

**Rope Bondage and Affective Embodiments:  
A rhizomatic analysis\***

**El Bondage con Cuerdas y las Corporalizaciones  
Afectivas: Un Análisis Rizomático**

**A Bondage com Cordas e Corporalizações Afetivas:  
Uma Análise Rizomático**

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**\*Artículo de investigación:** Drawing upon the authors' fieldwork, this article argues that rope bondage functions via affective relations, which enable practitioners to think of themselves outside of identitarian structures of connection, if they so choose. Basándose en el trabajo de campo de los autores, este artículo argumenta que el bondage con cuerdas funciona a través de relaciones afectivas, las cuales permiten a los practicantes pensarse a sí mismos fuera de estructuras identitarias de conexión, si así lo desean.

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## Abstract

Rope bondage, also known as *shibari* or *kinbaku*, is an embodied practice commonly associated with BDSM (an acronym for Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) in both academic and non-academic environments. However, BDSM and sex-oriented discourses are not inherent in the practice. Rather, they are only two potential ways of framing rope bondage, the appropriateness of which depends on how practitioners choose to envision themselves and their practices.

However, as feminist and queer theory has argued, identity as a fixed social construct frequently serves normative, regulatory aims (Butler, 1990, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). Drawing upon the authors' fieldwork, this article argues that rope bondage functions via affective relations, which enable practitioners to think of themselves outside of identitarian structures of connection, if they so choose. Rather than engaging with the problematics of identity politics, members can share affective sensations felt through embodied experience, directed both toward rope and toward other bodies. Furthermore, practitioners' affective perceptions of time are altered by their corporeal experiences of rope bondage, which often bring about a *flow* state (Ambler et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Newmahr, 2011).

The affective practice of rope bondage and practitioners' multiple, self-reflexive corporealities while interacting with and through the medium of rope prompt the authors toward a rhizomatic model of analysis (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Masumi, 1987). Such a model works against hierarchies of time and identity, which are broken down through affective exchanges. A rhizomatic understanding of the growth patterns of rope bondage can also inform future scholarship on non-canonical changes occurring in the practice without necessitating that those changes be linked to the ostensible origins of rope bondage in feudal Japan, origins constructed chronologically to validate the practice's existence.

**Keywords:** affect theory; embodiment; kinbaku; rhizome; rope bondage; shibari.

### *Transcription conventions*

Word followed by comma (,) = short pause; word followed by dash (-) = self-interruption; ellipses (...) = long pause; bracketed ellipses [...] = words omitted; italics for emphasis.

## Resumen

El bondage con cuerda, también conocido como *shibari* o *kinbaku*, es una práctica incorporada comúnmente asociada con BDSM (acrónimo de Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism, en español, Bondage y Disciplina, Dominación y Sumisión, Sadismo y Masoquismo) en entornos académicos y no académicos. Sin embargo, el BDSM y discursos orientados al sexo no son inherentes a la práctica.

Más bien, son solo dos formas potenciales de enmarcar el bondage con cuerdas, cuya pertinencia depende de cómo los practicantes eligen imaginarse a sí mismos y sus prácticas. Sin embargo, como la teoría feminista y queer ha argumentado, la identidad como una construcción social fija a menudo sirve objetivos normativos y regulatorios (Butler, 1990, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). Basándose en el trabajo de campo de los autores, este artículo argumenta que el bondage con cuerdas funciona a través de relaciones afectivas, las cuales permiten a los practicantes pensarse a sí mismos fuera de estructuras identitarias de conexión, si así lo desean. En lugar de implicarse con problemáticas de las políticas de la identidad, los miembros pueden compartir sensaciones afectivas sentidas a través de la experiencia incorporada, dirigidas tanto hacia la cuerda como hacia otros cuerpos. Además, las percepciones afectivas del tiempo de los practicantes se ven alteradas

por sus experiencias corporales de bondage con cuerda que a menudo producen un estado de flujo (Ambler et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Newmahr, 2011).

