

# Interview:

## Mestre Suassuna



By Miltinho “Astronauta”

Translation by Shayna McHugh

Source: [http://www.capoeirado brasil.com.br/entrevista\\_suassuna.htm](http://www.capoeirado brasil.com.br/entrevista_suassuna.htm)

Recently, we met at Mestre Suassuna’s house in Parelheiros (São Paulo) for a long talk about Capoeira. Those present included: myself (Astronauta), Mestre Esdras Filho, Mestre Dal, and Papagaio-de-Pirata. Some students (I remember Kibe, Gema, Muriel, Wagner (Saroba), Durinho, and others...) trained acrobatics on the lawn while we spoke lengthily with the Mestre. Papagaio-de-Pirata also asked Mestre Suassuna the questions sent by the visitors of our web-pages.

Check out the interview:

**Capoeirado brasil:** Mestre Suassuna, we will begin with the subject that has most led to recent controversies and that we must face, sooner or later, whether we want to or not. We have the conviction that we are living in a privileged moment in the history of Capoeira, a moment in which it is preparing to enter in its phase of “majority,” as a recognized professional activity, as cultural heritage of the Brazilian people, and as an organized sporting activity. Today it has large groups in action, and is expanding unceasingly throughout the whole world...

**Mestre Suassuna:** My biggest concern is not with the large groups, the sportization or the Confederation; it is with the capoeiristas, those who fight daily for Capoeira. Because before the big groups existed, there were capoeiristas spread around: there was one here, one there, one in the village of Socó, another in Parelheiros, giving classes; there wasn’t even officially capoeira, but they were there, holding the berimbau and teaching. All these anonymous people have to be valorized. It is those people who keep and sustain Capoeira; the Confederation still has done nothing for them. There is a capoeirista playing there, in the middle of the field... but he is in capoeira, he is there, teaching his capoeira with much dedication and enthusiasm, battling against all kinds of difficulties.

Working to valorize those people is not easy at all. One has to go there, in the periphery, supporting them, encouraging them, working with them, giving courses, guiding them in their organization, etc. Or else, the Confederation should remain just doing championships, and leave the rest of the work with others... a truly important federation has to seek out those people and give them directives; this is its role, it has to provide support.

**Capoeiradobrasil:** Capoeira was always a tool that politicians used for manipulation of the masses, and the time has come to change that. It is we capoeiristas who have to make our own policies.

**Mestre Suassuna:** That whole business of championships, of Olympics, is what concerns me the least. It's Capoeira that is important to me, what Capoeira is or what it ceases to be. Capoeira's strength is not in becoming a sport, in being in the Olympics; I think about strengthening it so much in that which it truly is, and to make people return to Capoeira itself to practice it as it is: a game, an activity that's full of joy, and not (as they want it to be) a festival of beatings and a wild competition. I would like to know what benefit being in the Olympics could bring to capoeira? What was, for example, the benefit it brought to judo?

**Mestre Dal:** Ok, Mestre, on that point, I have to disagree with you: Being in the Olympics indeed brought many benefits to the sports that made it there, in terms of publicity, organization, recognition, support, and investment.

**Mestre Suassuna:** I want to call attention to capoeira's strength: capoeira is growing stronger in the whole world, regardless of the Olympics; I don't want to hear tomorrow that capoeira became known in the whole world because of the Olympics. Capoeira is known world-wide, and is desired; the whole world wants to do Capoeira, while other styles, despite being in the Olympics, are almost bankrupt.

**Astronauta:** Anyway, Capoeira is much wider than simply its sporting dimension, and I think it will never be reduced to just that. The athletes who go to the Olympics represent only a small segment of the totality of Capoeira.

**Mestre Suassuna:** To give you an idea, in Capoeirando of this year (2001) there were courses oriented more towards the martial competition style, the capoeira that I once called "cloned," because everyone plays exactly like each other. There was even a guy giving a course of only flips. And people representing the more playful, more traditional capoeira, called Angola, were also there: Cláudio, Jogo de Dentro. And the courses of those latter capoeiristas filled up with people. So I said to Mestre Decânio: "Wow, look where they are gaining numbers, there, it is Capoeira"; Mestre Decânio commented: "It is; here is capoeira, and over there it is not!..." and they slowly penetrate and conquer; they are not there to flip, to do acrobatics, they are there to play and teach capoeira, and they are learning to value their own work. Thus, the interest in the hard, martial capoeira without creativity, which is characteristic of championships, doesn't arouse as much interest as it sometimes seems; no, it is a partial interest.

