

Abstracts of the 12th Annual Conference of the Committee for Martial Arts Studies in the German Association of Sport Science

“Blurred Boundaries: Martial Arts and Combat Sports Between Cultural
Embodiment, Pedagogical Application and Political Appropriation”

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Martin Minarik & Dinah Kretschmer (Eds.)

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TILMAN UHLICH, BENJAMIN BONN & SWEN KÖRNER

Assemblages of Muay Thai: Assemblages of Sport and Gender

Anna Adlwarth

Abstract

This presentation explores the concept of assemblages of sport and gender in the context of Muay Thai, examining how this combat sport is shaped by dynamic interactions of cultural, social, material, and emotional elements. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with practitioners and a trainer from an alternative gym in Leipzig, the study adopts Assemblage Theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; DeLanda, 2006) to analyze the multiple and interconnected dimensions of Muay Thai.

The research focuses on the alternative left-wing punk scene, where combat sports are not merely practices of physical exertion or competition but are reimagined as sites of community, resistance, and transformation. Elements such as training spaces, cultural rituals, trainer-participant relationships, and participants' emotions and experiences converge to form assemblages that challenge traditional understandings of sport. The holistic nature of Muay Thai, incorporating choreography, aesthetics, and spiritual dimensions, allows participants to construct new meanings of sport and gender.

Particularly significant is the potential for these assemblages to contribute to the deterritorialization of fixed gender categories in sports. By enabling mixed-gender training and providing inclusive spaces for FLINTA* (female, lesbian, intersex, non-binary, trans, agender) participants, these spaces foster the reimagination of gendered hierarchies. The findings suggest that the assemblages of Muay Thai in alternative spaces produce practices that are generative, dynamic, and resistant to normative structures, offering insights into broader possibilities for rethinking sport and gender.

This paper invites further discussion on the transformative potential of assemblages in challenging existing power dynamics within the world of sport.

Keywords: assemblage theory, muay thai, gender and sport, alternative sports practices, deterritorialization

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Martial Arts in Heterogeneous Teaching/Learning Settings: What Pedagogical Approaches Are Applied, What Conceptual Influences Do They Undergo, and How Is Practical Implementation Carried Out? (practical session)

Patrick Auerbach

Abstract

Martial arts have been incorporated into the curriculum at (higher) educational institutions (Karsch et al. 2024). However, their implementation in physical education and sports programs remains limited (ibid.). Pedagogical approaches and teaching concepts for conveying martial arts could provide an opportunity for this sport to be taught more frequently. The teaching concept that I presented in excerpts during the workshop, designed and implemented (for teacher training: Primary School, Special Education), could serve as a possible solution. The design of the course follows the model of 'Constructive Alignment' (Ouden & Rottlaender 2017) within the framework of higher education didactics. In this approach, learning outcomes, teaching-learning methods, and assessment methods are understood as interrelated. The selection and arrangement of the learning content was based on the dual planning grid of special education (Rath 1992). In doing so, subject-specific focuses were contrasted with special/pedagogical priorities. The structure of the learning content is derived from the module description (Module Handbook of DSHS Cologne: LA GS/Special Education, 2017) and selected scholarly literature. The design of individual sessions to achieve the aforementioned learning outcomes followed a consistent didactic three-step process: introductory phase, working phase, conclusion phase, and consolidation phase.

Keywords: martial arts education, physical education (PE), sport pedagogy, teacher Training/teacher education

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Transfer processes of educational principles using the example of the changes in karatedo lessons in the course of its internationalization and sportification

Matthias Beschnidt

Abstract

With the global spread of far eastern martial arts, they became modern sports. Judo and Karatedo are well-known examples. Today they are practiced and taught worldwide by people of different cultural backgrounds. In lessons, the underlying educational principles are usually spread 'implicitly' - i.e. without being explicitly mentioned - through the way they are taught. It turns out that those who are assumed to be 'modern' are often the declarative, educational principles of the west are particularly widespread, but they are not the only ones.

If the educational principles underlying a lesson remain unclear, misunderstandings, misinterpretations and loss of information arise when teachers and learners assume different ideas.

The key question is whether and which far eastern educational principles still exist and implicitly influence intercultural teaching settings, such as those that often take place in karatedo. Because without such clarification, the different educational principles themselves represent an unrecognized, transformative momentum.

Such a focus enables a cultural-scientific and educational-practical discussion of intercultural communication that operates in a tradition-oriented manner and at the same time develops individually in a body-related manner.

Keywords: martial arts pedagogy, intercultural communication, implicit educational principles, karatedo, transformative momentum

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Stories of Self-Defense? Narratives in the Teaching of Self-Defense in YouTube Shorts

Benjamin Bonn, Swen Körner & Mario S. Staller

Abstract

YouTube, like other video platforms, is not only a context for socialization but also an explicit address and reference for teaching and learning processes (Jörissen et al., 2019). The ubiquitous accessible content is marked expressly within claims of impartment, instruction or similar. That said, these contents offer possibilities for mobile learning (Ally, 2009; Döring & Mohseni, 2020). Sporadically, martial arts related contents may represent a martial arts research objective (e.g., Zembura, 2013); however, current studies do not focus on the aspect of teaching or training martial arts.

