

Violence Without Blood

The American, and lately the Western, addiction to sex and violence is well known. Really, it is not that remarkable when you consider that sex and violence is nothing more than an exaggeration of the normal human desire for romance and adventure.

In movies prior to the 1960s, sex could only be suggested so romance had to be emphasized in its stead. As openly sexual material began to fill the screens, romance seems to have faded away. Similarly, as more and more violent images and were screened, we began to lose the implications of danger that older adventure films offered. In an attempt to outdo the last blockbuster, Rambo Stallone and Commando Schwarzenegger killed every bad guy in sight (with either a burst of blood or a stunt fall from a hidden mini-trampoline). When movie producers had to up the ante to keep moviegoers buying tickets (without losing those viewers revolted by human slaughter), the movies offered super-heroes, and violence against machines as in *Star Wars* and *The Matrix*. When you kill machines, you might just qualify for a kiddie as well as an adult audience because you are showing violence against robotry rather than humanity. The destruction of property is always preferable to the destruction of life.

In the martial arts, we participate in another sort of violence that we find adventurous because it is semi-dangerous yet seldom dangerous enough to cause more than a little blood or a minor injury. In fact, the more unsafe a practitioner behaves, the better the chance he will be eliminated from a competition or asked to leave a school.

In the traditional martial arts, it is considered inappropriate to resist or counter a technique being demonstrated. Still there seems to be a gut reaction among many students, perhaps too eager for the danger and/or too untrusting of the art, to make the practitioner prove his technique. To prove a technique however, implies a real violence.

Sincere martial artists are therefore caught between a rock and a soft place. Egon McCentric resists your wristlock not because you did not off balance him, but because you were kind enough not to slam the lock on. "I cudda punched you out...like this..." says he, his knuckles worshipping at your temple, completely ignoring your kindness or your left foot about to stomp his big toe. Now, if you should repeat the technique with off-balancing, a powerful snap and a toe-stomp, Egon will complain that you have no self-control, and you will be the one Sensei asks to leave. Conversely, if you do not test the technique against resistance so that you become absolutely confident it would work in 95% of the situations, you stand the chance of becoming one of those effete martial artists who dance their way to black belt with the cooperation of polite and non-violent partners.

Traditional martial arts are just theoretical enough to fall into nambi-pambi-ism and just real enough to do permanently damage to someone who thinks those arts are better suited for theatrical hopscotch contests. We are lucky enough to have arts that can be tempered to our training and application needs. If Sifu Simon wants a t'ai ch'i school in which martial exercise is more important than self-defense, he can tone down the adventure

and need not test his techniques. On the other hand, if Sensei Sarah insists on functional self-defense, her Small Circle Ju-jutsu had better throw big, resisting, hard-bottomed blokes who do not mind simulating situational self-defense in a more than semi-realistic way.

If Western martial artists are addicted to sex and violence, or the less blatant romance and adventure, they must decide which of the two really benefits them more. Sure, you can have sex within romance, but to what extent can you have violence within adventure before it gets dangerous, counterproductive, or even psychologically unhealthy?