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## Rupture and Rhythm: A Phenomenology of National Experiences

*Forthcoming in Sociological Theory*

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates how people make sense of ruptures in the flow of everyday life as they enter new experiential domains. Shifts in being-in-time create breaks in the natural attitude that offer the opportunity to register national – or religious, gender, class, etc. – experiences. People interpret the disruptions in perception and proprioception by drawing connections with domains in which similar kinds of disruption are evident and with contrasting ones. Normalizing the transition, rhythm – as both cadence and overall flow – helps people readjust to the new circumstances. Based on extensive qualitative fieldwork, the study examines the specific case of how novice and experienced tea ceremony practitioners in Japan move into, interpret, and normalize action within tea spaces.

## Rupture and Rhythm: A Phenomenology of National Experiences

### **Introduction**

In an essay, Minako Watabe describes her first visit to the tea ceremony club at her high school. She was so taken aback that an audible “Wow!” escaped from her lips. “I never knew that the school had a room that looked like a traditional Japanese inn.” Yet upon entering the space, her senses sharpened and she began to observe small details such as “how the sunlight was radiantly reflected on the tatami mats.” Though she knew of the tea ceremony, she had never experienced it, and was struck by the combination of simplicity and concentration. “Once inside the room, everything that occurred was focused on very basic things: how to walk, how to open and close the door, how to fold the cleaning cloths.” A “pure interest” in these fundamental elements of everyday life, otherwise overlooked – along with a desire to spend more time “in the atmosphere of the Japanese room” – enticed her to take up the practice (Watabe 2002: 17-18).

### **Routine and Rupture**

Much of everyday life is habitual, from the routines of leaving the house, to the coordinated actions of driving a car, the rituals of checking out at a supermarket, and the process of taking a shower. Such occurrences, though commonplace, go largely under the experiential radar. In the shower, one thinks about last night’s dream or what lies ahead in the day rather than whether to soap up the left or right side of the body first. Indeed, if one loses the ability to perform tasks habitually, either mitigation techniques must be found

(Engman and Cranford 2016) or life becomes so overloaded with conscious effort that burnout results (Ehn and Löfgren 2009).

When we carry out routine tasks, our bodies and actions recede from our attention as we orient ourselves to other things (Polanyi 1966/2009, Merleau-Ponty 2002, Leder 1990, Wilk 2008). If sitting, we rarely think about our legs; when reading a book, we are more aware of the words on the page than the movement of our eyes. On such occasions, our bodies do not leave us entirely, but shift into the background – “effaced” in Merleau-Ponty’s terms. However, learning a new skill like swimming, for example, demands explicit body consciousness: one focuses on the motion of the arms and legs, or on coordinating movement with breath. But once the skill is mastered, the body withdraws from awareness again. We re-enter what Schutz describes as the *natürliche Einstellung* (Schutz and Luckmann 1973) – “natural orientation,” often rendered “natural attitude” – of taken-for-granted being in the world. A person, of course, can call the body back into awareness, but doing so often disrupts the smooth execution of the task at hand. If one focuses on the minute eye movements involved in reading a novel, it becomes difficult to enter into the fictional world completely. Likewise, when something goes awry within a regular routine, as when we trip and fall or become ill, our body can suddenly – and forcefully – return to awareness to us. In such cases, as Leder (1990: 84) describes, the body “dys-appears.” That is, it appears to us due to a dysfunction or rupture in routine.

Tavory and Winchester (2012) develop this analytic line in their research on the “experiential careers” of Jews and Muslims. Upon joining a religious community, initiates discover they must reconfigure everyday habits to conform to the demands of religious prescriptions. Though challenging for many, these bodily struggles offer an opportunity for

developing what converts describe as an awareness of god. The new requirements – prostrating oneself to pray, dressing in religious garb, not turning on lights on holy days – insert ruptures into commonplace routines. The result is a heightened awareness of experience that informants code as a perception of the divine. However, as the new practices become habituated, they too became routinized: one’s mind wanders during prayers, or a veil or yarmulke becomes a silent extension of the body. As a result, long-term believers must exert effort to resist the inattentiveness that accompanies habituation. Reviving the ruptures from the mundane – whether through conscious effort or by relying on the annual cycle of religious events – produces a renewed focus on and a re-enchantment of religious experiences.

In tracing the transformation over time, Tavory and Winchester compellingly show *when* and *where* changes in experiences deemed religious occur. However, they leave open the question of *why* ruptures in everyday routines are interpreted as religious in the first place. In the cases they examine, the solution appears to be obvious: the experiences are deemed religious because the rupture-inducing behaviors are religious prescriptions. The same might be said of the linguistic code-switching or institutional choices that Brubaker et al. (2006: 239-300) describe of residents in a multi-ethnic Romanian city. It’s of little surprise that speaking *Hungarian* in that context is read as an indication of national belonging. Yet the answer may be less clear for other kinds of experiential careers. Indeed, in other contexts, speaking Hungarian might be read in religious terms as an indication of Catholicism. In a more ambiguous example, Linde-Laursen (1993: 277) describes a set of friends washing the dishes after a meal. Discrepancies in how they carry out the mundane task – a breach in routine, in effect – becomes a moment that the participants interpret

through a national lens. They comment on “Swedish” versus “Danish” styles of washing up, and as a result, suddenly feel more national than they did during the meal. Yet from the vignette alone, it remains unclear why the rupture is interpreted in national terms, rather than as a gendered or educational difference. The following puzzle remains: if meanings are affixed to ruptures, why are particular meanings chosen?

At stake is how experiences are understood and integrated into narratives to make sense of them. As Schutz describes, meaning emerges not in the moment, but post hoc: “[I]t is only in explication that my own behavior becomes meaningful for me” (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 16). Disruptions in routine or ruptures in the flow of experience are brought under control through interpretation, which restores sense to disorder.<sup>1</sup> When someone on a bus, for example, surprises us by yelling, we come up with accounts for the behavior: the person is angry, upset, or perhaps a bit nuts. People routinely employ narratives to account for disrupted states (Katz 1999: 47-9), yet phenomenological studies, focused on the mechanics of experience, have traditionally devoted less attention to the question of which interpretive frames are applied (see Martin 2011: 188). The issue is complex and full engagement would need to map the realm possible interpretive frames and account for why some are more likely to be used than others. This paper, more modest in scope, addresses the preliminary question of why a particular interpretive frame may be applied in the first place. To do so, it moves beyond the here-and-now proclivity in much phenomenological writing to consider how embodied experiences are embedded within a

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<sup>1</sup> Though the present analysis does not engage emotional reactions, these are a common tool for transitioning out of ruptures, particularly when disruption takes the form of an unexpected challenge from others. See Katz (1999) and Garfinkel (1967).

wider social context that includes both the physical environment (see also Jansen 2008, Klett 2014, Katz 1999) and institutionalized tropes.