**Mestre Dal:** But it will grow, without a doubt. It's the new students who are very interested in that; they dream about the Olympics...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Yeah, I agree, the progress is irreversible, but we must be alert in order to preserve capoeira. I like to listen to Mestre Decênio, because he says much in few words!

**Astronauta:** Yes, Mestre Suassuna: tell us about Mestre Decênio!...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Dr. Decênio trained capoeira with Mestre Bimba until a certain time, and later he stopped, he went to practice the profession of medicine, he went to be the director of a hospital. So he didn't accompany the later phase, of ungoverned capoeira spreading throughout all of Brazil. Then, when they called him back, he came at a time in which the whole world needed him. He came to recuperate, to promote the rescue of Bimba's capoeira, of the capoeira of that whole era, with all the technique that had become corrupted, the principles that had been forgotten.

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Suassuna, you know capoeira more than all of us here; you know that Regional ended. With Mestre Bimba's death, Regional no longer existed; it was transformed...

**Mestre Suassuna:** But even when he was alive, the students were already playing all different...

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Few people, today, know and play capoeira Regional...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Right, even Itapoan modernized Regional. Mestre Deputado is the one who stays closest.

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Okay then: capoeira Regional died; Angola, is still here, but also, it is no longer the Angola of Pastinha's time. So what I want to say is: Mestre Suassuna, you know more than any of us here what capoeira is; when a guy plays over a meter away from his partner, it's already no longer capoeira! It's something else.

**Mestre Dal:** It's one player divorced from the other...

**Mestre Suassuna:** It's acrobatics, it's a circus...

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Today, there are people who try to preserve Angola, but it's no longer that Angola of yesteryear, played in your time. I saw you and Brasília playing Angola, I saw Canjiquinha, I saw Gato Preto...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Look, what's lacking is people who are really concerned with Capoeira. There are many people, including those who work with Physical Education, and who are totally against everything there – Olympics, sportization, regulation and strict legislation – but capoeira expands in all directions. Capoeira is very strong and

multifaceted, and it is not this or that opinion that will dominate: no one is lord and master of capoeira. Not I, not anyone.

**Mestre Dal:** Capoeira will also grow as a sport, and, like all the other sports, it will be exploited, with commercial interests, with media, as a business; that is a reality.

**Astronauta:** Street soccer, pickup games, didn't cease to exist after the growth of soccer as a professional sport...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Nor will it cease; the pleasure of playing ball on the beach, etc.

**Astronauta:** Just as capoeira will not cease to exist...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Look, the time that I have left to enjoy capoeira, now... I am leaving what I know to some of my students... it's like this: I'll die around 2040, at one hundred and something years old. Until then, I will bother everyone a lot, I will be very annoying and tiresome. After I die, you'll do what you want with capoeira, go to the Olympics, but I know and love capoeira, and to change capoeira and to want to transform it... it's the same thing as giving your last name to a son that isn't yours, or giving your son someone else's surname. The transformations that they are doing in capoeira are all nonsense; no one is really concerned with capoeira. Capoeira is a warrior, and I am concerned with my work – the capoeira that I learned – and I don't depend on the recognition of the University of São Paulo or anyone else (by the way, the USP was the first to disregard me. You remember that, Astronauta). I am recognizing myself, looking at myself in the mirror and recognizing myself, and it is already very good. It's enough to say that Bahia, recently, has recognized Mestre João Pequeno as a valuable citizen; they gave him the key to the city. That's one thing, but on another day the government took from him the space he had, his academy – João Pequeno, eighty-something years old... it's a dirty trick! So I'm one person who is concerned with capoeira; I live in capoeira, I don't care about who is or is not successful. Everyone has the right to his success, each one with his capoeira. Capoeira is joy, it is good humor, it is not that competition business; it is spontaneity. And truly, there is a place for all that: championships, competitions, shows, playing around, therapeutic applications... in truth, Capoeira is so rich that I don't think that a single confederation will have the ability to take care of Capoeira, since it is so rich. Capoeira should have various confederations, various entities. Capoeira is popular wisdom, it is playful, and so you think a federation or confederation will organize capoeira? On the day in which they organize capoeira, it will be totally... lost. Capoeira is totally disorganized; it is the expression of a people, it is a chat in a bar, it has a thousand faces, it has lawyers, it has doctors, it has physical education professors, it has vagabonds, it has something of everything. So there must be a thousand entities to support capoeira, not controlling it, because capoeira is bigger than all that. A confederation must be a point of support for the capoeiristas who seek it. It must be a lever, for the weak, for the strong, for whoever is in the middle of the forest, in prison, wherever.

