

Editing and Art

“Redacting”- editing for publication

It's one thing to juggle items around for yourself, quite another to put items together for an audience. When you are singing in the shower, you not only can ignore the breaking voice, but you also can remember the lyrics after the fact as if you had never forgotten them (even though you forgot them through four renditions already). Similarly, when one creates a work of visual art, the preliminary versions seldom see the light of day. While it is true that Leonardo's sketches and Michelangelo's cartoons (no, not Andy Capp, but the sketches used to outline mural paintings) were more artistic than the published works of many of today's vaunted artists, they fell far short of what the Renaissance masters themselves wanted to produce for posterity.

In today's world of ready-fire-aim, that which is halfway between business and art happens with only half its artistry intact. The rest is considered a beta version that will be perfected in time. Recently, I bought a new editing system, a refurbished iMac with the new Final Cut Pro X to go with the hotshot 10.7.2 Lion OS, “The most advanced operating system on earth.” Now, even though I am a Mac-ophile, it was frustrating that none of my old apps worked on Lion. I had heard that professional editors disliked FCP X, but having done some research, decided that the app's benefits outweighed its deficits. Now, in this day and age, we are all used to buying computer doo-dah that has to be learned, adjusted, customized, accessorized, etc., so I expected as much. On balance I like the new programs, but I did not expect to experience the same kind of workarounds on my new Mac as I had experienced on my old Macs. “Why?” I asked myself. The only answer I could come up with is that neither Lion nor FCP X was yet a masterpiece. Rather, they were works of art in progress. Not sketches or cartoons exactly, but not the Mona Lisa or the Sistine Chapel, either.

Now, I could rail and moan about the lack of a high standard in today's culture, but in this case, I intend to make a less obvious point. Consider, if you will, neither canvas nor mural art, but martial arts. Most martial arts are considered complete, handed down in a defined form redacted for public consumption. And yet they are not the classic, iconic masterpieces that Leo and Mike left us four hundred years ago. On the contrary, only a few ancient martial arts have been granted the status of classics and those are considered national treasures to be maintained unchanged no matter how archaic. Most of us practice traditionalistic arts that change with use, much like apps change with consumer feedback. Final Cut Pro X is still Final Cut Pro, but it is halfway between FCP 7 and the less professional iMovie. The Lion OS is still Mac system X, but is souped-up to be better. In being better, it is also worse. At least it is until it manages to support older apps or offer free new ones with every purchase.

If your traditional martial art, meant for self-defense, has become a sport meant for tournament, is it still your art? Has it simply evolved, simply adapted to its consumers, or has it become something else? When we are proud of our martial art, what are we proud of? What it was, what it is now, or what it has the potential to become? If you have the temerity to create an art or the good fortune to inherit one, how should you maintain it?

Should you innovate as your knowledge grows or bow to tradition as if you were a classicist? Should you care what students want or what the founder wanted? If the former, you may end up with an art that is neither what you inherited, nor what you intended. If the latter, you may end up with no students to carry it on.

We all unconsciously edit the art we do. The danger occurs when persons in authority redact their arts for public consumption while the public is more fickle than a computer operating system or this week's version of a computer app.