The domain is one that abuts studies of banal nationalism – a subsection the nationalism literature that, unlike investigations of national performances (e.g. Spillman 1997, Roy 2007, Virchow 2007, Zubrzycki 2013), turns on the relationship between routinization and meaning-making relevant here. For more than two decades, scholars have examined the myriad ways that nations are ingrained, almost unnoticed, into quotidian existence. Reading stories in the newspaper about *our* political leaders or *our* sports teams, for example, relies on the nation to determine the referent, even if not explicitly invoked (Billig 1995: 111-27; see also Shahzad 2011). Sometimes tokens of the most prosaic sort – crumpled money in a wallet, weathered flags on post boxes, park benches painted in the national colors (Billig 1995; Brubaker et al. 2006; First and Sheffi 2015) – embed the nation in the background routines of daily life and sustain a national presence, even if they make little show of it. Indeed, it might be argued that a nation has arrived once it can be taken for granted (Edensor 2002: 88). If members of an established nation are challenged on what defines it, they will respond as though their social world has been, in ethnomethodological terms, breeched (Skey 2011). National inflections lie low on the experiential horizon in such cases, even as they do the work of crafting a distinct national “we.” Yet how do potential indica of the nation move from background to foreground to become an active symbol of the nation?

Probing this issue requires an analysis that goes beyond the ways that categories or frames are employed in interaction (see Brubaker et al. 2006: 207-38) to focus on how embodied actions themselves become resources for shifting awareness and interpretation.

Though Linde-Laursen, in his account of dishwashing, emphasizes verbal assertions, the vignette suggests that differences in embodied style play a central role as well, possibly serving as the provocation for national claims.<sup>2</sup> If we take seriously Merleau-Ponty's (2002) insight that corporeal orientations shape the way that people make sense of the world around them, we can examine the ways that the ongoing negotiation of being-in-time, proprioceptive orientation of bodies in space, and disruptions in perceptual experiences afford or encourage particular interpretive frames. Central to this, as the analysis will elaborate, is the form that actions take within the rupture, which is determined by not only repeated patterns or corporeal configurations, but also rhythms, flow, and interactional modes. The meanings that people attribute to ruptures, channeled by both perception and proprioception, will be guided by such stylistic contours as well.

## **Methods**

Understanding how moments of rupture are interpreted and normalized requires a combination of qualitative approaches. Ethnography's newel, participant observation of actions and being-in-time, supports the capture of transient experiences and physical orientations. It demands attention to the spaces that frame bodies and the objects the body engages, in addition to corporeal performances and movement. Over time, the observing participant too accrues the "bodily hexis" the field requires (Wacquant 2004), enabling her to reflexively access its proprioceptive transformations. Converting phenomenal

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss (1973: 72), for example, engages in such an exercise when he reflects on national styles of walking, though he does not delve into the phenomenology of perambulation implicated in each.

observations and alterations into text invites writing in a mode that elicits among readers the feeling that they also have entered the scene. Conveying the sensual experience in this way facilitates capture of the connection between not merely act and interpretation, but – crucially – perception and interpretation.

Yet on its own, a focus on the phenomenal is insufficient to account for distinctly national inflections. Why should a particular stylistics of action be seen in national rather than religious terms, for example? Or, rephrased as the perennial dilemma of interpretive sociology: How do we really know? As such, to understand how a given interpretive frame becomes relevant requires attention to structures of representation as well. The challenge is one posed by Wagner-Pacifici (2010) in her call for a cultural sociology that moves not only from the “outside in” but also from the “inside out” by combining phenomenal and social structural modes of analysis. The approach applied here offers an example of how the synthesis might be achieved and suggests its analytic benefits.

Phenomenal experiences remain more-or-less private affairs unless communicated through a shared idiom or cultural code (Ferguson 2004: 15-22). Thus, the present analysis also relies on pedagogical situations in which teachers explicitly instruct students in the actions and sensations they are to incorporate, as well as interviews and essays in which practitioners articulate their own experiences and awarenesses. If a phenomenological analysis alone is unable to capture the contents of another person’s consciousness in the moment of action, these additional sources provide reliable indications of what an individual’s experience might be. Furthermore, the repetition of tropes and phrases across cases suggests that such experiences are not entirely unique. The analysis also explores the sources that establish and transmit the general cultural codes participants use to convey



experiences, and therefore it also draws on representations within wider society found in advertisements, textbooks, magazines, and popular books.

The analysis is based on continuing ethnographic fieldwork on the tea ceremony in Japan that began in 2002. The fieldwork includes two long stretches of one to two years, alongside repeated semi-annual visits of at least one month. The bulk of the research took place in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Awaji Island – representing the country’s metropolitan capital, historic capital, and rural hinterlands – in addition to occasional travel to other regions. I studied the tea ceremony for over ten years, and carried out participant observation of weekly classes at four sites for at least one year. I also visited six additional classes less regularly but multiple times, and made one-shot visits to fourteen other sites. With time and training, crucial for developing sensitivity to minute differences in corporeal orientation, I acquired a teaching certificate and sufficient experience receive regular invitations to assist at tea gatherings. Beyond observing classes, I also participated in public tea performances at community centers, hotels, schools, and local festivals, helping with backroom preparations or the tea service proper. To understand practitioners’ motives and how tea fit into their lives, I conducted semi-structured interviews with over one hundred tea practitioners, including housewives, students, architects, antique dealers, doctors, office workers, and professional tea practitioners. As a white American, I am an obvious foreigner in Japan, which can encourage people to think and express themselves in national terms. But though I might cue such national framings, they are not unique to my presence. Japanenesss is commonly referenced in tea contexts produced in Japanese by Japanese and for a Japanese audience, where there is no immediate foreign presence (see also Surak 2013: 119-71). In the analysis that follows, I rely on such artifacts as much as

possible. An important set consists of essays by high school and college students. The dominant tea school holds an annual competition in which students from across the country write open-ended essays about their experiences learning tea. The winning texts – between thirty and forty, depending on the year – are pulled together in a booklet. I examined those from 2002 and 2013, selected due to availability.

The analysis turns on one of the most resonant symbols of Japan today: the tea ceremony. Though the origins of the national inflections of the practice are beyond the scope of the present analysis (see Surak 2011), it is worth noting that for most of its history, stretching over four hundred years, the tea ceremony served as a tool of power politics wielded by elite men. Yet by the twentieth century, it had become largely a hobby of housewives, accruing strong national associations in the process (see Surak 2013: 57-90). Currently, around 2.1 million people in Japan practice the tea ceremony, and over 90% are women (Statistics Japan 2006). Formal tea gatherings – *chaji* – stretch over four hours and include a multicourse meal of *kaiseki* haute cuisine, in addition to multiple servings of tea, breaks in the garden, and two ritual arrangements of the charcoal that heat the kettle. Though often intimate gatherings of around five people, these lavish affairs require great expense and time. As such, most practitioners attend a full formal tea gathering only a few times each year, either as a “host” putting on the affair or as a “guest” attending it. Tea students mostly occupy themselves with weekly lessons in which a teacher instructs a small group of learners, often between three and seven in number, on the hundreds of ritual procedures for making tea. These vary based on the particular utensils used, the architecture of the tea room, and the season of the year. In winter, a bowl might be picked up with the left hand and set down with the right, whereas in summer it will be picked up

with the right hand, adjusted with the left, and then set down with the right hand. Learning these ceremonial forms – *temae* – and embedding them into the body so that they are carried out seamlessly constitutes the bulk of what tea practitioners do as practitioners.<sup>3</sup>

To this the analysis turns.

