

EDITORIAL

Paul Bowman and Benjamin N. Judkins

The idea behind the title and theme of this collection – ‘the invention of martial arts’ – first emerged as a question: In an era when academics have an obligation to be familiar with arguments about the ‘invention of tradition’ [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983], ‘imagined communities’ [Anderson 1991], ‘imagined geographies’ [Said 1995; Said 2005], and so on, how are scholars to approach the question of the history, or histories, of martial arts?

We feel that this question has particular currency for the emergent field of martial arts studies not least because (without naming any names) quite a bit of scholarly work on martial arts history still seems to be undertaken and produced without taking into account any of the simultaneously enriching and complicating insights and arguments that have become necessary and common knowledge in the fields not only of historiography but also of social and cultural studies more widely. The title, ‘the invention of martial arts’, seeks to evoke the insights and arguments of such historiography, and to invite scholars to explore the invention of martial arts, when the word ‘invention’ is read in terms of such ground-breaking texts as *The Invention of Tradition*, *Imagined Communities*, *Orientalism*, and the many other works of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, cultural history, and cultural geography that have been stimulated in response to these seminal contributions.

However, our interests extend beyond the field of history. The questions and concerns of martial arts studies are not merely those of history or historiography. But the idea of ‘invention’ is equally apposite in relation to the very broad spectrum of questions that we wish to encourage scholars working in the field of martial arts studies to address.

Accordingly, we invited proposals that would engage critically with any significant aspect of ‘invention’ in, around and of martial arts – from the origin myths, folklore and popular cultural imaginings of traditions, to motivated political or ideological interventions and inventions, to the most modern, commodified, mediatized and spectacular inventions of martial arts, and beyond. We proposed that contributions could include (but without necessarily being limited to) studies of: origin myths and lineage narratives in traditional martial arts; rediscovered and reconstructed martial arts; the appropriation of martial arts in nationalist, nation-building, social management and other political processes; the dissemination, development, and transformation of martial arts; the commodification and international trade in martial arts; comparative considerations of the ‘same’ martial art in different contexts; the place of martial arts in contemporary culture, society and economy; the relationship of martial arts to tradition, modernity, postmodernity, coloniality, postcoloniality, neocoloniality and globalisation; and martial arts and/as/in ideology.

Perhaps martial arts studies will always be interested in such questions. Or perhaps interest in themes like these will wane in response to new

cultural issues, theoretical and methodological developments, as they emerge in unpredictable ways and from unexpected quarters. Certainly, what came in, in response to our call, surprised us.

Benjamin Judkins, for instance (one of the editors of this journal) initially began to write what he thought would be a small piece for this editorial. However, as his research into and analysis of this area was already so expansive, what had originally started life as a short introduction to the topic soon grew into a fully-fledged research paper. Consequently, it appears here as the first article, 'The Seven Forms of Lightsaber Combat: Hyper-reality and the Invention of the Martial Arts' [Judkins 2016]. As Judkins argues, martial arts studies has entered a period of rapid conceptual development. Yet relatively few works have attempted to define the 'martial arts', our signature concept. His article evaluates a number of approaches to the problem by asking whether 'lightsaber combat' is a martial art. He asks: what is the link between 'authentic' martial arts and history? Can an activity be a martial art even if its students and teachers do not claim it as such? Is our current body of theory capable of exploring the rise of hyper-real practices? Most importantly, what sort of theoretical work do we expect from our definition of the 'martial arts'? These fundamental questions are compellingly explored by Judkins.

Thomas A. Green responds to different, yet in some key ways related, questions and concerns in his article, 'The Fifty-Two Hand Blocks Re-Framed: Rehabilitation of a Vernacular Martial Art' [Green 2016]. As he notes, from the late 1980s, a cluster of related African-American vernacular fighting styles became a focus of contention among martial artists. Over the next twenty years, evidence drawn from popular culture, social science, and sport validated the existence of vernacular styles such as 'Jailhouse Rock' and 'the 52s'. These were never taught systematically, but were an accumulation of tactics, rhythms, and attitudes, learned hands on. Green observes that the style that has received the greatest exposure is based on a boxing paradigm, and he discusses the attempts to commercialize it, before moving on to discuss the efforts of martial arts researcher Daniel Marks, 52s practitioner Kawaun Akhenoten, filmmaker Kamau Hunter, and fitness innovator Hassan Yasin – all of whom have sought to recognize, record, and revitalize the 52s and related physical traditions. Re-framing the 52s as a heritage art, Green argues, has involved making claims about a uniquely African-American expression for cultivating health, fitness, and ethnic pride, as well as the development of a structured, culturally-based curriculum; all of which has sought to rehabilitate an 'outlaw' art into a viable expression of contemporary physical culture.

Using a different methodological approach, Allyson Quinney explores questions of gender and feminism in the UFC, in her article, 'The @ UFC and Third Wave Feminism? Who Woulda Thought?: Gender, Fighters, and Framing on Twitter' [Quinney 2016]. As Quinney notes, most professional sports, such as hockey, tennis, and basketball, separate men's and women's sports leagues. In 2013, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) disrupted this pattern by showcasing its first women's mixed martial arts (MMA) fight in a once male-only fight league. As Quinney argues, while the UFC's inclusion of female fighters is a step forward for gender equality, the change does not come without issues. Her essay focuses on the framing of female UFC fighters

on Twitter over a four year period. Through an intersectional feminist analysis, it examines how Twitter users frame female fighters' bodies in relation to gender, race, class, and sexuality. It argues that there is an imbalance in attention paid to female fighters in regards to gender, race, class, and sexuality, and this constructs contradictory messaging about feminism, female fighters' bodies, and the UFC on Twitter.