La práctica afectiva del bondage con cuerdas y las corporeidades autorreflexivas múltiples de los practicantes mientras interactúan con y a través de la cuerda incitan a los autores hacia un modelo rizomático de análisis (Deleuze y Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 1987). Tal modelo funciona en contra de las jerarquías de tiempo e identidad, que se desglosan a través de intercambios afectivos. Una comprensión rizomática de los patrones de crecimiento del bondage con cuerdas también puede informar estudios futuros sobre cambios no canónicos que ocurren en la práctica sin necesitar que esos cambios estén relacionados con los orígenes ostensibles del bondage de cuerdas en el Japón feudal, orígenes contruidos cronológicamente para validar la existencia de la práctica.

**Palabras clave:** teoría del afecto, incorporación, kinbaku, rizoma, shibari.

## Resumo

A bondage com cordas, também conhecido como *shibari* ou *kinbaku* é uma prática construída comumente associada com BDSM (sigla de Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism, em português, Bondage e Disciplina, Dominação e Submissão, Sadismo e Masoquismo) em ambientes acadêmicos e não acadêmicos. No entanto, BDSM e discursos orientados para o sexo não são inerentes à prática.

Pelo contrário, são apenas duas maneiras possíveis de enquadrar o bondage com cordas, cuja relevância depende de como praticantes escolher a imaginar-se e as suas práticas. No entanto, como a teoria feminista e queer argumentou, a identidade como uma construção social muitas vezes serve objetivos de regulação (Butler, 1990, 1993, Sedgwick, 1990) política fixa e. Com base no trabalho de campo dos autores, este artigo argumenta que a escravidão com cordas atravessa relacionamentos, que permitem que os profissionais pensam em si mesmos identitárias fora estruturas de ligação, se assim o desejarem. Em vez de se envolverem com questões de política de identidade, os membros podem compartilhar sentimentos sentidos através da experiência encarnada, direcionados tanto para a corda quanto para outros corpos. Além disso, as percepções emocionais dos praticantes tempo afetadas por suas experiências pessoais com cativo de corda, muitas vezes produzir um estado de fluxo (Ambler et al, 2017. Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Newmahr, 2011).

A prática afetiva da bondage com cordas e múltiplas corporeidades reflexivos profissionais ao interagir com e através da corda incentivar os autores a um modelo de análise rizoma (Deleuze e Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 1987). Tal modelo trabalha contra as hierarquias de tempo e identidade, que são quebradas por meio de trocas afetivas. Uma compreensão rizomática dos padrões de crescimento em cativo com cordas também podem informar futuros estudos de mudanças não-canônicas que ocorrem na prática, sem a necessidade de que essas mudanças estão relacionadas às origens ostensivas de cordas de cativo no Japão feudal, origens construídas cronologicamente validar a existência da prática.

**Palavras-chave:** teoria do afeto, incorporação, kinbaku, rizoma, shibari.

Rope bondage is the consensual practice of tying people, and sometimes, things,<sup>1</sup> with various lengths, colors, thicknesses, and types of rope. To define what constitutes rope bondage beyond this loose sketch is difficult, as it is not a unified body of techniques but rather a growing collection of styles and approaches. Even naming such a collection can cause difficulties. Rope bondage is also known as *shibari* or *kinbaku*,<sup>2</sup> words connoting Japanese style and/or origins. Though some practitioners use “shibari,” “kinbaku,” and “rope bondage” interchangeably (Barkas, 2016; Galati, 2017, 7), others consider the practice’s denomination a matter of debate.<sup>3</sup> The practice’s origins too are contested. Many claim rope bondage originates in the martial art of *hojōjutsu* (Master K, 2014), a restraint technique which likely arose during Japan’s Warring States Period, though historical support for this position remains fragmentary.<sup>4</sup> Today, numerous adaptations and conceptualizations morph and mold the practice. Certain educators and performers are associated with particular styles of tying, yet a profusion of rope bondage practitioners and practices exist, combining aesthetically-, sex-, and performance-focused with traditional and/or improvisational modes. This profusion only grows as rope bondage gains increasing popularity (Midori, 2002).

