

## Appearance and Reality

I just excised this from a novel I am working on called *An Atlantis of One* (now available online at both Amazon and B&N). It was meant to suggest that appearances often hide an unseen reality or, at least, deceive one into thinking those appearances are the real reality. It did not seem to flow with the development of the novel, so I felt it might be more helpful here rather than there.

One time, in the dojo, I was trying to illustrate a point about posture and self-defense. Traditionally in karate, the “ready” posture is a symbolic front-facing stance, feet at a natural angle shoulder-width apart, arms in front of thighs with hands in fists. It is formal enough to keep the student mentally prepared even though it would never occur in an actual situation. I explained to the class that often the way we train is too rigid to be used literally, but that rigid formalities discipline the body so that an informal version of the shapes and movements can be called up when needed. I explained that the advanced *karate-ka* responds appropriately but seldom formally.

In today’s society, a society not only visual but also very literal, people are impressed by aesthetic form and athletic motion. They think that what they see in karate is what they will get in self-defense. They believe that advanced karate is aesthetic and athletic. In fact, advanced karate may be just the opposite. If the opponent drops without an observer seeing why, the practitioner is probably applying advanced karate.

I called for one of the bigger students to prepare to attack me while I was standing in the rigid ready stance we always teach beginners, the same one that begins every training kata. He lunged, punching toward my face. I stepped back into a formal front-weighted stance, blocked, and rapidly retaliated with a few punches and a kick before sweeping him to the floor and kneeling into a final *coup*. It was standard stuff, done quickly and smoothly. I heard a few students take involuntary inhalations at the potential violence of the retaliation.

Returning to his preparation stance, my student smiled, as pleased at my defense as I was in his strong attack. I knew a stronger one awaited.

From the formal ready posture, I relaxed my fists, and shifted my weight to one leg, much like standing on the street waiting for a bus. I no longer stared into his eyes, but used peripheral vision to keep aware while looking at an imaginary storefront across the imaginary street. As my opponent attacked, I shifted my weight to the opposite leg, turning my hips slightly. I snuck a single knuckle between his ribs, folding him forward as he lunged passed me. I then returned to a normal front-facing ready position close

enough to him so that he was unable to right himself without bumping against me. As a result, he fell to his backside. Instead of gasping, the class began to giggle.

“Which of these interactions,” I asked, “was more visually exciting? And which was more advanced?”