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Wrestling with Modernity: Posture, Masculinity, and the National Body in Early 20th Century

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Glíma is a traditional form of wrestling brought to Iceland from Scandinavia some time before the 13th century. In one form or another, *glíma* has been practiced continuously to this day, but as an organized sporting event, it is only one century old. With a view to recreating Iceland's medieval Golden Age, the young men involved in the Youth Movement in the early years of the 20th century chose as their sport a practice with saga roots and within a few years it was labeled Iceland's national sport. In 1912 Iceland sent its first team to the Olympics in Stockholm to demonstrate *glíma*, a nation among nations on the global stage.

Glíma offers an interesting vantage point on the formation of the modern national subject. On the basis of written and visual documents about *glíma* – pamphlets, rules, newspapers, memoirs, photographs and film footage – this presentation focuses on the physical discipline and body techniques involved in forming the modern national subject with an eye on that subject's reflexive relationship to its own practices. I'm interested in particular in the stress on posture in *glíma* training, competitions, and visual representations of the masculine body and in the democratization of body language that once was a marker of distinction across Europe for noble bodies.

In the past three decades *glíma* has been transformed through its conversion from national culture into heritage. Heritage transforms people's relationship with their own practices, the ways in which they perceive themselves and the things around them. As a reflexive relationship to one's own practices, it sets the stage for its own subversion. Heritage creates a sense of distance by imagining a vista outside one's own self from where one may observe one's own practices with, as it were, an outsider's gaze. The distance thus introduced between the subject and itself enables the recognition of the collective subject of cultural heritage. At the same time, however, this distance allows for detachment; it opens up the prospect that we might imagine ourselves differently, that we might disrupt the official representation of who we are and what it is we do. As a reflexive relationship to one's own practices, heritage thus sets the stage for the ironic subject – the self-conscious actor whose ironic stance measures her distance from the culture and identity attributed to her.

This new language of heritage creates the conditions for another sort of subject to emerge, one that is less universal than the modern national subject of one hundred years ago and more dispersed, reflexive, and ironic. I propose to explore in particular the kinesthetics of these subjects of heritage and the ways in which people engage with the present through tactile replications of past grips, embraces, and tumbles.

This paper is part of a larger collaborative project investigating the body of heritage: how it is constituted, disciplined, carried, experienced, and placed in relation to other bodies and objects; how the past is made corporeally present; how temporal relationships are inscribed on bodies; the body as a site of past-present articulation, a medium of performance, a site of heritage experiences, as well as a tool of investigation.