**Mestre Dal:** I agree, Suassuna, capoeira exists for oneself, and survives all the attempts to destroy it or control it, but someone has to take care of that institutional side of it, and if it is not us, capoeiristas ourselves, that side will fall into the hands of people who are unprepared for that responsibility.

**Mestre Suassuna:** Look here, Astronauta, your father once made a song, which I was going to record, but I lost it. He predicted that a few years in the future some people would want to be the fathers of capoeira, and then the song said that no, that capoeira would not have anyone as a father, because vagabonds don't have fathers, and capoeira is a vagabond, it is a vagrant! Capoeira is like a brook, a stream that runs and that takes the form that is necessary, depending on the path. It will not have a father, full of rings and diplomas, no. Those people don't even know the language of capoeira. If I say, "Do a capoeira move," he will not know what it is. Then he will say in a pompous voice, "The armada is an axial turn, mass times acceleration, or whatever..." (general laughter). I say: good grief, is he going to teach the armada like that??? Oh, just the other day I was at a batizado here in Colônia, in Marsilac, and I saw spontaneous capoeira there: the players giving kicks here, leaping there, and I said, "Oh, now that is capoeira!" Then, the guy at my side said: "But isn't it disorganized, mestre?" and I said, "No, it is we who are too organized." (general laughter)

**Mestre Suassuna:** Capoeira changed a lot; we must accompany it. The other day, Papagaio de Pirata here brought me a boy's question, which said: "How do your students manage to have such a rich and agile capoeira, since you are an old mestre?" Now, I respond, it's because I am accompanying capoeira, I am accompanying the thought of a people; it is what the people want it to be. I am adapting myself, the capoeira of São Paulo; Mestre Brasília and I adapt capoeira to the system of the people here. Mestre Bimba once said that people from São Paulo would never learn capoeira; however, today, we cannot apply this statement even to Americans. That girl there, Gema, helps give classes and plays a capoeira in which no Bahian can identify a defect. She is there integrating herself. On one hand – culturally – it is indeed the Bahians who know capoeira. But in practice, in the technique of the movements' execution, in the discipline and dedication, there are people from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais; that's the mixture of capoeira. If you go to New York and see a student of João Grande playing, you don't know if he's American or Bahian; just like today you see the Japanese playing soccer and sometimes beating the Brazilians. So in summary, I think that human beings are equal in all places; the difference is only a cultural question.

**Papagaio de Pirata:** That observation made me remember Nádia's question from Germany, who asks: "Dear Mestre Suassuna: Here in Germany, I have often heard the 'game of miudinho' being mentioned. I still have not had the opportunity to see that game. So my question is: Where can I find information about it? How would you describe this game? I thank you in advance for your reply. Axé!"

**Mestre Suassuna:** Okay, Miudinho is like the capoeira Regional of today: nowadays, everyone is throwing their legs here and there, and this is neither Regional nor Angola, but it is a form of capoeira. It's clear that just because Mestre Bimba died doesn't mean

no one would ever do capoeira again; capoeira had to develop, as it has developed into Miudinho. Today, there are many people doing movements of Miudinho, which was a rescue that I performed of old capoeira. I developed those movements, close sequences that only exist in my academy. There are many people giving Miudinho courses, doing Miudinho movements, but it is not Miudinho – just as there are many people giving courses of capoeira Regional, but it is not Regional. So I rescued the old capoeira, I improved it, I gave it a performance that is more appropriate for modern times, and I tried to work the movement in the sense of exploring the limits of the human body. Miudinho is played in a small space (at most 2 meters in diameter) requiring the capoeiristas to interlace, passing through each others' space without touching each other, without physically or morally injuring each other.

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Suassuna, about that, I wanted to ask another question: Can Miudinho be compared, does it have a similarity or something to do with the “Jogo de Dentro” of Capoeira Angola?

