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Empty Hand Paradigm

A philosophical and theoretical framework of a scientific school or discipline within which theories, laws, and generalizations and the experiments performed in support of them are formulated.



Taken down during a stickfighting “Duel” this photo shows that the context of any scenario can change quickly. In this case, the man on top has lost his stick and is resorting to empty hand strikes against his opponent.

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Each issue features practitioners of martial arts and other internal arts, other features include historical, theoretical and technical articles; reflections, Filipino martial arts, healing arts, the culture of the Philippines and other related subjects.

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The FMA Informative is very grateful to have Mr. Daniel Murray bring forth his views on Empty Hand Paradigm. Mr. Murray has trained in the Filipino martial arts under Timothy Kashino and has also been blessed with the opportunity to train extensively under Senior Grandmaster Vicente Sanchez in the Philippines.

Complimentary to his love of the Filipino martial arts, he has a love of grappling styles and holds a Brown Belt in Judo and a Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

The FMA Informative reader may remember Daniel from his 2015 FMA Informative issue #201 - Cadenilla Eskrima Group written about the very basic, concepts and principles of Lightning Scientific Arnis - originally called "Tersia Serrada Cadenilla y Espada y Daga" - from Senior Grandmaster Vicente Sanchez.



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Or from 2016 his very informative and realistic look at "Theory and Practice of Contact Sparring in the Filipino martial arts" FMA Informative - Issue 220. In the issue Mr. Murray presents a number of key theories designed to establish a conceptual framework for the development of an effective sparring program that while designed specifically for the Filipino martial arts can be applied to virtually any style.

Now Daniel brings another aspect with this issue which the material is all intended to establish a context, a framework through which we will view the use of empty hand techniques and tactics. Daniel firmly believe that this framework is what is most often missing from programs that attempt to teach realistic self-defense within the martial arts. There is nothing wrong with remaining true to traditional training methodologies and techniques

However, at some point, the responsible instructor, if they are claiming to teach self-defense, are they gearing the students training toward that scenario in a realistic way.



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The Empty Hand Paradigm

This is the first in what I hope will be a series of articles that will inform the reader of how I utilize context to create a conceptual framework for the teaching of empty handed self-defense. While some of this material would overlap with weapons training, those correlations will be explored in a further article. Also, it is important to establish these specific views prior to the demonstration or teaching of specific techniques and tactics. In the end, nearly everything and every technique is about context.

Given the amount of time martial artists spend training for the unarmed combat situation, it is frightening how little time is spent on considering the circumstances surrounding those situations themselves. As with most issues in the martial arts, specific styles have a tendency to create a scenario that their skill set is best suited for, and then choose to believe that all scenarios will happen in that manner. This not only cheats them out of a variety of training opportunities, it is downright dangerous for the student.

This is true of all martial arts and is certainly not limited to the Filipino martial arts. As such, please note that this article is less Filipino martial arts centric than many that I write, but I think it is a universal issue that must be addressed. Instead of imagining combat as we wish it would be, let's try to look at it as it really is.

In Rory Miller's book "Meditations on Violence", the author does a very good job of describing the fact that violence in and of itself is a very large concept that is difficult to easily define for every situation. Along those lines, I want to be clear that for the purposes of this article we are only discussing a one on one confrontation between two adults. Further, I am going to be talking about three distinct scenarios which we will define and then show how those scenarios both overlap and how training for each can better prepare you for the other. Those three scenarios are "*The Duel*", "*The Fight*", and "*The Assault*".

The Duel

Whether we chose to admit it or not, this is the paradigm that most martial arts spend a majority of their time preparing for. What defines a duel in the context of unarmed combat? For our purposes we shall define it as:

Duel: *"A contest between two individuals who have both agreed to engage in combat under the guidance of a set of rules with a clear structure to determine a winner. The duel will take place at a designated time and location and civil and criminal charges will not be pursued for any injuries incurred by the participants."*

So what are we describing when we consider the Duel? It encompasses everything from a light sparring session, to a point tournament, to a Judo or wrestling match, all the way up to a mixed martial art contest. Every one of these situations involves participants who have a clear structure of the conditions they must compete in, what tactics they are allowed to use, what the possible outcomes are, and the maximum time limits the encounter can last.

