not try to go backwards but

accepts his loss of balance. Indeed, the attacker *follows* the counter-attacker's whole body movement by bending his body back (from 4.7) and letting his right foot slip as the counter-attacker steps in to his back and makes contact with his arm (from 5.1).

Extract 8 shows that, between the moment of the seizing and the moment in which the counter-attacker enters his body, another semiotic structure can be inserted. The possibility of inserting another structure between two structures shows, first, that a certain degree of improvisation is possible by combining relevant elements at relevant moments, and second, that the whole body movements are organized according to a syntax i.e., a combination of units following an order). The shared movement – while bodies make contact – can therefore be lengthened by the counter-attacker for all practical purposes.

**Extract 8** (*below and overleaf*)

The attacker, A, is on the left. The counter-attacker, C, is on the right.

20.95

21.09

21.22



A: keeps on seizing > 22.14

21.09 A: moves his right foot forward > 21.38

C: raises his seized hand and coordinates its trajectory with the trajectory of his left foot > 22

21.09 C: begins to pivot his left foot backwards while supporting his weight on his right foot > 21.75

21.28

21.38

21.75

22



21.38 A: puts his right foot on the mat and moves his left foot in front of his partner

21.75 C: puts his left foot on the mat

22.14

22.37

22.6

22.96



A: stops moving forwards

22.37 A: moves his left foot backwards

C: changes his whole body direction: his left arm goes right and his body's weight is on his right foot



We can observe that, in 20.95, the counter-attacker, instead of stepping directly in the attacker's back as in extract 6, pivots and moves his left foot back. He coordinates this complex foot movement with the movement of his seized arm. This is another semiotic structure called *tenkan* (pivot). We can observe that the attacker responds to the counter-attacker's pivot with two steps instead of keeping the half-body semiotic structure as in the previous extract. Here, he organizes his contribution to the kata by following the counter-attacker's movement via his grip on the counter-attacker's wrist and by stepping forward in the direction indicated by the counter-attacker. From 22.14, the mutual configuration of both partners' bodies is comparable to the moment observable in 20.95 prior to the pivot. However, the result of the pivot is that the counter-attacker is positioned much more in the attacker's back than he was previously. From 22.37, the attacker initiates the semiotic structure *receiving with the body*. He steps back with his left foot and, from 22.96, orients his left hand toward the mat following the counter-attacker's left arm movement.

In these last few extracts, we saw how practitioners coordinate their whole body movements through a *tactile mode*. The counter-attacker's semiotic structure shapes his transactional segment in order to give direction to the attacker. Reciprocally, the attacker's semiotic structure shapes his transactional segment in order to follow the counter-attacker's movement. Through semiotic structures, they build a world of bodily contact through which they are able to communicate.

## CONCLUSION

Morihei Ueshiba invented aikido by refashioning elements from preexisting martial arts used to prepare practitioners to be effective in 'real' combat situations and utilizing them in an effort to transform conflict into harmony. In this paper, I attempted to 'build a bridge' between the macronotion of aikido and the microphenomena through which aikido practitioners construct the conditions of possibility for anticipation and collaboration in the achievement of harmony.

As we saw in the extracts, the individual transactional segments are always shaped by practitioners in response to their fellow practitioners. The interactional space in which the counter-attacker is able to project and therefore to anticipate the attacker's next action is built on the basis of semiotic structures that connect transactional segments and thus connect practitioners. The semiotic structures, meanwhile, are reconstructed cooperatively through a simple sequence in which the counter-attacker initiates a first action to which the attacker responds.

Interestingly, this sequential principle of cooperation, in which one practitioner responds to the initial action of the other, allows both practitioners to *coordinate simultaneously unfolding body movements*. In other words, the simultaneity of their contributions to the interaction is possible because through semiotic structures they can interpret visually and tactilely what the other is doing as an *initiator* or as a *responder*. The participation categories of attacker and counter-attacker are therefore embedded in a social (semiotic structures) and interactional (sequence of initiations of actions) system of conflict simulation which affords practitioners the conditions of possibility of pacific harmony between two opponents.

If we think about other martial arts which rely on the kata-type of training – kumite in karate, kata in judo, but also specific training in fencing or boxing, for instance – we will find the same kind of interactional organization: semiotic structures which provide practitioners ways of using their bodies in front of a partner and in sequences of attacks/counter-attacks linked to participation categories. Every particular martial art practice and culture can be described by this interactional framework. Thus, if we consider that the practice of aikido (and the practices of all other martial arts as well) is a *social fact*, and if we want to understand how practitioners find common ground on which to tactilely communicate, then martial art studies will do well to explore further the insights afforded by observing naturally-occurring interactions.

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