This study explores modes of representation, regarding the teaching of self-defense in short videos on YouTube („Shorts“). The emphasis lies on narratives as narration (Sugiyama, 2001) or representation (Abbott, 2008) of events, answering the main question: How is self-defence narratively located in images and text? Which situations are reported, which narrations frame the teaching? Which kind of storyworlds or master narrative (Shenhav, 2015, S. 34) are constructed?

The study is based on a qualitative-empiric method. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021), YouTube Shorts are scanned with the keyword „self-defense“ and explored in terms of images as well as texts. Based on the principle of empirical saturation (Strübing et al., 2018), the analysis explores successively and inductively (narrative) modes of self-defense presentation.

The analysis produces organized insights on narratives used for the presentation of self-defense in YouTube Shorts. These may include aspects like the function of self-defense, specific occasions for self-defense and diverse kinds of representations. Thus, the present study provides an opening for the discussion of teaching martial arts and self-defense beyond the physical borders. The conference topic of Blurred Boundaries is reflected in two ways: First, regarding the teaching and application of self-defense between virtual and physical domain, and second, between media teaching offer and invisible learning in a loose (pedagogical?) relationship.

Keywords: self-defense, narratives, mobile learning, impartment, video analysis

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Political Sport. Apolitical Sport? Interpretations of Boxing Between Weimar and the Fall of the Wall

Anna S. Brasch

Abstract

Sport—including boxing—becomes political at the latest when athletes compete for their nation, turning the competition into a contest between states. In German-language discourse, reports on "international" boxing matches date back to the 19th century, particularly concerning the "Great International Prize Fight" between Heenan and Sayers.

However, in the German-speaking world, the short 20th century saw an especially pronounced political appropriation of this combat sport, reaching a new level compared to earlier political interpretations. From a discourse and literary-historical perspective, boxing during this time could hardly be considered outside the dominant paradigm of politics. While the systematic politicization of boxing began during the Weimar Republic, the sport was reinterpreted under National Socialism as a collective struggle for national survival and was semantically "Germanized." The year 1945 did not mark a profound rupture in this politicization—in fact, quite the opposite. At first glance, and given that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) explicitly defined itself in opposition to fascism, it may seem surprising that GDR boxing discourse exhibited remarkable continuity rather than a fundamental break. Ultimately, even the Federal Republic of Germany's construction of sport as "unpolitical" was itself deeply political, as it sought to distance itself both from the National Socialist past and from the socialist model of sport.

The planned lecture aims to outline the key trajectories of boxing's political interpretations during the short 20th century through selected examples. It will also offer a brief outlook on the dissolution of politics as the dominant paradigm in boxing discourse from the turn of the 21st century onward. The lecture is situated within the context of my habilitation thesis, *Boxing: Literary Representations of a Culturally Charged Symbol in Modernity and Their Historical-Epistemic Conditions*, submitted at the University of Bonn in late 2023.

Keywords: boxing, politicization, history of discourse, literary history, short twentieth century

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Evaluation of the Examination Regulations of the Aikido Federation Germany

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Abstract

The graduation system of the Aikido Federation Germany e.V. (AiFD) follows the traditional Japanese Aikikai system and includes centralised and decentralised dan examinations. Since May 2021, the AiFD has enabled decentralised examinations to be held in your own dojo under the direction of their own teacher. This project examines the perception and acceptance of both examination formats based on two hypotheses: Centralised examinations are perceived as more objective and decentralised examinations as more humane.

Data was collected via an online questionnaire (SoSci Survey) from 182 AiFD members (age 52 ± 11 years, gender: 58/122/2 - f/m/d). The questions assessed the objectivity (objective, comprehensible, comparable and linked to the examination programme) and humanity (exam anxiety, inclusivity, organisational hurdles, solidarity, content as in training) of the examinations as well as the overall judgement and the value of the graduation.

The data were analysed using paired-samples t-tests with a Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = 0.013$). The results show that decentralised examinations are perceived as significantly more humane ($t(141) = 11.47$, $p < 0.001$), while there were no significant differences in the perception of objectivity ($t(131) = -0.29$, $p = 0.387$), the value of graduation ($t(135) = -1.37$, $p = 0.086$) or the overall judgement ($t(139) = 1.90$, $p = 0.030$). The results suggest that decentralised examinations are a more inclusive and anxiety-free alternative without compromising the perceived objectivity or the perceived value of graduation.

Keywords: aikido, graduation, evaluation, objectivity, humanity

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Method development of Kenko Kempo Karate

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Abstract

For our ageing societies the concept of Kenko Kempo Karate (KKK) opened the option of entering or remaining in the martial arts community at advanced age. Erich B. Ries formulated the concept in 2011 as a sport for health, a martial art and an effective form of self-defence. Content. The heart of the concept: (a) no competitions, (b) introducing both internal (QiGong, TaiChi) and external (Shotokan) techniques in each training session, and (c) graduation on the basis of personal growth in stead of technique lists. Depending on the competence of the individual teacher, techniques from other martial arts replace those of Shotokan. Introducing. Main task consisted of additional training of existing martial art teachers followed by their classification at 1st–3rd dan KKK, both in Germany and The Netherlands. For some Dutch teachers the terms ‘kempo’ and ‘karate’ were confusing. An additional name (VITOK) was introduced that stressed the vitality effect on practitioners. Actual teaching of starting students still lags behind although internationally introduced. Developing. Between 1999 and 2024 the concept developed slowly into a teaching method for training and discussion among students and teachers. In a friendly atmosphere both the martial art and its relationship with daily life are subject of study. Graduation in KKK remained an additional motivator. This in contrast to Aikido and Judo that also formulated Dutch variants for older persons but without a coloured belt system nor containing self-defence. Future. Although KKK is meant to be style-overbridging, it became increasingly clear that the competition-focussed Western view commonly prevented a mindset needed for actual self-preservation. Introducing technical content from 19th century Okinawa martial art for health and self-defence, could be an effective solution within the KKK method.

Keywords: Kenko Kempo Karate, aging society, health-oriented martial arts, personal growth graduation, self-preservation

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Learning With and From Aikido: Tranquillity, Empathy, and Nobility for Intercultural Communication Competence

Greet DeBaets

Abstract

This study explores the use of aikido as an embodied pedagogy in intercultural communication training, based on a mixed-methods analysis with 73 participants (employees, employers, and entrepreneurs). The theoretical foundation of the study is an aikido interaction model. Aikido interactions and intercultural interactions share essential characteristics, particularly the focus on harmonious and effective exchanges.

The study demonstrates significant overlaps between these types of interaction. While aikido does not introduce an entirely new conceptual framework, its embodied approach provides distinct pedagogical benefits for intercultural communication training. A closer examination reveals a particular added value in three core concepts fostered through learning with and from Aikido: tranquillity, cognitive empathy, and anthropocosmic nobility. These elements contribute to the enhancement of communication skills in intercultural contexts.

Aikido cultivates tranquillity as a self-regulated state that fosters both openness and curiosity while enabling meaningful connections with others. Connection in aikido implies at least a relational perspective, akin to cognitive empathy, which seeks to perceive situations and oneself through the eyes of others and acknowledges power imbalances. If we derive an ethical dimension from aikido, it aligns with an anthropocosmic worldview that is aware of anthropocentric systems and deliberately distances itself from them to achieve noble outcomes.

The study's conclusions are particularly relevant for the further development of communication training. At the same time, the question arises as to what impact these findings might have on aikido itself and potentially on other martial arts.

Keywords: aikido, embodied pedagogy, tranquillity, cognitive empathy, anthropocosmic nobility

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Kenko Kempo Karate with Shogen Ryu for Selfpreservation: Going back to the roots for a modern approach to martial arts for elders

Matthias Dülpe

Abstract

Kenko Kempo Karate (KKK) for us is more of an idea or a method than another style of karate. "Freedom of style" is anchored in the statutes of the association (KKKO). In fulfilling this, each KKK teacher uses his or her personal technical repertoire as an underlying "core system". This is usually done by three steps of deconstruction of the standard martial arts. First, the wide technical scope of combat sports is being reduced to a feasible level for the KKK target groups, by the KKK teacher himself. Second, sportive competition is omitted, and third, the positive health effects of the 'soft' or 'internal' Chinese martial arts" (QiGong, TaiChiChuan) are integrated. Thus, the focus on "health" (kenko: jap. health) and self-defense replaces the competition and high-level sportive targets of standard martial arts.

In my presentation I will argue and demonstrate, that there are alternatives to this deconstruction of standard martial arts in utilizing them as KKK core systems. In our dojo, "Kampfkunst Igensdorf", we implemented the Okinawan Shogen Ryu Karate Do (SGR) as a "core system" in our training, because it already meets all the requirements of a health-oriented self-defense system, as the many very old but active masters on Okinawa show us (youtube, Sensei: Masters of Okinawan Karate Series). In a way, this turn means to go back to the roots of Okinawan karate, which was civilian hand-to-hand combat fighting arts with strong health-oriented components, which became formalized later through the Japanese occupation, and decontextualized by transfers into school and competitive sports – with becoming an Olympic discipline 2020. I will show some of the essential characteristics of Shogen Ryu and discuss how they meet the target and idea of Kenko Kempo Karate. As other classical Okinawan styles, and in alignment with old masters' writings, SGR comprises kihon (basic techniques), kata (solo exercises) and ki chi te (partner exercises) (<https://shogenryu.com>). It may seem closer to self defense than usual sports and gymnastics practiced by the KKK target group, but this makes sense as we understand self-defense - the technical exercises - as a partial aspect of self-preservation/protection, i.e. any knowledge and behavior that prevents physical/mental damage. Their practical value goes far beyond practical self-defense in a fight, and our practitioners rarely have to defend themselves against physical violence. Safe and dynamic posture, controlled movement and breathing, safe physical exercise, and the mental focusing, stabilization and enabling help to defend them against very real threats such as physical decline, civilizational and other diseases, such as dementia and Parkinson's disease through regular training inside and outside the dojo!

Keywords: Kenko Kempo Karate, Okinawan Shogen Ryu, health-oriented self-defense, self-preservation, martial arts deconstruction

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Fighting for Understanding. Exploring Empathy through Brain Synchrony in Boxing

Jakob Fruchtmann

Abstract

While boxing is often stereotyped as a violent sport, we see it as a form of rhythmic antagonistic co-operation with great potential to strengthen prosocial faculties (Channon/Matthews 2018). Based on the assumption that the fighting diad is one rhythmic, balanced, and interdependent whole (in the case of competition - until one side wins), we ask whether boxing can enhance empathy (for a comparison to dancing cp. O'Shea 2018). The reasoning is that as anticipation is a key predictor of athletic success (Williams/Jackson 2019), the capacity to "feel" the opponents' physical, mental, and emotional state is key. Therefore, feeling the opponent is key to overcoming them. Consequently, we argue that empathy is a key skill that needs to be trained for success in combat sports (a similar argument is made in Blick 2025 for the case of BJJ). Specifically for the case of boxing, the paper emphasizes aspects of rhythm and rhythmicity of interaction, different forms of empathy, and their relation to brain synchrony.

Previous research has shown that brain synchrony is closely related to empathy (Schwartz et al. 2024) and can be often observed when people suffer together (Peng et al. 2021). Our study merely suggests this to be the case, when the suffering is mutually inflicted, as well. Existing research has demonstrated brain-to-brain coupling by measuring brain activity in various contexts of social interaction (Kinreich et al. 2017), but this study aims to extend this understanding to the unique demands of boxing. By exploring this athletic endeavor's cognitive and emotional aspects, we hope to shed light on the nature of interpersonal interaction and challenge negative stereotypes about the sport.

To test our argument empirically, we suggest measuring brainwave patterns during sparring sessions. We aim to determine whether boxers' brains begin to work in unison, potentially indicating increased empathic understanding. The experiment should collect EEG data from boxers during sparring sessions and synchronized video footage to provide a multimodal dataset for analysis. We also suggest testing whether the extent of synchronization changes over more extended periods of training together.

Keywords: boxing, inter-brain synchrony, empathy, rhythmic antagonistic cooperation, EEG hyperscanning

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From Martial Chivalry to Martial Arts: The Concept of Martial Arts in Modern China through the Name Change of the Chinese Martial Arts Association in 1919

Die Hu

Abstract

In 1919, on the order of the State Council to establish martial arts associations nationwide, a newly established organization in Shanghai, the “Chinese Martial Chivalry Association (zhonghua wuxia hui 中华武侠会)”, changed its name to the “Shanghai Chinese Martial Arts Association (shanghai zhonghua wushu hui 上海中华武术会)”, announcing its transformation from a civil organization to a branch of a public institution. This research examines how this transformation reflected broader changes in Chinese society and politics during this turbulent period.

With the promotion of a new political orientation “martial valor (shangwu 尚武)” and a new aesthetic orientation “healthy (jiankang 健康)”, the martial arts, as the more modernity and progress concept, replaced martial chivalry as the new fulcrum of ideological reconstruction. This transformation reveals how the government utilized martial arts as an ideological propaganda tool in times of national crisis. It reflects the continuous reconstruction of traditional Chinese culture in modern times under the impact of modern Western political discourse and aesthetic orientation, which is also a process of homogenization of Eastern and Western civilizations under the Western discourse of “modernity”.

Through an examination of the 1919 renaming of the Shanghai Chinese Martial Arts Association, we can better understand how martial arts practice became a vehicle for political ideology and cultural transformation and influenced contemporary perceptions of martial arts.

Keywords: Chinese martial arts, Chinese martial chivalry, martial valor, modernity

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Effects of Krav Maga on perceived self-efficacy

Salome Junge & Swen Körner

Abstract

Krav Maga training aims to improve skills for dealing with real-life threat and attack situations (Staller & Bertram, 2015). A cross-gender study on the effectiveness of civilian Krav Maga training is missing so far. While the effectiveness of the training cannot be scientifically tested on the basis of real situations for ethical reasons, the participants' self-efficacy expectation offers a starting point for this. According to Bandura (1997), perceived self-efficacy is a central predictor of human behavior in performance situations. Measuring areas of self-efficacy can provide appropriate information about the effectiveness of self-defense training (Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2018).

The aim of the study is to examine the influence of Krav Maga on self-efficacy expectations. The focus is on both self-defense-related and general self-efficacy.

The study follows empirical-quantitative research design. In the pre-post procedure, the general and self-defense-related self-efficacy are assessed by means of questionnaires (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1999; Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Fuchs & Schwarzer, 1994). The intervention over several weeks includes weekly Krav-Maga training. Parallel to the intervention group (N = 48 test subjects), the general and self-defense-related self-efficacy were assessed in a control group (N = 69 test subjects). The results were analyzed statistically (t-test) using SPSS.

There is a significant increase in self-defense-related self-efficacy in the intervention group. This applies to both the measurement instrument (MI) of Fuchs & Schwarzer (1994) (pre-M=5.200, SD=0.912, post-M=5.575, SD=0.711, $p<0.001$) and to the measurement instrument of Ozer & Bandura (1990) (pre-M=5.859, SD=1.465, post-M=6.297, SD=1.342, $p=0.004$). The results of the control group are ambiguous. On the one hand, there is a decrease in self-defense self-efficacy (MI: Fuchs & Schwarzer, 1994), on the other hand a significant increase (pre-M=4.986, SD=1.708, post-M=5.437, SD=1.735, $p<0.001$) (MI: Ozer & Bandura, 1990). General self-efficacy did not increase significantly in any of the groups.

