

## From phenomenology to a theory of corporal combat and martial arts

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### Abstract

This work aims to propose, based on previous phenomenological outcomes, a Theory of Corporal Combat Phenomenon (TCCP) and to anticipate directions for the propositions of a Theory of Martial Arts Phenomenon. Although theories concerning Martial Arts (MA) aren't uncommon, there is not one based on phenomenological analysis. Previous theories concern natural assumptions about values and conceptions of what MA is, or even deconstruct the phenomena. Guided by Edmund Husserl's philosophy, outcomes about combat experiences analyzed by bracketing natural knowledge allow us to grasp the inner structural intentionality that, in all varieties of manifestations, gives into existence the Martial Arts. A significant essential approaching of corporal combat has been made by Figueiredo (2009), who conceptualizes Combat Sport by having the body as target and means of the actions. But not all Corporal Combat manifestations analyzed to return "to the things themselves" - Physical Brawl, Fighting, Playing of fighting, Duel, Self-defence and Instrumental Offensive Combat - are MA&CS (Barreira, 2017). Findings are simplified and presented as a theory fostering not only a more accessible apprehension but the visualization of new investigative problems focused on Martial Arts practitioners' experiences in different contexts. The TCCP leads to the conclusion that corporal fighting experience is central to MA manifestations as practices involving complex phenomena such as teaching, learning, training and fighting practices in community contexts. Future descriptions on how martial arts practitioners' development occurs when experiencing different Corporal Combat help to develop a Theory of MA Phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology; martial arts; combat sports.

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### 1. Introduction

Theories concerning martial arts are not uncommon, and this is coherent with the growing interest in martial arts as scientific subjects and with the scientific process. Theorization is at the core of philosophical and scientific practices, which happen when theoretical attitudes change the natural manner of perceiving and acting in the world. As with culture in general, martial arts do not have or look for theory with universal value, unless approached with a theoretical attitude which aims to find definitive rationality to the goals of this special culture - from a scientific perspective. Meanwhile, what could be called theoretical assumptions are present in many martial arts, giving some important mindsets for the practitioner, many times working with parables and analogies. That is the case for example on a source from the II century A.D. to the so-called Chinese martial theory form (Henning, 2007). Scientific theories concern, for example, natural assumptions about values and conceptions of what martial art is. That was the case for hoplology (International Hoplology Society, n.d.), based on some evolutionistic ideas and apparently without academic repercussion (Bowman, 2017), a theory of Japanese martial arts (Tokitsu, 1979, 2000), the physicalist Integrative Combat theory (Vey, 2010) or the General Theory of Martial Arts proposed by Cynarski (2019), considering a mix of values and virtues, especially Japanese Budo, on a sociological and anthropological approach. Criticizing all approaches that look for a definition of martial arts, Bowman's (2017) theorization deconstructs the phenomena concluding it is not possible to say what it is. Its perspective, however, stills works on what can be called, in Husserlian terms, scientific natural attitude, or, more precisely, a historicist natural attitude. Between all these theories, there is no one based on the phenomenological analysis of structural lived experiences of

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these phenomena. A perspective like that is supposed to avoid both deterministic and relativist interpretations of MA&CS.

## 2. Objectives

This works aims to propose, based on previous phenomenological outcomes, a Theory of Corporal Combat Phenomenon (TCCP) and to anticipate directions for the propositions of a Theory of Martial Arts Phenomenon.

## 3. Methodology

Distinct attitudes and objects relatedness – natural/cultural, scientific natural/scientifical, phenomenological/essential – are described by philosopher Edmund Husserl (1919), the founder of phenomenology who proposed the task of philosophy – followed by science – was the construction of a new approach to understanding mankind and the world, where reason and truth are pursued to their essences. Following his footsteps, theorizing with this philosophical sense of the term takes into account the purpose of digging the crusts of facts from the various existing martial arts to capture in their inner sense those intentional elements that structure and make them possible. Guided by Husserl's philosophy, outcomes about combat experiences analyzed by bracketing natural knowledge's allow to grasp the inner structural intentionality that, in all varieties of manifestations, impulse martial arts to happen. Instead of analyzing the process, results are presented to foster new imaginative variation from the essential structure of different combative forms and some of their consequences, particular to martial arts understanding.

