

Aikido : the Art of Meeting and Movement

“...the intensity of presence...the face to face that unites the painter and the model, an active face to face...where the model is invited to participate...to investigate the relationship that is engendered between painter and model...the relationship, the encounter, the meeting... lend meaning... such meaning, that pure technical virtuosity alone could never achieve...forming as such the whole, for the present moment...”¹

Aikido and movement

In Aikido the encounter gives rise to movement. And as such the movement is a “collective work”. The justness and the pertinence of the movement are on par with the authenticity of the exchange. Our practice is nothing other than this quest for authenticity. To do what is necessary, on one side, as on the other, and solely that ... To listen to the other, to be with the other in their rhythm and their intention. To forget oneself and to be as present as possible. It is not about deciding, but about participating with determination. It is not about wanting to be the fastest but about simply trying to harmonize oneself to the gestures of the other...To engage to one’s fullest in the encounter. Rather than submitting to the situation, to accept it, to allow oneself to be guided and this paradoxically in order to remain actor, capable at each moment to foster the exchange. To stay present and offensive, to be perfectly in position in order not to be injured, to be potentially capable of reversing the situation. To be without anticipation, without any gesture or behavior that is not the consequence of the other’s actions. To purify one’s actions, to eliminate the superfluous, to remain sober, attune to going towards the justness of the movement. The actions on each side may annul each other. One or the other may take the leadership without being in opposition but rather “by being with one’s partner.” In this acceptance, the situation may be overturned and the roles reversed. Each one becomes the mirror of the other... the movement which arises from each meeting must be considered as unique and unfinished. Unique because the movement is different from those preceding and because never again will it come to pass in the same manner. Unfinished because we will never be done with this quest for completion which characterizes our art.

These encounters that Aikido offers fourth for us to inhabit can be disappointing... But that is the cost to bear. Creation nurtures itself from experience, from hesitation, from errors... And our practice is not wholly transparent; often it is play out within the shadows. But from such shadows swells forth light. It is the shadow that gives meaning to these moments of magic that we share in a dojo. These moments are not solely reserved for the most experienced. Virtuosity or technical expertise is not indispensable and in any event, is not the sole condition to intensely living the encounter. Whatever the technical level, it is the authenticity, sincerity and reciprocity of the presence of the actors which will develop in the encounter the sensations of sharing, of freedom and of creation. In the end, technique becomes pretext for encounter. Through regular practice, technical prowess will become more precise but that is only the result of successive and renewed meetings. The goal is not technical mastery... In fact, there is no other goal than to practice and to be in each encounter as present as is possible. This possibility is open to all practitioners. Through this martial relationship, each one, regardless of rank will be able to give meaning to their practice...

The sculptor confronts the matter, the specific nature of a block of wood or a slab of stone or piece of metal. From this encounter, the sculptor generates a form, forms the matter, creates. This process is about a meeting, is an exchange for the artist is not alone, the work is an interaction between the matter and the self. The result is not just the product of the sculptor’s technique or inspiration, it is also the consideration of the specificity of the matter being sculpted. It is about being “with,” about using the constraints of the formless matter such that these

¹ Extraits d'un texte de Jean Pierre Chambon "Pleines figures" dans "Espace Vallès - 18 septembre / 18 octobre 2014" exposition de Sébastien LAYRAL

constraints become opportunities... Herein, with the practice of Aikido, there are many common elements. The matter to sculpt is the energy offered by one's partner, the product of both the determination and the engagement within the exchange, of the sincerity of the attacks, each characterizing the partner's "being" in the present moment, in the "here and now." For, the exchange may take the form of the technique that is executed. In order to do so it will have been necessary to be attentive to one's partner, to be present with this partner in order to direct, to guide the energy and give it the desired form, that of the relevant technique... the movement that is executed will never be the sole creation of the one that is supposed to do the technique but rather the resultant of the encounter and the exchange...

Aikido is demonstrative in the sense that it can be spectacular. Seen from the outside, there exists within the execution of techniques a form of aesthetics and theatrics which may lead the neophyte to exclaim over its particular "beauty." This cannot be denied and in general the beauty of the movement is the fruit of harmonious practice between two partners. But what appears as more pertinent is the perception of this practice from the interior, from the sensations of the practitioners themselves, not what is "given to see" but what is "given to live." From the outside, one can limit oneself to the form itself, to its appearance, to what holds the practice together. It is more complex to perceive the true content of this form. The "shell" may indeed be empty and one may remain intent solely on the visual. Given that Aikido is a practice, the artistic dimension lies not as much in the perception of a "finished product" as it does in the sensations "of evolution" felt by the practitioners... The movement is, in the end, the form that taken in each meeting with its corresponding level of reciprocal presence, intensity and authenticity. Aikido is an art for the experimental aspect of its practice, for what is given to live, to feel and to share....

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