Many understand rope bondage solely within the purview of BDSM (an acronym for Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism), a subject garnering increasing attention in the academy (Bauer, 2014; Newmahr, 2011) and pop culture (Weiss, 2006). Studies have attempted to de-pathologize *kink*, as BDSM is also known (Beckmann, 2009; Kleinplatz and Moser, 2005; Langdrige and Barker, 2007; Newmahr, 2011), yet even as the pathology of kinky sexuality is contested, kink remains viewed from within sexual discourse (Galati, 2017). Michel Foucault maintains that BDSM play<sup>5</sup> can reflect the “desexualization of pleasure,” constructing embodiments which are not genitally-focused in “a creative enterprise”<sup>6</sup> uprooting “the idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure” (1994, 165). However, the potential to uncouple BDSM from sex is as rarely recognized as the potential to uncouple rope bondage from BDSM. Some research affirms that BDSM is an affective practice (Martin, 2018; Steinbock, 2014), yet rope bondage in its own right remains undertheorized (Pennington, 2017), its

1 Practitioners such as Lee Harrington, Hajime Kinoko, and Midori have tied chairs and large rocks, or woven walls.

2 *Shibari* (縛り) translates to “tight binding.” *Kinbaku* (緊縛) commonly contains the same core kanji as *shibari* (縛) and carries the same meaning, but can also be written as 禁縛 which includes a sense of prohibition or punishment.

3 For Barkas, a hierarchical distinction between names is “a way of elevating one arbitrary group over another,” encouraging a “nationalism of rope bondage” (2016, 16-17), yet the rope festival Eurix Berlin specifically brands itself a “rope bondage” rather than “shibari” or “kinbaku” event, to welcome an array of practices.

4 This is, firstly, because *hojōjutsu*’s origins are unclear. Japanese combat teacher Cesare Turtoro writes in the foreword Christian Russo’s *Hojōjutsu: The warrior’s art of the rope* that “[t]he art of the capture rope, in Japanese *Hojōjutsu*, has ancient origins. In Japan it is said to date back to the 15th century” (2016). Russo’s cover states *hojōjutsu* is “of Chinese origin and developed during the period of the ‘Warring States.’” Conversely, though martial artist Shihan Woodman (2013) describes *hojōjutsu* as “quintessentially a Japanese art that is a unique product of Japanese history and culture” (17), he admits that “pinpointing the historical origins of *hojōjutsu* [is] problematic” (19), indicating *hojōjutsu*’s obscure genesis. Beyond the uncertain evolution of this supposed root of Japanese rope bondage, historical evidence does not confirm with certainty that rope bondage developed from *hojōjutsu*. Despite this, a narrative linking rope bondage to *hojōjutsu* is constructed to validate *shibari* and *kinbaku*’s placement at the top of a rope hierarchy, elevating these practices through a fallacious appeal to tradition.

5 “Play” is a word frequently used to describe kinky activities.

6 Hong-Kong-based practitioner O.U. illustrates how rope can be a desexualized “creative enterprise,” opposing those who insist rope is sexual by examining other embodiments of pleasure: “that’s what I’ve started exploring with my dance [dancing with ropes], is like what other emotions can be shown” (personal communication, 04.07.2018).

affective intensity understudied. Meanwhile the materiality and versatility of rope bondage practices have been taken up mainly in non-academic practitioner guides (Harrington, 2007; Midori, 2002), or studies conducted for thesis and dissertation research (Hedwig, 2011; Galati, 2017; Ordean [forthcoming]). This work attempts to advance into the lacuna surrounding rope bondage practices and research connecting rope and affect. Drawing from fieldwork with rope bondage practitioners based in Hong Kong, London, Paris, and Berlin, we illustrate that far from being identical experiences, rope's affective embodiments can be imagined along a continuum<sup>7</sup> opposing fixed binaries and hierarchies. Rather than building a taxonomy of rope bondage, this paper remains provisional; the authors' attempt to utilize the rhizome as a model for analyzing the ever-expanding multiplicity of embodied, affective rope bondage practices and their materiality.

Because there are as many ways of understanding rope bondage as there are practitioners, answers to the question of whether rope bondage can or should be sexualized and/or classed as BDSM depend upon how practitioners choose to identify, disidentify, or refuse the box of identity around rope bondage. For example, when discussing rope bondage some interview partners argue against an assumed connection between rope and sex,<sup>8</sup> while others argue against an inherent link between kink and rope.<sup>9,10</sup> Still others do not mention sex at all, instead focusing on BDSM to assert BDSM and rope bondage are inextricably interconnected.<sup>11</sup> In other words, how rope bondage practitioners negotiate sexual and kinky narratives, and how they incorporate these narratives into their senses of self, reflects the diversity of embodiments and identifications rope bondage makes possible.

Though mercurial variables comprise a sense of self, identity is frequently seen as fixed. Problematically, as much feminist and queer theory has argued, identity as a rigid social construct often serves normative, regulatory aims (Butler, 1990, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner 1993). Fixed identities also establish claims to community and authenticity which support exclusionary projects (Cameron and Kulick, 2008). Thus practitioners who profess to have “kinky” identities or to practice “authentic Japanese rope bondage,” for example, may inadvertently reify rigid definitions of both BDSM and rope bondage which work to deny access to those who do not align themselves similarly.

7 The authors advocate the use of “continuum” in alignment with Adrienne Rich’s “lesbian continuum” (1982), which depicts a range of experiences and relations beyond genital contact (also cf. Pennington, 2018, note 57). Having no clear edges, the rope bondage continuum is open to many styles and techniques.

8 O.U. declared: “this assumption, that somehow a good rigger [a practitioner who ties] can make somebody feel sexually excited regardless” and that the goal of rope is “to have an orgasm” feels “horribly misguided somehow... I’m getting annoyed with people thinking that rope is just all about sexual... whatever.” That is not to say that sexual discourses should be completely dismissed, says O.U.: “it’s cool, I’m happy if that’s the direction people choose,” but sexual expression in rope is not every practitioner’s ultimate goal.

9 When asked, “Is there for you a clear link between the BDSM scene and the rope scene?” A.N. answered: “Not necessarily. You see, the rope that I do with [my partner] is not BDSM at all. There’s no link. For example, when I tie certain people, it can be BDSM [...] I do ‘domination rope’ with my submissive [not my partner], who I met at a BDSM party [...] Come to think of it, with them I don’t ‘do rope,’ I ‘do BDSM’...For me it is very different.” (interviewed 20.05.2018, Paris, translated from French).

10 V.J. observed: “it’s rope, not kink, it, or you know the two aren’t necessarily, uh, mutually inclusive” (interviewed 06.02.2018, London).

11 P.A. asserted it is “impossible to separate rope from BDSM” (interviewed 28.06.2018, Paris).

### *The Affective Lens*

While some rope bondage practitioners utilize identitarian vocabulary to define their orientations toward their rope practices or themselves as BDSM practitioners, others do not. Rather than engaging with the exclusionary mechanisms of identity and identity politics, some practitioners form communities of affinity shared through affect (Pennington, 2018), a prepersonal corporeal intensity passed between affected and affecting bodies (Massumi, 1987, xvi), delineating degrees of transfer “embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things” (Massumi, 1995, 85). It is no coincidence that Massumi’s formative definition of affect is to be found in his introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, the same work which spells out the efficacy of the rhizome in replacing vertical, “arborescent”<sup>12</sup> hierarchies with omnidirectional, interrelated agglomerations (1987, 7). Deleuze and Guattari’s mapping of rhizome as horizontal, complex, and connected shows how affected bodies are able to connect with one another non-hierarchically at any point across heterogeneity (ibid).