### **Tea Spaces**

The urban landscape of central Tokyo is iconic of late twentieth century capitalist megalopolises. Over the sprawl of post-war prefab structures loom high rises whose facades of blinking neon signs cast a twenty four-hour glow. Below them, streets and stations teem with commuters numbering in the millions. In a residential area of one of the city's the main hubs stands a house that doubles as the office of an interior decoration firm

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<sup>3</sup> The ritual performance of tea turns on sociability, hospitality, rule mastery, attention to detail, obsessive particularism, connoisseurship, timed rhythms, and multi-sensory engagement – qualities it shares with other forms of food preparation. French *haute cuisine* too is far more a rule-guided consumption experience than a hunger suppressant. It's of little surprise that the elaborate artifice around the presentation and consumption of food, particularly in fine dining, provides rich material for concretizing regional or national culture, if often with classed inflections. The social is perhaps so forcefully present because individual consumption is necessarily private: no one else can eat what we have eaten. To render it public requires structure, order, shared codes – a “civilizing process” in Norbert Elias's terms. The behavioral expectations, rules of presentation, and cultivation of taste transform food into an opportunity for expressing and affirming a collective bond and mastery of cultural knowledge (Ferguson 2006: 15-30).

and shares its rear garden with a tea room.<sup>4</sup> The generous corner plot suggests the economic success of the owner, at the upper end of the middle class. Yet the house, though broad and double-storied, is hardly extravagant. With synthetic siding and contemporary windows and doors, the building is tastefully modern in construction and style. From the street, few would expect to find an elegant tea room behind it, unless one walks through the garden's gate to emerge into its "alternative world" – *bessekai* – as some tea practitioners describe it.

From the moment of entry, much in the tea room stands out from the modern scene surrounding it. Unlike the swinging hinged door to the building proper, the entrance to the tea area slides open and the wooden lattice portal rattles *garagara*, alerting a visitor's presence. Above the door, a sign announces the name of the complex, Chōshōan, carved into a piece of unfinished wood. Though simply composed, the three characters *chō-shō-an*, literally "hut of the sound of the pines," stand out. Not only is the moniker poetic – the metaphor refers to the pleasing hiss of steam escaping a tea kettle – but unlike most horizontal script in contemporary Japan, the name is read not left to right, but in the older style of right to left still used with vertical script. The reversed flow catches the habituated eye and recalls the nameplates of temples and the occasional age-old shop that still carry on the antiquated practice.

The complex itself, though compact, houses an interlocking set of rooms that includes two tea rooms, a preparation space, and a storage area. In contrast to the white

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<sup>4</sup> The owner of the firm works in "modern" interiors– not tea rooms or traditional design. She installed the tea house in the mid-2000s out of her own interest in the practice and a desire to teach on occasion.

plaster or light wallpaper of most buildings, the walls are constructed from high quality *kabe*, a clay-based mixture that, before the post-war construction boom, was a staple in architecture. Tatami mats, woven from rushes, line the floors, and the ceilings are constructed from wooden slats, sometimes decoratively interlaced. Allowing passage between the rooms are sliding papered doors whose smooth surface is broken by a handle – an indentation rather than a knob – set low enough to require anyone who opens them while standing to stoop slightly, though they sit at a level comfortable for those opening the door while kneeling.

With a garden in the back, one might almost forget that the complex is located in one of the world's most densely populated urban areas. Irregular stepping stones create a path across a bed of moss and pebbles, bounded by long grasses and small bushes manicured into asymmetrical ovals. At the far end stands a small stone basin, continuously filled by the slow drip of water from a bamboo fountain. Guests invited for tea, having left their shoes at the main entrance, will slip on the sandals that lie waiting for them at the garden's door. Those in everyday clothes and socks may struggle to keep the thong-style slippers of slick woven straw on their feet, while guests in kimono wearing the split-toed *tabi* stockings will find it relatively easy to maneuver into them and proceed to the basin. Using the wooden ladle provided, they will purify their hands and mouth. Even novices will be roughly familiar with the procedure from visiting shrines, which share a similar

setup, if with a larger basin, though at such religious sites far less attention is paid to the fine details of the movements or to the exact resting position of the ladle when finished.<sup>5</sup>

Defining the complex is a tea room comprising a mere 4.5 tatami mats, or about nine feet square. The compact space possesses many of the characteristics canonical of tea room architecture. Perhaps most notable to visitors is the guest's door – a “crawl-through entrance” measuring about 28 by 28 inches that demands a person bow her head to enter. Standard history books explain that the passage was designed to be so narrow that samurai were forced to leave their swords outside. But more immediately consequential for practitioners today is the effect on the person. Crawling into the space both bends the body into a position of humility – a spiritual orientation encouraged in the tea room – and places the person automatically kneeling on the floor, allowing the space to feel larger than it is. As such, the door smoothes the transition from the world of standing on the ground to kneeling on it.

Indeed, the room expects its inhabitants to be seated on the floor. Not only does kneeling create more distance between one's head and the low ceiling, but the scroll in the decorative alcove, hung to be read from below, is partially obscured if viewed while erect. Kneeling serves a functional purpose as well for the compacted posture allows for as many as four guests and a host to comfortably inhabit the narrow space without touching. The folded legs anchor the body to the ground, restricting its movement to the front. One can easily bow or bend closer to the floor, but with the hands folded on the lap, lateral

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, at one demonstration for children I attended, the tea teacher introduced the basin by telling the students that by learning how to enter a tea room, they would learn the proper way to purify their hands when they visit a shrine at New Year's.

movement is limited to slight turns towards one's neighbors. So positioned, with the arms near the floor, the tatami mats become a broad table on which the action of tea preparation takes place. The eyes of the guests, only a few feet from the host, fall – without craning the neck – on the gestures of the host preparing the tea on the ground.

The posture also contributes to an atmosphere of formality and propriety. The term for kneeling, or *seiza*, literally means “correct sitting.” If increasingly rare, the position is still assumed on ceremonial or formal occasions, from funerals to speeches to marriage requests. It also carries strong national inflections. Books on the Japanese body typically contain entire sections on the posture, claiming that Japanese knees are perfectly formed for *seiza* (e.g. Yatabe 2007, Tei 2009). The elderly are inclined to observe that the contortions encourage the pigeon-toed way of walking regarded as the supremely elegant when wearing a kimono. And some commentators even attribute Japan's prowess in the martial arts to the strengthening effects that *seiza* putatively has on the knees. Such folkloric sayings, however, may provide little comfort to most Japanese, accustomed to a life of chairs, who find kneeling for an entire four-hour tea gathering quite difficult. Often a host will prepare a small cushion to ease the strain when inviting a novice to a gathering, though initiates are expected to bear the pain as long as possible. Those who search for relief by shifting their legs to the side typically offer an apology first.