The results show that Krav-Maga training increases the subjective conviction of being able to defend oneself against real threat and attack situations. The validity of the results must be questioned due to the ambiguous results of the control group. However, there is a difference between the groups. Further qualitative research could provide more insight.

Keywords: krav maga, self-defense, self-efficacy, effect, empirical-quantitative

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The Work of the UNESCO ICM

Dong Chan Kim

Abstract

The International Centre of Martial Arts for Youth Development and Engagement under the auspices of UNESCO (ICM) was established in 2017 through an agreement between the Republic of Korea and UNESCO. As a Category 2 Centre, ICM is dedicated to achieving its mission through strategic alliance and extensive networking. ICM's project goals align closely with UNESCO's global priorities, including gender equality, Africa, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its specific functions and objectives, as outlined in the agreement, focus on youth and women as primary target groups. The Centre's activities are organized around three key areas: capacity building, research and knowledge sharing, and the collection, safeguarding, and dissemination of data and materials to support educational, cultural, and scientific initiatives worldwide.

In the past year, ICM advanced its capacity-building efforts through family and youth martial arts camps, a Model UNESCO Conference on "Sport as a Tool for Sustainable Development," and a martial arts coaches' academy emphasizing inclusivity. For research and knowledge sharing, ICM conducted regional studies, like Central Asia in the case of the last one, on martial arts, and hosted events such as a seminar on mental health and well-being and a forum on martial arts as cultural heritage. In addition, ICM organized an international martial arts photo contest and exhibition and is developing an online martial arts database.

To date, ICM has collaborated with universities, cultural centers, academic societies, and various UNESCO entities, including UNITWIN, other Category 2 Centres, national commissions, and regional offices. Since 2019, it has also served as a permanent consultative member of the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport (CIGEPS).

In summary, ICM fosters collaboration in diverse program areas and institutions, bridging cultural, education, and scientific domains. By leveraging martial arts as a tool for youth development, inclusivity, and cultural exchange, ICM contributes to the global dialogue on martial arts and combat sports, enhancing their pedagogical, cultural, and social relevance.

Keywords: ICM, martial arts, youth development, UNESCO, exchange and networking

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A Gentleman's Game? An Ethnographic Investigation of practices of Morals, Honour and Aesthetics in Rugby Union

Christopher Kirschner

Abstract

This presentation examines the symbolic order(s) of rugby union and related practices of morals, honour and aesthetics. The question of mediation, incorporation and application of practical knowledge, as it's often raised in the sociology of practice and sports, will be its point of departure. I draw the following conclusions based on (auto-)ethnographic data. Examples will be given of how symbolic orders, understood as incorporated dispositions of habitus, are translated into a historically evolved *modus operandi* and a kind of inner and outer attitude. These insights will emphasize those practices that lie outside official rules and regulations and are therefore often overlooked, but whose practical implementation embodies specific ideas of morals, honour and aesthetics. Especially the historical genesis of sports, that can be traced to the present day, shows similarities to social and political practices of certain class fractions and the beliefs and lifestyles associated with them.

The following will not conclude with the stability of these practices but rather point to the blurring of practices and categories such as fair play, honesty, respect, discipline, masculinity or physical toughness. Through this practical vagueness, which also affects the symbolic order itself, the historical processes are also subject to a relative openness of outcome, so that the participation of women, homosexuals or non-white players becomes not only possible but also part of its reality, despite previously opposing practices and exclusions. In this sense, the symbolic order proves to be flexible to the extent that a change in social structures outside the field can lead to changes in the latter without the meaning of the game as such being called into question.

Keywords: symbolic order, habitus, practice, ethnography, rugby

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Between Closeness and Distance: Student Perspectives on Learning to Fight in Higher Education

Swen Körner, Tilman Uhlich, Mario S. Staller & Benjamin Bonn

Abstract

Given that fighting and learning to fight are inherently physical phenomena in both sporting and educational settings (Krabben et al., 2019; Werner et al., 2020; Zander & Karsch, 2024), the question arises of how physical contact and proximity are handled in different instructional contexts and how they should be managed in line with professional teaching standards (Abraham & Collins, 2011). Empirical data indicate a strong need for safety and health measures among participants to ensure a structured approach to contact and contact intensity (Staller & Körner, 2018). However, no national or international data exist on how aspects of physical proximity and distance are experienced in the process of learning to fight. This research project aims to address this gap. The study is framed by broader societal discourses on critical physicality, particularly regarding sexual violence, which has become a pressing issue in organized sports in recent years (dvs-Präsidium, 2023).

This pilot study examines student expectations regarding physical proximity and its management in martial arts-related courses at the German Sport University Cologne (DSHS). The project aims to expand existing contact and safety concepts based on empirical data and derive implications for course design.

