

## *The Hovering Threat*

When I put up BUSHIDO-KAI's sample videos on YouTube, I make sure to disable the comments option. I am not interested in some Generation Q (I made that up: Q stands for QuickFix) martial sportster telling me what body part I represent and how I am a self-delusional threat to real martial arts knowledge everywhere. People get away with all sorts of rude behavior when they are anonymous, 927 miles away, and have nothing to do with their afternoons but prowl video sites. I put our video clips up for those people who might enjoy them in hopes that they will peruse our website and eventually become satisfied customers. Despite my cautionary actions, every few months someone takes the time to go out of his way to send a comment to me about a clip he viewed. Here's one about the *Invisible Aiki* clips:

*Bervlit has posted a comment to your profile:*

I think these guys suffer from mental disease... I wish i live near u so ur teacher can demonstrate and my "poor " boxing skill how his invisble technique would defeat me. I am also a traditionnal as u can see, cause in the past martial artists were challenged, i wish i could come and ask u a good "lesson" to me.

Besides the obvious challenges with grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, consider the implicit (if barely implicit) threat. This type of macho threat might stem from some sort of psychological problem, but more likely, is typical of a person developing in a culture in which threats, bullying, and low-level secular terrorism has become common.

When I receive a comment like this, my mind experiences a quick succession of thoughts, starting with the educator in me wanting to correct his misperception of what aiki is intended for. Then I begin to release the more visceral response of wanting to buy him a ticket to this area so we could proceed with whatever kind of lesson he thinks appropriate: boxing, wrestling, MMA, or grammar. Next, I catch myself knowing full well that a 22-year old, 220-pounder might easily outlast a 64-year old 187-pounder, and realize that, although my immature macho pride is still in tact, I have too much tact to take that tack against his verbal attack. These things get tacky, don't they? Finally, I sit back and analyze the real criticism, hoping I will learn something from it. Unfortunately, simplistic attacks come from a simplistic perception of reality. My anonymous critic is saying that Takeshin's "invisible aiki" skills won't work in the ring even against an untalented boxer. What a surprise! Who'da thunk? This is the old argument of critics taking the object of the criticism out of context in order (and this is the second take-away from the email) to boost their own egos by dumping on someone else's.

People ask me, "Why bother to get upset with these emails? They are probably just punk kids who don't know any better." Granted, or they are punk young adults who don't know any better. But soon they will be older (if not mature) adults who don't know any better. And therein lies the crux of my concern. I'm not concerned that those who have embraced an idea of "real world fighting" might knock down the dojo door in

search of a “lesson,” rather my concern is that the hovering threat of verbal bullying has become the norm of the culture.

Why? My social psychology skills being minimal, I can only take a small jab (certainly one that would not phase the boxing abilities of Mr. Bervlit) at it: the culture has become cruder because cruder tends to get more attention and attention has proven, in the past half-century or so, to produce some level of success (obviously fame and often money). Cruder is the over-weighted counterbalance to pruder. In the 1950s, the culture was very withdrawn, happy to retreat from The Great Depression, WWII, and the Korean Conflict and settle into picket fence-bound homes, raising 2.3 church-going kids, working 9 to 5 in the marketplace (if a man) or at home (if a woman). The Boomer children of the Greatest Generation found picket fences, churches, 9-to-5 jobs, and gender roles rather boring, so they acted out in an attempt to open society up. They succeeded.

I have a standard lecture to insert here about the goods and the bads my Boomer generation produced, but rather than inflict that upon you, let me say summarily that the pendulum has swung from constraint, dignity, and social morés to a lack of all three. Since I was part of the Boomer revolution and no prude, I supported my generation’s cultural changes, but I also saw within them seeds of a seedier culture. We are living in that culture now. The hottest music on the planet is gangster rap; the hottest sport is a tough-talking and brutal MMA; the hottest fad is body art (i.e. tattoos); the hottest street wear (at least among guys) is ghetto droop; the hottest economic trend is welfare; and the hottest pastime is anonymous commentary on free internet sites.

No one of these things is bad or good by itself. Consistent to my argument that criticisms should be presented in context, I ask you to look at the context. Taken all together, the culture seems to be cannibalizing itself. And that is a concern to me both because I live in the culture and because it negatively affects the traditional martial arts that I see as a positive channel for what might otherwise be negative cultural tendencies.

*More on the position of traditional martial arts in the culture next time.*