

Resistance in martial arts: for a martial semiotics

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Abstract

While considering non-verbal language, semiotics of the natural world opens the question of the sensitive. The issue of the body and the body-in-act is formulated through the martial arts the long tradition of which makes it a particular object. The body performance, as from physics involves the concept of resistance. The current reflection questions the semiotic mode under which martial arts think out resistance. The tensive ratio energy / movement induces four modalities that set the type of martial acting body: resistance, strength, absorption and bending. The pattern of resistance comes in cognitive resistance, pragmatic resistance, active resistance, passive resistance and flesh-resistance. The resistive tension, by putting into contacting active resistance and passive resistance, describes the correspondence between adversity (intensity) and body activity (extensity). Exploring the issue of the sensitive in martial arts indexes martial semiotics.

Key words: martial arts, body, resistance, semiotics

Résumé

En considérant le langage non verbal, la sémiotique du monde naturel inaugure la question du sensible. La problématique du corps et du corps en acte se trouve formulée à travers les arts martiaux dont la longue tradition en fait un objet singulier. La performance corporelle, en tant que relevant de la physique fait intervenir la notion de résistance. La présente réflexion interroge le mode sémiotique sous lequel les arts martiaux pensent la résistance. Le rapport tensif énergie/mouvement induit quatre modalités qui fixent la typologie du corps actant martial : la résistance, la force, l'absorption et la flexion. Le motif de la résistance se décline en résistance cognitive, résistance pragmatique, résistance active, résistance passive et résistance-chair. La tension résistive, en mettant en contact la résistance active et la résistance passive, décrit la correspondance entre l'adversité (intensité) et l'activité corporelle (extensité). L'exploration de la question du sensible dans les arts martiaux indexe une sémiotique martiale.

Mots-clés : arts martiaux, corps, résistance, sémiotique

Introduction

The survival instinct inherent in all living induces the need for security, the sense of protection. Thus, living beings are provided with various systems for their defense in case of attack by predators but also to overcome their prey. The primitive man will soon realize that, disadvantaged by nature as having no armor, it was essential for him to find a substitute for this natural protection. By inventing the tool, he could now attack and defend himself against other living species. But over time, he finally ended up concluding that: man is his first predator and his most frightful opponent is himself. Therefore, he began to strengthen himself to face his (alter) -ego: combat systems were born.

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The martial art, unlike combat sport, does not only aim efficiency: martial movement is primarily aesthetic. Moreover, the purpose of martial combat is not the awakening of the ego but rather its death. This is a fight against the ego through the alter-ego; the ultimate victory being the one that you win over yourself. Under these conditions, the resistance is seen as a condition of survival. It therefore appears that it is a parameter of martiality. The current reflection questions the semiotic system behind resistance in martial practice. It aims at describing how martial art thinks out resistance, incorporates it or embodies it.

1-The body as an object of sensitive semiotics

Starting from the reflection on natural languages, because of the linguistic heritage, the French semiotics experienced asceticism (limiting but necessary). By setting the conditions of the natural world semiotics (Greimas, 1968), Greimas was initiating the idea of going beyond the verbal language, realizing the semiological project of Saussure (Saussure, 1916) because

"if substance is a variable and form a constant, all substances (as semiotically formed) can be charged to show expressions and content; not just the sound substance (displayed in oral expression) or graphic substance (which is shown in writing), but all substances in the world, that is to say, all sensitive ways in which the world is revealed to us through our sensorial apparatus (by our body): be they visual, tactile, audio and olfactory, sensory-motor, etc." (Maronne, 2006, p. 50)².

Such an opening implied enrichment of the device and review of instrumental concepts. The adventure of semiotics through the non-verbal marks a stop on the issue of the body the relevance of which cannot be denied in view of a semiotics of cultures that would describe the conditions of production and circulation of meaning in human societies:

"Every concrete experience takes its first references in the body support in "situation", that is to say in relation to time and space as perceived by the body. Our body locates us in space and time by our initial references which are visceral and muscular like other animals elsewhere." (Leroi-Gourhan, 1964, p. 106)³.