Student perspectives were collected qualitatively through $n = 33$ semi-structured focus group interviews conducted during the final in-person phase of each respective course (Flick, 2009). The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using MAXQDA (24), following the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021), which ensures an inductive, data-driven thematic categorization based on student-relevant markers.

At this stage, data analysis is still ongoing. However, it is expected that the findings will provide a nuanced understanding of student expectations, experiences, and preferences regarding proximity and distance in the context of learning to fight within university courses. The results will inform the expansion of the existing contact policy for combat-related courses at DSHS, offering practical insights for professional interaction and training design. Additionally, the findings may be applicable to other movement-related disciplines and non-university contexts.

Keywords: closeness and distance, learning to fight, professionalism, higher education teaching, safeguarding concept

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From Bushidō to the judo values - ethics in the self-presentation of Asian martial arts associations. An empirical analysis of the communication of values on official websites in comparison to historical codes

Robert Krome

Abstract

Based on the question of the extent to which contemporary martial arts associations draw on traditional samurai ideals to present their ethical orientation, the values were listed and compared with traditional values.

The book of the same name by Nitobe Inazo (1899) is formative for today's understanding of bushido. In his book "Bushido: The Soul of Japan", he presents a canon of ethics that he saw - according to today's interpretation - as being etched into the DNA of the Japanese. Further analysis shows that both Nitobe's ideals and the values mentioned on the websites are predominantly subsets of those ethical principles that were formulated - directly or indirectly - in Hagakure and Budoshoshinshu around 1700. In addition to this consensus across 300 years and cultural boundaries, there are also modern approaches.

Keywords: bushido, samurai ethics, Nitobe Inazo, Hagakure, Budoshoshinshu, traditional values, Japanese warrior tradition

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Martial Aikido as a Method for Training Performing Artists (practical session)

Slava Kushkov

Abstract

The Japanese martial art Aikido unfolds its potential as a medium for performing artists. The changing demands in the field of performing arts make it necessary to explore new approaches in training. The contemporary theater's shift towards absolute physicality, energetic presence, and above all, immediate responsiveness requires new technical tools and interdisciplinary foundational knowledge.

Aikido is increasingly being applied in the training of performing artists and has proven itself as a versatile movement system. What makes Aikido a unique instructional system is its intrinsic understanding of training as an ongoing process—both in learning and teaching. The focus is not merely on acquiring skills that are repeatedly executed in the same manner but rather on developing abilities that empower performing artists to continue working on themselves independently beyond their formal training.

Aikido enhances instinct and provides the necessary experience to enable creative action. It fosters improvisation, concentration, awareness, imagination, observation skills, and partner work. As a dialogical martial art, Aikido is partner-oriented and situational, allowing for flexible responses to a counterpart's impulses and movements.

Managing stress, practicing relaxation, and cultivating composure help synchronize internal and external rhythms. Ultimately, Aikido avoids unnecessary strikes and pain experiences as a physical learning method, instead anticipating attacks and deflecting them through fluid motion. This not only reduces the risk of injury but also heightens spatial awareness and sensitivity to movement. These qualities make Aikido training particularly enriching for the work of performing artists.

Keywords: aikido, performing arts, energetic presence, movement system, situational responsiveness

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The Chinese Sword Classic (jianjing 劍經) in the 16th century and today

Lena Liefke

Abstract

Compared to the probably most famous military text in Chinese history, The Art of War (Sunzi Bingfa 孫子兵法, 5th c. b.c.), which has been translated into numerous foreign languages, the so-called Sword Classic (jianjing 劍經) attributed to the military Yu Dayou 俞大猷 (1503-1579), has found little consideration in Chinese Studies in Europe so far – despite its relevance to the military and martial arts history in China. In Chinese research the text is considered the first systematic, comprehensive treatise on the theory of the art of attack and defence with the stick and could be regarded in the context of other military and martial arts texts documenting the systematization of military and martial arts knowledge during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

In recent Chinese martial arts research the text is highlighted due to its assumed great influence on the development of Chinese martial arts (Wushu 武術) and considered as a key to understanding the central principles of Wushu. At the same time, martial arts practitioners in East Asia transfer individual fighting techniques of the jianjing into practice, presenting them in blog or video formats for practical application and herewith demonstrating a lasting impact of the jianjing onto today's martial arts culture. The presentation displays the Sword Classic as a text floating between its context of creation in the Ming dynasty and its current reception in the 21st century, touching upon the question of (cultural) political appropriation and instrumentalization (→ zhongguo tese 中國特色, "Chinese characteristics").

Keywords: Yu Dayou, sword classic, Ming dynasty, martial arts history, cultural political appropriation

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‘Martial Arts Washing’ as a Special Case of ‘Sportswashing’

Martin J. Meyer

Abstract

Well-known cases of ‘sportswashing’ in combat sports are the ‘Rumble in the Jungle’ in Zaire in 1974 as well as the ‘Thrilla in Manila’ in 1975. During the Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, a variant of ‘sportswashing’ has reoccurred. ‘Martial arts washing’ deviates from generic ‘sportswashing’ in the way that the values and attributes associated with martial arts are hijacked by powerful individuals and reinterpreted to suit their agendas. In particular male politicians who are close to right-wing authoritarian ideas apply ‘martialarts washing’ to present themselves as virtuous martial warriors. In the presented article, the concept will be illustrated by describing events and key personalities associated with the current Russo-Ukrainian War, like the Russian president Vladimir Putin, Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov and Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as Elon Musk who launched attempts to intervene in the conflict. In this process, a theoretical framework is established by connecting ‘martial arts washing’ to sport nationalism, nation branding, ‘sportswashing’ in general, and toxic masculinity.

Keywords: Putin, Kadyrov, Musk, sportswashing, Russo-Ukrainian war, martial arts

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Senses of Evidentiality. Taijiquan on the Tightrope between Bullshido, Cultural Tradition, and Internal Martial Art

Robert Mitchell

Abstract

Like many "movement systems" originating from East Asia and classified as martial arts, Taijiquan (太极拳 *tài jí quán*)—a practice more commonly associated with elderly individuals moving slowly rather than with martial arts—has a lot of work to do. This movement form is expected to be simultaneously an expression of cultural tradition, a relaxation technique, and an "internal" martial art. These goals are not necessarily easy to reconcile with one another. Moreover, defining what constitutes an "internal martial art" in contrast to "external martial arts" such as Karate or Kung Fu requires extensive discourse and pedagogical clarification.

Given this challenging "selling point" of Taiji—especially in comparison to other martial arts—it is understandable why Taiji has been labeled as an example of "Bullshido"—a martial art ultimately based on deception. This also explains why so-called "Taiji masters" have recently been publicly beaten by MMA fighters in widely publicized matches, aiming to expose them as frauds.

Rather than debating the authenticity of this martial art—neither in the sense of a traditional cultural heritage, which was largely disrupted during the Cultural Revolution, nor as a more or less effective fighting method—this lecture will present three types of data from a sociological perspective: a Chinese television program, individual and partner exercises in training sessions. This selection aims to illustrate how practical evidence for the authenticity of this movement system is produced both through media and physical practice and what is required from practitioners: a belief in the fundamental principles of the practice, rooted in bodily perception and sensory awareness.

Keywords: taijiquan, internal martial arts, practice theories, sociology of the body, ethnography

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Becoming Stick, Becoming Animal: A Philosophy of Transitory Practices in the Martial Arts

Max Ryyänen

Abstract

“Train hard, become the stick,” or, “the stick should move you, not vice versa,” say martial arts slogans, accentuating the need to practice so much, that the stick connects in depth with the body-mind. “Do not act like a monkey, become monkey,” says another, and one can exchange the monkey with tiger, crane, or any animal embodied in Kungfu, Kalarippayattu, or Silat – requiring the student to train for long, so hard, that the self changes.

These transitory practices, which bring to mind method acting or the myth of changing through withdrawal (Jesus in the desert, Robert Johnson in the delta), play a significant role in martial arts, and have been discussed by e.g. Donn F. Draeger and D.S. Farrer.

Philosophical pragmatism and phenomenology open up a few paths for those who’d like to dive into the topic.

The founder of pragmatist aesthetics, John Dewey, focused on habit. Changing one’s habits was the main challenge for his philosophy of life. Richard Shusterman provides a somatic take on this. Reflecting philosophically the body, in dialogue with practice, the accent on experience, becoming something is seen to be experiential challenge. In most martial arts philosophical riddles and sayings accompany the path to change, thereby being forerunners of the method. Could the dialogue between somaesthetics and martial arts practice offer us some valuable insights?

Martin Heidegger studied the network of equipment, which supports our lifeworld. The ‘readiness-at-hand’ of a hammer makes it transparent for us. Through its use, we dive deep into ancient cultural transmission – from our surface-oriented use of it as ‘present-for-hand’ (the hammer as object). Becoming stick points to an extended version of this, paving the way to think that through the interplay with one unique tool one can dive even deeper to existential and cultural heritage. How to extend Heidegger’s thoughts, philosophically speaking?

And do these two philosophies resonate with each other, together with the traditions offered in martial arts? What can one make out from the whole?

Keywords: somaesthetics, phenomenology, habit, embodiment, readiness-at-hand

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The Country Needs New Men (On MACS and right-wing-ideology)

Frank Siegele

Abstract

"Real men are right-wing, real men have ideals, real men are patriots—then things will also work out with a girlfriend." This is the view of right-wing populist Maximilian Krah from the AfD. Additionally, since 2023, so-called "Active Clubs" have been spreading in Germany, following the U.S. model. Their goal is to recruit young men into far-right ideology through shared sports and leisure activities. The leading figures come from the combat sports scene and use this neo-Nazi organizational structure to pursue objectives such as preventing an alleged "white genocide." There is a legitimate concern that the combat sports scene is being infiltrated—or even deliberately targeted—by such extremist movements.

The transitional phases of puberty and adolescence present significant psychosocial challenges for young people. Young men, in particular, often lack positive role models. In their search for a masculine identity, they can be susceptible to violence-glorifying ideologies. To counteract this, preventive interventions are needed—for example, in schools but also within the combat sports community itself—by sensitizing and specifically training coaches on this issue.

"Integrative Budō Therapy," a comprehensive mindfulness-based approach, focuses on developing and strengthening key competencies such as self-assertion, resilience, impulse control, de-escalation, and peacefulness, while also fostering awareness of "gentle emotions." Ultimately, the goal is to become capable of peace.