Tatami mats – along with the clay walls, decorative alcoves, and sliding paper doors – are definitive of *washitsu*, literally “Japanese rooms.” Though a part of the contemporary landscape still found in some homes, restaurants, hotels, and community centers, they are not common enough to go unmarked in a country now dominated by modern construction techniques. Schools, for example, will typically contain one *washitsu*,

and might have a sign outside labeling it as such. Housing advertisements may list a residence as including a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, and a *washitsu*.<sup>6</sup> From the lack of furniture to the natural construction materials, the space stands out from common counterparts. Indeed, according to the Architectural Institute of Japan (1990), one must be “trained” to learn how move properly and manipulate things in its space. Offering a glimpse into what this might entail, a teacher at one tea lesson instructed a twenty-something initiate from central Tokyo on the adjustments in proprioception demanded. “The tatami are not just the floor, they are like a tabletop on which you place the things you use, like a tea scoop. The perception of them is different from that of a floor. That is the sensation of a *Japanese washitsu* [‘Nihon no washitsu’].” To appropriately inhabit the tea space requires not only an adjustment of corporeal orientation as one becomes accustomed to kneeling on the floor, but also in perceptual orientation and the resources the new relationship to space affords. Though the reiteration embedded in her unusual phrase – “a ‘Japanese’ Japanese room” – was unnecessary, the doubled modification ensured that the national resonances of this perceptual re-training not go missed.

Small details, like a sunken hearth to boil water in winter or certain type of wood slating on the ceiling, set tea rooms apart from most *washitsu*, though these can easily substitute if a purpose-made room is not available. Tea spaces, however, occupy a more lofty position within the hierarchy of Japanese buildings, and since the Meiji Period have been commonly referenced as a touchstone of Japanese architecture (Sand 2003, Uchida

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<sup>6</sup> If a contrast must be made, the other rooms can be designated *yōshitsu*, or “western rooms,” though the label is far less common than *washitsu*.



2005). Yet both forms stand in contrast to the contemporary construction of the main house. In the kitchen, for example, the doors swing outward rather than slide, the walls are made of white plaster and lined with lightly printed wallpaper. The waist-high countertop ensures that plates and foods are prepared while standing, rather than on the floor, which made of vinyl lining, is not as welcoming as the tatami of the tea room. In the house, chairs – not the floor – are for sitting. The tea complex, by contrast, stands out as a space apart.

The difference is readily noticed. Tomiko Imori (2013: 19-20), for example, described in an essay on learning the tea ceremony the feeling that overwhelms her when she enters the tea room at her high school. “Opening the sliding papered door to the *washitsu* reveals a world different to everyday life. When I go to lessons, I can feel within my body that the world is different to the one I normally inhabit.” The world in the tea room appears “simplified” before her eyes, and she is able to relax. “Usually many things run through my head. I’m thinking about two things at once, and I feel anxious from that. But when I enter the *washitsu*, the noise of everyday life disappears and I focus only on serving delicious tea to the guests.” For her, the tea room stands apart from the contemporary spaces she typically inhabits, but in a particular way: its simplicity serves as an anchor against the multiple directions that modern life pulls her. For others, the mere difference to common spaces is enough to disrupt the natural flow, sharpen the senses, and heighten awareness. Ayane Akimoto (2013: 33-4) joined the tea club out of a desire to experience “Japanese tradition and its long history.” Not knowing a thing about either, she set foot within the tea room and was immediately impressed by the “the special atmosphere of the space” and “the silence that penetrated” her heart. Misora Yanai (2013: 34) describes the sensation of transitioning into the tea room, a distinction she still notices

even after six months of repetition. The experience for her is so poignant that she uses it to launch her essay and pull the reader into her tea world: “I open the door. The wonderful smell of the tatami mats enwraps me. My heart lifts, and I extend a foot into the *washitsu*.” For Akari Nakagawa (2013: 48), the architecture of the tea room and the objects in it were what struck her when she first decided to learn tea. The thatched roof, the stone steps, the old but stately gate “called forth” a feeling of “mysteriousness and heightened awareness.” Rendering this world extra-ordinary are the numerous ruptures in the “natural attitude” (Schutz and Luckmann 1973) that the tea room provokes. The roof, the steps, the tatami mats, the sliding papered doors stand apart from commonplace variants and unsettle routine actions. Novices in particular find their awareness and sense perception sharpened as little can be taken for granted in such exceptional spaces.

### **Tea Performances**

But what occurs within these spaces? In a typical tea performance – only one component of a formal tea gathering – a host prepares tea for a handful of guests, usually less than five, following a set of intricate procedures that can last twenty or thirty minutes. The host first arranges the bowls, scoops, and tea containers for preparing the beverage and then symbolically purifies them before finally whisking up the *matcha* powdered tea. In the most informal “thin tea” procedure, the guests – also following strict rules – each drink a serving of tea in turn while viewing and commenting on the utensils selected for the occasion. Nearly all movements are regulated, down to the foot used to enter the room and the angle of the fingers and wrist when carrying a bowl. The proliferation of official textbooks featuring hundreds of photographs of each ritual procedure, as well as official

videos and other media, ensure that the fine details of position and motion are standardized among practitioners. As a result, it is relatively easy for an adept trained in one part of the country to travel elsewhere and seamlessly participate in a tightly choreographed gathering with strangers.<sup>7</sup>

Tea training imparts more than expertise in the arcane ritual forms for preparing tea; it also retools the most basic everyday motions – standing, sitting, walking, turning, bowing, opening and closing doors – into a refined and formal variant. Though the actions themselves are common, there is little that is casual to them if carried out in the tea room. Bowing, though a nearly mindless accompaniment to most greetings in Japan, cannot be taken for granted. To suggest formality and respect, novices typically curve their backs and bend their necks to bring their face almost to the floor. In response, the teacher will demonstrate how to maintain a straight torso and bend only at the waist as the hands move smoothly from lap to floor and the fingertips land in a cleft. Following a strict form, similar to the instructions in Japanese-language etiquette books and business manuals (see, for example, Tokio Narejji 2013: 26-7), students are taught to count to three as they bow down and to hold the position for the same duration before returning upright, again to a

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<sup>7</sup> Some differences in preparation techniques exist among the various styles (“Schools”) of tea preparation. But to the untrained observer, these are minimal – whether one crosses a tatami mat with two steps or three steps, for example. Of the schools, Urasenke predominates, accounting for nearly 70% of practitioners, with the Omotesenke School claiming around 20% of practitioners. Here, I focus on the Urasenke style of tea, though I also carried out participant observation of Omotesenke, Mushanokōjisenke, Edosenke, Dainihon Sadō Gakkai, and Sekishūryū classes and performances.

count of three. They also learn three levels of formality, each grade distinguished by depth, as well as the amount of contact between the fingers and the floor. Etiquette manuals commonly flag the Japaneseness of such greetings, and it is not unusual to find statements like the following: “Bowing is the action used in greetings if one is Japanese” (Shiotsuki 2005: 26). In the tea room, this way of bowing, over time, become second nature to participants. But unlike the genuflections in everyday life, the elaborate rules must be explicitly taught, with mistakes made along the way. New students, and even some experienced ones, may forget how deeply to bend on a given occasion, and consistent precision may take several months to master.