Semiotics of the sensitive is thus raised. Reflection has began since *De l'Imperfection* (Greimas, 1987) and *Sémiotique des passions* (Greimas&Fontanille, 1991) has been experiencing a deepening with the recent works (Martin-Juchart,2000 ; Fontanille, 2004, 2011;Mathé,⁴2014a, b). The typology of the body figures suggested by Fontanille body is fertile on this subject:

"In fact, the figurative varieties of acting-bodies are based on the category content / container, and the four positions of the semiotic square can be deduced from it:

1)The relationship of annoyance sets the distinction between body-envelope (where the form is dominant) and the body-flesh (where the material is dominant), that is to say, in fact, between the container and the content.

2)The contradicting relations reveal two other positions: (i) the body-point (the deictic reference position), resulting from the denial of the body-envelope (negation of the form: non-container); (ii) the hollow-body (the inner body mentioned for example about tasting), which results from the denial of body-flesh (negation of the material: non-content). "(Fontanille, 2011,pp. 99-100)⁵.

² « si la substance est une variable et la forme une constante, toutes les substances (en tant que formées sémiotiquement) peuvent être chargées de manifester des expressions et des contenus; pas seulement la substance sonore (qui se manifeste dans l'oralité) ou la substance graphique (qui se manifeste dans l'écriture), mais toutes les substances du monde, c'est-à-dire toutes les façons sensibles dont le monde se révèle à nous par notre appareil sensoriel (par notre corps): qu'elles soient visuelles, tactiles, sonores, olfactives, sensorimotrices, etc. » (Maronne, 2006, p. 50).

³ Toute expérience concrète prend ses premières références dans le support corporel en "situation" c'est-à-dire par rapport au temps et à l'espace perçus corporellement. Notre corps nous inscrit dans l'espace et dans le temps par nos références initiales qui sont viscérales et musculaires comme les autres animaux d'ailleurs. »(Leroi-Gourhan, 1964, p. 106).

⁴The author indeed starts from the issue of body to address the issue of clothing and fashion.

⁵ De fait, les variétés figuratives des corps-actants reposent sur la catégorie contenue/contenant, et les quatre positions du carré sémiotique peuvent s'en déduire :

1) La relation de contrariété fixe la distinction entre le corps-enveloppe (où la forme domine) et le corps-chair (où la matière domine), c'est-à-dire, de fait, entre le contenant et le contenu.

2) Les relations de contradictions font apparaître deux autres positions : (i) le corps-point (la position de référence déictique), qui résulte de la négation du corps-enveloppe (négation de la forme : non-contenant) ; (ii) le corps-creux (le corps interne évoqué

These figures being phenomenological events, we will speak about *incorporation* to refer to the embodiment process, the transition from *acorporeality* (non-body state) to *corporeality* (body state). Corporeality is the meeting place of the philosopher, cognitive sciences, Communication sciences and semiotics (the sensitive). The link with the latter is justified in that "*our corporeality is the cause of our ability to semiotize the world by providing us an awareness of the forms and movements or values and rhythms.*" (Martin-Juchat, 2000, p. 13)⁶. In this perspective, the term kinesis (Hall, 1991) or kinesthetic (science that studies sign language) makes totally sense.

The related concepts of *intercorporeality* (dialogue between various body figures) of *transcorporeality* (fusion and clearing of figurative differences) and *metacorporeality* (second-degree corporeality) can be developed. The *modus operandi* of semiotic reading can be analysed *ipso facto* under two aspects: internal exploration and external exploration. In the first case, it will study the *in-body* to account for the mode of incorporation. In the second case, it is *excorporation* which is concerned. The latter will focus on the theme regardless of any *corporeality-induced* event. These reading paths illustrate the general semiotic dichotomy / particular semiotic, theoretical dichotomy / applied semiotics

In the specific case of martial arts, the body is considered in terms of somatic praxis. It is set in motion by subjects of actions. Maronne points out:

"[...] in gesture praxis, man is subject of the statement, while being a "he" for us, it is the "I" agent of the statement, the subject of the functions that make up his behavior; in the communicative gestuality, man is the subject of enunciation: he is a "you" for us, but an "I" for himself, since he desperately seeks to produce and transmit statements". (Maronne, 2006, p. 53)⁸.

2- The body, between resistance and martiality

"The martial artist performs an alternative body yang movements (quick, heavy) and yin (slow, light). Yin and yang are the two opposite and complementary fundamental energies that, according to Chinese Taoist thought, are the regulatory modalities of the universal order. [...] In the martial arts, the whole challenge remains in the yang harmony (mind) with the yin (the body) by the alternative gesture (yin-yang)." (Mesli, 2009, p. 21)⁹.