We can note, that on the basis of these criteria alone, there seems to be little similarity between the Duel and, let's say, a street fight (which will be defined in our next section). The Duel is little more than an athletic contest between people who, for the most part, will be utilizing the same skill set and tactics to gain victory. This is largely the type of training most martial artists engage in. A Judoka does not spend hour after hour in the dojo learning how to slip a boxer's jab in order to execute a perfect throw, nor does a Wing Chun stylist spend time learning to defend the single leg takedown of a skilled wrestler. Instead, most



While "The Duel" does not address many issues of the "Fight" or "Assault", the benefits of competition against a fully resisting opponent pays dividends in many other areas.

stylists spend an inordinate amount of time learning to defend themselves from someone attacking them with the exact same tactics they would use themselves.

This is one of the key drawbacks of the Duel mentality when we apply it to practical self-defense. It creates in the practitioners a set expectation of what combat will look like, an expectation where we impose our own ideas into the tactics our attacker will use. This delusion leaves many practitioners unable to think outside the box and adapt to something unexpected. A fine example of this was the early Ultimate Fighting Championships when stand up fighters who'd never considered the ground game were being defeated left and right by wrestlers and BJJ stylists.

This brings us to a second danger of the Duel mentality and that is how the Duel deals with "Range". More often than not, the arts best suited for a Duel have a particular range of combat they are best suited for. Boxers fight in punching and clinch range, Tae Kwon Do stylists are known for their skill at kicking range, and BJJ practitioners fight on the ground. They are able to specialize in these ranges because the rules of their contest are designed to keep the battle specifically in those ranges. Put a TKD or BJJ stylist in a closet where there is no room to kick or get a takedown and you will quickly see them revert to the most basic concepts of defense that are totally outside the guidelines of their art. This problem does not affect all Dueling arts to the same degree as both MMA and Muay Thai attempt to address a variety of ranges within the context of their competition.

Finally, the tactics that one might use in a dueling context could be completely inappropriate for a situation you are dealing with, or might simply not be able to be applied in the same manner. Let's take the concept of a boxer's jab. In the ring, this is one of the boxer's most effective and important tools that can be used to create distance, inflict damage, and set up combinations. However outside the Duel, your jab might strike the attacker in the skull and result in the breaking of your knuckles. Or you might immediately end up in a wrestling type encounter and not be able to use the jab. The same can be said for a double leg takedown. Perhaps your altercation is taking place in a crowded bar where there simply isn't room to execute the maneuver or when you try to do so on the street; you slam your knee into the pavement and injure yourself.

All of this is not to say that the Dueling paradigm does not have many benefits. Actually, there are a number of positive benefits that you can honestly only learn in the context of a competition. Matt Thornton of the Straight Blast Gym speaks often of the concept of "*Aliveness*" in your training. This means that once a technique or tactic has been learned by the practitioners, it comes to be trained in a way that develops an understanding of timing, distance, power, and how to utilize that technique against a fully resisting uncooperative opponent.

This is one thing that is often missing in the non-sport specific martial arts and its absence becomes obvious when practitioners of these styles have to deal with practitioners who train in a more "alive" manner. Realistic sparring (which is essentially Dueling) should include some degree of hard contact and movement where the goal is not so much to gain points but rather to stop your opponent. This hard contact teaches you both to strike with real power and timing but it also serves a callusing for your own body. Once you have had your bell rung a few times, you won't be afraid of it anymore and can learn to deal with it in a more effective manner.

By this same token, to some degree your training should include the "unmatched" Duel. That means you are competing against someone who is fighting outside your preferred tactics. If you have good boxing skills, you should spar someone who is going to try to take you down or is going to work leg kicks against you. This will keep you from being stuck in a mindset of only using your favorite skill.

You can also make your Duel training more realistic by adding variables to the environment such as forcing yourself to fight with your back to the wall or in a smaller area, or if you favor ground fighting, force yourself to work for takedowns that are more "throwing" oriented as opposed to level change oriented.

If you add these concepts to your practice and also keep your mind open to the fact that the Duel is not the only vision of combat, you are creating an effective training methodology that will span across all three of our paradigms.

The Fight

When most people think of the situations where they are most likely to use “self-defense”, what they are really thinking of is the scenario of “The Fight”. The Fight, defined, is:

Fight: “A violent encounter between two willing individuals that is most often predicated by a verbal altercation and some degree of posturing. No rules or tactics are established, nor is there a clear criterion for what will end the encounter. There is no telling if both, one of, or neither of the participants has any training. Further, both participants may face civil or criminal charges for their role in the encounter”.