**Mestre Suassuna:** Well, in the first place, Miudinho cannot be considered a fight in capoeira; instead it is a development of aesthetically beautiful movements that exist in capoeira, movements that were forgotten, swallowed by capoeira's violence, by the strength of the athletes, who became very driven in the practice of capoeira, from the exaggerated influence of body-worship. So, while others were developing the more violent side of capoeira, I thought it more interesting to develop this side of the art, trying to discover and challenge the limits of the human body's malleability. Miudinho is the perfected Jogo-de-Dentro, with variations, things that I introduced or developed with my students. It's a game in which you develop your capacity not exactly in fight or *malícia*, but in doing movements, for you to feel what your body can do. Neither violence nor *malícia* is the goal of Miudinho; it is a game to be worked as poetry, without offense.

**Papagaio de Pirata:** Let's repeat Cláudio's question: *“Clearly the capoeira played today is not the capoeira of the old days, and, from the films that I see, the old capoeira was half rustic, without an elaborated aesthetic. It was certainly cleverer, more loyal; however, I have my doubts about whether it was fight-like such as the capoeira of today. But in an interview, I saw a certain mestre say that no capoeira more fight-like existed than the capoeira of the past... so, I ask you: how do you see capoeira played today? How do your students manage to have such a rich and agile capoeira, since you are an old mestre? What do you think of the capoeira of the Bahian Recôncavo, especially that of the city of Santo Amaro da Purificação? Axé, Great Mestre!”*

**Mestre Suassuna:** I already responded to a piece of that question, right? Now, regarding that question of violence, I will add: there exists a difference between capoeira being violent and being aggressive. They are two different things. Capoeira used to be violent, because it was full of weapons, full of cunning, and the fatal strike was very quick. Today, capoeira is aggressive: the violence is wide open; it is already stamped on the capoeirista's face that he wants to get you. The violence of the past was disguised; one guy deceived the other and led him into a trap. The capoeira of today shows the capoeirista's unrest and insecurity; he attacks openly because he doesn't trust in himself.

For example, the case of the immediate hit-back: sometimes if you are playing with a student, and he gets you with a rasteira, if you are not yet competent, you attack, body-to-body. The capoeira turns violent, and it's a scare. Because the capoeirista, above all, must be a person who is attacked without attacking, is offended without offending; he leaves and later gives the response. Today, capoeira has lost a little of this aspect. The capoeirista annoys without becoming annoyed; he irritates and mocks the other guy with *mandinga*, with the ginga. Capoeira lost in its essence, in its disguise, and what did it gain? It gained in technique, in strength, and in aggression.

**Papagaio:** And about the other part of the question: “*How your students manage such a rich and agile capoeira... etc*”?

**Mestre Dal:** Yes, because although your students do not practice that aggressive capoeira, it's undeniable that they can also fight: there are no reports of them getting beaten up in rodas where they face other capoeiristas. How did you manage that: capoeira that is art but survives in the middle of a fight, in the middle of violence, maintaining its identity?

**Mestre Suassuna:** It's the same thing I said: aggression is different from violence. Aggression is the invasion. The art of illusion is something else: to set your trap and suddenly, in exactly the right moment, release the quick and violent snare over the adversary. Aggression is invading the rights of the other person; it is playing the game of the strong against the weak, the strong guy that goes in to beat someone up. But capoeira, on the contrary, was born from the fight of the weak against the strong. Capoeira was born to provoke the opponent, and not to be provoked. The capoeirista who allows himself to be irritated by the other guy is incompetent, a person incapable of playing capoeira. He practices other styles. For him, capoeira is not the main objective. If it was, he would know how to get up in the morning, apply a takedown, and then say “Bye, see you tomorrow...” Now, I never taught my students to exhibit the aggressiveness that is common today. Look at Luiz Medicina: he is not and never was a player who invades and attacks anyone's physical or moral integrity. He is a capoeirista. All my students there in the south of Bahia play capoeira with respect and good manners.

**Mestre Dal:** And there is no record of anyone having superseded Luiz Medicina in Capoeira...

**Mestre Suassuna:** Yeah, I say that I was lucky to have him as a student, because he was already born a capoeirista. He teaches his capoeira there, and no one ever went to challenge him or disrespect him... Incidentally, Astronauta, you received a rude e-mail, from a student of the group Abadá, right?

**Astronauta:** Yes, mestre, but we don't know the truth: he signed the message JURUPEMBA ABADÁ, I have no idea, but he is said to belong to MUZENZA... and he challenged us to a “cock-fight roda” and said that our mestre is very old, and called us a “group of little faggots”...

**Mestre Suassuna:** So, you can tell that guy that Suassuna only responds to the Mestre of Abadá, or of whatever his group is; that guy who wrote the e-mail doesn't even merit a response. It's unnecessary. The capoeira of Cordão de Ouro, and Miudinho, is in focus because it's bothering the whole word.

**Astronauta:** Well, I responded with exactly that. He should abandon capoeira, because it has nothing to do with what he wants; he should practice free-fighting, if he likes cock-fights and exchanging beatings. He would do this if he were smarter, because in free-fighting he could at least win some money; but he should leave capoeira in peace for the capoeiristas.

**Mestre Suassuna:** Yes, tell him that, but also that Suassuna will only speak with his mestre. He should pass that message along to his mestre.

**Papagaio de Pirata:** Juliana's question is controversial: *"Is there singing during the toques of Banguela, Iúna, Santa Maria, Amazonas, Idalina, and Lamento? And is the hymn of Capoeira Iúna or Amazonas?"*

**Mestre Suassuna:** Whew, that's very confusing. Every mestre says something different. There is no singing. Mestre Bimba sang during a few certain toques. For each toque, there is indeed a type of game, a different expression of game (although Mestre Bimba almost never applied that; his toque is São Bento Grande, is Iúna). As for Amazonas, Idalina, and Santa Maria, each of the mestres says that they have a different game. For some it's the knife game, for others it's the game of *floreio*, etc... Iúna was the game of mestres and graduated students – and today it's the aspirin of capoeira (laughter): everyone plays Iúna just to calm down the capoeira roda, and it is nothing like that...

**Papagaio de Pirata:** And in Iúna, is it just the berimbau or is there accompaniment?

**Mestre Suassuna:** It is accompanied only by percussion, just the pandeiro, because there is no atabaque in Regional; Bimba didn't want it.

**Astronauta:** Right, he said that the pandeiro is the atabaque of capoeira.

**Papagaio de Pirata:** Mariano Kwenha, a native of Angola living in England, wants to know about Capoeirando 2001: how was it? Could you talk a little about that?

**Mestre Suassuna:** Hello, Mariano. It's too bad you weren't there this year; it was a success, each day got better and better. In truth, I don't want it to grow much more, so that it doesn't spoil. I don't want too many people to come, so it doesn't get too crowded. I want people such as yourself, who are concerned with the quality of the event. I want the friends of Suassuna, of Gato, of Peixinho, of Jogo-de-Dentro, of Cláudio... this year we had African dance, maculelê, puxada de rede, and we had a luau... next year, besides all that we're going to do candomblé and other interesting things. We will grow and bind our roots together there, Afro-Brazilian culture. There in England, you should join up

with Mestre Gato's people. And, from Cordão de Ouro, there is Poncianinho, who is in London... but I'd really like to meet you, Mariano.

**Mestre Dal:** Yeah, an African who wants to know capoeira as it is!

**Mestre Suassuna:** Well, I'm not a historian, but I believe that capoeira was born here, developed by the slaves...

**Mestre Dal:** Mestre Suassuna, the globalization of life has become a reality; it reaches the economy, information, relationships, and eventually it will reach capoeira as well. It has already reached it, since capoeira is in the whole world. There's the cultural aspect of capoeira that we all want to preserve, so I ask: in Japan, in Israel, in Russia etc., the people don't live the historical-cultural reality that we live: to be concerned with the liberation of the negro, with the ritual of Capoeira, and other cultural realities... how do you think that this will reflect in capoeira; could the fact of living a different cultural reality influence capoeira's development? How will capoeira adapt itself to other cultures, which did not go through slavery, rebellion, the "*capitão do mato*"...?

**Mestre Suassuna:** Yes, that is a problem for the capoeirista. We have to work so that all these peoples adapt themselves to our cultural system, to capoeira as it is. Of course we will teach the blows, the movements, but we will also bring the "cultural package" – the history, the rituals, the music, and the types of games. All this must be brought as well, and they will have to assimilate it, to their way, as they think possible.

**Mestre Dal:** Because recently there was a debate in Tokyo, and Mestre Gladson, who was present, told us that in a roda there, a mestre was singing to the sound of the berimbau and then a student jumped into the middle of the roda, interrupting the mestre, without the least respect for ritual. Mestre Gladson asked about this, and received from the student the following response: "Here, we don't have that, we don't even need a berimbau playing, because we have nothing to do with your culture; this is Japan..."

**Mestre Suassuna:** No, that is not capoeira. We have a song that goes: *Pé pro ar, pé pro ar; vou jogar capoeira, pé pro ar* [Feet in the air, feet in the air; I will play capoeira, feet in the air]. Over there, they are just throwing their feet in the air, not doing capoeira. That student understands nothing of capoeira itself. This is why I say that I learn every day from Mestre João Grande. When he is invited to an event nowadays, he says: "No, I won't go there, give a course or anything, unless you pay me – USD\$1000 at least. Listen, if you think that it's your cultural right, play the capoeira that you want to play, do backflips here and there..." When I was young, I listened to rock music at the highest volume, but today, no; I hate the noise! But I cannot determine what those kids will listen to... it's a phase they're going through. When they really want capoeira, they will have capoeira.

**Mestre Dal:** In that same lecture, in Tokyo, there was presented a clip of a Japanese film about the Yacuzas, the Japanese mafia, and it's using capoeira and capoeiristas (they are

having classes with capoeiristas) to form new gangs – the marginal side of capoeira being used there.

**Mestre Suassuna:** It's like I already said: Capoeira is rich in different aspects, it has marginality as well... and so FICA, where does it enter?<sup>1</sup>

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** For me, FICA doesn't enter anywhere in that issue. Karate, Kung Fu, and Aikido are also utilized by these Japanese mafias. FICA has nothing to do with it.

**Mestre Suassuna:** Of course it enters. Why doesn't it stop the film? Prohibit it!

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Huh? But what about the right to free expression of the guy who makes the film? It's another subject, it has nothing to do with it!

**Mestre Suassuna:** But there is the following: Capoeira does not have to make a platform for the Universal Church. No, my friend, Capoeira was bad, it is bad, it fights wars, it fights on all sides, it is competition; it is also a game, axé, culture, it is a toy, it is a sport, everything, and it is *malandragem*. And where's FICA in all this? Here's something interesting: you go to the United States and there are two hundred martial arts you could learn there. If you want, one guy could grab the other and tie him in a knot, or break his whole body, but that's not what the Americans want. They want Capoeira; they want *the game of Capoeira*, the *mandinga*, so much so that capoeira is now the strongest over there. There's Jelon and Boneco and those who went there in the beginning, but who is strongest there? It's João Grande! Even though he is so old. Now, you have to see: Capoeira is a game, it is dance, it is fight, it is of war and it is of peace, it is of culture, of music, it's a bunch of things; if a guy wants to use it for beat-downs, use it!

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** No, but then it is no longer Capoeira!

**Mestre Dal:** It is, I agree! The *combined value*, the *cultural* is the differential. If not, the guy can do any martial art, and it's the same thing.

**Mestre Suassuna:** What's going on is that those kids, today, are leaping, flipping, and doing a ton of acrobatics. They jump here and there, but when the time comes to judge their capoeira, from zero to ten, you give just a 3. Because the guy isn't playing Capoeira; this is a damned confusion...

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** Today there is no longer Capoeira Angola nor Regional.

**Mestre Suassuna:** No, my son, there is indeed!

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** No, I don't think so. There's no one who preserves Capoeira Regional. Neither Gato, nor Acordeon, nor Itapoã.

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<sup>1</sup> The FICA that is being discussed here is the International Capoeira Federation, an entity with the aim of unifying and organizing capoeira. It is *not* the Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (International Capoeira Angola Foundation).

**Mestre Suassuna:** No, but for me, it's like João Pequeno says: "Capoeira does not have two, no. Capoeira is just one!"

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** So, what exists today? It's a modern capoeira, a different capoeira, much more than Regional and Angola. There are people who cultivate Angola, to preserve the knowledge of Angola, and there are those who do the same with Regional; however, when you enter in the roda to play capoeira, it's something else, it's neither Angola nor Regional that is played, no one knows what it is. It's contemporary, modern, I don't know...

**Mestre Dal:** It's hybridized...

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** So much so that capoeira doesn't have *schools*; doesn't have one of Bimba, one of Pastinha...

**Mestre Suassuna:** No, no, but it does! You're not traveling throughout the world, as I am, and you're not seeing, not accompanying capoeira's development. I say: let's travel, let's see capoeira there in Santo Amaro. There is capoeira Angola, there is capoeira Regional, in Santo Amaro da Purificação, etc.