In addition, Mullis wrote:

« A somaesthetic based on the notion of qi views the other's movement as an expression of somatic energy that can be interpreted, joined with, and responded to in a more or less efficient manner. This is contingent on having a body that is familiar with pathways of movement and the feelings associated with expressing and receiving energy. » (Mullis, 2013, p. 112).

It appears, on the basis of these remarks, that martial arts are a combination of energy with the movement. The following tensive model shows four configurations: (i) strength [+ motion / energy +] (ii) resistance [-motion / + energy], (iii) bending [+ motion / -energy], (iv) absorption [- motion / -energy].

par exemple à propos de la dégustation), qui résulte de la négation du corps-chair (négation de la matière : non-contenu).» (Fontanille, 2011, pp. 99-100).

⁶« notre corporéité serait à l'origine de notre capacité à sémiotiser le monde en nous fournissant la conscience des formes et des mouvements ou bien des valeurs et des rythmes. » (Martin-Juchat, 2000, p. 13).

⁷In his article, Martin-Juchat, exploring the martial arts from the perspective of information and communication sciences, is questioning this issue from the perspective of "the relationship of subjects to thinking subjects".

⁸« [...] dans la praxis gestuelle, l'hommeest sujet de l'énoncé, tout en étant un "il" pour nous, il est le "je" agent de l'énoncé, le sujet des fonctions qui constituent son comportement ; dans la gestualité communicative, l'hommeest le sujet de l'énonciation: il est un "tu" pour nous, mais un "je" pour lui-même, dans la mesure où il cherche désespérément à produire et à transmettre des énoncés. » (Maronne, 2006, p. 53).

⁹« L'artiste martial effectue une gestuelle alternative de mouvements yang (vifs, lourds) et yin (lents, légers). Le yin et le yang sont les deux énergies fondamentales opposées et complémentaires qui, selon la pensée taoïste chinoise, constituent les modalités régulatrices de l'ordre universel. [...] Dans les arts martiaux, tout l'enjeu subsiste dans l'harmonie du yang (l'esprit) avec le yin (le corps) par le geste alternatif (yin-yang). » (Mesli, 2009, p. 21).

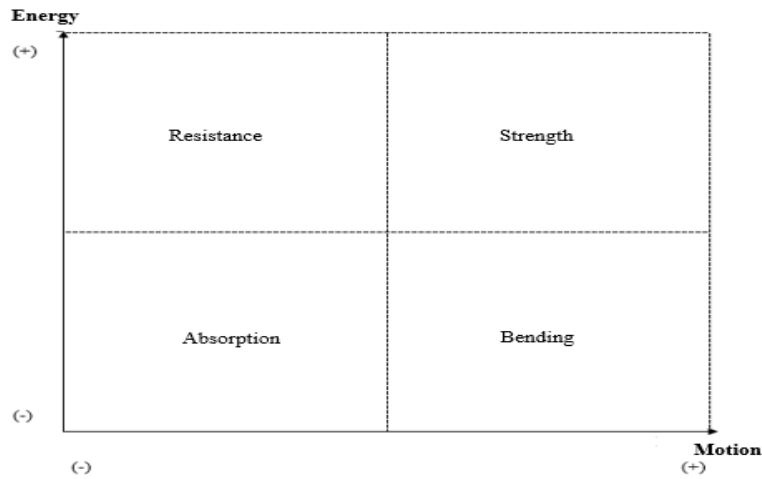


Fig. 1: Tension between energy and motion

In addition, the body is a major material of the martial art. Thus, it would be a benefit to the typology of body figures (Fontanille, 2011) to be completed in the specific case of martial arts, in view of the tension between energy and motion. Then we would get the different patterns associated with martial acting-body depending on configurations: resistance, strength, absorption and bending.