When many people say they want to learn how to defend themselves, they are usually saying they want to learn how to handle “The Fight”. Throughout our training, we often fail to realize that while we think we are training for “Fighting”, we are in actuality training for “The Duel”. On the surface, it is easy to believe that the two are closely related but they are more like second cousins.



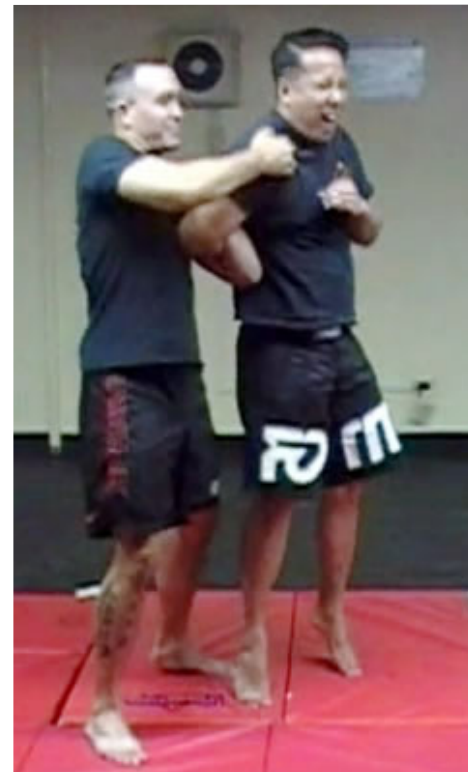
Scenario based training, to include wearing street clothes and training on hard floors, can add essential skills to your tool box for dealing with both the “Fight” and “Assault”.

Our first difference is in the fact that unlike the duel, which takes places at a set time and place that allows for some degree of preparation, the Fight takes places more on the spur of the moment and can happen anywhere at all. Locations could include a bar, in the home, on the street, or anywhere else you can imagine. This element of surprise is important for two reasons. One, you do not know what type of opponent you are dealing with. He could be a random dude of the street who is more bark than bite, or he could be a five time Dutch Kickboxing Champion. Your only indicators of his ability will be gleaned in the build up to the fight, a period of time that Rory Miller refers to as “The Monkey Dance”, a time frame where both participants tend to posture and talk in order to both psych out their opponent and psych up themselves.

The second reason is the adrenaline rush that comes from conflict. In a Duel, you have forehand knowledge of what is about to occur and you have had the opportunity to mentally prepare for it. While you are bound to be nervous, you have already considered the possible outcomes for the

situation. In the Fight, you are forced to deal with a great deal of stimuli in a short amount of time. The “Fight or Flight” instinct is going to be in full effect and you are going to be faced with all the physiological changes that come with adrenal stress, to include auditory exclusion, tunnel vision, and tremors. More than likely these factors are going to keep you from performing anything but gross motor functions, especially if you have never participated in good hard sparring and wrestling to prepare yourself for them.

Another difference from the “Duel” is that in the “Fight” there are no set rules or tactics. You do not have foreknowledge of what types of attacks you will have to defend against and common “illegal” maneuvers such as groin strikes, head butting, and eye gouges might be used (either by yourself or your attacker). Additionally, where as many “Duels” begin with the participants separated in such a way that they have the opportu-



Pain Compliance tactics that are unlikely to work within a “Duel” context, may in fact become applicable during a “Fight” or “Assault” scenario, with modification.

nity to use movement and tactics to control distance to their advantage, many fights begin with the participants no further than arm’s length apart and not in a prearranged fighting stance. This set up precludes many of the techniques utilized in the “Duel”, such as kicking and effective boxing. When grapplers make the unsupported claim “90% of fights end up on the ground”, they do not add the qualifier that it happens because many people do not know how to fight at this close of a range. Lacking this knowledge, then end up in a directionless clinch and simply fall to the ground.