Perhaps responding most directly to the initial impulse behind our call for papers, George Jennings' article is called 'Ancient Wisdom, Modern Warriors: The (Re)Invention of a Mesoamerican Warrior Tradition in Xilam' [Jennings 2016]. As he demonstrates, *Xilam* is a modern Mexican martial art that is inspired by pre-Hispanic warrior cultures of ancient Mesoamerica, namely the Aztecs (Mexico), Maya and Zapotec cultures. His argument is that it provides a noteworthy case study of a Latin American fighting system that has been recently invented, but aspires to rescue, rediscover and relive the warrior philosophies that existed before the Spanish Conquest and subsequent movements beginning in 1521. Using the thought-provoking work of anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo*, Jennings analyses the Xilam Martial Arts Association through the way that they represent themselves in their three main media outlets: their official webpage, their Facebook group and their YouTube channel. He argues that their portrayal of the art as a form of Mesoamerican culture and wisdom for current and future generations of Mexicans is contrasted to contemporary Mexico, a Western (Occidental) project that is far removed from the foundations of this diverse country. Jennings argues that certain elements of Mesoamerican civilisation may be transmitted to young Mexicans through a mind-body discipline, which in turn acts as a form of physical (re)education. He concludes that xilam is both an invented tradition (in a technical sense) and a re-invented tradition (in a cultural sense), which provides lessons on the timeless issues of transformation, transmission and transcendence within the martial arts.

In a related work, Paul H. Mason's article is entitled 'Fight-dancing and the Festival: Tabuik in Pariaman, Indonesia, and Iemanjá in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil' [Mason 2016]. As he argues, festivals bring people together in affirmations of community. This article looks at two festivals in coastal locations in Indonesia and Brazil, with a close inspection of performances of fight-dancing included within both festivals. Both Indonesia and Brazil have a colonial past, he points out, and he examines performances of fight-dancing in festivals in two geographically distinct contexts. He argues that the improvisatory or choreographed organization of the fight-dancing performances echoes the manner in which the festivals themselves are assembled, and that as these festivals grow in popularity, the process of inventing tradition is heterogeneously co-constituted by those parties who actively invest in the symbolic capital of the events. Verbal and non-verbal forms of expression reinforce each other in the construction of a multivalent sense of regional traditions. The corporeal engagement of organisers and participants blurs the boundary between embodied remembering and narrative accounts. Based on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork, this article explores the interweaving of fight-dancing with the history, growth, and post-colonial expression of regional festivals.

Augustin Lefebvre looks at the corporeal engagement of organisers and participants of aikido, in 'The Pacific Philosophy of Aikido: An Interactional Approach' [Lefebvre 2016]. The article engages with the question of the invention of martial arts by examining the case of this important modern Japanese style. Relying on existing schools of traditional martial arts, Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) created his system with the goal of transforming techniques aiming at killing the opponent into techniques which could positively benefit both partners. Instead of becoming stronger than the opponent, the goal of aikido practice is rather to improve the individual's behaviour during their physical interaction with their partner. The question Lefebvre examines here is how practitioners manifest such philosophy during their practice and through their embodied conduct. One central organizational device for structuring aikido practice, he argues, is a key pair of participation categories: *attacker* and *counter-attacker*. Using them, Lefebvre focuses specifically on how practitioners simulate a situation of conflict through *semiotic structures*, through which they construct a world of movement in which anticipating the attacker's movement becomes possible. Because practitioners are organized with such a framework, they can, through movements of the whole body, pacifically produce and resolve the situation of conflict. Using ethnomethodology, multimodal studies, and the analysis of video recordings of naturally occurring interactions, this study contributes to understanding how a practical philosophy is implemented within the practitioners' bodies and is manifested during social interaction.

The issue ends with a range of reviews of books, conferences and a new DVD documentary. First is a review of Barry Allen's *Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts* [Allen 2015], by Hiu M. Chan; second a review of Alexander Bennett's *Kendo: Culture of the Sword* [Bennett 2015], by Andrea Molle; and third, a review of Lee Wilson's *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Indonesia* [Wilson 2015], by D. S. Farrer. Daniel Jaquet then provides an overview of three recent conferences focusing on Historical European Martial Arts studies. Finally Douglas Wile provides a fascinating and extremely insightful and provocative review of the new DVD documentary, *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West* [Strugatz 2016], which focuses on the impact of Cheng Man-Ching on his American students.

This issue demonstrates that martial arts studies, as a research area, not only benefits from the various concepts of 'invention' discussed here. It also has the potential to bring unique insights and greater depth to a variety of debates as they are taking place in a number of disciplinary contexts. As such, the contributors to this volume have made an important contribution to the development of interdisciplinary research. Of course, while the articles and reviews in this issue are diverse and global in their ramifications, much still remains to be explored. We hope that scholars in our field will continue to research and illuminate these areas for years to come.

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