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**On the cover:** Grandmaster Donald Miskel.

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# THE LEGACY OF PANKRATION: MIXED MARTIAL ARTS AND THE POSTHUMAN REVIVAL OF A FIGHTING CULTURE (Version 2.0, 2014)

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## **Abstract**

This article is based on fieldwork conducted over several years with deep participant observation in a mixed martial arts (MMA) club. The study uses the concept of cultural performativity to analyze the close relationship between MMA and the ancient sport of Pankration. Informed by social scientific ideas assembled from what is generally known as the performative turn in cultural theory, and advancing a notion of the posthuman, I explore the bodily performances of MMA fighters engaged in combat fighting. In terms of the violence represented in MMA, the article asks what knowledge has been integrated from the legacy of Pankration and what impact it has had on contemporary cultures and societal norms. The explicit goal of the training sites is to recode the body, increasing the somatic potential to affect, and to be affected. Practitioners (or researchers) of martial arts must immerse themselves in an entire world of meaning, that is, a new cosmological order composed of movement, senses, emotions, and inter-subjectivity. Therefore, this article provides a philosophical account of MMA, in which I briefly touch on epistemological and ontological questions related to the legacy of Pankration in our time. Finally, in conversational deep interviews, I discuss fighters' views on the subject.

**Key words:** *ancient, fighting, Greece, MMA, ontology, Pankration, post-phenomenology, posthuman theory, new materialism, post-masculinity*

## **Introduction**

Every Tuesday around 8:00 pm, I go to the local MMA gym in my city. The gym is located in a basement that has been turned into a colorful place with red painted walls and blue mats on the floor – reminding me that the sport itself is quite vibrant in color. Before the class starts, I and the other fighters sit against one of the red walls watching the advanced session, where fighters with a professional record compete against one another. At this club, two fighters have records of competing in the *Ultimate Fighting Championship* (UFC). Sitting there, all of us keep silent as a way of showing our respect for the professionals.

When it is our turn to practice, the instructor orders us to start running in circles. “OK, you can start to carry each other on the back”, David (who is the main coach today at the gym) screams out loud. After two minutes he adds, “OK, shift partners and carry another partner.” This drill continues for what seems to be an eternity, and after some 25 minutes of warm-ups, I am exhausted and have a hard time breathing because my mouthguard restricts my inhalation immensely. My body is shaking and my muscles are really drained out. David then sits down on the floor in the middle of the gym and gathers everyone around him. He explains how to pass and cross someone’s *half-guard* when in a dominant position as a means to mount the opponent (to sit on top of your opponent’s chest and strike with fists onto the head). He uses one of the most adept fighters in the class and then demonstrates how to perform a full-mount technique; shifting his arms and legs, he uses his elbows to press the combatant’s head down onto the mat. David reflects, “Just like the old Greeks used to do it.” A big smile spreads over his face, “Great work, guys, we will practice these grappling techniques more next week. We’re finished for today. Thanks, everyone.” And with those final words pointing back in time several thousand years, that week’s Thursday training session is over.

After taking a shower, I walk back home thinking about Greeks, fighting and ancient warfare, *Pankration*, and the link to the UFC. I start writing down notes from the gym’s “jotting”, fighting sessions, and spontaneous conversations as soon as I sit down at my desk. While transcribing my data, I realize the need for this topic to be told.

## **Aim and Purpose of the Study**

Over the last two decades, martial arts practice and fighting combat sports have been seriously reassessed due to the extreme popularity of MMA has attracted since 1993, when

the first “modern” battle took place in Denver, Colorado. What does this have to do with Pankration? Why has combat fighting in huge events come back in our own “hypermodern” time (a symbolic hyper-simulacra)? The explicit aim in this article is to point out the attitudes, performances and ideas about MMA and Pankration that (partly) my informants give in their expression of how they understand the body and the violence associated with the sport. In doing this trajectory mapping, I will explain the connection in between the two theoretically and put forth the informants’ conceptions.

### **Method and Data**

This article is based on fieldwork that has been carried out for more than three years. In one of the Swedish MMA gym field sites in particular (I have been to gyms in the US, Japan, Hong Kong and Macau and lately in Brazil), I conducted auto-ethnographical work, which means that I am explaining the field from two directions. One direction centers on my own presence there in relation to the field site and the other one its juxtaposition with the stories the informants are telling me. Interviews in and after training, both spontaneously and semi-structured, were made in advance, as well as fully unstructured. I am basing this article on both participant observation and on the interviews concerning empirical material encompassing Pankration, MMA and combat sports as a whole. I extracted the subjective answers based on six informants and, in particular, from two key informants with UFC records. The observations in this study are mainly taken from the Renyi Gym, in Umeå, Sweden. I have had full access to the gym and I have taken part in the mid-advanced course on Tuesdays and Thursdays every week for a total of 4 hours a week. During this intensive fieldwork, I have gathered data both writing and taking field notes, using audio and video recording and also extracted empirical data from my physical experiences in the gym.

### **Mixed Martial Arts and Pankration**

During interviews, the practitioners often bring up how MMA is based on an ancient fighting style borne out of unarmed combat called “Pankration.” For example, “Jim” (pseudonym), one of the fighters with a professional record of competing in the UFC, turns to me during one of my field sessions and explains:

Violence between people, in the world has always existed, men have always fought other men and it’s just a part of our nature, that’s how we are, what we do and what is just inside of us, in our bodies. I don’t see any problem in that MMA fighting exists today, it’s just a part of a natural progress. The difference today is just that it is regulated. MMA is just a normal

continuation of something that has been going on since thousand of years. No one can stop it, it is here to stay.

Indeed, the original form of Pankration no longer exists, though it is an influence on various other forms, for example, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, karate, sambo, shoot, savate, the recent trend in no-holds-barred bouts, etc. Likewise some sports in Asia like the Japanese Kumetui from the 1920s, Thailand's Muay Thai boxing and onward came to model themselves after Pankration. Most of all, Pankration has influenced MMA to the extent that UFC, as well as other similar MMA events, seem to be modeled after this ancient Greek combat sport.

Pankration is a Greek word deriving from "pan" and "kratos," meaning "all" and "powers" and was in its time famous for requiring the application of both athletics and warfare [1]. Considered a sport, it is a combination of Hellenic boxing and antique wrestling melded into a freestyle fighting form that integrates striking and grappling techniques. Controlled, focused and disciplined on the one hand, it also allowed fighting in an all-out, brutal way, involving, for example, hair-pulling, kneeing, and elbowing [2]. According to records, the only things that were barred were biting and gouging [3].

Furthermore, Pankration may be among the oldest of martial art forms [4] Not only did it feature at the 33rd Olympiad in 648 B.C., for centuries it served as the prestigious final event, indicating exactly how revered a sport it was [5].

Like its predecessor competitions, MMA is surely an "all" "powerful" combat sport which sets, "two contestants wearing only trunks, small gloves and a mouth guard in a cage, and unleashes a multitude of full-force punches, elbow strikes, knee strikes, kicks, stomps, neck chokes, body throws and other grappling techniques against each other" [6]. An MMA fighter seeks victory by concussing an opponent into defenselessness, causing syncope by way of a neck choke, or by coercing an opponent into submission by any variation of these methods [7]. Given this description, it is perhaps not surprising that it has upset critics who argue that MMA is too brutal. Despite the heavy criticism, the sport is attracting many fans, much the same way that ancient gladiators were celebrated and turned in to stars. MMA, then, attracts a similar kind of large attention where, as in old times, it can fill an entire public stadium by gathering fighters with all kinds of backgrounds along the social, ethnic and fighting latter [8]. For this reason, one important link between MMA and Pankration can be said to be the splendor of ontological large-scale fighting.

Nonetheless, although the large-scale feature and the splendor connects MMA and Pankration in a fundamental way, MMA is a hybrid sport inspired by many different kinds of fighting styles and contexts. Discussing these topics after one of my gym sessions, “Greg”, one of the resident coaches, tells me that MMA, regardless of being a brutal sport or not, is, in his words, the following:

G: I got to say it, even though I know it is not totally true on the whole, without ...[1980s movie starring martial arts icon Jean-Claude Van Damme] “Kickboxer”, or this idea that you can sort of make a person unconscious by just staring at them or putting your hand in someone’s forehead and making them drop dead in a split-second, MMA fighting could probably not exist....There has always been this fairy tale kind of picture of men in fantasy, in movies, in media and in history since the Romans, that men should have the potentiality to knock someone out.

M: By this you mean that mixed martial arts fighting is what today?

G: Well, in relation to history, I myself, I love history, man, I know a lot from reading, it is just not fake, it is totally real, in that it is proven that men needed to learn how to fight to survive. Today, MMA is a living proof of that in our own culture.

M: OK, but there are different cultures with different martial arts styles and histories and backgrounds so...

G: Yes, but the thing is that MMA could not have existed without the f\*cking Neanderthals, they also had to survive (they did die out 28,000 years ago because of homo sapiens invading Europe) fighting us, when we came and took land from them! The point is that fighting, in life and death, has been around since the birth of mankind, the Romans, the Greeks and the Vikings also fought with bare hands, MMA would not have existed since, all people have developed their own style of defense all over the globe, and MMA is a result of that.

M: I got your point and it is really interesting.

G: Yeah, I am not like you, a scientist, but I can explain this in an easier way without using any theories like you have to do. I mean, that this is the result, MMA, it is the coming together of so many hundred years and different martial arts practices around the globe that finally led to this. The moves, the style has transferred to here now.



## A Performative and a Representative Return

While reading the books *Pankration, The Traditional Greek Combat Sport and Modern Mixed Martial Art*, edited by Jim Arvanitis (2003) and *No Holds Barred, The Complete History of Mixed Martial Arts in America*, by Clyde Gentry (2011), I observed how frequently the authors use terminology taken from anthropology and performance studies [9]. More specifically, the authors speak in terms of performance and ultra-modern fighting cultures, or, as Jim Arvanitis explicitly puts it: “mixed combat and the modern world’s version of fighting performances” [10, 11]. Gentry, in turn, wrote of extreme performances of bodies that clash into each other in a postmodern society [12]. Here my informant Greg’s notion of MMA history and practice fits in in a reasonable way.

This performance terminology refers to the *performative turn*, a methodological approach adopted by the social sciences and humanities that became particularly fashionable during the 1990s [13]. The performative turn is an urge to conceptualize how human physical practices relate to their contexts in a heuristic way going beyond traditional approaches to culture and society [14]. Above all, theories associated with the performative turn and the body emphasize sensory experience [15]. Another typical feature of the performative turn is an interest in how things are done vis-à-vis what they are. The performative turn simply focuses on doings of all kinds – that is, of performances. A performance is to act with agency in space and time.

In spite of being considered a phenomenon of the 1990s, the performative turn stems from two strands of 1940s and 1950s theory, that is, an anthropological/ sociological strand connected with names such as Kenneth Burke, [16] Victor Turner, [17] and Erving Goffman, [18] and a second strand from the philosophy of language connected with names such as John Austin [19] and John Searle [20]. From the 1970s on, the concept of performance has been integrated into a variety of theories in the social sciences [21] and humanities, such as poststructuralist thought, phenomenology, critical theory, semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstruction, feminism, and recently, new materialism and posthumanism [22].

Though these different theoretical frameworks have integrated performative turn concepts, they are frequently incompatible, one being a critique of another, and so on. Yet they all seem to be compatible with the ideas and the terminology of the performative turn. Why is this so? What is it about the performance concept that can strike such an ore in so many different types of thought about culture, society, and the human being? My point here is that if the concept of performance can bridge new scientific knowledge to this extent, what is

there to learn from and about MMA performances and the legacy of Pankration? Many of the informants regard MMA to be just that, a performance of both mind and body. This observation is exemplified by UFC fighter “Mickey”, 28 years of age with a record of two fights in the UFC organization, who claims legitimacy for MMA as being, “based on historical facts and ancient times”. I ask him how come he regards MMA being based on old structures rather than new ones, as it was founded in Denver, Colorado in 1993?

Mickey: Yeah, it is what is, no one can change it, and it has been around in our society for a long time, not just since a thousand years back in time when gladiators and Hellenic fighters killed one another every single day, I mean that, for instance, Vale Tudo [Brazilian fighting contests] and the Brazilians black slaves’ more symbolic dance martial art of Capoeira proves this. Not only in Japan but in all of Asia, martial arts have existed, ok, I am sure that it has connections between folk and people over far distances. People of Okinawa probably travelled, right? Anyway, I want to tell people that contact sports such as MMA are not something that were invented in 1993! They go far beyond that, man, listen, ok, it came together in 1993 under the name of mixed martial arts, but seriously, didn’t warriors before Jesus already fight each other in a total fight that included wrestling, striking, kicking, and any body technique one can imagine? I am so sure that it of course was the case!

Magnus: So by saying these things, what’s your main conclusion of MMA, gladiators, Pankration and fighting culture over all?

Mickey: I would, arguably hmm, keep to, um, that, eh, men of all kind, in all of time throughout history needed basic skills in body combat to survive and this has been carried on to next generation and to the next and so on...

### **Mixed Martial Arts’ Physical Reality**

MMA is first and foremost a physical reality. It is a corporeal existence about which one cannot gain adequate knowledge unless one lives through and experiences it. For example, during preparation, the fighter’s body balances several components like dehydrating in order to make a certain weight, working out a pre-advanced game plan, matching against similar fighters during camp training and so on.

Despite these various processes, MMA is usually characterized by a narrow focus on polarized oppositions, for instance, between winning and losing. The polar idea is that the fighter is ready to sacrifice his or her corporeal self in order to achieve victory. When thinking in these terms, fighters approximate archetypal representatives, turning into a culturally induced stereotype.

Part of the instrumental rationality of MMA violence takes an affective form that is fueled by the confrontational tension between fighters, but is most of all built around the body's autotelic potential to perform according to habituated reflexes [23]. At the same time, fighters do this with a great knowledge of combat, as well as the mimetic experience associated with sports in general, that is, that anything can happen [24]. "Jay", a dental student and a professional Thai boxer, emphasizes that:

J: In MMA, anything goes and can suddenly happen, and that is the fantastic part of MMA, it is a natural sport, and that is why people love it so much. People love to watch the sport and to take part in fighting that is semi-controlled, because it shows our skills in a modern society that is more or less fucked up in that everyone can join in an fight someone like a battle jam on the street.

M: OK, but MMA is more of a controlled sport, right...?

J: Well, yeah, but it has this reputation, as it comes from a very real and brutal background, it was founded to use in attacking people in the most hard way there is.

M: So, what is the meaning of all of this talk on MMA and its background then?

J: That it is just there and that it has been around for ages, simply as that. It's not a new thing come on! This is a Kumite thing, too, and Thai boxing in stadiums, it has been around for centuries, it wasn't invented yesterday! If you believe so, you're wrong as hell. Mixed martial arts is the new name, but the ancient name is Panchrase - fighting, that's it.

Thus it becomes apparent how MMA, from a posthuman point of view, shows us how the violence of "unnatural" chaotic acts becomes "natural", mimetic, mnemonic and autotelic by the use of physical force defined in sportive terms as sites of performance [25]. What seems to be at stake here is how MMA is to be judged, perceived, and negotiated as harmful or non-harmful by its critics and by its fans. As in Jay's quote, we can follow the idea of MMA's "natural" existence in that has been integrated by today's practitioners. Even though MMA is an old or a fairly new sport, previously called "Panchrase", after Pankration, there is this basic idea that martial arts have a long tradition and history which legitimizes MMA. To perform and to use MMA as a "normal" proclivity then gives the legacy that reinstates Pankration over time, even all the way back to the "old Greeks". As much as it sounds like the antique warfare of a bare body used as armor, MMA, in its detailed composition of different sophisticated techniques, cannot have been invented yesterday as some of my informants claim. MMA and Pankration have a very close affiliation and may be a reinvention of an ancient combat sport.

My research shows that MMA is a super-modern sport that generates a lot of money, which raises the question of whether MMA is popular because performance of this kind has not previously appeared in contemporary society. Thus MMA is a valuable tool in measuring how new subcultures and subgenres are received. In many cases, these sort of “new” fighting contests were often seen as brutal and dangerous. MMA deals with the “total” performative direct contact between human beings, with the physical performance so turned to a violent act that the action still takes place under a strict order with fighters checked before, during, and after a contest. Yet, the answer to the “heritage” of MMA may be that, hence in what contemporary violence is received and what attributes, ideals, norms, ethics and morals that follows in its footsteps, whether or not being a new sport or not...

Though MMA is still a relatively young sport, ultimate fighting contexts are in need of research that doesn't use oppositional logic since this might be misleading and a source of prejudice. Taking on a posthuman stance can redirect the focus on some conceded aspects in MMA earlier research.

### **Posthuman Proficiency and Implementation of Legacy**

Many articles in both general media and in medical journals have criticized MMA for being too violent. This critique has resulted in an overarching focus on how to make the sport safe. On the one hand, the Nevada State Athletic Commission in the US, which has the official authority to control the sport, has instituted the necessary rules and regulations; for example, the demands on doctors checking fighters and on referees have become much stricter. The Commission has also specified what kinds of violence are allowed and what are not allowed. Moreover, breaking the Commission's rules leads to suspension.

On the other hand, with most scholars and journalists, safety has primarily been about MMA's disciplined violence and having full control as a fighter. One prominent idea is training the body to become like a lethal and precise weapon.

The posthuman perspective addresses the question of safety in a somewhat different manner. In the beginning of my fieldwork, one of my main informants “Jeff” told me: “I would like to urge you to step down on the mat and start practicing with us so that you can see that it is not at all that dangerous”. After I started practicing MMA myself, I came to agree. Thinkers of phenomenology and new materiality theory claim that the body is in constant flux and adaptation; it expands, contracts, and incorporates depending on what is needed, and can habituate to any extreme condition. A body that practices violence adjusts to it by

accumulating relevant sensory knowledge [26] [27]. For this reason, one can say that the main safety switch is the body's situated ability to remodel itself. As "Jeff" stresses:

I am so confident because my body is overly disciplined nowadays, I can take so much heavy punching without taking any notice hardly. I am a bad motha-f, (joking), seriously, those who don't seem to understand that powersport, or contact sports as martial arts practice, has been around since the birth of Christ, should have a brain check, meaning that, how else in the world could man have survived when we lived in the cages; no surprise the MMA sport is taking place in a cage today uh!

Thus, full-contact combat is a situated individual enactment of existing corporeal conceptualizations of the autotelic and the mimetic [28]. It is a relational dyad that in many ways requires a socially based sensory experience from the research participant, that is, feeling the pain, the suffering, the sense and rhythm of combat. This indispensable, corporeal processes which MMA is founded on aims at building, breaking down, punctuating and rebuilding bodies over and over again. Seen from this perspective, the effects of fighting (smaller injuries like bruises, contusions and cardio/weight loss and a swollen lip, or a an eyebrow cut, etc.) are a given ingredient that is accounted for by MMA performers [29]. To the audience, this might appear brutal, especially when a fighter has taken a bad hit and the defeat is a fact, but it is part of the play performed. Ultimately, these materially based actions become a way of reinstating the contender's corporeal capital in the symbolic sense. That is, MMA performance is the embodied re-actualization of symbolic systems, for example, "men fighting in a cage," connoting aggression, fear, and violence [30]. "Jay" is keen to affirm this outward appearance and the symbolic inner logic of acting with vicious attitudes in the ring when he states:

J: It's me and my opponent in it, in the octagon fighting each other, it's a consent between him and me, not you, not him or anybody else [pointing around with his forefinger at the walls and the roof in a gesture of comparing with any person there]. All this talk on combat sports and MMA raising more violence and problems among youth, it's the opposite. In here, we teach young men to handle their aggression and staying out of problems. This is where it goes on, the real revival of learning how to control yourself, your body and your nerves. We perform bodily actions in the gym that are aggressive techniques that have been going on for an eternity, it has been passed on from a person to the next one and so on.

M: OK, so when you talk about MMA as a revival and passing on... what is that?

J: I myself trained as a Karateka in my background, I can see and make a clear, hmm, that there is a connection with MMA, someone developed these martial arts moves centuries ago, it can't just been born a hundred years ago, makes no sense. MMA is the natural continuation of practicing combat sports for decades.

Performance as a concept functions as a tool for framing and analyzing the construction of MMA. Accordingly, a posthuman idea consists of considering what an individual person's body has done in an explicit performance or in a sublime performative act, and what a fighter actively does with his or her body, that is, performing martial arts practice as a civilized sport [31]. MMA fights exist as a "meta-fight" both in its performative communication to the world watching the sport as just that, a sport, and as featuring top-trained athletes and not just brutal men, but rather performing and communicating top modern bodily skilled shows.

### **A Combat Turn of Performativity**

The scholar Dale C. Spencer has successfully applied a range of angles to the study of fighting cultures beyond ordinarily used theories [32]. The performance phenomena played out by MMA fighters are according to Spencer not about scripted imaginings, but about embodying expressive behavior. To emphasize these coded aspects of an embodied fighting culture, Spencer defines these performances as "restored practices". Spencer distinguishes between two kinds of performance phenomena. Referring to a framed event, he argues that performance is an enactment of cultural conventions and traditions, something that he calls a, "bodily experience of performance." Performance also refers to the informal happenings of daily life, which implies that everyday practices are performed, something that he calls, "bodies in time and space of performance" [33].

Furthermore, Spencer suggests that one should look at mixed martial arts fighting in terms of a continuum, that is, not everything that is happening in a fight is meant to be part of the performance at the same time, the entire time or even at all. For this reason, there are moments during MMA fights, just like there are moments during a political rally, a court gathering, or any type of sport event, when the performance, that is, the restored practices, become self-contradicting.

MMA restored practices come down to the bareness of the fighter's material body. Reading Spencer, this is what stands out to me, the naked and, in many ways, mundane struggle centering on bare bodies, that is, knuckled life forces coalescing. What makes this particular performance so attractive to audiences across time and space? In discussing the staged and event-ness of these performances, David explains:

D: Fighting, the adrenaline and the live kick of watching, taking part of something that comes so close to real fighting, it is as real as it gets, can't get any more natural.

M: OK, hmm that I can understand, and by natural you mean that?

D: It is a human thing, inside of us, we get heated up by watching people engaged in combat, it terrifies us and at the same time it scares the hell out of us, so it's both exciting to watch and really disgusting in a way, which I can understand so...

M: So, just because it is supposed to be a natural sport, we should accept it and see it as any regular other sport out there?

D: No, no, (long laugh), (pause), eh, let me say like this, MMA, yeah, it is new today to us, in media, in TV and among people who are not used to martial arts, but it doesn't mean that it is not a natural part of life, to compete and fight against someone. It's ridiculous to say that martial arts are new, see what I mean? The phenomena of fighting are as old as God has existed. It is a heroism in winning and too...eh, and a brave thing to put your body to a real test.

M: So fighting today has the same significance as a thousand years ago for example?

D: Yes, as long as it is consenting, no one should be critical, it's a normal thing to fight.

### **Posthuman Bodies and Martial Arts**

The legacy of Pankration is steeped in knuckled life force – which also means that the sport is balancing a large measure of physical sacrifice. It is thus valid to speak of a violent body order where the material reality is determined by a combination of what a human being can do to another body and how far one can push what one is allowed to do, namely threaten life in order to remain alive, and, in its most extreme form, kill another human being (symbolically or for real, using techniques like rear neck-choke, which can make the opponent unconscious) in order to survive (in the ring or on the battlefield).

Kicking someone in the head, striking or punching with the deliberate intention to destroy the opponent in front of a crowd, locates MMA in the terrain of ultimate fighting as being highly "violent". Still, MMA, revived or not from ancient times, passed on throughout time from one fighter to the next, exhibits strong characters of both authentic and wild competition between its combatants. Nevertheless, MMA's legacy as a subcultural phenomena balances in the "between-ness" of violence, sport and legitimate bodily behavior, asking how much

spectators, participants or academic professionals are ready to deal with the hyper-bodies of MMA. MMA exists today in modern forms, having been revisited to encompass sportive terms in displaying controlled and disciplined violence in real time.

When the UFC was founded, the main attraction was the appearance of no rules. As such, MMA competitions feature competitors in a ring or a caged-in area who inflict pain on their opponents by punching, kicking, elbowing, and kneeing their opponents into submission [34]. These features are undeniably similar in their materiality to the structural basis of Pankration's "all powers" free fighting styles [35]. Yet, in the "posthuman body" of today's MMA, the material and the virtual come together in an intricate blend [36]. Such a blending of materiality and virtuality indicates that the legacy has taken a new turn of late. David puts it like this: "MMA is the old new thing"!

When an MMA fighter, as compared to a Pankration fighter more than 2,500 years ago, confronts an opponent in a full-contact unarmed battle, he or she stages not only a real material body fighting for survival, but is also broadcasted simultaneously as a virtual body fighting. In the bout, the fighter gets feedback from both the live audience and the virtual audience. The live audiences cheer out loud, give their scores in numbers, and sometimes even give thumbs up and down as in ancient Greece and Rome. The virtual audience, exemplified by high-tech viewers getting public access through iPads, iPhones, PCs, TVs, etc., transfer their input to the fighters using email, twitter, UFC.com, and Pay Per-View. Live commentaries, Fox Sports channel, apps on smart phones and iPads and so on. Commentators transfer feedback and feedforward to the fighters through coaches and other camp colleagues working the direct online connections. That is hyper-media in flow.

Perceived as a posthuman cultural re-imagining of either a gladiator game or an Olympic Pankration event that blends the material and the virtual, this turns the fighting performances of MMA into a "hyper-simulacra" fueled by the very idea that the sport doesn't follow any rules. This has more to do with masculinity issues than with understanding the sport on a global level. A "post-masculine" theory could reveal the situated "men vs. men" fighting in a postmodern world, reversed and done over again as throughout history. Hence, we can see that there is no evidence of such a linear story; all we know is that Pankration has existed and that MMA is real and authentic in our society today. Combat sports of today are "as real as it gets" (see Downey 2014 for more reading). Nonetheless, MMA fighting on a scenic ontology scale provides a rudimentary briefing as it is possible to take part in this "ultra-modern" system of dyadic fight between men and women engaged in combat battle. As Jay sees it: "MMA is still a bodily thing and it doesn't matter the way it has been such a huge



market success. In the ring, like at Olympia a thousand years ago, you still have only your body and mind to rely on, just the same today, the same.”

### **Pankration Performativity and Phenomenology**

When applying the performance concept to the analysis of MMA fighting, another useful reference point is the happening of a performative turn within the arts, which took place in the intersection between theatre and art in the 1960s [37]. The German theater theorist and historian Erika Fischer-Lichte describes this development both from an historical and a theoretical perspective [38].

From a historical perspective, Fischer-Lichte argued that performance theory began when Theatre Studies was founded as an academic discipline at the beginning of the last century. In Germany, Theatre Studies was founded by Max Herrmann who claimed that the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators during an event, and not the dramatic text, as was earlier claimed, is what gives the theatre its distinctiveness.

One of Fischer-Lichte's historical points was that Theatre Studies and Ritual Studies (which today for the most part is a part of anthropology) share a similar historical development in changing the focus from dramatic text to performance and event-ness – a development that happened around the same time and is at the base of a close allegiance between these two disciplines.

In terms of theorizing the performative turn in relation to the arts, Fischer-Lichte proffered a new aesthetics that rethinks how meaning is communicated between the stage and the auditorium, addressing the fact that theatre and performance art are not art objects, but are taking place as events [39]. Instead of a semiotic communication model, Fischer-Lichte proposed the idea of an auto-poetic feedback loop and based it on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (cf. Spencer 2012, who also uses Merleau-Ponty in an analysis of MMA), that is, the embodied and experientially based co-presence of performers and audience negotiating the meaning of the performance together. The meaning, as the performance art culture of the 1960s and onward helped Fischer-Lichte to illustrate, is negotiated on two different perceptual levels. Thus, the perceiving subject in the auditorium and the performing subject on stage oscillate between “the order of presence”, emphasizing the lived phenomenological body, and “the order of representation”, emphasizing the semiotic body [40]. Oscillating between these two perceptual orders, experiential meaning is first attained, since, consistent with Merleau-Ponty, the lived experience is what allows for reflection to occur in the first place [41].

Like theatre and performance art, MMA happenings are staged as events, although extreme ones in huge arenas, something that highlights a very important fact: the theatrical platform of event-ness provides a common ground. Consequently, it is reasonable to say that the fighters on stage as well as the audience in the auditorium oscillate between “the order of presence”, which emphasizes the lived, phenomenological, autotelic, violent body, and “the order of representation”, which emphasizes the semiotic body that can be read symbolically (for instance, it can be compared to Pankration by its fans, viewers and the participating fighters). Attending a MMA event as an onstage fighter or as part of the audience no doubt entails oscillating between these two perceptual orders. It also means that the experience of violence is a fundamental part of the later reflection on it. It is very likely that this was why my main informant urged me to start practicing MMA before writing about the sport.

Before taking Fischer-Lichte’s theoretical understanding of performance in the ontological direction, it should be noted that this phenomenological knowledge is first and foremost lived and, therefore, cannot be communicated scientifically. I argue that the distinctiveness of MMA as an embodied performance of restored practices puts both the performers and the audience in contact with the experiential level of its violent exposure. However, whereas the fighter’s experience is based on direct, first-hand physical adjustment and adaptation, the audience’s experience is based on indirect adjustment and adaptation to violence.

Fischer-Lichte pointed out that during an event the experiences are very often not experienced as “ordinary”, but rather as “extraordinary”. This means that the event-ness of an MMA gala provides a unique opportunity to study the experience of violence, since the extraordinary experience allows for the everyday culture to stand out and appear in a new light.

### **Combat Ontology**

Studying MMA in relation to a performative turn, there is much understanding to be gained pertaining not only to phenomenological theory, but also to cultural theory, that is, the posthuman [42]. As fighters’ often talk about the identity and the warrior’s symbolic life of MMA, with it’s historical backgrounds in Pankration, it is thus important to speak of and to situate combat sports in an ontological perspective. Chris an American UFC fighter claim that he’s identity as a sportsman in the UFC organization (with a record of 16 professional matches) and being a fighter in MMA is also made possible through the legacy of Pankration and the fact that he was a martial artist with background in wrestling and in Karate. Chris conversation with me in the gym in Raleigh, US, shows he’s thought clear.

M: So, as you mentioned, what would you say is the connection between Pankration and MMA?

C: Obviously, you know, you have people in martial arts that don't get the whole picture of MMA, they don't see the devotion we put into the sport. We suffer and we sacrifice so much.

M: Who are 'they' you're talking about?

C: Fans of the UFC, around the globe, everywhere, we did this, but MMA was made already in historical terms, I did not invent the thing man, but I can say I was there and I was a part of the sport when it became popular again.

M: You mean that you reinvented the sport?

C: Not like that, from scratch but from being in there in the cage when we adopted the features of it.

M: So, this sport, I am talking about mixed martial arts now, what you are saying is that MMA has existed long ago and that the sport today, it's symbolic world is similar to ancient times?

C: I couldn't know man, I all know, is that my own personal feeling is that the UFC has adopted the system from something that has been going on for a long long time man. My identity as a fighter, but I could not have been a fighter without Pankration in the first place, as I guess, we do what we read into things, we try to go along with the stuff that we find very appealing to us.

M: Ok, I get it, so basically MMA is a sport, which you consider to be a product of both ancient times and modern days, am I following you right now?

C: Well, yes, but as I grew up training Karate in the classical Dojo, MMA, which didn't exist back then, was something just waiting around the corner for me, and when I turned 18 there was the UFC, and everyone wanted to compete and take part of this movement that spread worldwide. I wanted to try my skills and then I learned that mixed martial arts was a new sport, but it took sometime before it clicked to me. Now, mixed martial arts is global, everywhere...

M: So, now you describe MMA as something not existing, but suddenly being there, right out of the blue or what? Or you are saying that MMA as a movement helped martial artist identity?