Knowing that we will not be able to dictate our range in a “Fight” the same way we will in a Duel, this calls for us to alter both our tactics and techniques accordingly. This is why some things that do not work very well in the context of the “Duel” can still be effective in the context of the “Fight”. Take the Jeet Kune Do “Straight Blast” for example. Essentially a version of Wing Chun vertical fist chain-punching, the “Straight Blast” can be a difficult tactic to employ in an unmatched Duel. When the opponent has the foreknowledge of your skill set, the ability to control range, and knowledge of takedowns, it is not that hard for them to counter the Straight Blast immediately with a double leg takedown level change. This has led to many MMA enthusiasts to claim that the Straight Blast is useless.

If we place the tactic in the context of the Fight however, things change. Since you are already at close range with your opponent, you have a very good chance of landing the first strike if you engage preemptively. After this first contact you do not let up and fire punch after punch until the opponent is backing up, and then you can move into clinching range. It is at this point in the altercation, where you have gained the upper hand, that you then might be able to employ tactics such as wrist or arm locks, foot sweeps, and other maneuvers that you cannot often make use of in a Duel.

Since I made mention of engaging preemptively, we have to consider the final major difference between the Duel and the Fight, and that is legal ramifications. We live in a litigious society where violence is punishable not just in a criminal context but where you may also be liable for the injuries you inflict on the person you “Fight” with. It seldom matters who threw the first punch or if you feel you were engaging in self-defense. Engaging in a “Fight” is a slippery slope of legal problems that should be considered very deeply and in much more detail than I am going to address here. There is a reason why people say the best way to win a fight is to not get in one.

This is where the “**Fight**” is unique from both the “**Duel**” and the “**Assault**”.

In the “**Duel**”, both participants are free from legal action for their involvement and as such they both choose to participate.

A “**Fight**” can only occur if both people are willing to engage in it. If you chose not to, and both make these intentions clear and try to escape the situation, the “Fight” transforms into “**The Assault**” and now we are faced with different considerations.

How do we as martial artists prepare for the Fight? The greatest aspect of preparation is psychological and mental. Learning to defuse potentially violent situations, if not avoid them completely, is a key component. This can be combined with scenario based training that includes verbal interaction that simulates the situation in order to at least attempt to replicate the adrenaline rush that comes with conflict as well as hard contact sparring so that you can see which tactics work better at this range versus the ones you may normally utilize in a “Duel” context.



While many people utilize range to define the nature of an encounter, the context under it is entered is more important. At this range, it is still unclear if this is to be a “Duel”, “Fight”, or “Assault”

The Assault

Now we come to what we should most be preparing for if we are concerned with self-defense, yet what we spend the least amount of time truly learning about. To me, an “Assault” is:

Assault: “An act of violence perpetrated on one individual (the attacker) on another (the victim) without the victim’s consent or prior knowledge. This act of violence has no governing rules and the severity of the violence could range from a minor injury to attempted murder. While the victim has an inherent right to defend themselves from their attacker, they must exercise due regard to their own use of force as it relates to local laws.”

This is the real deal folks. When we talk about assault we are getting down to the most ancient and basic interactions of human beings, the primal nature that has not changed for millennia, no matter how much we may like to think society has changed us and civilized us. At the core, assault is about one individual trying to impose their will upon another for their own gratification. That gratification could be monetary as in a mugging, sadistic as in a thrill kill, or sexual/power based as in a rape.

If we look at our three paradigms as a progression from most civilized to least civilized it is clear why we talk about the “Assault” last. We also do this because it is an extension, emotionally and mentally, of the “Fight”. As with the “Fight”, we are going to be forced to deal with adrenal conditions, a lack of rules, and no clear outcome or time frame for the violence to last. The “Assault” is the most dangerous of violent encounters because it is the one in which the victim has the least amount of warning and control over the situation. You may have no notice of it prior to it occurring and you may not, initially at least, have the opportunity to escape it.



This scenario could represent training for a “Duel” (MMA), a “Fight”, or an “Assault”. Techniques and positions are not exclusive to one scenario, but the mindset to dealing with them may be.



Some tactics and techniques are applicable across all three of the presented scenarios. (Here the author demonstrates the application of a Heel Hook).

It is almost impossible to truly prepare for an “Assault”. Scenario based training, both in a “Dueling” and “Fighting” context, can provide some preparation but there are too many other variables that are impossible to replicate. The best things you can do outside of your scenario training is use awareness and avoidance to minimize your vulnerability, while also accepting the fact that “Assault” is something that CAN happen. When you train, train for the worst case scenario and work on your weaknesses more than your strengths.