Affect is felt through embodied sensations. Rope bondage practitioners affectively orient themselves toward both rope and bodies—their own bodies, and the bodies of other practitioners tying, being tied, switching, or self-tying. Such affective orientations are directed materially, which has a noteworthy influence on rope bondage practitioners and practices. Specifically, rope’s material vitality can be partially expressed through Jane Bennet’s thing-power materialism, an idea which gives voice to a kind of materiality de-centering the human, attentive to the power non-human things can exert (2004). As Harrington comments: “rope can loosen or tighten on its own. Some rope stretches...the ropes move slightly...rope marks are caused by pressure on the skin” and rope can cause rope burns (2007, 18). Remaining attentive to these material changes and effects contributes to the affective orientations rope bondage practitioners have toward rope, orientations which reflect both rope’s material vitality—its ability to affect even though it is a “thing”—and a rhizomatic structure of connection. These orientations are not solely arranged in a tree-like, top-down manner running from practitioner to rope, but also form from rope to practitioner and from rope to rope in a network of reverberations and connections. Casting rope through space creates “lines of flight,” Deleuze and Guattari’s name for de-stratifying marks of multiplicity which indicate rhizomatic connection (1987). Further, rope literally passes reverberations along its length, just as the emotional reverberations of those in rope affectively pass intensity from person to person through affective contagion (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 8, 18).

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<sup>12</sup> Based on the “model of the tree and descent” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 10), arborescent structures function vertically and impede the establishment of creative interrelations along other axes. In rope bondage, an arborescent model assumes the existence of a fixed and limited hierarchical evaluation system, in which the quality of a rigger, for example, would be judged solely on their fidelity to “original” Japanese techniques.



Figure 11. Jute rope, 6mm, and the marks it leaves on skin's surface. Photo courtesy the authors. 2018

Concentrating on the application, pressure, movement, and intensity of rope on skin, and the variety of affective sensations which arise from that material contact, can allow an individual to subjectively experience a feeling of surpassing habitual perceptions of time while engaging in rope bondage. As practitioners become enmeshed in webs of affective contagion across networks of rope and corporeal entanglement, their affective awareness of time can alter. Instead of perceiving it as linear, practitioners may see time moving according to other rhythms in an affective temporality which brings kinky perception to the verge of an altered state of consciousness (Beckmann, 2009; Newmahr, 2011).



Rather than mystifying such phenomena, the authors wish to align them with a state of consciousness known as *flow*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's description of the feeling of intense concentration required to skillfully complete a particular, often durational task (1991, 2013). An altered sense of the passage of time is one characteristic of flow, which can be induced through activities such as swimming and playing guitar and has also been described in relation to BDSM (Ambler et al., 2017; Newmahr, 2011). Staci Newmahr (2011) argues that many practitioners are "more highly motivated to recognize altered states in bottoms than in tops"<sup>13</sup> (97), and that tops who undertake what she calls "advanced bondage" achieve flow through mental focus while bottoms "experience flow as a result of intense rhythmic sensation, sensation or pain itself, unrelenting focus on a particular task, or concentrated effort" (97–98). While supporting Newmahr's contention that kink communities recognize flow in bottoms more easily than in tops, the authors' fieldwork indicates that in rope bondage, flow occurs readily across power dynamics. Though the intense mental focus which produces flow is undoubtedly required of tops during "advanced bondage," bottoms regularly exercise mental focus as well, concentrating on breathing or body postures, while tops' work is also physical, inducing strenuous positions or delivering strong sensations. Thus, while Newmahr seems to contrast tops' supposedly mental triggers into flow state with bottoms' supposedly physical triggers, in rope bondage a top's work is just as physical, a bottom's just as mental. Both parties must exert their abilities to maintain safety for self and other. This means that the intense mental concentration and corporeal effort equally required from rope tops and bottoms produce flow.

