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Editors: Benjamin N. Judkins and Paul Bowman

Show, Don’t Tell: Making Martial Arts Studies Matter

Are Martial Arts Trivial?

Do the martial arts matter? And how can we as scholars more effectively discuss their social impact when writing to a scholarly, but non-specialized, audience? Or, to put the question differently: How do we move beyond simply talking about these practices and instead show our readers their actual significance?

Consider the following vintage Japanese postcard printed in the 1930s. It is one of the more powerful images of the traditional Asian martial arts which we have come across in the last couple of years. At first glance, it might seem unremarkable. Here we have two young men practicing judo in the dojo of a local educational institution, much like young men in Japan have been doing for decades and continue to do to this day.

Figure 1: Vintage Japanese postcard, pre-WWII. The main inscriptions at the top and bottom read: ‘Celebration/Commemoration of the Principal’s Homecoming’ followed by ‘Kodo-kai’, the hosting organization (Translation by Jared Miracle).

ABSTRACT

How can we make martial arts studies matter? Returning to the issues of triviality and legitimation raised in the Spring 2017 editorial, in this essay we explore various strategies for conveying the intellectual importance of our work to a scholarly but non-specialist readership. In recent years the field of martial arts studies has made impressive strides in terms of both growth and public exposure. Yet this success suggests that increasingly gatekeepers in the form of editors, funding bodies and promotion committees will have an impact on the development of our field. Appealing to such readers is a critical next step in the creation of martial arts studies. The first draft of this editorial was presented by Benjamin Judkins as a keynote at the July 2017 Martial Arts Studies Conference at Cardiff University. It has subsequently been edited to reflect the opinions of both authors and the current context.

KEYWORDS

Martial Arts Studies, Martial Arts, Disciplinarity, legitimation, triviality, field building.
While the Asian martial arts are often associated with a sense of peace or harmony (often for entirely orientalist reasons), this image is unsettling. One’s eyes are immediately drawn to the racks of waiting rifles on the wall behind our martial artists, and beneath these racks we can see a row of hanging bayonets. Rifles and bayonets were stored in similar fashion in the barracks where Japanese soldiers worked, ate and slept during their occupation of various parts of Asia and the Pacific. The weapons in this image were likely intended for the school’s drill team and military education classes. Their presence was not intended to cause a sense of alarm to contemporary Japanese viewers, who were simply supposed to register a well-stocked ‘modern’ educational facility.

The very banality of the scene invites the flowering of subconscious associations within our mind’s eye. Compulsory military training became an increasingly pronounced component of the Japanese educational system during the 1930s, at much the same time that Japanese aggression in China increased. Indeed, this was an important decade for the Japanese martial arts. Disciplines like kendo, as taught in schools, were reformed to strip them of their sportive elements to better prepare students for battlefield encounters [Hurst 1998; Bennett 2015]. Jukendo, or bayonet fencing (which has recently been in the news due to the protests that erupted over plans to once again make it available in some Japanese schools), took on an increasingly ideological character and became the most commonly practiced Budo in the immediate run-up to the Second World War [xinhua.net 2017; Bennett 2015].

Yet, this image is powerful precisely because none of that is shown. We do not need to see Japanese naval landing forces in Shanghai, or soldiers digging pill boxes on Pacific Islands, to know roughly what year it is. We do not need elaborate backstories to understand who these young men are, or what their future holds. And no one who looks at an image such as this is going to ask whether the martial arts are ‘trivial’. Nothing answers that question quite like a row of neatly polished bayonets making an appearance in a judo dojo on the eve of WWII.

Do the martial arts matter and, by extension, does martial arts studies matter? Questions of triviality versus substance are interesting to us as social scientists because they have a cyclic quality to them. We are privileged to live in a time when we can ask that question in earnest. In 1941, people may have been asking whether kendo was an effective training mechanism for practical swordsmanship [Gainty 2015]. But no one saw the physical, social or ideological aspects of these systems as trivial. During the post-WWII period, the American occupation forces in Japan moved to regulate and even ban some martial arts organizations and activities because they understood that these things create social externalities that reach far beyond the realm of individual practice.

These observations were not restricted to discussions of the Japanese martial arts. Consider this photograph, printed as part of an American newspaper report on the Chinese resistance to the Japanese occupation in Guangdong on June 7th, 1939 [figure 2].
Here we see a female Chinese militia leader, silhouetted against a stark sky. The empty expanse at the top of the frame visually highlights the blade of her long handled *dadao*, or ‘big knife’. While American newspaper readers in the 1930s knew little about the details of the Chinese military, their exotic blades had acquired an iconic status, much like their counterpart, the Japanese *katana*.¹ We obviously cannot see where the woman’s gaze is directed, nor do we need to. We do not need to see an artillery scarred landscape to understand who she is and what is about to happen.

A backstory is ultimately unnecessary to grasp the social significance of the martial arts in China during the 1930s. Indeed, it is fascinating to compare these contrasting images of Japanese and Chinese martial artists, both caught up in the opening stages of the same conflict. On the one hand, Japanese consumers are meant to understand how their disciplined arts were producing effective and unquestionably loyal soldiers for the state’s highly modern army.

In contrast, American voters, wondering about the wisdom of sending war aid to China, were assured that this country’s martial traditions would produce heroes and heroines willing to stand up and oppose the Japanese no matter the personal cost. While not a modern and disciplined fighting force, such brave individuals should receive more than our empathy. They should also receive our support. It is the essential simplicity of these images, as well as their direct appeal to group identity, that made their message effective.

¹ Indeed, a fascination with the seemingly exotic weapons of Chinese martial arts, and particularly their oversized blades, was already well established among the Western reading public by the outbreak of the Boxer Uprising in 1900. Chinese propaganda efforts during the 1930s often emphasized the bravery of ‘Big Sword Troops’. These efforts were so successful that by the time of America’s entrance into WWII the *dadao* was appearing in newspaper headlines, newsreels and even children’s trading cards.
In the editorial of the Summer 2017 issue of Martial Arts Studies, we asked whether martial arts studies is trivial. These images suggest that the answers to this question are not always obvious. We cannot really engage such a question without making explicit our scope and domain conditions. Who is our intended audience? To whom do these arts matter, or not matter? When is this question being asked? Is the year 1939, or 2009? Through what theoretical lens should we evaluate the question of substance?

There is much that could be said about each of these conditions. For the sake of brevity, let us restrict the current discussion to how we can make martial arts studies matter in the current era. Likewise, the audience that we must consider is not mysterious, though it has its complexities. Perhaps we should start there.

In our own writings, we try to imagine ourselves being read by an audience of three different people. The first of these could be any reader of this journal. To succeed, our writing must speak to, and build from, critical conversations that are already happening within the martial arts studies literature. Yet, as the editors of this journal, we frequently encounter scholars who are writing about the martial arts who do not yet know that our field exists, or who cannot quite figure out where the bridges lie between their own projects and those discussed in the larger literature. It is important that we continue to work to expand the scope of our discussion, bringing more of these voices into the conversation.

Second, we imagine writing for a certain type of practicing martial artist. While not a professional academic, this individual generally has at least some university education and a burning passion for their chosen style. They would like to see their art discussed with the same rigor and conceptual toolkit that they were introduced to in school, and yet they want to be able to see their personal experience in the resulting analysis. Keeping the lines of communication open between dedicated scholars and practitioners is vital as it better ensures that we will continue to have access to the sorts of data that the field needs to develop interpretive or causal theories in the future.

The final, and in many respects most challenging, reader that we must consider is a fellow academic who has no long-term interest in martial arts. What such readers really need is an assurance that our discussion is both factually, theoretically and methodologically sound and helpfully relevant. More precisely, can martial arts studies scholarship speak to the big questions in their discipline?

At the current moment, our books and articles are likely to encounter all three of these types of reader. And this creates a challenge when asking what we can do to make martial arts studies matter. Simply put, not every reader, academic committee or funding organization is looking for the same sort of thing. Our first conclusion is that we must be increasingly conscious of the complexity and heterogeneity of our audience at every stage in the research process.

It is this last aspect of the puzzle that brings us back to our introductory photographs and the title of this work. In truth, it has never been difficult to make the martial arts matter in a narrow disciplinary sense.
One first locates a critical debate in the discipline – for instance, how national identity is invented and stabilized through the creation of an imagined past. You find an aspect of martial arts history, practice or representation that speaks to these specific questions. Next, one writes a case study or two in which the martial arts are used to stake out a position in this debate, critique some leading thinkers, and advance a theory of one’s own.2

Success within a disciplinary framework is formulaic by design. This is because every discipline (and every department) generates and publicizes its own standards of evaluation. Knowing how our work will be evaluated, we know something about how to go about doing it. And in some respects, this remains a critical exercise. As a purely practical matter, martial arts studies must be seen to make contributions to the disciplines before anyone will be willing to engage with us on a more fundamental level. And success in the disciplinary realm is usually a prerequisite for young scholars seeking promotion and tenure.

Still, when writing for other parts of our audience, things become more complicated. Martial arts studies draws its strength from the fact that it is a resolutely interdisciplinary exercise [Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011; Bowman 2015]. As a community, we do not all share the same methodological orientation. We come from many fields, from all areas of the globe, and we study fighting systems from every hemisphere. And we have no interest in challenging that to impose a narrow understanding of what ‘good martial arts studies’ must be, or to define substantive relevance in theoretical or methodological terms.

That said, how do we make martial arts studies matter in the absence of shared disciplinary or methodological perspectives, or even a shared consensus on what things should be central to an academic discussion? Bowman has noted that our field is currently in a ‘pre-paradigmatic state’ [Bowman 2016: 118], but the question remains as to whether this is solely the result of its relative youth or if there is something more fundamental about its constitution that will continue to promote heterogeneous development.

It may be helpful to remember that we are not the first group of writers to face such a challenge. Lacking an audience with a unified personal perspective, storytellers and filmmakers long ago discovered that the best way to create understanding was to cultivate within their audience a sense of personal investment and empathy. If we want to continue to encourage the growth of martial arts studies, we will need to do the same sort of thing as we increasingly encounter editors, colleagues and funding officers who, while not necessarily hostile to our project, will likely have never heard of nor thought that much about it before.

To draw on the classic piece of advice often attributed to Anton Chekhov: It will never be enough to simply tell these individuals that they should be excited about martial arts studies. Rather, we need to write in such a way that we show them what we can contribute and demonstrate the unique perspectives that will be lost if our voices are not represented at the table.

2 Examples of authors who have successfully coopted a disciplinary framework to present work on the martial arts to a broader audience include Meir Shahar [2008], Peter Vail [2014] and Lauren Miller Griffith [2016].
CONNECTING WITH A NON-SPECIALIST AUDIENCE

How then do we ‘show’ that martial arts, and by extension martial arts studies, matter? Again, the introductory images of the judo dojo and the female militia leader provide some hints for reaching a non-specialist audience. Or perhaps we want to think about some of our favorite martial arts films and what makes for an effective visual story. After all, it seems highly unlikely that many of us would be practicing the martial arts today, let alone researching them, if not for the massive explosion of enthusiasm that these films ignited within the global public consciousness starting in the 1970s [Bowman 2017: 144-147].

Authorities on screenplays have noted that good stories often share three basic characteristics. First, they feature an active protagonist who reveals their character through the choices they make [Field 2005]. Second, some aspect of this character’s beliefs, either about themselves or society, is challenged, thereby allowing the character to develop a meaningful story arc. This is what K. M. Weiland poetically termed ‘the lie your character believes’, and heaven only knows that we have a few of these in the martial arts [Weiland 2016]. Thirdly, effective writing needs to show that something is at stake. The audience must feel that the actions of the characters have meaningful consequences both for themselves and for other individuals in society.

The images of the judo students and the female militia leaders, while single photographs rather than entire screenplays, draw their audience in (and by extension reassure them that the martial arts matter) precisely because they hit each of these points in a remarkably effective way. The female militia leader is clearly an active protagonist. The lie that she believes is that her efforts, even in the absence of Allied military aid, will influence the outcome of the war. That belief defines her story arc. And obviously there will be meaningful consequences for what happens next if American military aid is not forthcoming.

These same three hints, with a bit of translation, can also help us to communicate more effectively when discussing our own academic research with a non-specialist audience. It is not simply enough for us, or half a dozen of our close colleagues, to understand why some aspect of the martial arts matter. We must get much better at conveying these insights to groups of people who have less of a personal or professional connection to these questions. Editors and funding bodies are right at the top of that list. And these same three principles of communication – developing an active protagonist, describing complete story arcs, and emphasizing meaningful consequences – can (with a bit of tweaking) be the keys to demonstrating that martial arts studies, as a field, really matters.

AN ACTIVE PROTAGONIST

Let us begin with the idea of having an ‘active protagonist’. In a screenplay, or even a photograph, there is usually little question as to who or what the protagonist is. Luckily, academic theorizing, whether interpretive or positive in nature, also forces us to focus our attention on certain key actors or variables. In the social sciences, we sometimes make a distinction between independent variables, by which we mean basic causal forces, and dependent variables, the thing that is being explained. The question then becomes: Where do the martial arts fit into this equation?
If we always approach these questions from the perspective of the various disciplines, where we start off by saying, ‘I am a political scientist’, or anthropologist or historian ‘who researches martial arts’, a certain bias can enter our research design without our realization. After all, the big debates within the field of political science often take political and social institutions as the key factors in any situation, and then go on to ask how other groups (like martial arts movements) are coopted and subordinated to these larger political processes.

Perhaps, as in the previous example, the martial arts come to be tolerated, or even supported, by the state as they can provide a unifying mythology that serves the instrumental needs of a nationalist agenda. That is basically the story that Andrew Morris told during his examination of the Central Guoshu Institute which was an organization backed by the Chinese state and the ruling KMT party during the 1930s [Morris 2004]. In a project like this, the martial arts organization is examined, but only as an extension (or subsystem) of a larger and more fundamental project.

These can be very interesting sorts of questions, and they clearly focus on the martial arts. Morris made important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between the modern Chinese martial arts and society. Yet, as the dependent variable, or the thing that is explained and interpreted, the martial arts are being cast in the role of a ‘passive protagonist’. As voluntary social institutions, these groups may face dilemmas, but because (in many of these models) their agency is limited, the choices they make reveal little information about their values or identities. In this sort of structure, the martial arts might function as a lens for political or social analysis, but they are only one potential lens among many. Beyond a case study or two, both we and our editors will be forced to ask: Is it necessary to look at the martial arts at all? Why not labor movements, or film industries, or sports leagues?

A wide range of other voluntary associations or popular culture phenomena, most of which are better understood and more respectable, would work just as well. Or, to return to our original metaphor, passive protagonists can help us to explore the world. In the long run, however, narrators tend not to be very interesting guides.

In the hands of a skilled story teller, active protagonists reveal their character to the audience not through exposition, nor as victims of fate. Rather, the actions that they take reveal their core identities, values and strategies for navigating a challenging environment. In our own writing, we can replicate this insight by remembering that individuals often join martial arts groups precisely because they seek to make changes in their own lives or in their communities.

Rather than simply accepting elite views of what a modern Asian state should be, authors like Hurst, Gainty and Morris have demonstrated that martial artists in both China and Japan spent much of the 1920s and 1930s actively opposing Western-inflected elite opinion and championing their own vision of what modern Japanese and Chinese societies should be. Through savvy public relations work and strategic alliances, martial artists in both states enjoyed more success than one might have expected in both carving out a niche for themselves and using government resources to spread their ideas throughout society. It was not the Ministry of Education’s idea to put all of those kendo classes...
In Japanese schools during the early 20th century. Rather, the classes were the result of decades of concerted lobbying by Japanese martial arts organizations and individuals [Hurst 1998; Morris 2004; Gainty 2015].

In the work of authors like Hurst, Gainty and Morris, the martial arts are transformed into independent variables that have a measurable effect on a broad range of other social institutions. More precisely, the martial arts of the 1920s and 1930s cannot be ignored because they generated many interesting social externalities. No longer are the martial arts merely a lens. Cases such as these reveal that martial arts studies is more than an adjunct to the preexisting disciplines, it is a critical tool for understanding fundamental aspects of the human experience.

In practice, any sufficiently complex research agenda has the potential to approach martial arts as both dependent and independent variables. The arrows of social meaning and causality are often deeply recursive, and some mix between the two will be necessary. But we make the best case for the existence of martial arts studies as a truly independent research area when we discuss the martial arts as an active protagonist.

GIVING THE MARTIAL ARTS A STORY ARC
THE BALANCE BETWEEN THEORY AND DATA

Now that we have established the martial arts as a potentially important social force, what do we intend to do with it? Good screenplays encourage the audience to empathize with the protagonist as their actions reveal fundamental insights about who they are, and demonstrate how their view of the world evolves. In short, the martial arts need to do something. They need a story arc.

Luckily for us, engaging story arcs often focus on the process by which a character comes to realize that some of their beliefs, either about themselves or the world, are either false or mythic in nature. It is when a confrontation between myth and reality finally erupts that we discover who our protagonists are. Identities, desires and relationships are clarified in these confrontations.

It seems that there are few areas of social life in which marketing myths, half-truths, lies and legends collide more frequently, or forcefully, than in the martial arts. It is very difficult for anyone to think about the historic European martial arts without envisioning a world in which noble knights charged around on white horses. Michael Ryan’s work on Venezuelan stick fighting, which Judkins recently reviewed for this journal, evokes images of small farmers resisting waves of outside oppression with nothing but their machismo and polished hardwood garrotes [Ryan 2016; Judkins 2017]. And it seems that every Chinese folk martial art practiced today feels obliged to trace its origins to an imaginary burning of the Shaolin temple or forfeit its right to be called ‘kung fu’.

This does not exhaust the potential misunderstandings that define the martial arts. For every internally generated legend, historical exaggeration or marketing myth, there is also an externally imposed social narrative. In France and the Netherlands, various actors,
including successive governments, decided that kickboxing would be a good cultural fit for the immigrant Muslim community and encouraged the sport as an aid to cultural assimilation. As Jasmijn Rana points out in her article ‘Producing Healthy Citizens’, it is hard to imagine programs like this working when only Muslim youth are encouraged to join kickboxing classes while all the rest of the citizens are given public pools and swimming leagues [Rana 2014]. While all parents in the United States instinctively ‘know’ that taekwondo classes are a wonderful mechanism to instill self-discipline in children (the trait that society seems to value above all others), they also ‘know’ that there is something just a little bit off about adults who continue with these hobbies, rather than turning to more serious pursuits. These adult practitioners get internet parody videos rather than praise.3

Bowman offers a detailed examination of the stories that we tell ourselves in Mythologies of Martial Arts [Bowman 2017]. In light of this study, it seems difficult not to see the many ways in which the martial arts, and their social position in the modern world, have been shaped by these myths. There is an undeniable thrill that comes with the discovery that apparently common-sense propositions might be anything but. This might lead to attempts to debunk certain popular misconceptions. But in all cases students of martial arts studies should first strive to understand the social externalities (either positive or negative) that these myths generate.

Or, put differently, how is it that the lies that you believe about your own practice impact other people who have never thought of themselves as martial artists? Students and instructors might believe anything they want. Those beliefs, however, are not without consequence. Douglas Wile, in his article ‘Fighting Words’, explores at length the implications of current Chinese language debates on the origins of taijiquan the impact of which reaches far beyond a handful of history buffs [Wile 2017]. He suggests that this discussion touches on central questions of Chinese identity, academic freedom and the Party’s control of traditional culture. This seemingly arcane dispute has political implications for everyone.

To fully explore such topics, one must first find the appropriate balance between theoretical development and empirical exploration. It is impossible to identify the interesting puzzles that surround the martial arts without a well-polished theoretical lens. Such questions only emerge when observed phenomena contradict our expectations. And these expectations are inevitably a result of the theories that we hold, whether we are conscious of them or not.

Nevertheless, if we fail to dive into the empirical data, we will never be able to convince the non-specialist readers that these social discourses and causal mechanisms have a substantive impact on the broader community. Again, that is the bar we are striving to reach when we attempt to show that martial arts studies, as an interdisciplinary project, matters and brings something to the table that more traditional approaches might not.

3 Among other examples, Master Ken’s incredibly humorous videos on YouTube seem to mock the adult martial artist who has failed to put away childish desires and fantasies. For a more detailed discussion of his comedy, see Bowman [2017: 20-24].
This brings us to the last point of discussion. We need to convey clearly to our audience that their understanding of all of this will have meaningful consequences. This is one area where we believe that the martial arts studies literature has often come up short.

After all, who wants to preach to the choir? We do not need to convince our colleagues and interlocutors within the field that the reconstruction of Spanish fencing systems, or the detailed documentation of traditional wrestling practices, really matters. Any one of us could come up with half a dozen research questions to pursue through the study of those disciplines before reaching the end of this essay. Nor do we need to convince the cross-over audiences composed of actual practitioners who enjoy many of our books and articles. The very fact that they are willing to wade through an ethnography on some aspect of boxing, or yet another history of Japanese swordsmanship, speaks to a level of obsession that makes any apologies unnecessary.

At the same time, it seems that there is a great deal of low hanging fruit that remains un-plucked. In the opening editorial to the Summer 2017 issue, we observed that there are very few discussions of actual violence coming out of the field of martial arts studies, even though this is a pressing theoretical and policy issue. It is also a problem that students of the martial arts might be uniquely qualified to speak to. Nor is there only one conversation to have. Violence exists in many modalities, from interpersonal to interstate conflict. The nature of martial arts schools means that they have often been implicated in, or been forced to respond to, community violence in pretty much every region of the globe.

A few voices in the historical and anthropological literature have already picked up on these threads, but much more remains to be done. As a field, we are well-positioned to examine the current trend towards greater levels of organized ethno-nationalist, social and political conflict. How should we approach the rise of organized groups dedicated to promoting brawling and other forms of violence at political protests? Can we speak to the somewhat complex connections between various forms of terrorism and martial arts training? And what insights might martial culture open on the nature of domestic abuse? I doubt that these topics will reflect many of our individual experiences within the martial arts, of course, and there is always a bias towards writing what you know. That is another bit of advice that you might get from a screenwriter. Yet, there is an urgent need to begin to tackle these many faces of violence.

Still, we do not wish to downplay our accomplishments. They are important to consider as well.

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Sixt Wetzler addressed the question of violence at length in his keynote at the July 2017 Martial Arts Studies Conference in Cardiff University. His presentation is currently being written up for publication and will hopefully appear as a chapter in the forthcoming book *The Martial Arts Studies Reader*, which will be published by Rowman & Littlefield International in due course.
In the last few years, martial arts studies has firmly planted its feet on a new and more difficult path. For decades, pioneers like Burton, Draeger and Hurst attempted to bring the study of the martial arts into the academy [Burton 1884; Draeger 1979a, 1979b; Hurst 1998]. And yet, for a variety of reasons, they failed. Hoplology never gained the traction that martial arts studies currently enjoys, remaining essentially a hobby, and the few real successes that emerged, such as Hurst’s study of the armed martial arts of Japan, or Esherick’s work on the Boxer Uprising, tended to fall within the confines of disciplinary-bounded discussions [Esherick 1987].

The current view looks very different. Rather than studies of traditional fighting systems or combat sports being a personal eccentricity, something that an individual scholar might pursue in lonely isolation in addition to their ‘serious’ academic work (or as a limited addendum to it), the martial arts are now receiving a degree of respect within the academic world. We no longer ask whether it might be possible to treat the martial arts as an academic subject of enquiry. The evidence rests all around us, in ever growing piles of recent publications and manuscripts awaiting review.

The last few years have seen the creation of academic journals, research networks, a book series, and well-attended annual conferences held in multiple locations around the globe. Top university and academic presses have taken on an increasing number of martial arts studies manuscripts, and their appetite for these sorts of projects only seems to be growing.

All of this is good news. And yet, a moment of reflection reveals that this rapid success has also raised the stakes. A university press can only publish so many monographs in a calendar year. This means that our acquisition editors must argue not just that our project is interesting, but that it is more important, and will generate more enthusiasm, than some other project.

More graduate students in fields like anthropology, cultural studies and history are focusing their dissertations on martial arts related research projects than ever before. And every year a number of these students hit a highly competitive job market full of interesting and well-qualified candidates. Likewise, the increase in university press publications reminds us that the first generation of assistant professors to have written in this area is rapidly coming up for tenure review. And as part of that process they will need to demonstrate to several individuals that not only were they capable of getting works of martial arts studies published, but that these projects have made critical contributions both within and beyond their disciplines.

The question we posed in the editorial of the last issue of this journal may have been somewhat rhetorical. It is unlikely that anyone reading these pages believes that the martial arts, or martial arts studies, is trivial. Trivialities do not inspire so many individuals to write books and research articles or embark on transoceanic fieldwork.

This same understanding may not be shared by the funding bodies, tenure committees, and acquisitions editors who are even now getting their own vote on whether, and how, martial arts studies continues to develop. Ironically, the success that we have enjoyed up to this point has
moved us into a position where we are likely to meet such gatekeepers with increased frequency.

Our next challenge as a field will be to establish a regular presence at the various large disciplinary meetings that dominate the academic calendar, further increasing the visibility of our work. Beyond that we need to find the sources of funding necessary to institutionalize the gains that we have already made. These are exciting opportunities and we are fortunate to be working from a solid foundation. Yet, making martial arts studies matter within the larger academic context is a challenge precisely because of our past success in professionalizing the discussion.

Rather than repeatedly explaining the many ways in which the martial arts have mattered, we need to show these gatekeepers what we as a field can do. We must demonstrate the unique insights that we can bring to the table. Not everyone will approach that goal from the same perspective, and that is one of the strengths of the interdisciplinary approach. When we strive to treat the martial arts as an active protagonist (or as an independent variable), we make a stronger case for the intellectual independence of martial arts studies. When we balance theoretical insight with historical, ethnographic or sociological data, we have the best chance of reaching non-specialist readers and convincing them that the martial arts generate externalities that extend beyond the realm of the individual hobbyist. Lastly, by emphasizing the meaningful consequences of these discourses and practices, we answer the question of whether the martial arts are ‘trivial’.

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AFFECTIVE MYTHOLOGY AND ‘THE NOTORIOUS’ CONOR MCGREGOR
MONOMYTH, MYSTICISM AND MIXED MARTIAL ARTS
DARREN KELSEY

ABSTRACT
There are many ways in which we can interpret the sporting, commercial and personal success of Conor McGregor whose stories, fights and social appearances are analysed in this paper. There are archetypal traits of the hero and the trickster in McGregor’s journey, persona, legacy, and the semiosis that surrounds him through the myth of the fighting Irish, all of which I consider as affective mythologies in their psycho-discursive forms. Prior to this analysis, I revisit the discourse-mythological approach (DMA) whilst accounting for the psycho-discursive framework I developed to analyse affective mythologies. However, I found recurring mystical qualities which called for the expansion of this analytical framework. By analysing the myth of the law of attraction, I argue that a non-reductive materialist approach to mind and consciousness is necessary due to the role of mysticism and ideology in popular culture. Since the study of martial arts requires attention to cultural, political, economic, commercial, psychological, biological and transpersonal phenomena, this paper encourages more radical interdisciplinarity between cultural studies and biological sciences to develop innovative theorisations of culture, ideology and consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION
MAYWEATHER VERSUS MCGREGOR

On 12th December 2015, Conor McGregor knocked out Jose Aldo in 13 seconds to become the undisputed UFC Featherweight Champion. Less than one year later, McGregor took the Lightweight title from Eddie Alvarez to become the first UFC fighter to hold belts in two different weight classes concurrently. McGregor has since become arguably the biggest star in the UFC. With his boxing skills being a key strength in his MMA style, he challenged Floyd Mayweather to a boxing match. Mayweather was regarded by many as the greatest boxer of all time with a record of 49-0, and he came out of retirement to accept McGregor’s challenge. Given the fact that McGregor had never professionally competed as a boxer, many dismissed this as a ridiculous spectacle and a cynical cash grab. Whilst the fight did generate over $100 million for each fighter, with Mayweather thought to have earned over $300 million, there was far more than money at stake: The reputations of both fighters and their respective sports were on the line. The fight was attended by over 13,000 spectators and purchased as a pay-per-view event by millions of viewers worldwide – making it one of the highest grossing fights of all time. Just the pre-fight press conferences alone were attended by countless fans, including thousands of Irish fans who travelled to see McGregor. After an impressive start to the fight from McGregor, Mayweather showed his poise and his class, winning via stoppage in the 10th round. For many, McGregor had performed well and exceeded expectations. Despite losing, there was a wide level of respect for McGregor’s having taken on such a challenge (when some critics had said he would be unable to land a single punch) and being competitive in the ring with Mayweather.

How had McGregor become so popular? What did he symbolise and how had his ‘greatness’ become so widely recognised beyond MMA and the UFC, especially in his home country of Ireland? As Joe Rogan said early on in McGregor’s career:

“There’s some wild brash dude out of Ireland that was kicking people’s asses and doing it in spectacular fashion … He’s got that thing, whatever it is. He’s got talent, obviously he’s got speed, excellent striking technique, excellent wrestling and jiu-jitsu, but he’s also got that thing. It’s hard to figure out what that thing is but you know when people have it.

[https://youtu.be/9IlISjahuNW]"

There are many ways in which we can interpret the sporting, commercial and personal success of McGregor. There are distinct archetypal traits of the hero and the trickster in McGregor’s journey, rhetoric, embodiment, persona, cultural and personal legacies, and the semiosis that surrounds him. These elements form part of the stories he has told and the stories that have been told about him. Those stories are theorised in this paper through an analysis of affective mythology.

Prior to the analysis, I outline the theoretical and analytical position I adopt in the McGregor case study. I recap the discourse-mythological approach (DMA) whilst accounting for the psycho-discursive framework I developed to analyse affective mythologies [Kelsey 2017]. However, amongst the semiotic and archetypal material in this analysis, I found recurring mythical and mystical qualities (such as visualisation and the law of attraction), which called for the expansion of my analytical framework. Hence, I introduce non-reductive materialism as a philosophical position to understand how the psycho-discursive mechanisms of metaphor and externalisation operate through affective mythologies. By taking a non-reductive materialist approach, this paper will enhance the scope of the analytical framework I adopt in my research on affective mythologies. In conclusion, I will argue that a non-reductive materialist approach to mind and consciousness is necessary due to the manner in which forms of mysticism and ideology recurrently operate through forms of popular culture. But before I cover the analytical framework that is adopted in the case study, I will discuss visualisation and the law of attraction in relation to McGregor.

VISUALISATION AND THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

The Secret [see Byrne 2006] is a film and book claiming to point to a force that exists in the universe through which visualisation and positive thinking will attract (magnetise) good fortune. This concept has influenced McGregor’s personal philosophy and is often present in his rhetoric. It often operates through the persona he has constructed and the archetypal qualities of his story. The law of attraction (positive visualisation) is a metaphor that is used to enable a positive and focused mind-set. A materialist approach to mind and consciousness, which I will discuss later, means there is no external entity being attracted to an individual through positive thoughts. That said, whilst the law of attraction might be fantastical in terms of its mystical claims about the universe, the metaphorical, affective qualities for those who use this myth to focus their mind are real; it provides a mind-set for individuals to feel positively empowered and in control. Its externalised, metaphorical form is necessary in order to stimulate its internal affect. Like religious metaphor, it serves its own mythological purpose through the affective qualities that it resonates with in the psyche (a Jungian concept of the psyche that I will return to shortly). The myth of the law of attraction only becomes a fallacy when it transforms from metaphor to literalism. McGregor, for his part, often refers to the law of attraction in both metaphorical and literal terms.
In cases such as The Secret, as well as in the rhetoric of other motivational speakers, we see how the literalism of metaphor functions as a vehicle for ideology, as economic and social narratives that try to naturalise cultural conditions through dualist concepts of a greater power or entity in the universe. Through the motivational talks of Tony Robbins, for example, Robbins refers to the law of attraction as one reason why the rich get richer and the poor are poor – because the poor have not discovered the law of attraction [https://youtu.be/YISTfOo-R4I]. In The Secret, it is reported that a gay man who was being bullied and intimidated because of his sexuality changed his mind-set and experienced an immediate change in circumstance because of the law of attraction and positive visualisation. These are the kinds of examples that can be ideologically problematic and misleading because they have a tendency to slip towards dualist mysticism by overemphasising the control that one’s mind has on external, physical factors. If positive thinking results in positive changes of demeanour, subtle adjustments of body language, subconscious interactions and interpersonal relations that resonate positively with other people, then these socio-cognitive explanations warrant attention. But literalising the law of attraction – from its metaphorical form into dualist, mystical forms – does not explain the psychological phenomenon of visualisation and positive thinking.

In the McGregor case study, I am still interested in understanding why visualisation is powerful, i.e. how it functions metaphorically and ideologically, as both a semiotic and psychological (internal/embodied) mechanism. The law of attraction myth, for some people, can be inspiring, unifying and motivational because of the mind-set it stimulates and the focus it provides. Its mystical and metaphorical elements stem from the four mythological functions identified by Joseph Campbell. Rather than criticising McGregor for adopting the law of attraction, I am interested in how this myth resonates through his story and how other archetypal, semiotic and mythological forms support this myth to construct McGregor’s greatness as a cultural phenomenon. McGregor’s mysticism makes a significant contribution in the monomythical narrative of his journey. But how can we analyse McGregor’s story in terms of the archetypal qualities of his personality? This is where I adopt the discourse-mythological approach as a psycho-discursive framework for analysing affective mythologies. I will now outline this framework propaedeutic to a more thorough examination of the McGregor mythos.

1 Campbell identified what he saw as four common functions of myth [see Campbell and Moyers 1988]: a metaphysical (or mystical) function, a cosmological function, a sociological function, and a pedagogical function. These functions explain the social and psychological levels through which we use myths to help make sense of the world. There is no need to interpret these functions rigidly or use them to categorise every story in my case studies. Rather, the intertextual complexities of storytelling and current affairs will often contain overlapping layers of mythological functions. These complexities show us how multiple archetypes are developed through the affective dynamics and recurring functional traits of mythology.

**DISCOURSE-MYTHOLOGICAL APPROACH (DMA)**

In previous work, I designed DMA to analyse discursive constructions of myth in news stories [Kelsey 2015]. Initially, DMA was not a psycho-discursive framework. More recently, I adapted it to analyse the psycho-discursive mechanisms of other media and cultural texts [Kelsey 2017]. This section will provide an overview of the DMA framework in order to familiarise readers with its terminology and analytical grounding.

Discourse, mythology and ideology, though overlapping terms, must nevertheless be distinguished [Bottici 2007; Flood 2002]. As Flood points out, failure to define the concept of discourse within theoretical frameworks of myth have resulted in two central limitations: First, the distinction between myth and ideology has been blurred; second, a systematic approach for analysing how beliefs are expressed through myth has not been provided. By contrast, it is important to understand how myth ‘arises from the intricate, highly variable relationship between claims to validity, discursive construction, ideological marking, and reception of the account by a particular audience in a particular historical context’ [Flood 2002]. In distinguishing between myth and ideology, Flood defines myth as a type of discourse and a vehicle for ideology. Similarly, Bottici describes myths as narratives which ‘put the drama on stage’ [2007: 206].

When identifying ideological positions or expressions of discourse, however, the analyst often faces a problem, viz. the accusation of carrying or applying their own ideological perspective:

The problem is that, once one enters into the polemical use of the concept of ideology, it becomes impossible to extricate oneself from it – it triggers a vicious circle. The dichotomy of ‘ideological’ versus ‘real’ upon which this use ultimately rests can always be turned against those who employ it’. [Bottici 2007: 199]

Against this, a neutral approach to ideology [Kelsey 2014, 2015, 2017] enables comparative and critical analysis capable of addressing the content, structure, and functional elements of ideologies [Flood 2002] in different discursive and cultural contexts. Here, I do not claim any freedom from ideology or shy away from acknowledging my own subjective interpretations; the analyst can accept that their own knowledge, understanding and critique is influenced by ideology. In such an approach, the analyst is critically aware of this and is able to critically reflect: ‘Analysts are not free from ideology or superior to myth. But they can be critical and they can be reflective without proposing truth or falsity in their own accounts when we understand how myth and ideology function through the discourses we produce and consume’ [Kelsey 2014]. I do not take the negative approach to ideology [Fuchs 2015] that suggests ideology only exists in those things

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that we are critical of and, hence, our own critique cannot be equally ideological. Nor do I take a pseudo-objective, pseudo-scientific or Marxist approach. My position here has refuted the claim that we can operate outside of ideology through non-ideological objectivism [see Baines and Kelsey 2013, 2015a]. Ideology is not inevitably negative either. Rather, in taking this approach, I see culture as a battleground of ideologies that play out in a struggle to construct different meanings.2

This approach to discourse, mythology and ideology is concerned with how meanings function and the purpose that they serve rather than proposing fixed ideals of truth versus lies or non-ideological versus ideological. It is here that the DMA diagram [Kelsey 2015a] demonstrates its synergy of discourse, mythology and ideology.

As we can see, this diagram (Figure 1) only accounts for the circular mechanisms of ideologies and mythologies operating through discourses, which are also products of ideologies and mythologies. At this stage, it does not account for the deeper psychological groundings that account for the affective stimuli where archetypes [Jung 1946, 1959, 1973] operate across the transpersonal terrains of affective apparatus and the collective unconscious.

AFFECTIVE APPARATUS AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

When I initially developed DMA, it was never proposed as a complete model or fixed approach. DMA was developed as a dynamic framework that could always be refined and that was open to new synergies and further theoretical expansion.3 Hence, I proposed affective apparatus [Kelsey 2017] as the most substantive term for encompassing the psycho-discursive dimensions, language formations and social

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2 Fuchs argues that: ‘Critical theory is a critique of ideology; Ideologies are practices and modes of thought that present aspects of human existence that are historical and changeable as eternal and unchangeable. Ideology critique wants to remind that everything that exists in society is created by humans in social relationships and that social relationships can be changed’ [2015: 7]. On this basis, he argues that: ‘Critical theory has a normative dimension: For Marx, critical theory is a normative realism. It argues that it is possible to logically provide reasonably grounded arguments about what a good society is, that the good society relates to conditions that all humans require to survive (the essence of humans and society), and that one can judge existing societies according to the extent that they provide humane conditions or not’ [7]. However, a more moderate (or neutral) approach to ideology argues that all ideas created by humans carry certain ideological forms, rather than those that Marxism has decided are wrong. Critical attention can be paid to the problems that some ideologies cause (or are products of) but analysts do not claim to be free from ideology – they are part of a struggle of ideas within culture.

3 Kelsey [2017] introduced the concept of affective practice to DMA by adopting a refined approach to that of Wetherell, who showed that discourse studies could incorporate affect theory from a social science perspective. However, Kelsey adopted this concept in synthesis with psychoanalysis, which differs to Wetherell.
expressions of mythology. This stems from the neuropsychic depths of the unconscious and personal psyche to the collective actions and expressions of social groups, i.e. the transpersonal. These groups experience and express their own mythologies in cultural environments with distinct ideological implications. This approach enriches the scope of DMA and provides us with a psycho-discursive synergy that DMA with distinct ideological implications. This approach enriches the scope of emotion and provides us with a psycho-discursive synergy that DMA and other discursive frameworks previously lacked. As Cassirer [1946: 43] states, mythology, more than basic emotion, is the expression of emotion: 'The expression of the feeling is not the feeling itself – it is emotion turned into an image'. This is one example of why we should focus on this oscillation between non-representation and representation if we are to study mythology in its affective form. Jung's model of the psyche and collective unconscious is adopted here with this purpose in mind.

Jung's work helps us to think about the neuropsychic and evolutionary aspects of affective qualities behind cultural mythologies. Jung's work provides a useful starting point when we begin to think about the depth and significance of affective qualities that operate in our unconscious minds. Jung proposed the concept of a collective unconscious, a set of shared psychic structures within all human minds that are fundamental to all psychological development:

My thesis, then, is as follows: In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents. [Jung 1996: 43]

Before going any further, it is important to confront some common misconceptions of Jung’s work. Jung did not overlook the significance of culture and personal experience in the development of one’s own psychology, characteristics and personality. He recognised the importance of culture in personal and collective contexts that were significant to individual and group psyches. But deep beneath one’s personal unconscious (shaped by their own experiences and significantly influenced by the society in which they live) Jung proposed a shared psychic structure that is universal across all individuals. Jung conceived archetypes to be ‘innate neuropsychic centres processing the capacity to initiate, control and mediate the common behavioural characteristics and typical experiences of all human beings’ [Stevens 1994: 49].

Archetypes are developed from neurological stimuli, recurring psycho-discursive complexes and behavioural patterns that we all share. They take on powerful forms in how we tell stories to construct meaning. From the collective unconscious through to the social and cultural salience of consciousness, we can analyse the affective trajectory of archetypes as they become personally and collectively fused within popular narratives and stories of our times. Jung's model of the psyche encourages us to think beyond the parameters of textual, discursive and social practices of language, semiotics and communication. Jung’s model encompasses those conscious, physical qualities whilst delving deeper into the psyche to account for psychological stimulants and components of communication that we do not consciously draw on when we think and interact. These aspects are significant since they form those archetypes and psychological complexes that make meanings powerful and salient in their conscious and cultural forms.' I will now introduce those archetypal conventions that are most significant to the study of the McGregor mythos. I begin by discussing the monomyth [Campbell 1949, 1988, 1990] before a more specific discussion of the trickster archetype [Kelsey 2014a; Campbell 1988; Hynes and Dory 1993].

**MONOMYTH: THE HERO’S JOURNEY**

Through the influence of Jung, Campbell [1949] examined the historical and cultural traits of hero figures that occurred through ancient mythology and continue to feature in contemporary society. Of course, the specific qualities of a hero will be defined by the social group in which they exist and the moral codes they reflect – hence Campbell’s work examined, as he called it, ‘the hero with a thousand faces’. But there was a cyclical pattern to these stories that stimulated the formation of these characters and the journeys they pursued: ‘a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man’ [ibid: 23]. Through these stories, Campbell showed how the hero, upon
hearing the “call to adventure,” would take him to himself to answer the call and set out on a hero journey — a narrative pattern that, as we see in the analysis, resonates throughout McGregor’s own ‘heroic journey’.

As was the case with Jung, it was this recurring narrative and behavioural pattern that interested Campbell, especially in the way that it informed the construction of a familiar and recognisable story from so many different times and cultures. The hero’s journey is one of the most familiar narratives of mythology that we see commonly played out in fictional and non-fictional stories. It is a moral form of storytelling that we often use to reflect upon our own life challenges, experiences and journeys. Equally, it is important to remember that the ideological interpretations of one reader might feature an archetype that is used to make sense of a story, whilst a different reader might apply an entirely different reading. As Campbell showed, hero figures do not carry a monolithic form or set of characteristics and values. Heroes are dramatized and personified to reflect the core values and ideals of the societies in which their stories feature. As we see in the case study, McGregor’s journey resonates with Irish fans in a very specific cultural context, whilst there are other social, semiotic and psychological phenomena that construct ‘McGregor’s greatness’ in other cultural contexts.

The multiple forms that heroes take indicates that they could be ‘warriors or pacifists, leaders or rebels, saints or sinners, rocket scientists, rock musicians, or sports stars’ [83]. The form that a hero takes is largely dependent on context; a hero’s role is dependent on the world he is born into’ [Carlyle 1908: 312]. Lule adopted Campbell’s work through his own analysis of journalistic storytelling:

The Hero myth, like many archetypal stories, often takes on similar forms from age to age. The Hero is born into humble circumstance. The Hero initiates a quest or journey. The Hero faces battles or trials and wins a decisive victory. The Hero returns triumphant. The pattern, in more or less detail, can be found throughout mythology.

[2001: 82]

But, as Boorstin points out, ‘we have become self-conscious about our admiration for human greatness’ [1979: 51]. This has had a significant impact on the role of heroism in modern storytelling. Boorstin argued that we create pseudo-heroic characters through celebrities that serve a temporary interest and reflect values in certain contexts before later being discarded. Scholars have recognised modern heroes as disposable characters that serve a particular purpose at one moment in time [Lule 2001; Boorstin 1979]. In other words, it is not always the individual that we believe in but rather the values that they represent. Lule’s [2001] point that we see through and past the classical hero myth due to its cultural familiarity is important. In contemporary storytelling, we often need the faults and follies of hero figures to make them believable or more realistic than disposable celebrities.

As we see, McGregor differentiates himself from the other fighters through his theatrics, dress sense, uniqueness, audacious ambitions and ‘mystic’ predictions. For McGregor, these characteristics function within other conventions of the monomyth: the hero pursues a journey as humble hero on both a personal adventure and a greater moral quest. But he is not perfect. He makes mistakes. He is not always triumphant in every fight. But his trials and tribulations operate through those monomythical qualities that play into the image that he personifies and in which his fans believe.

### MYTHICAL TRICKSTER FIGURES

Tricksters have appeared in many forms from different cultures and mythologies over time. Often as anthropomorphic characters in fairy tales and classical myths they appear as animals such as the fox, the rabbit, the raven, the bear, or the coyote. There are endless examples of trickster tales that resonate through the parallels they reflect with the political and social affairs of modern societies and cultures. Campbell defined the trickster figure through a range of characteristics:

Almost all non-literate mythology has a trickster–hero of some kind. … And there’s a very special property in the trickster: he always breaks in, just as the unconscious does, to trip up the rational situation. He’s both a fool and someone who’s beyond the system. And the trickster represents all those possibilities of life that your mind hasn’t decided it wants to deal with. The mind structures a lifestyle, and the fool or trickster represents another whole range of possibilities. He doesn’t respect the values that you’ve set up for yourself, and smashes them … The fool is the breakthrough of the absolute into the field of controlled social orders.

[1993: 2]
Due to these characteristics, Abrahams describes the trickster as ‘the most paradoxical of all characters in Western narratives – at least as far as the Western mind is concerned – for he combines the attributes of many other types that we tend to distinguish clearly’ [17]. He claims that the trickster can fulfil a variety of roles at various moments in time: ‘clown, fool, joker, initiate, culture hero, even ogre… He is the central character for what we usually consider many different types of hero narratives’ [17]. More specifically, Radin focuses on darker and more destructive aspects to this figure:

Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself… He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being. [Radin 1956: xxiii]

According to Lule, the trickster is ‘one of the most fascinating and complex mythological figures, found in hundreds of societies’ [2002: 24] and more than just a sly, cunning, or devious figure. Tricksters contain traits that complicate their appearance. The trickster is often portrayed as a ‘crude and stupid figure, half animal [and] half human’ [24]. Lule addresses these traits in news stories:

News too often tells stories of crude, contemptible people, governed by seemingly animal instincts, who bring ridicule and destruction on themselves. In some stories, stupid criminals, dumb and dangerous athletes, hapless hit men, classless and crude rich people are offered up in the news as objects for mockery and contempt. [24]

Hyde [1998] and O’Donnell [2003] have both explored the paradoxical mechanisms that trickster stories often reflect in various contexts. Hyde argues that tricksters are complex and often ambiguous in their contradictory characteristics as ‘the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox’ [1998: 7]. Hyde further claims that ‘trickster stories are radically anti-idealistic; they are made in and for a world of imperfections… In fact, it may be exactly because these stories do not wish away or deny what seems low, dirty and imperfect that their hero otherwise enjoys such playful freedom’ [ibid:91]. Therefore, tricksters are figures who can, by nature, cross boundaries or create shifts in perceptions of their characteristics. As Street has suggested through analyses of trickster tales: ‘To question everything in society would lead to anarchy; the conflict is presented, and the balance achieved, in the trickster tales which so many societies possess’ [1972: 19]. As Frentz adds: ‘As an unconscious complex, Jung writes, the trickster can erupt in savage, animalistic, and often self-destructive behaviours, but if assimilated into conscious awareness and nurtured through humour it can become creative, spiritual and life-affirming’ [Frentz 2008: 61].

Even in instances when a trickster appears to be foolish or self-destructive, they reflect something about the societal circumstances in which they are situated. They make us reflect and stimulate change. Tricksters break down barriers in different ways that we do not expect to see – some might challenge authority whilst others might challenge our own expectations. We see these qualities in the McGregor mythos. Tricksters are often amoral and, in the case of McGregor, I am less concerned by his role as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ trickster. I am more interested in the paradoxical tensions and conflictual characteristics he embodies and which produces such a divisive character. As Jung said: ‘The shoe that fits one person pinches another; there is no recipe for living that suits all cases’ [2001: 62].

A PSYCHO-DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

It is important to understand that this case study does not psychoanalyse McGregor. We do not know the private McGregor. What we can analyse are the things he does and says through the cultural and affective qualities of his persona. The persona is an important Jungian term since the persona is a concept that Jung proposed as ‘a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual’ [1992: 192]. This is not to suggest dishonesty, and Jung’s point should not be reduced to the mask as mythical untruth. Jung understood the development of an appropriate persona as an important way of adapting to different social roles and circumstances. As a fighter, McGregor has said: ‘At the end of the day, you gotta feel some way. So why not feel unbeatable? Why not feel untouchable? Why not feel like the best to ever do it?’ [https://youtu.be/e3jwYznqv0]. Through McGregor’s self-actualising qualities, he has consciously crafted a unique persona through visualisation: ‘All that really matters is how you see yourself. If you see yourself as the king, with all the belts and everything, no matter what no one else says, as long as you see that and really believe it, then that’s what’s going to happen’ [https://youtu.be/e3jwYznqv0]. As Jacoby states: ‘A strong ego relates to the outside world through a flexible persona; identifications with a specific persona (doctor, scholar, artist, etc.) inhibit psychological development’ [1984: 118]. We see this flexibility in the analysis where different personas operate in different circumstances – McGregor focuses on his thoughts and situation as a family man and an Irishman as much as a fighter. The convincing and charismatic identifications that McGregor takes up all contribute to a polygonal construction of ‘greatness’ that is hard to define.
What I try to do in the case study is make sense of his journey – the McGregor myth – through the psycho-discursive, affective and communicative mechanisms of storytelling. In doing so, this article enhances the psycho-discursive scope of affective mythologies by laying down a philosophical position on mind and consciousness that is applicable to biological sciences [Haule 2011; Williams 2012; Wilson 1998; Dennett 2017]. This brings me to the point where I revise the work of Jung in relation to modern science through a materialist approach to culture, mind and consciousness.

**CULTURE. MIND AND MATERIALISM**

Before I continue with the analysis, it is important to discuss concepts of consciousness to enhance the framework covered so far. I understand I have covered a significant volume of theoretical material already, but this section is necessary since the ground covered here enables DMA as a psycho-discursive approach to expand and encourage more radical interdisciplinary developments in cultural studies. My aim here is not to undermine current research in the arts, humanities and social sciences – rather I take this opportunity to make a positive and progressive case for radical interdisciplinary expansions of theoretical thinking that might, I believe, empower cultural studies to make new innovations in addition to its current strengths and innovations as a field.

There are many debates on mind and consciousness that stretch well beyond the scope of this paper. Even within materialist philosophies of mind there are multiple ontological perspectives. The psycho-discursive approach of affective mythologies as a theoretical framework has the capacity to mature its cognitive, neurological, biological and philosophical scope. My aim for now is to establish a (non-reductive) materialist position on mind and consciousness. This analysis should start to provide the basis for more conversations between the disciplines introduced here. Whilst my approach to affective mythologies has already developed a psycho-discursive dimension, there is more progress to be made by collaborating with scientific disciplines that provide a post-Jungian framework with a stronger interdisciplinary synthesis between the social and biological sciences.

As Haule points out [2011: 1], within psychoanalysis Jung is often dismissed as a mystic who abandoned science to pursue his ‘dubious superstitions’. However, despite those aspects of Jung’s work, Haule points to recent developments in evolutionary psychology that give Jungians reasons for optimism. He credits Jung’s efforts to unify biological and human sciences in ways that were discursively impossible at the time yet which, in hindsight, he actually managed to with relative consilience. As others have pointed out, it is interesting that Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious holds similarities with modern scientific disciplines that have developed more recently, such as ethology and sociobiology [Stevens 1994]. Zweig and Abrams explain how anthropologists and sociobiologists have argued that ‘human evil is a result of curbing our animal aggression, of choosing culture over nature and losing contact with our primitive wildness’ [Zweig and Abrams 1991: xxx]. Zweig and Abrams also refer to physician-ethnologist Melvin Konner who tells the story in The Tangled Wing of going to a zoo and seeing a sign that reads ‘The Most Dangerous Man on Earth’, only to discover that he is looking in the mirror’ [xxx]. The interdisciplinary connections in Jung’s work across contemporary fields of science and anthropology are impressive considering the time when he was developing these ideas.”

For these reasons, Haule [2010: 1] tells the ‘story of the remarkable consilience between Jung’s archetypal psychology and a biology founded on Darwinian principles and augmented by the science of genetics – what biologists call the modern synthesis’. Haule sees archetypes as inherited behavioural patterns: ‘No one doubts that animals inherit behavioural patterns; and with the advance of evolutionary science in the last few decades, very few any longer doubt that humans do’ [2011: 10]. Whilst Jung provided various descriptions of archetypes, ‘a strong trend of his views has turned out to be amply supported by the structure of brain-and-psych as modern science understands them’ [10]. On the one hand, Haule does overstate universal agreement on the inherited behaviours in animals here – many scholars hold grave reservations over the current validity and potential accomplishments of modern science in this respect. But it is an intriguing premise and one that Jungian perspectives in cultural studies should draw on.

It is crucial to clarify that Jung did not propose the concept of archetypes as inherited ideas. Rather, he argued that an archetype was an inherited mode of functioning that corresponded ‘to the inborn way in which the chick emerges from the egg, the bird builds its nest, a certain kind of wasp stings the motor ganglion of the caterpillar, 

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6 It is also worth noting that there have been fascinating debates in neuroscience around the evolution of the brain and subsequent dynamics of consciousness [see Wetherell 2012: 44]. On the one hand, some argue that biological and cultural developments of the brain ‘did not replace these fundamental circuits of emotional readiness and experience, they augmented them’ [Oatley, et al. 2006: 146]. Oatley et al argued that language, for example, has enhanced our emotional functionality but we still express traits of our primitive selves that are not open to biological or cultural modification [146]. On the other hand, some have argued [Rose 1997, 2005] that rather than augmenting those fundamental circuits of emotions and primitive traits, the evolution of consciousness and influence of culture has re-shaped and transformed potential emotional responses according to our human circumstances [Wetherell 2012: 44].
and eels find their way to the Bermudas. In other words, it is a pattern of behaviour [Jung in Stevens 2016: 85]. Hence, I argue that it is misleading and reductionist to engage in a nurture versus nature debate here. