

### Creative and Recreative 3

*FROM Creative and Recreative, Part 1: “Traditional martial artists inherit their traditions mostly from Asian countries, their techniques mostly from previously developed arts, and their training mostly from modern founders of their styles,” ...but they assume their standards of excellence from their current culture.*

So here we are, somewhat appreciative of our inheritance and somewhat ready to add to it, as good innovative traditionalists are wont to do. Now, how do we determine what to add, what to adjust, what constitutes a reasonable adaptation for the contemporary world, and what constitutes a wholesale bleach job on what used to be a colorful canvas? Obviously we judge our actions according to what we wish to gain or keep, that is, according to what we value. And where do we get our values? I'd love to say that, as educated people in a free society, we objectively observe the interactions around us, mentally apply them to larger concepts, and from them draw our values. In reality, few of us even try to be objective. Our resulting subjective values are usually reflections of the larger culture around us, whether we like it or not.

That means that the values assumed by the traditional *budo* in eighteenth century Okinawa or even twentieth century Japan may not be the values we take as foundational in the twenty-first century West. When a person creates a martial way, a curriculum, a class, or even a way to study what a tradition offers, he/she does so from an unconsciously philosophical position—a position of presumed values.

Just after Bruce Lee's death, circa 1974, it was *de rigueur* for every martial artist with a little training and a lot of gumption to found his own art in order not to be caught in “the classical mess”. I remember a student from Wellesley College applying for admission to BUSHIDO-KAI. I asked what he had studied before. “I've created my own system,” he proudly said. Repressing a guffaw, I wanted to ask why a founder and head honcho wanted to study with li'l ol' me. Instead, I explained that, when on his own, he could do whatever he wanted, but when he was on this mat, he should stick to what we are teaching, otherwise, I gently added, I wouldn't be able to correct him. I realized that his prime value was Personal Independence while mine was Proper Instruction. It does not take a P.I. to discover that you can achieve the former only after you have experienced the latter. Personal Independence means nothing unless it is independent from something.

In my last two submissions, I have suggested that students consider what it had taken to found an art. I would like to suggest that again, but toward another end. What were the likely self-defense scenarios of Morihei Ueshiba (Aikido) or Kenwa Mabuni (Shito-ryu)? What were their loftier goals? And, how did one goal contribute to the other? Today, we seem to think that being a bad dude on the street is about as lofty a goal as any proto-bad-dude can dream about in his bad-dude bed at night. Martial arts, as far as we are concerned, should not only be mixed all the time, but should be mixed in a way to help us mix it up in the octagon because, damn it, we just can't find enough street fights in Bel-Air. Having tossed any spiritual values out the car door on

our last date, along with a stubborn partner, we aspire to be something of a mixed breed—with the killing power of a Rambo and the attitude of Bart Simpson on Qualudes. Cowabunga, man! Get outta my way!

If you don't think the values I have just described fit you, you may wish to consider the values of Miyagi, Funakoshi, Kano, Ueshiba, Mabuni, or even the publicly forgotten part of Bruce Lee that studied Krishnamurti and spoke in terms philosophical. But that would be re-creating a martial method that embraces older values, which means we'd have to think a little bit more independently, even objectively, in order to return to tradition.