## 4. Results and Discussion

A significant essential approaching of corporal combat has been made by Figueiredo (2009), who conceptualizes Combat Sport by having the body as target and means of the actions. Even institutionalized combat, as is Sport, have been bracketed to return "back to the things themselves" (Barreira, 2017). Different Corporal Combat manifestations have the same intuition grasped by Figueiredo, but aren't sports. Neither all Corporal Combat manifestations are martial arts which, because of its complex and controversial manifestations, is bracketed as well. Instead of idealized or 'real' martial arts conceptions, the phenomenological prerogatives lead the analysis to back to the experiences that are constitutive to it. It has been already pointed out that in this direction the essential dimension of martial arts would be its practice (Harrison, 2011). Although true, it is a very general assertion that does not grasp the specificity of the phenomena in question. Before becoming any institutionalized cultural artifact, martial arts must be preceded by combat experiences and not all combative experiences are putting into practice Martial Art. Combat experiences can be described as the forms of physical brawl, playing of fighting, duel, self-defence and instrumental offensive combat, as well as corporal fighting. Each one has been described around its intentional structures, explicating their motivations and intersubjective dimensions. Any Combat Sport Psychology must to consider intentional dimensions of these practices.



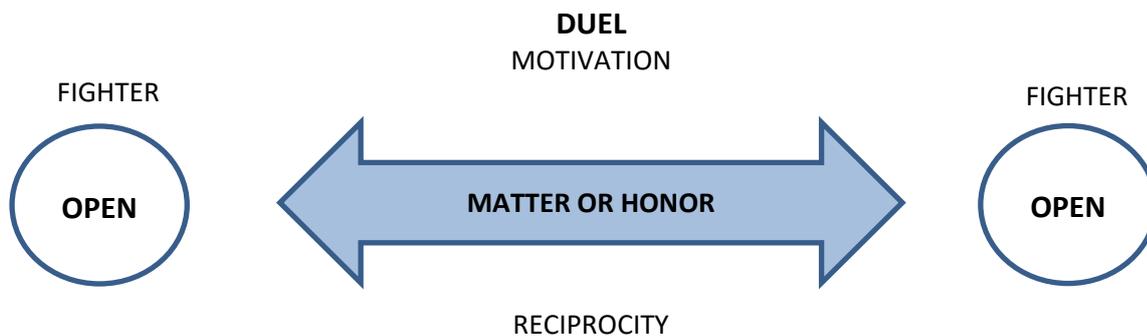
**Figure 1.** Street Fights and violence are not MA&CS, even if it can occur in their context.

These results are now simplified and presented as a theory fostering not only a more accessible apprehension but the visualization of new investigative problems focused on practitioners' experiences in different contexts.



**Figure 2.** Corporal Fighting gives the essential structure of MA&CS manifestations, many times occurring “as if” it is a duel, brawl or self-defence situation.

The Theory of Corporal Combat leads to the conclusion that if the intentional structure of corporal fighting experience is central to the manifestations of martial arts as complex phenomena, which include teaching, learning, training and fighting in community contexts, the structure of the duel is the basis of its foundational myth.



**Figure 3.** The duel as the basis of martial arts foundational myth.

Martial arts have the image of the duel as the founding myth of their fighting spirit. Their communitarian senses always remember that motive for the fight should not be for the wrong reasons, but it should be fair and this is a matter of honor. The sense of justice inscribed in the martial arts is a value for what is worth fighting for, giving its ethical sense.

Those structures of combative experiences describe how MA&CS can be used and have different functions, as fitness or spectacle. Different variations, as MA that loses its combative effectiveness - as *taijiquan* - must not necessarily be understood as being out of those structures, because, even without combat practices they are still doing reference to combat situations justifying their movements. In this sense, problems concerning the cultural studies field of martial arts (Wetzler, 2017) can be traced back to their comprehensive intentionality.

## 5. Conclusion

These results are simplified and presented as a theory fostering not only an easier apprehension, but also a visualization of new investigative problems focused on practitioners' experiences in different contexts. The Theory of Corporal Combat Phenomenon (TCCP) leads to the conclusion that - if the intentional structure of corporal fighting experience is central to the manifestations of martial arts as complex phenomena, taken to be teaching, learning, training and fighting (real or imaginary) practices in community contexts - dueling is the basis of its foundational myth. A Theory of Martial Arts Phenomenon can be fostered by future descriptions of martial arts practitioners' personal development that occurs when experiencing not only corporal

fighting but different combat forms and transitions between these experiences (Mello & Barreira, 2015; Bassetti, Telles & Barreira, 2016). This leads us to a better understanding of how violence can play different roles in Martial Arts practitioner formation.

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