Regarding your tactics, the “Assault” is the scenario where you must truly be able to think outside of the box. When your life is truly in danger, concepts of fair play are no longer valid. Eye gouges, ear slaps, and groin strikes become primary weapons. Your attacker has already

gained an advantage over you due to the circumstances of the attack and the fact that he has probably landed the first series of strikes or gained some control of your body. We need to circumvent those advantages in the simplest way possible. We have to be more ruthless and mean spirited than the attacker. Essentially we have to want to survive and escape this “Assault” more than he wants to complete it.

Which leads us to the most misunderstood and difficult aspect of the “Assault”, the responsible use of force. Many instructors do not address legal considerations as they relate to an “Assault” scenario, choosing instead to go the macho route of “It’s better to be judged by twelve than carried by six”. While it is very true that you must do everything in your power to keep yourself alive, it is a very fine line between appropriate use of force and excessive force. It is irresponsible and ill-advised for any serious instructor of the martial arts to not be familiar with the self-defense laws of their locality and to be discussing those issue with their students. The Filipino martial arts world has seen what can happen when such issues are not properly addressed with weapons and the situation is just as serious concerning empty hand defense.

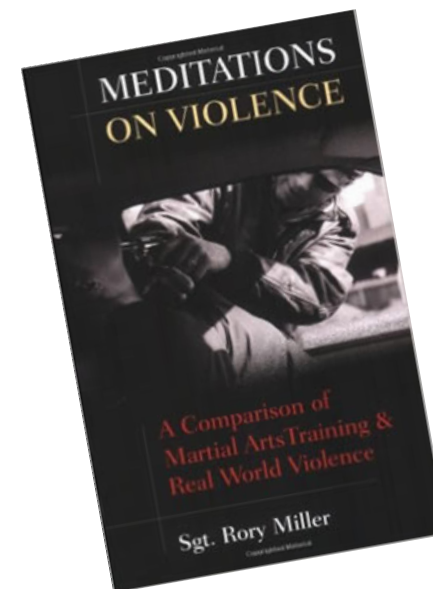
It is important to remember, that many situations that would fall under the criteria of an “Assault” such as mugging or home invasion are most often perpetrated with a weapon. Once we throw a weapon in the scenario, we are no longer in the Empty Hand Paradigm and will have to adjust both our own use of force and the legal ramifications as such. Those considerations can be addressed in a future article.

Conclusion

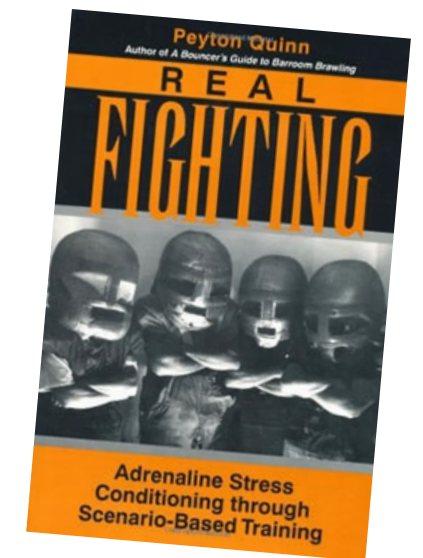
As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, this material is all intended to establish a context, a frame work through which we will view the use of empty hand techniques and tactics. I firmly believe that this framework is what is most often missing from programs that attempt to teach realistic self-defense within the martial arts. There is nothing wrong with remaining true to traditional training methodologies and techniques. However, at some point, the responsible instructor must ask themselves a few key questions

1. Which of the above situations are they devoting most of their students time towards
2. Are they acknowledging the differences between the presented scenarios
3. If they are claiming to teach self-defense, are they gearing the students training toward that scenario in a realistic way.

I firmly believe that no one instructor has all the answers and as such, feel that any serious instructor of martial arts must be willing to continue look outside their own art and be willing to take on new ideas. As such, I would recommend the following books as excellent food for thought on self-defense. While certainly not the only quality books on the subject, I consider them a great jumping off point:



Meditations on Violence by Rory Miller



Real Fighting by Peyton Quinn

School Submission

The schools listed teach Filipino martial arts, either as the main curriculum or an added curriculum.

If you have a school that teaches Filipino martial arts, or you are an instructor that teaches, but does not have a school, list the school or style so individuals who wish to experience, learn and gain knowledge have the opportunity.

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