

OPEN PAPERS

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The Origins of a Popular Combat Technique - the Savate- in the Bourgeois France of Louis -Philippe (1830): the Emergence of a Modern Sport According to the Theoretical Framework of M. Foucault

Not one combat technique similar to the Savate has been invented in the occidental civilization, with the exception of English boxing, in the eighteenth century. References regarding this French fighting discipline were minimal. The first known reference can be traced back to 1828 through a quotation attributed to Francois Vidocq. At the beginning of Louis-Philippe's reign (1830-1848), the savate became a real technique of combat: the "savate players" punched and kicked their opponents in frays. They learned these techniques in the streets or in the backyards of "cafés." Around 1840, the savate was transformed into a form of gymnastics, which was taught in private Clubs or Associations. Numerous sources described the conditions of that practice. H. de Balzac, in Colonel Franchessini, showed the interior of a private Club where gymnastics and savate were practiced. The Lecour brothers ran several attracted gym hall where "bourgeois" and nobles got exercise. In 1844, L. Leboucher wrote the first book on that discipline, (Théorie de boxe française et anglaise) which precise the different bodily techniques used by the practice of that period. The term savate was less and less used and, in 1842, was replaced by "French boxing" according to Théophile Gautier. By the end of the nineteenth century, this discipline was very well known: it was taught at school, at the army and in Associations. But, at the beginning of twentieth century, concurrence of modern sport was fatal to French boxing. It is only during the sixties that French boxing became a modern sport with national and international competitions.

The savate resulted in the crossing of new social, political and cultural conditions and a legacy of French spirit that we can locate in the duel. According to Foucault, knowledge, power and self-government had achieved a network, which could explain why this discipline appeared at that time. Knowledge led to a new

consideration of men statute (Episteme or Configuration of Man); power changed from a structural and relationships point of view (political government and bio-powers); and self-government was in favor of specific technical expression. But, "born too soon in a world too old," the French boxing remained an academic discipline where health and aesthetic were more important than efficiency in combat: it couldn't transform itself into a modern sport before the seventies.