When an individual enters flow state, their energy is directed in such a way that often the "self" and the "ego" seem to dissolve, and one rarely stops to think of oneself (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013, 112). For this reason, flow and affect dovetail effortlessly: affect is a prepersonal, experiential state of readiness (Massumi, 1987) and flow is a state in which one's consciousness of self ebbs away, leaving room for affective capacity. As detailed above, the rhizomatic web of affective connections between rope and rope bondage practitioners; rope's affective temporality; and linkages between rope bondage, flow, and affect all position rope bondage as an affectively charged practice.

### *Rhizomatic Compositions*

Searching for validation in canonical historical narratives—the accuracy of which largely remains unproven—some European rope bondage practitioners (Ordean, forthcoming) claim close connections between their techniques and Japanese cultural heritage. Courses, workshops, and literature on rope bondage (Master K, 2014) explore this connection in detail. Yet some interview partners reject grand historical narratives and describe their practices

13 The terms "bottom" and "top" denote those who relinquish or hold power or control during the course of a BDSM interaction (Pennington, 2018). In rope bondage, "bottom" often aligns with being tied and "top" with tying. Some practitioners prefer one role to another, but many are proficient in multiple behaviors which both resemble and transcend the categories "bottom" and "top."

as departing from, or even reacting against, so-called classical kinbaku (Ordean, forthcoming).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, an increasing number of practitioners reject exclusive appurtenance to a single category of bondage, or that rigid categories exist, instead reflecting multiple, self-reflexive<sup>15</sup> corporealities.<sup>16</sup>

These myriad imagined embodiments point to the trouble with adapting a linear, “arborescent” model when examining rope bondage’s process of development. In this model, trees and their roots have beginnings and ends, creating “binary relations between the points” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 21), and therefore enabling the imposition of a hierarchy of practices based on an imagined historical norm. Thus, attempting to reach the top of the “tree” entails “hierarchical modes of communication and pre-established paths” (ibid), suppressing divergent vocabulary of style and technique while continuously backreferencing one’s practice to the normative model. The self-referential political act of backreferencing ensconces the historical narrative within a position of unchallenged supremacy.

An open-ended affective approach to rope bondage can overcome rigid binaries and hierarchical supremacies, allowing individualities to emerge instead of insisting on essentialized collectivities, pointing to a rhizomatic model of analysis. Within a rhizomatic system, frameworks such as the ones discussed above—the (non-)BDSM, the (non-)sexual, the (non-)Japanese—overlap and perpetuate the creation of new becomings informed by influences and shared interests, which together “form or extend the rhizome” (ibid., 22). Belonging to one or multiple frameworks in the rope bondage continuum need not invalidate others within the rhizome, thus it cannot be contained in a system of hierarchies. Instead, a plurality of voices and approaches expand the rhizome, rejecting the idea that “one true way” of practicing can exist. This rhizome functions as an affective apparatus which opposes hierarchies of time (rejecting historical narrative as uncontested canonical reference) and identity (rejecting the need to identify with or against BDSM or the necessity of achieving sexual pleasure in one’s practice). Instead, time and identity become loci of affective distortion.

Affective time does not pass in a linear, hierarchical manner. Jasbir Puar defines affect partially as “the body’s hopeful opening,” directed not “toward or against or in relation to a teleological notion of time” but instead moving away from “‘past,’ ‘present,’ and ‘future’ to reorient us around what Manuel DeLanda calls ‘non-metric time’: speed,

14 Asked whether “Japaneseness” is important in his practice, G.E. dismissively answered: “No, not in the very least. I couldn’t care less” (interviewed 18.07.2018, Paris).

15 In some group discussions such as those at Eurix Festival, speakers emphasized the idiosyncratic character of their experience (“this is how it is for me,” “this is my experience, but I know it might not be the same for everyone”). The benefit of this type of reflexivity lies in disturbing the primacy of the self, encouraging a greater openness to fluidity, practice, and variation between self and other (field notes, March 2018, Berlin).