The prescribed forms of everyday actions also comply with the demands of a kimono. Teachers alert their students to these exigencies for most will have worn this increasingly archaic garb only a handful of times – college graduations and weddings offer rare opportunities. An adept walking in a tea room, for example, will not lift and plant his feet, but almost slide in small, measured steps across the mats, careful to avoid treading on the silken borders between them. To stand or sit, he will keep his feet carefully tucked under the torso to maintain a vertical back while moving up and down. Not only does the result convey elegance by minimizing superfluous movement, but it obeys the strictures of a kimono whose tube-like bottom – in both the men’s and women’s variants – resists walking with long strides originating at the hips and spreading the legs to stand. Turning in the tea room too complies with the “proper” way of moving in the dress, as defined in etiquette books as taught at kimono schools.<sup>8</sup> Left pivots begin not on the left foot, but

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<sup>8</sup> Kimono schools are common in urban areas and offer instruction in the details of wearing and moving in this increasingly rare costume.

with the right crossing in front of the body and meeting the left in a “T” shape to avoid spreading the legs and opening the garment’s front flap. Traditionalists and the kimono industry often lament the declining ability of most people, accustomed to the relatively free movement allowed by “western” clothes, to wear the costume with grace (see, for example, Horibe et al. 2006: 59, Ogasawara 2013: 137.) Relearning how to walk in the tea room, however, prepares the body to inhabit the traditional garb with ease, and the chance to do so can even be a draw for students. Hiromi Satō, a junior college student, described in an essay the thrill of dressing in a kimono. A tea performance during the national Culture Day celebrations provided the excuse: “Wearing a kimono while preparing tea was somehow exceptional.” Though she needed instruction in how to put it on and even fold it away, the unusual garment left her feeling that she was “truly a Japanese person” as she spread tea (Satō 2013: 13-14).

Even if wearing regular clothes, students are told to feel the effects of a kimono channeling their moves. At one class, a teacher instructed a novice in how to sit by telling her, “Don’t move so much and disturb the air round you. Your back needs to be perfectly straight the whole time. Imagine you are wearing an *obi* [the thick silk belt of a kimono] and you won’t wiggle around like that.” Another teacher encouraged a student wearing a skirt and blouse to feel a kimono’s wrap around her body. “When you turn, don’t bounce up and down. That just looks careless. Move smoothly, so you don’t disturb the air around you, and keep your right hand at your left knee so that the front flap of your kimono doesn’t fold open.” Later she told another, “When you put the tea caddy down, you need to move it around, not over, the bowl or else your sleeve may dip inside.” In this case, the instruction does away with the conditional. The teacher, directly projecting of the kimono

onto the body of her students, suggests that the proprioceptive transformation should be automatic: of course the kimono is there, channeling motion.

The retooled body, moving in space and maneuvering objects, sets a distinctive tempo of action as the gestures of tea preparation flow rhythmically, yet seamlessly, from one into another. To purify the small bamboo tea scoop, for example, the host folds a silk cloth and holds it lightly with her left hand. The moment she brings it to rest on her lap, she extends her right hand to pick up the tea scoop, tilting her torso forward rather than stretching out her arm. The right hand brings the tea scoop to the height of her naval, and she wipes the silk cloth along its body three times with her left. The first sweep is decisive, the second proceeds somewhat more perfunctorily, and the third returns to a more concentrated pace, followed by slight pause at the end to lend a sense of closure as the cloth leaves the bamboo. After the left hand, still grasping the folded silk, comes to a rest on the lap, the right replaces the tea scoop. Exhaling, the host sets down first the curved cup and then the handle before relaxing her grip. And inhaling, she returns body to an upright position.

The cadence is most prominently defined by two components: a general deliberate pacing and the occasional asymmetrical beat. The latter is created by manipulating intervals, or *ma* in Japanese. The third definition offered by the *Daijirin* dictionary specifies the concept's aesthetic usage, describing *ma* as “the temporal interval between beat and beat (or movement and movement) in Japanese traditional arts (music, dance, theater, etc.)” In these arenas, intervals are often asymmetrical – the woodblocks opening a kabuki play, for example, will gradually increase speed until a final, hesitant strike welcomes the players on stage. Tea training cultivates a sensibility to the irregular beat of

*ma*. Eri Fukuoka, in an essay, described the process. When she first took up the practice two years before, she “didn’t have a clue about how to behave” and felt “rather uncomfortable,” yet over time, the difficult procedures began to come to her “naturally.” Crucial was developing “a sense of the interval” between each movement. As an example, she offered the way that the water ladle is removed from the kettle. “When it’s brought in front of the body, one waits for just a moment before going into the next movement.” This delicate pause – interval – keeps her motions from rushing into the next and enables her to carry them out with a “balanced spirit.” And in so doing, it expresses what she labels a “Japanese spirit” (Fukuoka 2002: 11-12).

This rhythm of forward motion and suspension draws attention to the objects carefully selected for the day and used to prepare the tea. One example can be found in the rhythmic flow of wiping the tea scoop, described above, which ends with a moment’s pause and release. It can also focus awareness on the passing of time. At the end of a gathering, for example, a final scoop of water is poured into the tea kettle to lower its temperature. As the water flows from the ladle, it is slowed to a deliberate trickle of drip, drip...drip, and attentive guests will follow the protracted motion of the final drop as it gathers the weight to fall. Indeed, if it clings tenaciously to the ladle, the host might offer a slight wiggle to pry it loose and fulfill the expectation of closure. The irregular rhythm catches the participants, sweeps them from one point and deposits them at another, carrying forward the ritualized action with naturalness.

*Ma* is set within an overall controlled flow of movements that defines the distinct temporality of the tea room in contrast to the rhythms outside. In her essay, Hinano Ikeda (2013: 37-8) describes how she was initially struck by the “elegant and flowing gestures,

without a movement wasted,” and wondered if she could ever learn to move in the same way. Asami Tamagawa’s (2013: 28-9) first impression, too, was of a difference in flow. Reorienting herself in the unfamiliar environment, she ascribes to it a distinctively Japanese resonance: “Within the tea room, within all of the movements – so hard to understand – I felt the flow of a special Japanese silence.” For Miku Yanai (2013: 34-5) too, Japaneseness becomes a resource for accounting for the rupture. The quiet flow not only stands out, but it also connects her to “the people of the past” who enjoyed this sort of pleasure “possible only in Japan.”