Keywords: self-assertion, defensiveness, assertiveness, complex mindfulness, respect, acceptance, recognition, self-care, world-care

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The Outer and Inner Battle on the Path to Peace Competence (practical session)

Frank Siegele

Abstract

The workshop provides an insight into the budō therapeutic approach, which primarily views itself as a "way of teaching and a school of attitude" and is characterized by mindfulness, appreciation, care, and curiosity about one's own resources and potentials. The associated themes include: stance, combat, boundaries, protection, self-assertion, courage, mindfulness, and compassion.

Keywords: budo therapy, mindfulness, self-assertion, resource-oriented approach, compassion

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Police Logic 1.0: The Political Dimension of Self-Defense and Officer Safety

Mario Staller & Swen Koerner

Abstract

Recent analyses of the construction of internal police realities point to specific patterns of observation, description, and argumentation that serve to deproblematize police use of force in certain operational situations.

This includes specific argumentation patterns that frame the use of force as a logical consequence of observed operational realities (“You Don’t Need a Rocket Scientist to Figure Out What Could Happen,” Nave et al., 2024) (Burke, 2024; Eisenberg, 2023; Sierra-Arévalo, 2024; Simon, 2021; Staller et al., 2025). At the same time, there are different perspectives emerging from the external environment of the police system, such as media reports and court proceedings concerning police operations, where the same operational reality is viewed differently and the use of force is problematized (Nave et al., 2024; WDR Lokalzeit, 2024).

Another example concerns resistance to information from the external environment of academia. Here, too, specific internal patterns of observation and description can be identified, which manifest as resistance to reform movements (Burke, 2024).

We argue that the proliferation of these specific observation, description, and argumentation patterns—what we call Police Logic 1.0—can be observed as a political mechanism aimed at securing power. Our argument is based on the idea that power is particularly exercised through the construction of realities within psychological systems, shaped by cultural practices and their distribution (Castells, 2016).

In this context, police training based on the logic of officer safety and self-defense holds particular substantive, temporal, and social significance as a cultural police practice. This contribution analyzes these interconnections and aims to enhance the reflexive potential of internal police observation.

Keywords: self-defense, narratives, mobile learning, impartment, video analysis

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Pink Gloves Still Give Black Eyes: Women in Combat Sports – Conditions and Opportunities

Andrea Thiem

Abstract

I am currently preparing a publication, supervised by Prof. Schürmann of Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln. Thematic focus is the verbal codification of unfamiliar sensory perception of movement. Examples are the movement-styles Martial Arts and Belly Dance. In the course of years, as a cultural anthropologist, I collected relevant material and got, among other themes, entangled with gender ascription and their actualisation in movement styles.

I am maintaining the thesis:

The respective movement >scenes< represent social environments of their own, with own rules and so convey their specific habitus (in Bourdieu's sense).

What will happen if women expose themselves to those bodily practices? Will they adapt the required body model free of problems? Do they have to find their own ways – and if so, which – to experience a satisfying training situation for themselves, without conflicts and health-friendly? The found coping strategies particularly take into use the performance of gender, whereas different expressions of performance in training or competition have to be discriminated from civil life afar from sportive contexts.

Keywords: habitus, performance of gender, sensory perception, coping strategies, cultural anthropology

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Learning and Teaching Fighting – Project Draft for Comparing Two Teaching Methods in University Teacher Education

Tilman Uhlich, Benjamin Bonn & Swen Körner

Abstract

Based on the DSHS internal teaching promotion for the summer semester 2025, with the thematic focus "Teaching and Learning with Videos in Sports Practice", this micro-project will examine the effects of two different instructional models on students' experiences of combat sports. The selection of these instructional models is based on the pedagogical concepts of intentional and extensional education (Treml, 2000). For this project, a deductive teaching approach is chosen for intentional education, while the extensional approach follows the constraint-led approach (Renshaw et al., 2019; Renshaw & Chow, 2019).

To achieve this, two university courses on Wrestling and Combat Sports within teacher training will structure their teaching-learning situations according to one of these instructional models. Several sessions will be videographed. Subsequently, students from both courses will code these videos, capturing their experiences of the learning process and outcomes (light-contact sparring) from a student perspective. This coding will be qualitatively analyzed by the research team and later discussed methodologically and content-wise with the students.

The project serves as an example of how theory- or model-based teaching can be designed and how different instructional methods can influence the situational experience in physical education. By utilizing video recordings, the goal is to make the reflection process of future students more tangible for the participants. They will actively engage with "reflection in the learning process" (Wibowo, 2017) in order to develop a reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Additionally, the students will be encouraged to adopt a teacher's perspective when evaluating others' combat performances.

Videography provides students with the opportunity to analyze both their own and others' learning processes and learning outcomes from two school-relevant perspectives in educational research (Helmke, 2022). This allows for a reflection on key dimensions of teaching quality. The project thus connects to both model-oriented teaching practice and design-based research (The Design-Based Research Collective, 2003)—two potential fields of action for participants as students and future teachers.

Keywords: instruction, videography, fighting, higher education teaching, reflective practice

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