

The Disappointment of Non-reality

Occasionally martial artists get frustrated or disappointed with their studies. I used to criticize contract-schools who keep their disappointed students attending by the pressure of a legal contract. The students stayed not because they liked the school but because they did not want to waste their tuition money. From the school's point of view, they were adding some incentive and discipline to people who would rather be martial arts butterflies than develop a sting. In retrospect, however, I see that the contract-schools were simply recognizing dominant (at least for this culture in this age) human psychology.

Another way that business-oriented school kept people on the mat is by giving them quick promotions. Once you have a few ranks, you are convinced you have momentum and that the coveted black belt (which you think means hotshot master of the universe) is only months away. Might as well tough out that which you dislike long enough to get the rank.

Recently, I noticed what I expect is another trend. While not consciously used by grappling and MMA schools, it nevertheless serves to keep students away from more traditional martial arts. It is the constant presumption of the philosophy that what MMA schools do is **real** because it involves a lot of hands-on, sweat and grind training, where what traditional schools do is **unreal** because so little contact is made.

Let's break this down (no wrestling pun implied). It is a valid criticism, I think, that many traditional schools do not test their *waza* in even controlled circumstances let alone semi-realistic circumstances. Some martial arts practitioners, however, do martial exercises for the sake of perspiration and socialization, not primarily to develop fighting skills, so the critiques of the tough-tusch guys who see martial training as training to fight and nothing else are misplaced if not irrelevant in that exercise/social context. I understand where the down-and-dirty advocates are coming from, however, every time I see a black belt with make-up, earrings, and long finger nails (and that's just the men--the women are worse!) Seriously, however, everyone will recognize training in which pressed uniforms never get wrinkled, nor even a little stinky, as training that is hardly martial and hardly serious about the art. It is a logical assumption then that the more one's gi stinks, the more one breaks more bones than nails, the more one's training is serious.

So if a former MMA student, tired of getting chewed up and spat out decides to visit a traditional school, he will inevitably be disappointed at its "non-reality", at least from his conditioned point of view, because the traditional school does exercise but not sparring, or sparring but not grappling, or grappling but not ground-and-pound. Having created their own idea of reality, no other art seems to satisfy despite the fact the martial practice they are fleeing is unsatisfactory to them perhaps for the very reasons that seem to make it "real".

This is tantamount to saying I am selling my Hummer because it guzzles gas and is far too unwieldy for me to drive, but those hybrids—feh!—they are so fuel efficient and easy to maneuver that they can't possibly be safe.