The tempo within the tea room also aligns the actions of the host and guests. When the host has finally prepared the tea, she places it out for the first guest, taking the opportunity to turn the tea bowl outward before depositing it on the floor to be collected. As her hand leaves the container, her eyes flick briefly towards the first guest. At the moment the host’s hand returns to her lap, the first guest slides up to retrieve the tea – moving while her hand is still on the bowl would convey greed, and slowness might suggest inattention. Returning to his seat, he then offers apologies and thanks before drinking the beverage in a few sips, careful not to keep the others waiting. If the bowl is to be viewed after drinking, as occurs when more viscous “thick” tea is prepared, the final guest will finish the tea with an audible sip. She holds the bowl a moment longer on the lips than during the preceding gulps, which allows the first guest – or sometimes reminds him of – the opportunity to request to view the bowl.

These orchestrated pauses that align and push forward the movement can focus perception as well. Before attending a full gathering and its multicourse meal, students learn how to remove the lids on the rice and soup bowl with a simultaneous motion,



coordinated among the guests. Critical is an instant's hesitation when attendees savor for a moment the condensation of steam on the lids – ideally taking in the form of fine and even droplets said to recall the morning dew – before setting the lids aside, with two careful hands. The moment of sensory sensitivity synchronizes the gesture across the group as the rhythm creates an opening for aesthetic appreciation.

Rhythm helps coordinate the actions of the participants who, anticipating the next move, project themselves into the bodies of the others. Indeed, a highly cultivated attentiveness to cadence and flow can enable expert teachers to correct students even out of sight. A slight difference in timing can alert an instructor to a student who, after exiting the room and closing the door, has set down a bowl to the left or the right. But more than a pedagogical tool, the attention to rhythm becomes a base for expressing thoughtful consideration, from the apologies offered before drinking the tea to the hand-off of the bowl, orchestrated to avoid conveying overzealousness or disinterest. For this, anticipating the needs of others or projecting oneself into their position is crucial. As one practitioner explained, “Learning tea, you learn how to think about others. It’s not just about making tea and putting it out, but making tea in a way that will make the other people feel relaxed. If your movements are too abrupt, they’ll notice and not feel at ease.” Even high school students may recognize this, as did one in an interview who explained that “thinking about others” was the most important thing she learned through tea lessons. Her classmate repeated the response and added, “It’s not just about making tea and putting it out, but making in a tea in a way that will make the other person feel relaxed. I think about my movements now, and my mother has begun to notice it as well, like when I set things out with two hands. I feel like I’ve grown up a bit.”

Though anticipatory consideration of others is hardly unique to Japan – sociability without mutual regard is hard to imagine – it nonetheless widely claimed as a distinctively national attribute. Takeo Doi's (1973) *Anatomy of Dependence*, a perennial bestseller, opens with a description of the author's supreme disappointment upon arriving in the United States and finding his host unable to anticipate his needs. A more recent example from *The Dignity of the Nation* – the best-selling book of 2006, with more than two million copies sold – begins its list of particularly Japanese qualities with “unspoken understanding, intuitively knowing what others are thinking, non-verbal communication, respect for one's elders, duty, and mutual obligation (Fujiwara 2005: 3). Even texts about and for the service industry regularly contrast “western style” customer-oriented service (*saabisu*), in which demands are made only by the customer on the server, with “Japanese style” hospitality (*omotenashi*) that relies on the cooperative efforts of both the customer and server to produce a harmonious alignment through non-verbal empathetic understanding (e.g. Moriya 2013, Koike 2013). Such expectations inform what is lauded as “good tea” as well. As a popular design magazine *PEN* announced in a 2007 special issue on the practice that in the tea ceremony, “the host and guest become of one body” which is “the ultimate in Japanese hospitality.” Indeed failure on this score can even lead to discipline, if of a lighthearted sort. At one lesson I attended, for example, a young initiate from Tokyo forgot to apologize to the guest beside him for drinking first. Immediately the teacher chided the novice for not opening his heart to others, eliciting a round of chuckles and joking as the student offered the frail defense that he had said it silently within his own heart. As the teasing went on, one of the other students laughed, “He seems to be learning Japaneseness.”

## **Analysis**

### *Making sense of rupture: connection and contrast*

Within the tea room, with its tatami floors, strict comportment, and quiet atmosphere, little can be taken for granted. Even the most basic actions of walking, standing, sitting, and turning are reconfigured. The difference to everyday orientations – the “natural attitude” in Schutz’s terms (Schutz and Luckmann 1973) – can even coax an audible “wow” from novices, as quoted in the introduction. To kneel on the floor and receive a bowl of tea introduces a rupture in experience that requires interpretation to restore order. For this participants reach for explanations and accounts that transcend the immediate situation and are laden with national content. Broadly, there are two ways in which these national valences are applied: (1) through connections with other domains, considered Japanese or traditional, in which similar ruptures occur, and (2) through contrasts with non-Japanese or modern things.

To make sense of these disruptions participants draw homologies with items outside their immediate environment. The sliding papered doors, clay-based walls, the tatami mats, and decorative alcove mark off the tea room from the mundane spaces that dominate everyday life. Yet they share commonalities with other sites regarded as embodiments of Japanese tradition – such as temples or traditional inns – that reinforce their Japaneseness. As discussed above, hands are washed not under a tap as usual in modern life, but with a ladle, as one does in a temple. Why is the horizontal sign read right to left? Because it was the practice in the past, as one knows from reading the nameplates on traditional stores or historical sites. The unusual atmosphere of the tea room may strike

a new entrant as like an “old Japanese movie” or a “Japanese inn,” as two students reported. In these cases, participants account for the differences through homologies with similar places and things that too afford a legibly Japanese experience.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, contrasts with very different domains clarify and account for the distinctiveness. In the case of tea, the binaries traditional-versus-modern and Japanese-versus-Western, frequently intertwined, typically do this work. When, for example, the high school student Satomi Komeda (2013: 53-4) first entered the tea room, her casual gait evoked a sharp warning. “I was told not to walk on the silk edges of the tatami mats in a *washitsu* – something that was supposed to be obvious there. However, I live in an apartment and didn’t acquire that basic knowledge.” Here the tea room – a form of *washitsu*, or “Japanese room” – demands a different form of physical comportment than expected within an apartment’s mundane modern rooms, or *yōshitsu*, literally “Western rooms.” A similar contrast is found with the kimono that both defines the motions tea preparation and stands in juxtaposition to the, literally, “western clothes” (*yōfuku*) now customary in Japan. Typically, it is the distinction to the mundanely modern that catches the students in the first instance, while historically achieved contrasts with the West linger in the background and specify the content.<sup>10</sup> Once the difference between what is Japanese and foreign has become broadly disseminated, it recedes into the background, at which point continuous reference becomes unnecessary. Bowing is typically contrasted with

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<sup>9</sup> On the historical accumulation of these associations, see Surak (2011).

<sup>10</sup> If “Western” variants are the most common foil for defining national qualities, occasionally other distinctions with prominent neighbors including China and Korea are made.

shaking hands in high school English textbooks, for example, but often not explicitly defined as “Japanese” in everyday life. Yet the distinctions linger close enough to the surface for ready articulation if prompted through ruptures.

A substantial amount of time and labor is required to return to a state of take-for-grantedness in the tea room. For if the tea ceremony appears as the consummate expression of a distinctively traditional form of Japaneseness, it is hardly an assumed capacity of most national members. To achieve a controlled bow, natural movement in kimono, a smooth motility on the tatami mats – defined not only in the tea room, but also etiquette books and business manuals as “proper” forms – requires effort, or “nation-work” (Surak 2012: 172-76). As such, national membership is not a taken-for-granted identity as the literature on banal nationalism projects; the adequacy of one’s belonging is an achievement (see also Surak 2013, Lanier-Vos 2013).

Examining variation in the degree or sufficiency of national membership also shifts the conventional view of nations as imagined communities (Anderson 1983). In such accounts, horizontal comradeship defines nations, with national features established through contrasts made between “us” and “them” (Barth 1969) – a conceptual move that renders national members functionally equal and interchangeable for the group-making task at hand. Yet internal variation too can provide a foothold for national expressions: Who “we” are can be defined not only against “them,” but also other members of “us.” An individual may be a good or bad national, a typical or a strange national, an exemplary or a fake national. In these cases of “differentiation” (Surak 2012: 177-8), it is comparison against fellow members as members that enables such expressions. Simultaneously, it defines

standards for measuring incumbents and which they may be held accountable for, resulting in efforts to cultivate properly national forms (see Surak 2013: 6-8; Surak 2012: 176-9).<sup>11</sup>

An example of such processes can be found in Satomi Komeda's (2013: 53-4) description of the benefits of learning the tea ceremony. She asserts that people can "polish up" or improve themselves through learning the practice because it contains "uniquely Japanese" concepts like "graceful consideration of others." Such self-betterment is not a casual byproduct but a pressing need, for "Japan is becoming a place where we moderns, people like me or even older, have become alienated from common sense," including the considerateness she described earlier. As such, "within our changing world, we have taken a bad direction," but the tea ceremony offers "ways to improve that." In her injunction, learning tea offers a means for the wayward youth of Japan to reclaim a Japanese self that the modern world has detached from them. Almost demonstrating how this might work, Hiromi Satō (2013: 13-14) chose to learn the tea ceremony because she wanted "some sort of proof" that would allow her to "stick out her chest as a Japanese person." At her first public tea performance, she found that "wearing a kimono while preparing tea" felt "somehow exceptional." She learned the rules of dressing in the garment, and how to fold it as well, but as she inhabited it for the gathering, "the Japanese that emanates from the tea ceremony found grounding again in [her] body." In contrast to the banal nationalism literature, national belonging in these cases can hardly be taken for

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<sup>11</sup> As an ethnonational membership group, the boundary around "the Japanese" is relatively hard. Thus foreigners learning the tea ceremony do not become Japanese, but at best "more Japanese than the Japanese," as advanced practitioners may be praised.

granted. Indeed, becoming a good national requires effort, or “nation-work”, and tea ceremony serves as a ready cure to remedy a depleted Japanese identity.

### *Stylistics of action*

Structuralist connections and contrasts may evoke national resonances, but on their own they are insufficient to invoke them. To enliven the associations requires the active engagement both with fellow practitioners and the material components of the tea ceremony.

The tea room unsettles habitual behaviors – the entrance sign catches the eye accustomed to reading horizontal characters from left to right, the door handles are set at a height just a bit too low to be comfortably opened while standing, the narrow entrance to the tea room demands bowing the head to crawl inside. Everyday actions from walking to standing, turning, sitting, and bowing are re-learned to fit the exigencies of the space and the objects and garb that go with it. The disruption in bodily experience moves the person into corporeal awareness, from the pain of kneeling and the pull of the kimono, to the deliberate bow. To incorporate a new hobby, like the tea ceremony, is “to feel oneself doing,” as Hennion (2005) describes the pragmatic self-formation through which amateurs develop competence. It also demands a transformation in perception and proprioception, from the moment one enters a room with a low ceiling and low sliding doors. Kneeling shifts not only one’s body, compacting it and limiting its movement, but also one’s view and experience of the floor, which practitioners, as quoted earlier, may clarify as the distinctive orientation of a “*Japanese Japanese room*.”

Once these expectations are in-corporated, the retooled body can move within and move forward a smooth flow of action channeled by the objects and architecture of the tea space. The feet in split-toed *tabi* socks slide easily into the straw sandals, and the crawl-through entrance positions guests immediately kneeling on the floor. The motions of tea preparation assume a body molded by the exigencies of a kimono and project the garment's demands onto the participants whether or not wrapped in it. And over time the retooled body, projected smoothly into and "intertwined" with these accouterments, disappears again (see Katz 1999: 31-3; Leder 1990: 30).

Ruptures, though, can shake one into awareness again, and the tea ceremony is replete with such opportunities. A highly codified procedure that insists that even the most mundane gestures conform to its rules, the ritual provides ample opportunity for slip-ups and awkward actions. As such, the structure of the practice itself renders both breaks and their "Japanese" resolutions highly probable. If novices are far more susceptible, veterans are not entirely inured either from such nationalized recoveries. Though the tea ceremony is often promoted as a universalistic practice, open to anyone and instantiating global values (e.g. Sen 1979, Mori 2008), it is nearly impossible to carry off without ruptures, or "falls" (Katz 1996), that offer an opening to actualize Japaneseness. As such, structural complexity works against routinization and continues to provide opportunities for meaning-making even among adepts (cf. Tavory and Winchester 2013: 362-5).

### *Rhythm*



The disruptions are not only naturalized over time, but made regular within the flow of the tea preparation, guided by a temporal pacing that re-establishes order within the rupture. Rhythm holds the participants together, coordinates action, and normalizes the unnatural ritual. The formalism of the rigid rules and minutely prescribed actions, alongside the disruption of mundane behavioral patterns, might yield a tea preparation that feels stilted, but this risk is softened by a stylistics of action, carefully measured, that render the controlled motions of preparing the beverage natural and smooth. The rhythmical manipulation of time falls into two sorts: (1) cadence and (2) flow.

Cadence is marked by an attention to and delicate maneuvering of the intervals between moments of time, and marked out through the handling of objects. The deliberate but asymmetrical beat of wiping the tea scoop, introduced above, draws in the viewer and projects importance onto the utensils. The final drip, drip...drip of the water from the ladle focuses the collective attention onto the fleeting moment and the imminent end of the meeting. The irregular cadence rhymes with similar manipulations in other traditional arts as it catches participants in its movement – a transient moment that even the dictionary describes as “Japanese.”

The attention to interval occurs within an overall flow that is carefully attuned to coordinating action. Indeed, the performance itself would not come off smoothly if the actions of the host and guests were not harmonized. Deliberate pauses can align the movements and perceptions of guests, as when the lids of the rice and soup bowls are removed in synch. Similarly, the transferal of objects between participants is carefully timed. As discussed above, a guest moves to retrieve the tea bowl the moment the host removes his or her hand – no sooner and no later. And the group of guests will take turns

viewing the tea bowl through a similar orchestration of hand-offs. Facilitating the transition, rhythm guides participants as they project themselves into the bodies of others to bring their actions into alignment (see also Benzecry and Fine 2014). The closely coordinated action does more than push the performance forward; the flow carries meanings as well. Practitioners are expected to anticipate the needs of others and the next move that they will make. Their alertness to harmonized movement is read as expressing thoughtful consideration – a trait often praised as a national hallmark. Indeed, failures in this regard may even provoke chiding along such lines.