**Mestre Esdras Filho:** But I ask, who is playing Capoeira Angola, here, today?

**Mestre Suassuna:** Here? No one! What I want to say is that Capoeira is not measured by its songs, by its backflips, etc. It is measured by the capacity that a player has to handle this or that type of game, and know to give the right response; know to sing Angola or sing Regional. If he resorts to free-fighting or wrestling when the game gets tough, then it's not Capoeira. It's not Capoeira because he allowed himself to be irritated by the irritation of his opponent. The capoeirista is *crafty*, he is a cobra, he arms his trap, and he doesn't go around provoking others. If someone comes to grab me, and I know nothing, then he'll be able to grab me. But if I know jiu-jitsu, then I'll break his neck and kill him. So, the capoeirista never goes to grab anyone. Capoeira is the art of anti-grappling, the art of the weak against the strong; it is the cobra, the strike of the cobra. Look, why did Mestre Bimba teach the galopante? Because it is the blow that most irritates the opponent. Give this blow and wait for the guy to get annoyed, to grab you, and then give him a kick, a strike. The guy who resorts to grappling is not a capoeirista. If you slap the capoeirista in the face, he does ginga and composes himself; because if I slap your face and then wait for you with a hidden knife, and you come charging over here all crazy, I'll stab you. In the old days, it was like this. Today if you give the slap, the guy comes over annoyed, you grapple, he grapples, you're totally immobilized, and you stay that way...

**Mestre Dal:** Okay, but today you tell your students, you criticize this business of grabbing and grappling, and then someone says: "*But, wait a minute: in 1930 Mestre Bimba created a martial art different from traditional capoeira and introduced novelties. Why is it that he could, and today, jiu-jitsu, cannot?*"

**Astronauta:** Yeah, that's the case of Grupo Topázio, under Mestre Dinho...

**Mestre Dal:** So Mestre Bimba created a martial art that was something different, mixing elements of savate, boxing, judo, and batuque. Today they've added grappling, so why not?

**Mestre Suassuna:** Dinho, for example, I give my hand to him, because he did not call his fight *Capoeira* but instead *Capojitsu*; he knew that what he's doing is *Capoeira with jiu-jitsu*. He knew this, in contrast to the bunch of idiots there who think that they are playing capoeira. So it's *Capojitsu*, it's a different style. You should listen to Decânio about this, and what he said that Mestre Bimba said: "Stupid is the capoeirista who lets himself be grabbed; even more stupid is he who grabs." Today's capoeirista is stupid, is ultra-stupid: he arrives in a place and sees a huge guy, and he, who is small, wants to fight that huge guy, just because his mestre said that he's brave, a champion, and that he has to go there and get the huge guy. But it's nothing like this; the right thing to do is to leave, to escape, to say "I want nothing to do with it," etc. If the huge guy wants to get you, you say no, I want nothing to do with it, what's this, leave me alone, until the guy gets distracted, lowers his guard and becomes unprepared; when he is convinced that you don't want to fight, then... BAM, the fatal blow; and the capoeirista grabs his things, goodbye, a hug, I'm going, see you tomorrow. That's the capoeirista: crafty, treacherous, dangerous. Boy, I've seen capoeiristas be provoked, challenged to fight, and then converse, convince the guy that they don't want to fight, and even buy him a beer. Then when the guy is drinking, BAM, break the cup in his mouth, and then turn around and take off; it is the *malandragem* of capoeira! Câmara Cascudo used to say that every Brazilian is a capoeirista, every Brazilian has that *malandragem*. But today they've become stupid...

**Mestre Dal:** But the question persists: Why could Mestre Bimba introduce modifications in the art, and the jiu-jitsu guy, today, cannot?

**Mestre Suassuna:** Because you cannot misrepresent the principles of the art. Capoeira never was and can never be a martial art of immobilization. Mestre Bimba innovated, but he did not transform it into a martial art of immobilization. This is not of the spirit, of the essence of capoeira.

**Mestre Dal:** Okay, we know that, but the novice, the new student who does not know, he wants to go to the Olympics, etc. These are very important questions for the future development of Capoeira.

**Mestre Suassuna:** But this is why I fight so much against the Confederation, because it should be doing this: clarifying and elucidating Capoeira's different facets. There's the aspect of competition, which goes to the Olympics; there's the aspect of show, of performance; and then there's Capoeira itself, the game, the true form...

...and the chat continued until nightfall, with much animation, because when capoeiristas get together to talk about their art, their passion, they never want to stop, and no one can control that...

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