16 O.U. embraces a non-sexual rope practice, but sees a range of corporeal expressions as equally valid: those who choose sexual paths are also “totally legit.” E.G. asserts that being open to multiple corporealities helps create the rope continuum: “once you kind of open up this idea of like sexuality and orientation to something that’s more than just, like, this is the one narrow defined thing that I’m looking for [in rope practice], you know, seeking to find other people who fit that exact thing, I don’t know, I just think it just opens up” (interviewed 17.01.2017, Edinburgh).



Figure 12. A rhizomatic network of connections. Photo: Anatomie Studio 2017. 2018.

pace, duration, timing, rhythms, frequency” (2017, 19). Rope bondage play creates this affective temporality when the material intensity of rope affectively opens bodies to connection, immersing practitioners into fluid, embodied correspondence with relativity. Affective time is rhizomatic, not progressing in a linear manner, but connecting bodies in relations with other bodies in “a game...which creates bubbles in space and time”<sup>17</sup> as time contracts and dilates via the corporeal affects produced through rope’s material movement on and between bodies.

Apart from time, rope bondage’s affective “bubble” has the potential to restructure divisive identitarian relations into connective affinities (Pennington, 2018). Some ways of knowing center Cartesian-style dualisms, organizing epistemologies around socially constructed binaries such as sex and gender (Lorber, 1993, 569) and rewarding those

<sup>17</sup> According to rope artist and educator P.I. (Eurix Festival Berlin, 2018). [Translated from the original Spanish: “un juego...que crea burbujas en el espacio y el tiempo”].

who build identities around such calcifications. However, dichotomized identities are frequently reductive, just as it is reductive to dichotomize rope bondage into (non-)BDSM or (non-)Japanese identifications. Though it is easy to assume these categories as given, they are as socially constructed as sex and gender. Adopting “Japanese” as an identifying category mystifies the ideology behind its construction just as asserting all rope bondage is BDSM upholds the congealed, hierarchical power differentials behind sexual classifications (Foucault 1978; Lorber 1993; Rubin, 2014). Instead, a rhizomatic model embraces a range of modes of relating, allowing a multiplicity of behaviors to be identified as rope bondage without necessitating binaries.

Understanding the connections between rope bondage practitioners and practices as rhizomatic deconstructs hierarchical taxonomies, making space for multiple points of connection across a profusion of affective practices. The process of resisting arborescent hierarchization and rigid dualisms around time and identity opens bodies in spaces of affective encounter and connective reverberation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 479), encouraging fluidity, flow, and affective connection while discouraging untenable fixity. These spaces allow the formation of assemblages of affective contagion, engulfing those sharing a particular moment.

As the authors’ fieldwork and theorization have shown, rope bondage can be read as an affective practice. Though the BDSM and sex-oriented discourses which frequently frame rope bondage can also be explored via affective embodiments, this work has attempted to focus on the under-explored topic of rope bondage in its own right. The material, corporeal connections rope makes—both through generating foci of intensity on practitioners’ skin (Massumi, 1995) and through the lines of flight it creates in space—indicate rhizomatic, affective affinities (Pennington, 2018) between practitioners. These networks of relation also help extricate rope bondage from hierarchical, arborescent modes of analysis supporting calcified understandings of time and identity. Instead, flow state and practitioners’ multiple, often reflexive corporealities show why a rhizomatic understanding of the growth patterns of rope bondage practices helps chart non-canonical changes without necessitating that those changes be incorporated into narratives about the ostensible origins of rope bondage in feudal Japan. By focusing on rope bondage as affective, we have attempted to provisionally sketch the current state of some approaches to the practice, while our rhizomatic analysis gives voice to contemporary practitioners who do not necessarily adopt prevalent discourses, for instance incorporating elements of performance art, commenting on gender equality, or blending circus and dance techniques into their routines. Though these changes break from rope bondage’s origin story, all have a place within the rope continuum if imagined utilizing a rhizomatic, affective approach.

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