Sensitivity to and thoughtfulness towards others, along with an attention to interval, are qualities defined in dictionaries and popular books – and readily claimed elsewhere – as distinctively Japanese. But brought together in the ritual performance, they propel the flow of the gathering forward. The cadence catches participants in it and carries them along, creating what a number of practitioners describe as a pleasurable state of suspension within the action of the moment (see Connerton 1989: 92-4; Sudnow 1973). As such, the disruption initially induced is smoothed and normalized both over time and within the flow of the tea preparation itself, while the rupture and retooling are managed through reference to national valences.

Tea practitioners, as they interpret the breaks, move from the here-and-now of the immediate situation to a transcendent meaning: Japaneseness. The shift is similar to one that “pissed off” drivers on Los Angeles freeways make as they resolve their emotional response to a disruption in driving by reaching for – or being made aware of – a meaningful transcendent dimension to their actions (Katz 1999: 33-41, 77). In the tea room, the generalizing categorization relies on a folk sociology of national essences – one

institutionalized in books, manuals, advertisements, and the popular media (Surak 2013: 157-68) – rather than an independent continuity with the rhythms of everyday life in Japan.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, it provides an opening to reaffirm or deepen their own identities as part of a national collectivity, cultivating themselves into prime specimens.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis presented here reveals how ruptures in the flow of everyday life are interpreted and tamed to restore order. Shifts in being-in-time create breaks in the natural attitude that offer the opportunity to register national – or religious, gender, class, sexual, occupational, etc. – experiences within quotidian routines. The present study, extending the work of Tavory and Winchester (2012), shows how people make sense of the disruptions by drawing connections with domains in which similar kinds of disruption are evident, as well as with contrasting ones. In the case of the tea ceremony, the comparisons are semiotically pre-determined as an experience of a traditional and national sort, and this version of Japaneseness solders the ruptures by making sense of them. The result is similar to those observed by Lanier-Vos (2014) and Zubrzycki (2011) in their studies of how schemas guide the interpretation of perception in ways that make the nation concrete in national performances. But in addition, the present analysis employs a phenomenology of perception to show how this ebbs and flows over time: meaning-making occurs within a

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<sup>12</sup> In Japan, such folk theorizing so prevalent that it goes by the name *nihonjinron* (“theories of the Japanese”). Large bookshops may even have a *nihonjinron* section for the numerous titles on the subject.

dynamic, unfolding situation.<sup>13</sup> This finding contributes to the literature on banal nationalism, which addresses the ways that nations are embedded in quotidian routines. The present analysis shows that the nation is not merely part of the background furniture, and reveals how it can move into and out of relevance as people both make sense of ruptures and naturalize them. In this regard, crucial is an aesthetics of action. The banal is not merely the taken-for-granted; it is achieved through a naturalized stylistics of action. Though the research focused on experiences deemed national, there is little reason to assume that the mechanics identified here do not apply in other domains as well, including class, gender, occupation, and so forth.

The analysis proposes that ruptures take their meaning from form (Lakoff and Johnson 1999).<sup>14</sup> Yet on some occasions multiple interpretations are available – a question bracketed here to concentrate on the mechanics of rupture and rhythm. In the tea ceremony, for example, the experience of simplicity and focused attention might be narrated in spiritual rather than national terms, a technique often employed by non-Japanese who tend to make sense of ruptures through the lens of Zen Buddhism. What determines which frames are selected? Indeed, the question applies more generally to the

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<sup>13</sup> Zubrzycki (2011), too, is interested in the phenomenological experiences of the nation, but like most performance-oriented analysts of nationalism, she attends to actions over perceptions – “*wearing* a crown of thorns brooch; *carrying* a cross at a political demonstration; *singing* patriotic hymns at church” (32-3) – and, with the exception of one auditory example, visual representations over multi-sensory, proprioceptive experiences.

<sup>14</sup> See Jansen (2008) for an analysis of how visitors to an unusual museum struggle to reclaim meaning in rupture when the form it takes is ambiguous.

engagement and normalization of ruptures of all sorts. Is there, for example, a particular Jewishness to the ways that Hassidic converts discussed by Tavory and Winchester (2012) interpret ruptures and are transformed within them? In dishwashing debates of the sort analyzed by Linde-Laursen (1993), under what conditions does gender become a salient feature – or not? Continuing this line of inquiry, further research is needed to establish the determinants of and differences in the ways that people select or mix specific interpretive modalities.

The analysis also shows how, within the rupture, rhythm can reestablish order through the manipulation of cadence and the alignment of flow. These enable participants to focus attention and coordinate action within the new modality, and they too are interpreted and given meaning. The operation is similar to what Lefebvre (2004: 40-1) terms “dressage,” or training in a distinct rhythm that prepares an actor to inhabit a social space marked by a new tempo (see also DeNora 2000:85-7). Attending to the rhythms of interaction – though relatively rare in qualitative sociology – lends insight into how actors align their experiences within shifts or disruptions in ordinary flow. The result in the case of the tea ceremony is a “collective connoisseurship” (Benzecry 2009: 149), but one organized through rhythm rather than pure pedagogy: the pulse becomes a means to “get into action” (DeNora 2000: 8) and align with others. Further analysis of the scaffolding of rhythms could lend insight into the ways that people transition between different social worlds – a question of central interest to research on social mobility and identity. How, for example, do academically successful students from low-income families incorporate and manage the transition from the rhythms that mark interactions back home to those at elite universities, and back again? When are rhythms missed or misaligned? How do students

handle the rupture in interaction when the rhythms are wrong? Rhythms may be complementary across fields as well. Are the rhythms incorporated within the boxing world, for example, amplified in particular domains outside it? Investigating the rhythms of embodied action and interaction may capture the complexity of such transitions in greater detail than afforded by verbal reports.

Attention to rhythm also facilitates the phenomenological analysis of coordinated action. Traditionally, phenomenological research has relied heavily on first-person or individual experiences of bodies in space, whether mastering ballet (Aalten 2007), jazz piano (Sudnow 1978), glass blowing (O'Connor 2007), or religious practice (Tavory and Winchester 2012). Training may be eminently social in such cases – as, for example, when opera fans guide audiences in proper behavior (Benzecry 2009) – but typically less theoretical attention is paid to how action is coordinated (two exceptions include Wacquant 2004 and Katz 1999). Does this occur through the harmonization of rhythm, the projection of the self into others, visual or aural alignment, or alternative means? The processes analyzed here suggest that rhythms – whether in alignment or disjuncture – may be of far greater consequence to interaction as it unfolds over time than is often recognized.

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