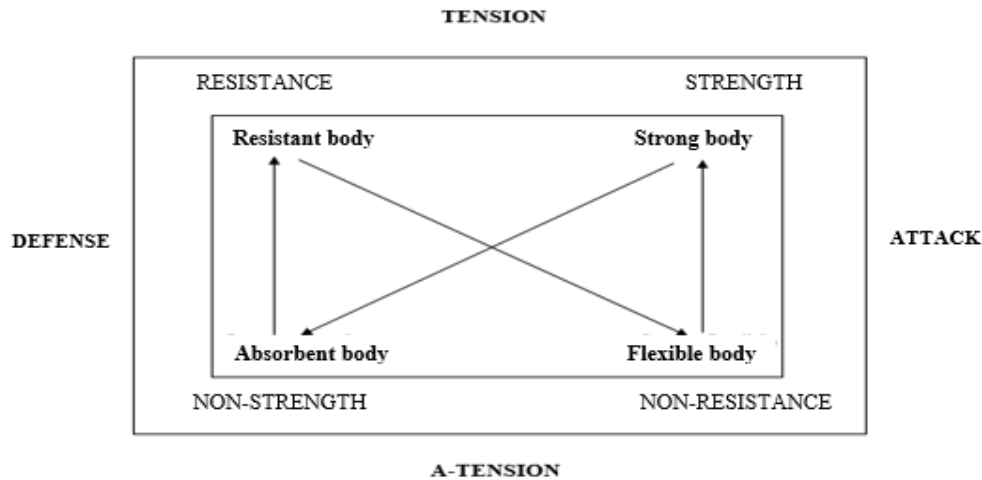


Fig. 2: body Square in martiality regime

The *resistant body* is subjected to the force and is opposed to it. The *strong body*, as to it, shows strength. We call *absorbent body* the negation of the strong body. As for the *flexible body*, it involves the strong body by denying the resistance. The first two couples depict the *tension* resistance-strength while the two others set the *a-tension* (non-strength/ non-resistance). At the same time, the deixis resistances / Non-strength and strength /non-resistance respectively illustrate defense and attack. The semiotic square of the martial physics is thus obtained: body square in martiality regime.

In the martial activity, the techniques and other space-body figures involved in the scenographic or choreographic text (Ouédraogo, 2013) are written on the body-envelope "since the envelope and motion are inextricably linked" (Fontanille, 2011, p. 99)¹⁰. This imprint on the body-envelope is part of a body memory in that the acquired movements are stored to come on surface again later in the form of reflexes. The pattern of the body-envelope provides the following possibilities: (i) the *resistant body-envelope*, (ii) the *strong body-envelope*, (iii) the *absorbent body-envelope*, and (iv) the *flexible body-envelope*.

¹⁰« puisque l'enveloppe et le mouvement sont inextricablement liés » (Fontanille, 2011, p. 99).

The martial body-flesh functions like the one of motor imprints. It is the place of mental training, landfill of martial values. It cultivates the *martialsuperman*. The body-flesh develops spirituality instead of the body-shell that is only interested in the sport dimension. It comes in four forms: the *resistant body-flesh*, the *strong body-flesh*, the *absorbent body-flesh* and the *flexible body-flesh*.

The *embodiment of the resistance* defines a syntax that takes place from the components that are the *resistant body-envelope*, the *resistant body-flesh*, the *resistant hollow-body* and the *resistant body-point*. It results from it the square of the body resistance.

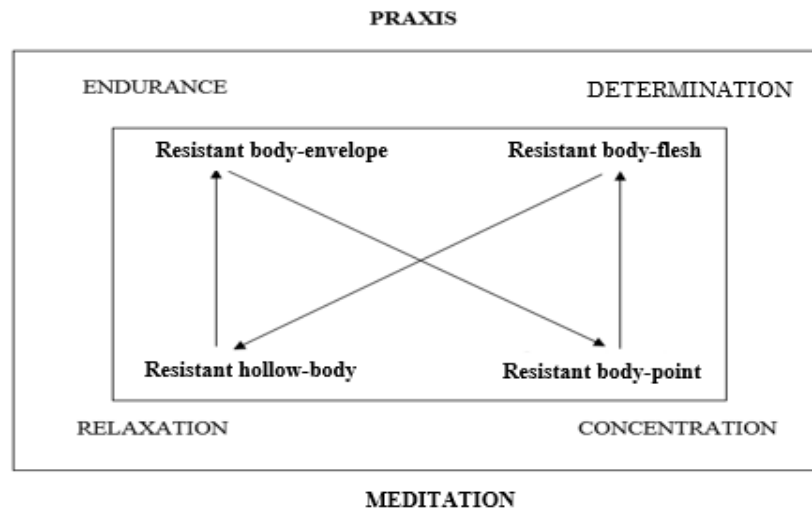


Fig. 3: Square of the body resistance

It is concluded that the *praxis* articulates the category endurance / determination through the opposition between the resistant body-envelope and the resistant body-flesh. Resistance appears here as an active ingredient. *Meditation* subsumes the categorical opposition relaxation / concentration. It presents the resistant hollow-body and the resistant body-point. Meditation is a function of the thought. The two axes set the pragmatic and cognitive plans. Tarik Mesli wrote:

"According to Chinese and Japanese traditions, the purpose of martial arts is to convey the essence of a thought [...] in the initiation of a bodily practice [...] by learning a technical form" (Mesli, 2010, p. 21)¹¹.

In addition, he said :

"From this long observation participating in the "martial art" phenomenon, we could analyze that combat art is a system of interknowledge changing into knowledge of society, nature and culture, in other words, the field of mind, body and technique."(Ibid., p. 26)¹².

3- Typology of resistance in martiality regime

The pragmatic resistance is updated at the surface level and its manifestations are quite noticeable. This is the character of the martial artist or even the efficient sportsman's. In this regard, the story of Master Chang Dsu Yao is evocative:

"My passion was so great that in reality I felt neither fatigue nor pain. I trained at least four hours a day, and in my free time I repeated the exercises."(Cuturello & Ghezzi, 1997, p. 7)¹³.

¹¹ « Selon les traditions chinoises et japonaises, le dessein des arts martiaux est de transmettre l'essence d'une pensée [...] dans l'initiation d'une pratique corporelle [...] par l'apprentissage d'une forme technique » (Mesli 2010 : 21).

¹²« De cette longue observation participante du phénomène "art martial", nous avons pu analyser en synthèse que l'art du combat est un système d'interconnaissance en mutation de savoirs de société, de nature et de culture, autrement dit, du domaine de la pensée, du corps et de la technique. » (Ibid., p. 26).

Another expert, Maurice Portiche said:

"The hardening of the arm he imposed on me was unbearable. [...] The pain was so intense that, at night, I felt like my bones were gnawed from within by a multitude of ants naturally disturbing my sleep. [...] Ultimately, it took me a year of daily training to be able to withstand the blows he unflinchingly stroke on me !" (Portiche, wd, p. 15)¹⁴.

From these testimonies it appears that resistance is key to a sustainable practice of the martial art. All exercises contribute to overcome the pain, heaviness and fear: it is a *power-to-resist*. Less noticeable, cognitive resistance is updated at the deep level; involving cognitive sciences. The instructor goes from coaching status to that of a coach: he is asked to push the acting-body at its full capacity. This requirement implies a directed knowledge. Some martial disciplines strongly articulate this principle: Qi qong, TaijiQuan, Xing yiquan, Baguazhang ... Chinese tradition speaks of internal arts "because they prefer some " inner " qualities, like the flow of internal energy and mental concentration. "(Cuturello and Ghezzi, 1997, p. 11)¹⁵. This is *know-how-to-resist*.

The passage from the plan of power to that of knowledge exposes the anteposition of the practice in relation to theory. Martial theories are taught only when the student has acquired the space-body figures, becoming a disciple.

Understood as the « *two ways of affecting the body of the acting and change its "power of action " » (Fontanille, 2008, p. 254)¹⁶, passion and action are opposed (Ablali and Ducard, p. 2009). In this sense, the other scheme of strength *incorporation* lies in the active category vs. passive category. *Resistance* is described as passive when to the increase of adversity (intensity) corresponds the almost zero invariance of bodily activity (extensity). This is the junction between the *inertia* state (low intensity) and that of *serenity* (high intensity). Passive resistance characterizes the *capacity*. It is shown in the scene by the refusal of an acting-body A to fight, its non-reaction in front of the adversity action of the acting-body B.*

The *active resistance* rather implies correspondence between increased adversity and the bodily activity. It is a conservation measure that consists in neutralizing the action by the reaction (high or low intensity and extensity). It determines the *responsiveness*, junction between the state of *inertia* and the state of *agitation*. The distance between the capacity and responsiveness is the *patience threshold*. This distance varies from one acting to another and illustrates self-control of the martial artist. It is a measurement tool of the martial spirit. The martial art teaches the acting-body to push the patience threshold. The set angle is 0 to 45 °. It illustrates the resistive tension.

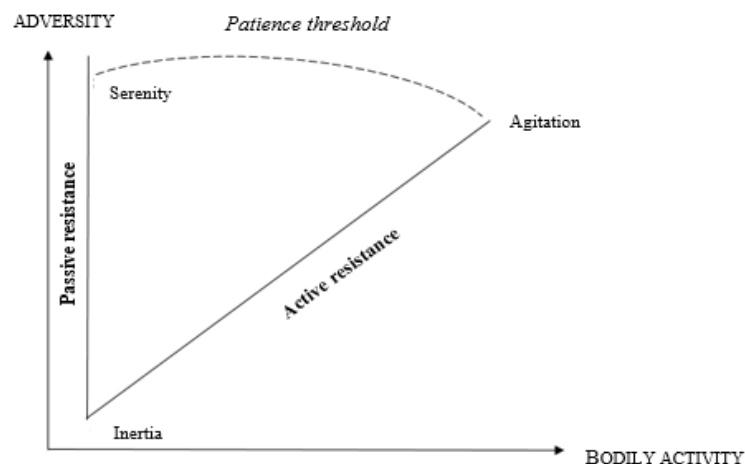


Fig. 4: Resistive tension

¹³« Ma passion était si grande qu'en réalité je ne ressentais ni la fatigue ni la douleur. Je m'entraînais au moins quatre heures par jour, et pendant mon temps libre je répétais les exercices. » (Cuturello et Ghezzi, 1997, p. 7).

¹⁴« Le durcissement des bras qu'il m'imposait était difficilement supportable. [...] La douleur était si intense que, la nuit, j'avais le sentiment que mes os étaient rongés de l'intérieur par une multitude de fourmis, perturbant naturellement mon sommeil. [...] En définitive, il me fallut une année d'entraînement quotidien pour être en mesure de supporter sans broncher les coups qu'il m'assenait ! » (Portiche, sd, p. 15).

¹⁵« parce qu'ils privilégient certaines qualités "intérieures", comme la circulation de l'énergie interne et la concentration mentale. » (Cuturello et Ghezzi, 1997, p.11).

¹⁶« deux manières d'affecter le corps de l'actant et de modifier sa "puissance d'agir" » (Fontanille, 2008, p. 254).

A final type of resistance subsumes the previous four: it is the *flesh-resistance*. It is observed among elite martial artists who managed to embody the resistance¹⁷. The latter, which symbolize the humanized vital energy (*qi* in Chinese and *ki* in Japanese) bear adversity beyond the capacities of the uninitiated, positioning itself as the *embodiment* of resistance. Martial scene gives to see at major competitions, demonstrations or cinema, acting-bodies subjected to various kinds of tests (fire, cold, apnea, severe shocks, heavy loads ...) which remain unaltered. The aim of the staging under these conditions is to show and evaluate the resistance of the subject. We witness in the flesh-resistance the merger of four body figures of the resistance according to the formula of the semic molecule: flesh-resistance = [/ body-resistant envelope/ + / resistant flesh- body/ + / resistant hollow-body / + / resistant body-point /].

Conclusion

An innovative issue, resistance remains a fertile research area in semiotics. Directed towards the question of the body, it interests in several ways martial arts. An important parameter of martiality, in addition to strength, resistance characterizes the martial acting-body. It works according to cognitive vs pragmatic modes and active vs passive. To the four types that are cognitive resistance, pragmatic resistance, active resistance and passive resistance, is added a fifth: flesh-resistance. The indexed martial semiotics, if it favored the resistance for methodological reasons, could be enriched by new contributions in apprehending martiality through the prism of the three other configurations in the tension energy-movement: strength, absorption, bending. It is part of an imprint semiotics because the hand-to-hand, beyond the face-to-face of fighters, expresses the relationship of man to things around him in a registration game.

But beyond the question of the sensitive, resistance has other places of manifestation. To answer the question how does semiotics think out resistance, it would be necessary to explore the means of incorporating and excorporation. One, in going through several body-objects, would provide us with sufficient light to address with assurance the other: the construction of a unified semiotic of resistance.

¹⁷Note, however, that the discretion and the sense of secrecy (primary values of traditional martial arts) require some teachers not to demonstrate this quality. In this sense, those who do it (in competition or demonstration) are not necessarily the only ones or even the best practitioners.

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