C: Haha, I see, no, here's the deal, MMA was the name, the new modern term, but fighting, as in a gladiators game has been around several hundred years, and Pankration is the model that UFC use in their commercials, you've seen the pictures with men in ancient clothing fighting right? My identity as an MMA fighter is the same; I can turn into something and be this guy too...

In critical theory, the posthuman is a reconceiving of the human being, that is, an ontological being that is not a singularly defined individual, but one who can "become" or embody different identities and understand the world from multiple, heterogeneous perspectives. Collecting a number of key texts within posthumanist theory, the editors of this anthology Cecilia Åsberg, Martin Hultman, and Francis Lee include a list of words explaining the main concepts. Their main topic, posthumanism, is explained as, "theories that comment on the changing circumstances for human existence following modern transformations concerning technique, health, democracy and environment" [43].

Strongly influenced by phenomenology and posthumanist theory, Ann E. Hartzmann introduces a model for a posthuman scenic ontology in her forthcoming doctoral thesis *Känsla för skådespelarkonst: en studie av hur känslor görs (Feel for Acting: A Study of How to Do Feelings)*. What the posthuman scenic ontology helps her to explain is the different ways in which an actor can do feelings on the theatre stage.

Hartzmann's model for a posthuman scenic ontology is developed in dialogue with an article by the Dutch anthropologist of science and technology Annemarie Mol titled "Ontological Politics: A word and some Questions", where Mol argues that reality is multiple and not a singular object that can be described from different positions or situations in terms of one singular reality [44]. To perceive how this multiplicity is played out, Mol relies on the performance metaphor, showing how reality is created in several coexisting versions. Between these versions of reality, ongoing negotiations take place that Mol defines as a political ontology.

Building on Mol's notion of a political ontology, Hartzmann claims that the politics of ontology during a staged event is, in Fischer-Lichte's terms, extraordinary rather than ordinary. Hartzmann then proposes that modern scenic ontology primarily has considered the stage along a vertical axis between heaven and hell, conscious and unconscious, and dream and objective reality. From Mol, Hartzmann collects the idea that a horizontal axis intersects the vertical axis, suggesting coexisting versions of stage reality rather than singular objective reality as the one solid reference point.

Consistent with ontological reasoning in general, Hartzmann also discusses the actor's *being* on stage, which is where my main attention lies. The ontology of being refers to the relationship between the human being and the world; on the stage, this refers to the relationship between the actor and world outside him or her. From the beginning of theatre history until postmodern theatre and acting, the actor has been perceived as *in* the world on stage, just like the human being is assumed to be *in* the real world. What Hartzmann evokes is that the actor's being (corresponding to the audience being and seeing) on stage oscillates between at least three coexisting versions of being in relation to the world. Actors, as well as all human beings, are oscillating between being *in*, *of*, and *with* the world at the same time. Being *of* the world is an understanding collected from Merleau-Ponty, drawing on his notion of "inhabiting space", whereas being *with* the world is an understanding collected from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, drawing on their notion of "becoming" [45]. To be acting *of* the world, consistent with Merleau-Ponty's concept of "inhabiting space", refers to the idea that an actor's body and the world are fundamentally interwoven, and that he or she must use their senses to find their way to necessary understandings about, for example, a character, a stage set, or a co-actor [46]. To be acting *with* the world refers to the idea that there is no dividing line between the human being and the world, only a flow of connections in constant change and transformation [47]. Moving between realities and the being *in*, *of* and *with* the world, that is, performativity, is the coming together of all this. Performativity rises from an actor or a group of actors managing to balance all of this at the same time in a distinct way [48].

Hartzmann writes that although Fischer-Lichte built her idea of the ordinary as extraordinary on the oscillation between perceptual orders as framed by the feedback loop and founded on the lived body's experiential capacity, the idea itself does not fully reveal the ontological multiplicity of the process. In shifting from perceptual orders to scenic ontology, Hartzmann attempts to capture the multiple playings, deemed the extraordinary politics of scenic ontology, that are happening all at once during a staged event [49]. This multiple playing combines the insights from both Mol and Fischer-Lichte and stems from the fact that in the theatre, there is an additional line of playing going on beside between versions of reality and versions of being, that is, the playing between facticity, or the material bodies and objects and the fictive drama [50] [51].

In accordance with the ontological model developed by Hartzmann, I want to put forward the idea of an MMA fighter oscillating between being *in*, *of*, and *with* the fighting world on stage. More precisely, I am suggesting that how well a fighter performs will depend just as much on the balance he or she manages to strike between these three beings as on the violence he or she inflicts on an opponent. That is, the distinctly performative aspects of MMA fighting are

just as important as the violence itself and a fighter's dependence on striking a performative [52] balance takes on the function of a self-regulating system vis-à-vis safety. With this in mind, I suggest that it is worthwhile to start talking about combat ontology [53] as a new concept. And just as "Gregg" explains: "MMA is connected to all forms of martial arts, it has been around forever, it's just the name that is new."

## **Conclusions**

I want to stress that combat ontology, as taken from the point of view of posthumanist theory, offers a conceptual understanding of embodiment and situated knowledge that reveals a different MMA reality.

The point is not that the various theoretical ontological model inputs are compatible in every aspect, but rather that, in an ontological combination where they are thought of as different coexisting versions of being and reality, the inputs compliment each other. Analysis of MMA in reference to the constant political negotiations going on within combat, sports, and science, for example, whether further control and safety regulations should be passed, emphasizes that the performativity of fighting ontology is the kind of knowledge that could potentially alter the narrow focus on the violence only. Furthermore, as a kind of measurement of the violent exposure allowed, MMA already is an indicator of how to perceive sports violence. In view of the fact that the new conceptual understanding needs to be theorized further, communication with scientific scholars and MMA practitioners alike is needed.

The posthuman understanding of modern combat sports through the example of MMA shows that the phenomena of fighting cultures rest not only on violence, but also on performativity. MMA is a combat engagement where the violent body exposure is more than just a self-destructive activity reduced to self-serving singularities. Refocusing on MMA fighting and bodies can reveal how the sport rests on a performance that has more to it than the appearance of brute aggressiveness.

The force of MMA actions involves a great deal of bodily intimacy and reciprocal exchange that can be described as dyadic. However, these forceful actions must strike a performative balance *in, of and with* the combat world to be effective. Posthumanly stated, performativity is what it takes to perform violence in a safe way.

Is the Pankration legacy, then, also about something more than the appearance of a brutal fight between two unarmed combatants, a similarity measured in violence? Rather than a certain type of violence, the legacy of Pankration consists of the importance of performativity,

that is, the extraordinary politics of combat ontology. Following the talks with my informants, it becomes obvious that fighters regard MMA as a natural follower of an already extant martial art sport.

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**Fig 1.** Professional MMA-Fighters in the mixed martial arts club at the fieldwork location in northern part of Sweden, Umea. The picture features trained UFC-fighters (Ultimate Fighter Organization) sparring during the advance class session on a Tuesday evening fight pass. Photo: Magnus Stenius 2012 during ethnographic observations in combat arts.

# RISING FROM THE ASHES

**Donald Miskel**

I have some distressing news for the Peter Pan generation. We're aging. Yeah, you heard me right, we're getting old. Some of us, myself included, have gotten there already. Age is a biological reality. Live long enough and you'll find that out. Getting old isn't fun but the alternative isn't pretty. We either get old or we get dead.

Actually the whole nation is aging. When I was a kid the life expectancy for a person in America was sixty two years. Now if you die at that age people will say that you died young. If you have cable TV you're aware that people are obsessed with staying young. You can tummy tuck, face lift, collagen inject and zumba till you drop but in the end age is going to win out. The best you can hope for is to be the best that you can be at whatever age. It is my belief that you don't get old, you relinquish your youth. Our nation has the unfortunate distinction of being the only one that throws away its elderly. We don't value age as do some other cultures but maturity doesn't have to mean your life is null and void.

It is an unhappy truth that athletes while staying in shape stress their bodies and sometime do themselves more harm than good. Taking that into consideration it should change how we train and how we teach. Banging your head into a concrete block to condition it for head butts has proved to be counterproductive. Likewise much of the hand conditioning of the past. If you're the average adult you may have to actually defend yourself one or two times in a lifetime and hopefully not at all. Understanding that, it may not be wise to beat our hands into clubs. I'm pretty sure that you plan to use your hands for something else other than weapons.

Martial artists are no more exempt from age or injury than anyone else. Though a deteriorating mind ( too many kicks to the head) may thrust us into a second childhood we aren't getting any younger and we have to make the necessary adjustments. That doesn't mean giving up on life and likewise it shouldn't mean giving up on our common passion. We are martial artists and we must 'kung fu'. For us it's like breathing. It's in our blood.

I'm an 'old school' martial artist. I trained in the old way. I banged, battered and abused my body for the sake of battle efficiency. I'm approaching my late sixties now and I've lived to regret it. After almost fifty seven years in the martial arts I am considered a Hanshi and grandmaster but my ability has lessened as my knowledge continues to grow. As much as I hate to admit it I can no longer leap the proverbial tall building at a single bound. To be honest I can barely launch my building bounding butt over a crack in the sidewalk. So what is a sensei to do? We reinvent ourselves to maximize our efforts and to maintain whatever efficiency we can.

Due to injuries because of working in high risk professions I have had two back surgeries (fused from just above the tailbone to just below the shoulder blades) and several to my arms and hand. My orthopedic surgeons told me that my martial arts career was over. So, hearing that what did I do? Did I sit my old butt down like someone with good sense? That's a silly question. I'm a martial artist. Of course I didn't. Instead I found other ways to do the same thing. My undefendable roundhouse kick to the head became by necessity a mui tai type kick to the calf or thigh. My killer side kick to the throat became a cutting kick to the shins or diagonal stomp to the knee. I revisited my judo, jiu jitsu and aikijitsu training and revived my boxing skills. Since I don't need as much flexibility I've gone back to power lifting. My kicks aren't as theatrical but they are every bit as devastating and I punch like the kick of a mule. Not a bad tradeoff in my estimation but even with all of that age continues its slow attack on my body.

Time will come when I won't be able to do much in the way of hard training. Eventually my weight training will be replaced with tai chi and chi gung. I'll continue to study and research the arts but my efforts will become less physical. I have often said that those who can, do and those who no longer can, teach. You don't have to be able to do a roundhouse kick to the head to teach a student how to do them.

When even that becomes too difficult I'll continue to share what little wisdom I've accrued in a lifetime of martial art training through lectures and articles. After all, the pen is mightier than the sword, or in my case the keyboard is mightier.

In the end let quote a great martial art luminary( myself); "A master is a master because of what he knows, not because of what he can do". Quoting again from the same impeccable source; "those who no longer can, teach". Youth may have been burned up in the impersonal fire of time but like the mythical phoenix we rise from the ashes. Where are those wise and knowledgeable teachers out there? Come on my brethren; rise. There's a desperate need for

those reborn phoenixes in the martial art community. Your knowledge and wisdom is needed more than ever.

God bless you, my martial art family. Train honestly and go with God.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel

# CONDITIONING FOR THE MARTIAL ARTIST

**Donald Miskel**

People involve themselves in the martial arts for any number of reasons. I would like to think that the arts have something for everybody. It offers a means of self defense if taught properly. Many see it as a competitive sport. That isn't what the martial arts were designed for but if taught with competition in mind it is a nice sport. The martial arts offer mental as well as physical benefits. The martial arts teach discipline and builds tenacity and self confidence. There is a group of people who involve themselves in the arts for exercise. According to what art you involve yourself in the martial arts offer moderate to intense exercise. That's good for the casual weekend warrior but the serious martial artist need more. That is if he hopes to excel and mold him into a real warrior and the fierce competitor that the arts promise.

Most who know me know that I'm an advocate of strength training. I pump iron and practice several other modes of intense training. I'm not interested in body building but I am interested in strength and a powerful body. In previous articles I have explored the benefits of weight training and I still swear by them.

I'm no longer a young man. I'm closer to seventy than I am to sixty. Fifty seven years of that time has been dedicated to the martial arts. Along with training in the arts I've been weight training since my early teens. I've listened to the arguments from various instructors and masters about the negative benefits of weight training for the martial artist. Early in my martial art career I studied judo and jiu-jitsu and I wrestled in school. In those arts I heard less about the detriment of weight training but when I became involved with karate, kempo and kung fu all of that changed. I was an amateur boxer in my youth and later boxed as a semi pro which meant that I was a sparring partner for serious boxing competitors. I never heard those complaints in boxing but as I dedicated myself more to the oriental striking arts I began to hear that litany. Weights and karate (my primary art at the time) don't mix. Fortunately I listened to my own counsel on that matter. I continued to strength train when all

of my fellow students listened to our instructors and did only moderate calisthenics. In the end I generally managed to physically dominated them. I hit like the kick of a mule.

Weight training isn't the only means of conditioning for the martial arts. A practitioner can choose any of a number of methods but if he is serious in his art he'll soon realize that he needs more than moderate stretching and a few pushups to mold his body into the fighting machine he might envision himself to be.

A weight training program doesn't have to be a power lifting regiment or body building routine. Ballistic training with relatively light weights increases the strength of the ligaments and tendons while strengthening the fast twitch muscles that compliment speed. Long lean muscle can be the result of the right kind of training. High reps with light weights can accomplish that admirably. Weight training doesn't have to result in excessive size or bulk. A lifting program can be tailored to the need of the person.

In no other martial art, area of physical competition, sport or fighting system does anyone think that their art alone is enough for physical Conditioning. Expertise demand more. Not that we'll ever reach that level of perfection but if we intend to strive for it we'll have to condition our bodies to compliment our training.

Strength is only one consideration in this supplemental training. Aerobics are necessary for endurance. Flexibility is also necessary. Not just the occasional ham string stretch or Chinese split but total body flexibility. A well conditioned body lends itself better to the demands that intense training and even combat puts on it.

Practicing the basics will condition the body well enough for the casual practitioner. Punching and kicking in the air will increase speed while work on the heavy bag will increase punching and kicking power. That level of training would suffice the average casual student who may compete in the occasional tournament or kata competition but for the serious athlete or hard core martial artist more is required. There is no easy path. Expertise comes at a price. It comes with blood, sweat and tears and with maximum effort. The path to mastery requires more than the twice a week hour long class. A sensei will teach you the techniques but it's up to you to condition your body to perform those techniques. Not in the gym or dojo but where the rubber meets the road. You may be able to punch like Joe Lewis or kick like Bill Wallace but if you're winded after a couple of kicks and punches you'll never be the warrior you want to be. You have to train. It's become a cliché but it is as true as when it was first uttered; "No pain no gain".



Pain isn't pleasant. Most sensible people avoid it but most sensible people don't become warriors. The warriors in our society are the policemen and soldiers who keep our community and our country safe. Also the warriors are those who will make the sacrifices necessary to mold themselves into true martial artists. That should include you my brethren. The Black Dragon Fighting Society has been famous for creating some gut bucket fighters. While our new image hopefully lends itself more to individual social and familial responsibility we don't want to lose that edge. We practice our own code of bushido. We are gentle warriors. That is to say we're gentle when we can be but the ultimate warriors when we have to be. Being constantly capable and ready for any eventuality means being mentally and physically prepared. That state of readiness comes at a price. It requires personal effort and sacrifice. It requires physical training and physical and mental conditioning.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel,

Judan Shodai Soke, BLMAA and Senior Grandmaster/ head of Family, IFAA BDFS

# THE POWER OF MEDIOCRITY

**Donald Miskel**

I'm sure that anyone reading this will probably think that the title is a misprint or a misuse of the English language. No misprint there and while I'm known to stray into Ebonics on the rare occasion this time I'm on point. In this article I want to talk about the common place or the mediocre. As hard as we may strive to perfect our various arts most of us fall into the area of the mundane. There are a few superstars amongst us but most of us, myself included, fall outside of that rarified category.

All of us who have thought or even studied the martial arts have come across that rare gifted individual who is endowed with bucket loads of natural ability. You know him. The one who never has to study and hardly cracks a book and still keeps a 4.0 GPA. The one who the sensei shows the technique to one time and automatically does it better than the sensei. We won't dwell on our serious dislike of those individuals but we will look at the advantage of being an average or even below average student.

Being average doesn't mean that we can't accomplish great things. It only means that we will have to work our rearmost extremities off to accomplish our objectives. What comes natural to that occasional martial art prodigy will be accomplished for us in the sweat of our brows. Some of us have to work harder to accomplish the same thing but that doesn't mean that those accomplishments are beyond our grasps. We'll just have to strive harder and reach higher. Okay, with that being said, how does that translate into an advantage?

I'm glad you ask. Your query gives me excuse and opportunity to pontificate. There is an advantage to be had in the ordinary. Those of us who were klutzes tripping over our own feet and have against all odds become martial art teachers and masters illustrate the point that I'm trying to make. With patience, persistence, determination and old fashioned stubbornness the extraordinary can be accomplished by the ordinary; the ordinary being most of us. Most of us aren't Bruce Lees, Count Dantes' or Frank Dux'. Those low life lilly livered miscreants didn't have to work their tushes off to become martial art masters. That

was relegated to us ordinary individuals. But even with the challenges that most of us face in the process of attaining knowledge and ability some of us have managed just that.

As much as I would like to be one of those individuals endowed with superior reaction time, extreme eye hand coordination, extraordinary reflexes, superhuman strength and eye blazing speed I fall into the area of the ordinary. I was just a barely average student. Here I am, fifty seven years into my martial art career and still trying to get the hang of the intricacies that make the mundane magnificent. I haven't gotten there yet but I'm still striving. I'm too stubborn and too dumb to take no for an answer even when no makes more sense. I am, like so many of us, like the bumble bee that is too stupid to know that physics precludes their ability to fly. Fortunately bumble bees don't understand physics.

I grew up in a deprived part of the city of Chicago. Just a few miles away was the Hyde Park neighborhood where the University of Chicago makes its home. When I was a kid Hyde Park meant money. The junior high school that I attended was located in Hyde Park. Consequently I came in contact with more privileged children. They had the things I wish I had. The things that I dreamt about were just handed to them. I had to work for everything I had. I have a learning disability so school was a challenge to me. I had to study twice as hard to accomplish what some other students took for granted. I learned how to study because nothing came natural to me. On second thought, that isn't true. Some things did come natural to me. Unfortunately those weren't the type of things that would make me successful in life. In the end I attended one of the highest rated schools in Chicago and I managed to earn several graduate and a couple of post grad degrees. Learning to face my challenges in life propelled me further in life than the natural abilities that some of my friends were gifted with. Even a plodder will reach the finish line if he keeps on toiling toward his goal. I'm living proof. Not having much taught me to appreciate the little that I did have. I learned not to take anything for granted. I found out that nothing would be handed to me on the proverbial silver platter. My disadvantage became my greatest asset.

In my teaching career I've come across the occasional gifted student. They didn't have to work as hard as the other students. What was a struggle to the rest of the class came easy for them. They got it right the first time so they disdained the constant repetition. That was for the ordinary student. Guess what happened to those students. They could perform any given technique on demand but somehow their knowledge and natural ability didn't translate to the streets. Knowledge isn't always ability and ability doesn't always translate into muscle memory. Knowledge is cerebral but combat is governed by the primitive brain. You can't reason your way through a fight. It's a known fact that if you have to think about it it won't work for you. It may reside in your intellectual brain but combat isn't intellectual. It breaks

down to basic training and muscle memory. The techniques that you repeated ten thousand times; so many times that you could do them in your sleep, are the ones that will see you through in a pinch.

To the one who did the technique ten times to your ten thousand the techniques that may save his life will elude him when it's most needed. Many times in teaching we feel that we need to require more of the mediocre student than of the one with natural ability. In all actuality the opposite holds true. We have to keep in mind that it is our job to enable every student to become proficient where their abilities really matter.

We can't be lured into complacency with that class superstar. We have to demand the same of him as of the other students. He too needs the consistent training and constant repetition to translate his knowledge into a usable self defense tool. In its pure state a martial art isn't a sport. It isn't for competition. It isn't designed to impress your friends and neighbors. It's about self defense and combat. You may or may not be proficient in those other areas but if it fails you as a fighting system it has failed you completely. Your beautiful form and flashy techniques won't impress an attacker. The command of your art as a mode of combat will. Losing a match or a kata competition won't cost you your life. Losing a fight just might.

In conclusion I would like to say that it is seldom that the natural student will stay with you long enough to be really proficient. People tend to get bored with things that don't offer a challenge or that come too easy. Likewise we don't appreciate something that we don't have to sacrifice or work for. The harder earned a thing is the more it's valued. More often than not the plain ordinary student will stay and go the course. So we see that there is an advantage in mediocrity. We will often be faced with the challenge of the mediocre student but we can work with that. That same student with those same challenges was probably you a number of years ago. In the end persistence will mean more than natural ability. That same fact holds true for the natural student.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

Dr. Donald Miskel

# FOUNDATIONS AND ORIGINS

**Donald Miskel**

Everything has to start somewhere. Everything that is to stand must have a foundation. Nothing exists in a vacuum. I'm real big on finding the roots of things. How things came to be what they are. Being a writer I'm always looking for the roots of words and the origins of various adages and clichés. How did various phrases and ideas become part of our vernacular? Every 'old saying' has its author. The same holds true for the martial arts that we study today.

Many of the martial art masters that founded the arts that we study today studied with someone. Very few had a spiritual epiphany that morphed into one of the martial arts that have become cornerstones in the martial art world. Master Gichen Funakoshi studied variations of Naha and shuri te. Master Kano and Ueshiba studied various forms of jiu jitsu. If you go back far enough jiu jitsu probably has much of its roots in sua jau and aikijitsu in china. Karate and kempo was heavily influenced by the various Chinese kung fu influences that found their way to the Ryu Kyu islands. It may be informative and beneficial to research the origin of whatever art you study.

In my many years in the martial arts I've had the privilege of studying with several instructors in a number of systems. I stayed with several of them long enough to attain menkyo(s) or teaching certificates. A couple I've stayed with long enough to be considered a master in the systems. Not that I claim mastery in anything. After fifty seven years I'm still a student. I guess I'm a slow learner but I keep on plodding along.

All of the systems and arts that I have studied have amalgamated into one eclectic system. I divide the system that I teach into two key components. Either the kempo or aikijitsu systems can stand along and can be taught independent of the other but ideally they are designed to complement each other. I've studied arts that I may have been qualified to teach at some time or another. I don't teach any of them but all of them have found their way into my key art. All of them to a greater extent form the art that I teach.

My primary arts were karate (shorei goju), Okinawa kempo and diato ryu aikijitsu with a smattering of judo, aikido and hakka ryu jiu jitsu thrown in the mix. They are the foundations for everything that I study or teach.

How do you find the roots of a particular system? You can look at the point of emphasis of the art. Is it basically a striking or a grappling art? Does it advocate fighting at a distance or up close? Does it advocate strength or technique? Is it external or internal; hard or soft? Is it circular, linear or a combination of the two? These and similar questions can give you insight into the origins of your art. Let's look at some of these questions and examine a particular art. We'll look at goju karate as an example.

Okinawa goju is considered a softer system than shorei and shorin karate, the two other major styles of karate on Okinawa. Goju has both linear and circular techniques. It is in affect two systems in one. Looking at the sanchin (hour glass) stance of goju karate and its crescent stepping patterns you can see shades of pau qua chang, an internal style of kung fu. The mawashi uke (round house) blocking patterns support this. On the other hand there are the tensho blocking and grabbing techniques that are reminiscent of white crane kung fu. A lot of the high kicks and long hand techniques bear this out. One could also look at the explosive oi zuki (lunge punches) of the systems along with the gyaku zuki (reverse punch) and see a serious similarity to tsing i. These influences along with the influences of the local Okinawa te systems (Naha te, Shuri te and Tomiki te) make up what we know as goju karate.

Trying to understand the roots of your system may or may not make you a better practitioner but it would definitely give you a deeper insight into the individual arts that made up your system. Examining these systems may give you a better concept of the intregul parts of your art and how they come together to create the art that you study. Taking a closer look at these individual arts may even make you a better martial artist. Plus you can impress your friends and fellow students with your academic knowledge. I might warn you though, to be careful how you go about enlightening your sensei with your superior knowledge. No need of getting a butt whipping if you don't have to. Sensei(s) can be a little testy about those kinds of things.

God bless you my newly enlightened brethren. Train hard and go with God.

Dr. Donald Miskel

# LIVING LEGACIES

**Donald Miskel**

A real parent is secure in his position and his relationship with his children. He feels no need to compete with them. He doesn't envy them their youth. It is his wish to see his children do better than he did; to be more successful, accomplish more and to be better. Each generation should be a step upward.

When my biological children were young I had formal schools. They were raised in the dojo for all practical purposes. I didn't insist that they make the martial arts central in their lives or that they reach black belt level but I did insist that they would be able to defend themselves in the streets. They had to have a secure grasp of the basics and be proficient at self defense. I insisted on that level of knowledge and ability.

Unfortunately only one of my children stayed with the arts long enough to reach black belt. I am now teaching my grandchildren and the hand full of protégés that follow my vision. They are my children in the arts. I have trained quite a number of students in the various arts that I've taught over the years but only a handful have been allowed into my inner circle. Those are my ushi dashi(s), my close door students. They are the ones that will carry the art after I am gone. I am approaching sixty seven years of age and I'm in my fifty seventh year of involvement in the martial arts. I teach the occasional class or seminar and instruct my private students but I no longer have a school. At this hallowed age I am more involved in ministry than the teaching of the arts. What I do in the arts involves research and writing, managing the organizations I head, and advising and serving as a council member on a few others. I do more teaching through articles than through hands on instruction. At this late date I live vicariously through the accomplishment and advancement of my children; my personal students in the arts.

A martial artist is measured by his own knowledge and ability but an instructor is measured by the quality of his students. I was never big on tournaments. I fought only what was required to make rank. I was more interested in the application of the arts and how their teaching translated to self defense or combat than with competition. When I was coming up

there was no MMA. We fought full contact in the old World Karate Federation and in the early BDFS. There was no safety equipment allowed or available. We trained for combat. I followed a handful of the hardcore instructors and students and fought in some of the illegal pit matches that were held during the day. I was more interested in real world combatives than the esoteric aspects of the martial arts. Even till this day that is still somewhat the case. My focus is on the martial aspects of the martial arts. I don't deny the spiritual or character building aspects of the art but it has never been my primary function. I teach spirituality through mentoring and ministry.

I was pretty combative when I was young. That was common place in the neighborhoods I grew up in. The inner city of any major city is a rough place and Chicago is rougher than most. Even in that environment I was more aggressive and confrontational than most of my peers. I wasn't shy about scrapping. I would and did fight. Over the years I've mellowed out. That had to do with my spiritual awakening but much of it was because of my involvement in the arts.

I had occasion to prove my martial art training both in the streets and in combat while in the military. I know that what I teach is effective in combat. Teaching the type of students that I teach it has to. When it comes down to the wire that is the acid test of any martial art or of a martial artist. Take the martial out of the martial art and you have nothing more than ballet. Nice to look at but ineffective where it matters most. Since I got out of the military I can count the physical altercations I've had on the thumbs of one hand. Actually there were more instances than that but I work hard to avoid any kind of physical altercation. I now measure the effectiveness of my art by my students.

Many of my students work in high risk professions. I have taught more than a few law enforcement officers, prison guards, personal security specialists and mental health techs. The training that they have received has served them well and on occasional has made the difference between safety and serious injury or death. I can't count the heartfelt acknowledgement and appreciation that I have gotten from students who used their training in threatening situations. The thanks that I get from those students give me validation of my efforts. They are my mark of success.

I have turned out a couple of fighting champions in my lengthy career. However there were never enough of those to mark me as a trainer of competition champions. Their success probably had more to do with their own innate ability than my training in that area. I taught them for combat but they were able to translate their training into competition. As proud of them as I am I can't take credit for their success. If on the other hand they deal effectively



with a violent confrontation on the streets I will take some credit for that. I trained them and they were trained for that type of thing.

These days I am the Head of Family of the IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society, the senior Grandmaster of the Black Lotus Martial Art Association and the pastor and senior advisor of Kenpo Karate Family International. I also sit on the board or the masters councils of several other organizations. I am a chaplain through the Shinja Martial Art University, I'm a licensed and ordained minister and pastor and I'm an adjunct professor at a major university in the Chicago area. Obviously my focus has changed. The martial arts are still a major part of my life but I live much of that life vicariously through my students and membership. Their success is my success. They are my living legacy.

I admonish the sensei and masters out there to train their students for reality. I'm not saying that you shouldn't teach some of the competitive aspects of the arts but keep in mind it is a martial art.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel

Head of Family, IFAA BDFS

Sr. Grandmaster, BLMAA.

# FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

**Donald Miskel**

This year will mark my sixty seventh year in the land of the living with fifty seven of those dedicated to the martial arts. I have been blessed to be able to make this journey. It has been a fantastic experience. As I continue my sojourn in this world my journey in the martial arts continues also.

I've been advised by friend and family alike to sit down and take it easy. They say I've done enough and I'm too old to continue doing what I'm doing. Possibly they're right but for me this is a lifelong journey. With the many challenges that age presents and the effects of the many injuries I've accrued along the way training becomes more of challenge. I practice both internal and external martial arts but I still strength train. I even do a little teaching but my primary contribution to the arts these days has to do with sharing spiritual and philosophical insight and managing the organizations that I head and/or advise. In that vein I have an observation that I would like to share. Blindsided you with that one didn't I? Probably not. Those who know me know that I'm a preacher and given occasion I will preach.

People study the martial arts for many reasons and on many levels. I often comment on that fact but I would like to revisit it with an eye on a particular aspect of that same fact. Any of the Eastern martial arts can be studied as a do or as a jitsu. For instance judo is an art. It is practiced as such with an eye on the ascetic. Jiu Jitsu on the other hand is a fighting system. It isn't a sport and it isn't taught to enlighten a student. It is and was created as a survival tool. It reached its pinnacle in dark allies and battle fields. In a word it was created to give a combatant the edge in a fight.

Many martial arts made the transition from combat systems to sports or ascetic arts. Consequently many of the more deadly techniques have been excluded and the techniques that were taught for combat have been modified to make them safer to practice with an opponent. For example the karate punch isn't taught in its most lethal form. The seiken zuki (full twist punch with palm facing the floor) or tate zuki (vertical fist) aren't taught in their more lethal form. The original punch was formed with the fist halfway between those two positions

with the fist at roughly a forty-five degree angle. A strike that's formed properly accesses the body cavities and nerve nexuses more efficiently. The difference can be devastating and isn't suited for a sport application. In affect the more dangerous techniques were changed to allow those arts to be practiced in friendly competition.

Today many martial artists are sportsmen. They're more interested in competing than fighting. I have no problem with that but to think that that is the original and sole purpose of a martial system is inaccurate. Martial systems weren't created as sports. Nor were they created to advance spiritual growth or moral development in a practitioner. They were created to injure, maim or kill. An eye gouge is a simple and effective combat technique but don't expect competition eye gouging to become the new rave. By the very nature of its devastating effectiveness it is suited only for life and death combat. That's the nature of any real fighting technique.

The problem with the competition based martial arts is that their sport applications are being passed off as combat effectiveness. Please take my word for it, what's effective on the tournament floor doesn't necessarily translate to the streets or to the battle field. A baseball bat can be a lethal weapon and a hurled baseball can do some real damage but baseball players aren't trained in combat. Baseball is a sport and should be recognized as such. If you think that playing in the little league qualifies you for combat you're headed for a rude awakening. We need to be honest with ourselves and realistic in our expectations. You won't become combat ready by practicing tournament karate.

I respect a tournament champion who is good at his trade. I don't subscribe to that path in my martial training but I admire what he does. I'm pretty sure that I can't compete with Bill Wallace on the tournament floor but he probably hasn't been trained to survive on the mean city streets of Chicago or those like them in other cities. What he studies wouldn't be applicable for hand to hand combat. That very sort of thing is what some martial artists train for. They train for combat effectiveness or for survival in the real world.

I am impressed by those who compete and make a name for themselves. They may do it for self satisfaction, notoriety or for fame and glory but if they do it well they have my respect. However I'm more impressed by those who train and teach quietly giving the tools for others to survive or grow. Whether they teach to enable their students to defend themselves or to train up model citizens and instill good moral values in them they have my support and admiration. The willingness to serve, minister and mentor is in my eyes the highest expression of the martial arts.

It's nice having a large and lucrative commercial school. I certainly can't criticize success in any legal enterprise. However I am more impressed by the sensei who teaches in a community center, in some damp church basement or in a park. The one who passes up monetary success to enable him to reach the challenged teen, troubled child or at risk adult. Those such individuals are my heroes. They give selflessly of themselves to be a blessing to others.

Whatever your path be true to yourself. You have every right to follow your dream. However don't criticize those who seek a different path. We are all martial artists however we decide to pursue our dream and on whatever level we choose to do so. The tournament champion is no more a martial artist than the sensei who trains and teaches out of his garage. The instructor who owns a successful school is no more a martial artist than the sensei who has a backyard dojo. Some of Bruce Lee's best students were trained in his back yard. Success isn't measured by size.

It is my belief that we should give back. Those of us who have gained the most should be willing to give the most. Keep in mind that the sensei of the historical past were as much father and mentor to his student as fight instructor. I feel that that should be our endeavor.

I have rambled through several issues but let me end this discourse with the spiritual and philosophical truth; "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In the end the greatest fight that you'll fight is with yourself and for your own character. In entering that fight let's fight the good fight.

Train hard my brethren and go with God.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel.

# GRANDMASTER VINCE PALUMBO TEACHES STICKFIGHTING TO THE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN CHINA!

**Vince Palumbo**

Hello to all of my friends from around the world, and I hope everyone had a great Christmas and a fantastic New Year's Celebration with your family, friends and loved ones.

My 2014 started with an invitation to travel over in China so as to conduct seminars for 5 days at one of the largest police academies in China, actually I was invited there by a man in charge of Chinese Law Enforcement Combatives training for their police officers, and his name is Professor Jiang of the Shanghai Police Academy.

I was introduced to this Policeman a few years ago by a mutual friend of ours, his name is Professor Stanley Tam of the Shanghai Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy which is also in China.

Stanley Tam brought Professor Jiang to my academy in Australia a few years ago because Professor Jiang was so interested to learn Cacoy Doce Pares Eskrima and the Cacoy Pangamot Filipino Jiu Jitsu styles that I teach at my academy in Australia.

I've been ranked to 'Grand Master' level in both of these Filipino Martial Art styles by my fine teacher for many years that I've been his student, he is the Supreme Grand Master Ciriaco 'Cacoy' Canete of Cebu City in Philippines, and he is 94 years of age rite now.

So I understand how to use that cane very well because of my hundreds of full contact stickfighting fights that I have had in the Philippines, Indonesia, USA, Hong Kong, Macau, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, and all over Australia as well.

I am the holder of 30 World Titles in Full Contact Filipino Stickfighting with armour, and also with limited armour, plus with the use of a live rattan canes, and without the use of padding!

Anyway, when I arrived in China to conduct my 30 hours of teaching seminars at the Police Academy there, I was surprised to see a cross section of students who wanted to learn the two Filipino Martial Art systems that I teach at my own ICMA academy in Australia.

I had 2 Army Colonels training with me, also members of the Chinese Police SWAT Team, members of the Chinese Tactical Response Unit, members of the Chinese Prison Guard Unit, and members of the Chinese Security Services Organization training with me as well.

All of them were the law enforcement combatives instructors from these different academies from all over China, and they had travelled from their provinces and cities to do a hard week of training with me, so I had to do a good job and impress these guys because many of these instructors had previously travelled to the USA so as to train with FBI Combatives Instructors.

Some of the Chinese Law Enforcement Combatives Instructors had also travelled to Israel for more training with leading Krav Maga Instructors in that country as well, so I was definitely under pressure to impress all these guys during my 30 hours of teaching there.

I took these law enforcement combatives instructors through many hours of skill refining with the use of a rattan cane, so they learned control techniques against an offender, weapon retention and disarming, the empty handed restraint techniques against offenders, plus I also taught them how to disarm a knife from an attacker, and I introduced them to pressure point compliance techniques that can also be used against a violent offender.

I had some 30+ plus law enforcement combatives instructors at my week long workshop, and they had all attended other workshops either in China or overseas, and I am very proud to say that they voted for my week long workshop as the best one that they've ever attended, and they all told me they learned more in my workshop than what they learned with the FBI in USA, or with the great Krav Maga guys in Israel. (OOPS!!!)

So I felt real proud, and I certainly left an impact with all of these law enforcement officers who attended my week long workshop, and now I am in the process of organizing more seminars in China later on in this year.

On the last day as a 'Grand Finale' to our incredible week of training at the Police Academy, I told all of these law enforcement officers that I would fight each one of them in 'kulata stickfighting rules', so this meant that we only wore a helmet, gloves, and a groin cup. (No padded armour or any elbow and knee pads!)

We used solid live rattan canes against the flesh and bone of the body, and we went bloody hard too, that is because these guys were fit and strong, so they really wanted to test me, and also to test themselves, because this kind of stickfighting is brutal, and it is probably one of the hardest combat sports that I've ever done as a fighter.

I fought each student one after the other, and I only had 30 seconds rest in between each fight, and it hurt even more because the temperature was only 10 degrees outside on their police academy sports oval, so all the stick strikes against the skin gave such an incredible sting on impact, ouch!

I took so many shots that my body at the end of it all was red, blue and purple, actually I had to get some of that Chinese herbal medicine to rub on my skin after sparring with everyone, because I had to move all the bruising and swelling on my arms, legs and body, was due to the nasty shots on my shoulders, legs, knees, ribs and elbows, because they were all of the unprotected areas on my body.

And these fit, strong, and tough guys all really went for it during our sparring session, so believe me they all were tough too, but I managed to educate them about pain from an eskrima stick that day.

On fight number 27 this large guy stepped up to fight me, and he was one big bastard from up in Northern China, and it seems that he made claims to have done stickfighting in Philippines, so I thought to myself, this is real strange because he did not attend my workshop over the week, so what the hell is he doing here?

Then I found out that he was some kind of a special forces guy who wanted to have a go with me, and please keep in mind that he was about 6ft tall, and he must have weighed about 115kg's, but no fat, so he was solid, and he was real tough too.

Anyway, we faced each other to fight, and when the whistle blew to start, he came at me like a bull, so it was quite obvious that he had come there just for the purpose of doing a number on me rite in front of all them law enforcement officers, and believe me he hit me so hard with that solid rattan cane on my body, this is so I knew he was only there to do the job on me.

Then something went click in my head and I just lost it, and I proceeded to smash all the toughness out of this guy, with such severe strikes and precision, that his body was just swollen everywhere, and so he had the real look of fear in his eyes as I was chasing him around the ring beating really hard and fast with my stick against his flesh, then when the bell went off to end the fight, he just dropped to his knees, held up my hand rite against his

forehead, and then he just yelled out these words, "Shee Foo!" (Which translated means, 'Master')

Then he got up and hugged me, and continually bowed his head to me, because I gave him a damn war with our stickfighting, so he will never forget me!!

When I turned around and looked at the 30 people who I had sparred, they just roared with an almighty yell, and all said the word, "Shee Foo!" (I thought that I was in some kind of karate kid movie, it was awesome!)

Then I went and fought with 4 more people to end that long session, so after I just crawled under a hot shower, but it was an incredible experience, and it is something that I will never forget, because on the day that I had to leave the Police Academy after my 5 day workshop in China, they lined up to say their nice goodbye to me, then they all started clapping and calling out the name 'SHONDI', and it means 'BROTHER!'.

Now I have been invited back there to China in October, but this time they want me to teach over in Beijing, and I have been told that they want to slowly get the CACOY DOCE PARES ESKRIMA taught at all Police Academies in China, because they could see just how effective this martial style of that Supreme Grand Master Cacoy Canete truly is, so they want their police to learn these skills.

So I think this is great news for our martial art style, and I have also been told that the 94 year old Supreme Grand Master Cacoy Canete of Cebu City in the Philippines is really proud rite now, eh!

Supreme Grand Master Cacoy Canete has opened up my world, and he's taught me so much over the years, so I love him very much, this is why I was the first to spread this martial art in Poland, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Spain, and now in China, so may I say 'Salamat Manong Cacoy!'

Love from Vince Palumbo your loyal student!

GRAND MASTER VINCE PALUMBO.



# SELF DEFENSE VS. PERSONAL SECURITY

**Donald Miskel**

For the most part I don't write on demand and I don't take requests. I'm a martial art instructor not your local DJ. That being said let's talk about rules and the exceptions thereof.

I was talking to the senior instructor and President of the Black Lotus Martial Arts Association and one of my senior black belts. He had the audacity to try to coerce me into writing this particular article. I fussed and cussed (actually I don't do much in the way of swearing but it was a close call) but you see I'm sitting at my laptop pecking out the suggested article. I'm good for lecturing. Because I manage the affairs of two martial art organizations and sit on the board(s) of several others I do a great deal of my teaching in that manner. I try to expound on the philosophy, methodology, the inner workings and the underlying principles of the martial arts. Today's lecture was on self defense and personal security. Larry (McFadden) was the benefactor. Sometime I'm too good for my own good. Thus my present labor at the keyboard.

Many people get involved in the martial arts for self protection. Some take a few self defense courses while some go for the total package. In its raw form the martial arts are about fighting. Take the combative applications from the martial arts and you have either a nice exercise program or an interesting hobby. While conditioning and training will give one the physicality and coordination that makes them more capable in a physical confrontation neither of the two translates into an effective self defense program. If you want to be able to fight you have to train to fight. You don't learn how to fight by doing kata or participating in the occasional karate tournament. In the end you fight the way you train.

This isn't so much a lecture about self defense. Self defense is a worst case scenario. I tell my students that if they find themselves in a self defense situation their training has failed them or they have failed their training. For all intent and purposes self defense should be a back to the wall situation. It should be your absolute last resort.

Considering my background, the places I grew up in and my military experience I'm not shy about fighting. I don't particularly want to fight but if the necessity arises I'm more than willing and able to do so. Where I grew up violence was a fact of life. You didn't fight to prove some point or another. You fought to survive. Breaking my own rule on profanity I could 'fight my ass off'. My background gave me a no-nonsense approach to all things combative.

Larry, the President of my organization, the BLMAA and my nemesis at the moment asked me to expound on the difference between self defense and personal security. It would seem that he'll be teaching and expounding on the subject at the university he retired from and he wants me to do most of the work for him. After much harassment and badgering I finally agreed. The BLMAA and its associate fighting arts share a philosophy on personal protection. I'd like to share some of that.

- A) Avoidance: Stay away from those places that may pose a threat.
- B) Awareness: Put away the headphones, the blue tooth and the cell phones. Be aware of your surroundings.
- C) Observation: Keep your eyes and ears open. Recognize a possible threat before it becomes a threat.
- D) Balance: Appearing balanced communicates a state of awareness. Predators look for a soft target. They prefer an easy or compliant victim.
- E) Confidence: Like balance confidence communicates a state of readiness and capability.
- F) Defuse: Okay, all of the above failed. You find yourself face to face with an enraged adversary. Reason with him if you can. Try to calm him down.
- G) Deescalate: Take the blame if necessary. Try to walk away. Address the problem however you can to avoid a physical altercation.
- H) Flee: If you can. Get the hell out of dodge. It isn't cowardly to flee a violent confrontation.
- I) Defend: This is a one shot deal. You have to deal with the preemptive strike. Stop his initial attack and then...

J) Attack: Fights aren't won with a good defense. In a heads up confrontation 'the best defense is a good offense'.

K) Fight like your life depends on it. Chances are it does.

Since we got all of that out of the way let's look at the escalating levels of combat.

1. Verbal skill. Try to talk your way out of it before you have to hurt him.
2. Hurt before you injure
3. Injure before you disable
4. Disable before you Maim
5. Maim before you kill
6. Kill if you must
7. Survive at all costs

There it is in a nutshell. Personal protection involves a number of things. You must be aware. Look around you before leaving the house or any building. Constantly assess your surroundings and recognize any possible problem. Have your keys in your hand when you leave the car or leave the house to go to your car. Look in the back seat before you get in your car. I can go on with any number of precautions but I'm sure you get the point. If you are security minded chances are you'll be more secure.

Lastly you have to train yourself for that worst possibility. You have to train realistically. Choose your training to suit your needs. A weekend karate class at your local YMCA may not do it. Arm yourself with the weapons that will serve your needs. And remember, in the end, your safety is your responsibility.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel.

# KATA AND OLD SCHOOL KARATE

**Donald Miskel**

Many of the past masters knew and perfected one, two or a handful of kata. Now many practitioners know (or half know) many kata. Actually each kata or set of katas is an entire fighting system. It is possible to perfect only one or two kata in a lifetime. Instead of a hundred kata done a hundred times one kata done ten thousand times. Old school karate taught in the original manner.

In times past kata was karate. All of the techniques and secrets of a system were catalogued and hidden in its forms. Because systems were sometime combined into an eclectic method that became new expanded systems many kata were brought into the resulting system. As an example Shotokan Karate is a combined synthesis of Naha-Te and Shuri-Te. Thusly each brought its unique forms or kata into the final product. Tai Chi teaches only one long (or short) form. Wing chaun teaches only three. Some other systems have twenty, thirty or even more kata. The masters of the systems knew them all because he had to be able to pass them on to his students. Unless one was groomed for the headship of the system he didn't really know all of the forms. He learned the form or forms that he chose to perfect or that were deemed applicable to his own needs. Often this was determined by his teacher taking into consideration his physical attributes, his innate abilities, his temperament and his individual needs.

It takes a lifetime to perfect a kata. That is if one can ever be said to really perfect a kata. It's impossible to perfect twenty or thirty katas in a single lifetime. Many times we want to progress to the more intricate and ascetically pleasing forms but they aren't necessarily the most effective mode of combat for the practitioner. Complexity doesn't necessarily translate into practical application. Often more is less. Bigger isn't always better.

Master Gichen Funakoshi was once asked what was the kata for the beginner. Without hesitation he identified Taikyoka as the form for the beginner. He was then asked what was the kata for the master. After a moment's thought he stated that taikyoka was the form for the master. Often in simplicity lies mastery.

I don't teach many kata. I know a number of kata but I really only practice about three of them. I'll teach the several most basic katas to a student and then give him one to work on throughout his Kempo/Karate career. I teach many waza and fighting forms but in perfecting his kata I feel that a student perfects his own individual fighting style. What I teach these days is more of a fighting system than a martial art. That's because I teach many individuals in high risk professions with specific needs. In spite of that I still teach a hand full of students the martial arts as they have been passed on to me. The synthesis of the several arts I have studied makes up the art that I teach but it incorporates only a handful of katas.

I am often asked are katas important. I ask in turn, what do you want to study? If you want to be a martial artist you will have to learn and practice kata. If you just need a self defense or combat system you can probably do without them but understand, what you're studying isn't a martial art. If you want to be a martial artist then katas are a must. To a large extent, the kata is the art.

God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God.

Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel, PhD, ThD, Mdiv. (Judan Shodai Soke, BLMAA. Head of Family, IFAA BDFS)

# KARATE AND THE GRANDMASTER

**Donald Miskel**

On occasion I put myself in the line of fire with the stances I take and the articles I write to explain those stances. I'm probably getting ready to do the same thing again. Hopefully no-one will put a hit on me behind this and I won't die mysteriously due to some kyoshu jitsu or dim mak attack. No Hoppa Grass, that's dim mak attack not 'Big Mack' attack.

When I started studying the martial arts there were no Saturday morning kung fu flicks on TV and no kung fu matinees to shape my ideas of the martial arts. In 1957 Chicago there was just judo and jiu jitsu available, both of which were taught quietly in some small dojo or another. No big deal, no politics, no fanfare. No martial art mystique to create over the top sensei, masters and grandmasters. How I long for those simple times.

Karate became my art of choice. I studied several systems of karate, mempo/kenpo, aikijitsu/aikido and later kung fu wherever I could with whomever I could. I was beholden to no-one. For years I taught quietly in Chicago and Tucson. I always had a school or two and taught in colleges, YMCAs, Park District field houses, church gymnasiums and such like. I avoided organizations and shied away from the limelight. I avoided martial art politics like the plague. I even avoided advanced rank. I stayed a nidan and sandan for long periods of time. I never was a forth dan in karate. I was instead given a fifth or godan for time in grade. I didn't like it but I went along with it. Over the years I climbed the ranks and at the present time I'm considered a master or grandmaster by my peers.

Let me get into the meat of this message. I would like to talk about rank and the American martial arts. In the beginning of my martial art training I studied several classical systems and belonged to the related organizations. These were Eastern arts and followed the Eastern philosophies concerning rank and fealty. We went about everything according to the oriental methodologies. We followed the ranking systems according to their requirements because we were basically oriental systems. We even used Japanese terminology. However that was then; this is now. The martial arts we teach and train in have changed as well as those of us who teach and train in them. The directions of those arts have been shaped by our own

individual needs and challenge here in America. Taking those things in consideration change was inevitable. The arts that we teach have become uniquely American. The foundation of those arts may have been Asian but the arts have changed to suit our needs, body types and our temperaments. Consequently our loyalties have changed as have our ranking systems. We have become American masters teaching American arts.

Like many other American masters I hold high rank in several Asian arts. Like some other American teachers I had my own vision and using my extensive training and experience in the various arts I've trained in I created my own system or more properly my own martial concepts. I am ranked in those systems and the organizations that support them. My rank in the Asian arts would probably be recognized by my oriental counterparts but my American arts and my recognition of grandmaster rank by my American peers probably wouldn't. Nor should they.

Rank is extremely relative. What's accepted in some systems or by some organizations may be frowned on by another. I really don't put a whole lot of store in rank. They can mean too many different things. I look more to the knowledge and ability of the individual. I do get a bit concerned about those 10TH degree grandmasters with less than forty five or fifty years in the martial arts but occasionally there is the rare exception to the rule. There are the rare student prodigies that graduate from college at sixteen. Occasionally you get one of those in the martial arts. I can name three off of the top of my head. No name dropping here but the three I'm thinking of are recognized as masters and grandmasters by the martial art community. One in particular received the equivalent of a shodan, 1ST degree, from his instructor and went on to create one of the most innovative systems in existence today.

Who's to determine what is legitimate rank or a legitimate system? Of course I have my own opinion on this subject. If I didn't I wouldn't be writing this article. Personally I don't concern myself with the acceptance or rejection of the system that I teach. My students believe in it and it works for them. That's all of the acceptance I really require. I've taught and occasionally still teach the classical martial arts but I teach my own personal system to only a handful of people. I had the rank of godan or above in several classical systems long before I tried my hand at creating a different concept of those arts. I had over forty years of martial art experience when I started on that journey and then I didn't do it along. It involved the combined efforts of several other sensei and masters.

A number of individuals concern themselves with the advanced rank claimed by some of the proponents of the westernized arts. Let me clear something up. At fifth dan you have the knowledge and ability in and of your particular art. A godan will require about twenty five

years of dedication and training. Saying that a person started training at twenty. At forty five his physical abilities are beginning to wane and it doesn't get better with the passing years. In the end a master is a master because of what he knows not what he can do. What you can do diminishes with age. What you know doesn't.

I am the co-creator and senior grandmaster of the Black Lotus Martial Art Association and its several systems as well as the head of family of the IFAA Black Dragon Fighting Society. This will mark my fifty seventh year involvement in the martial arts. I have trained with some of the best as well as with some of the most controversial. I hold the rank of 10TH dan in two arts and advanced ranking in several others. Still I am nothing more than a godan, fifth degree. Actually none of us are. Rank beyond that is honorary and based on other than physical prowess. If we think otherwise we fool ourselves.

Recently I've been questioned concerning the rank and advancement of several BDFS members. I don't judge the rank of other masters. In the end their claims will speak for themselves. The IFAA BDFS doesn't confer rank. We don't even cross rank. We do accept members who head or represent various organizations or systems and the rank the said entities conferred on them. They remain autonomous and their claims are their own. We don't back up those claims. Their rank and their supposed exploits are their own. By inclusion in our organization we only acknowledge the rank conferred on them by their said organization. We back up no claims of past exploits unless we have personal knowledge of them. Other than that their claims are their own. We don't try to qualify those claims.

Let me state also, I will not base my friendship to anyone, martial artist or otherwise, on the opinions of others. My friends don't have to be your friend and those relationships don't require your approval. I don't have to, nor will I, explain the reason for or nature of those friendships or associations. That's between the person and myself. I am a minister and pastor as well as a martial artist. Oft times the decisions I make are harbored more in the latter than the former. I don't expect everyone to understand or agree with them. In such instances we can agree to disagree. Otherwise you are welcome to your opinions as long as you keep them to yourself.

With all of that being said I will admonish the up and coming masters and those claiming such rank to exercise honesty and integrity. It isn't my place or anyone else's to police you. You can do that without me. Be honest with yourself and others. Your credibility depends on it.



God bless you, my brethren. Train hard and go with God. Rev. Dr. Donald Miskel, PhD, ThD, MDiv, Judan Shodai Soke, BLMAA, Patriarch and Head of Family, IFAA BDFS

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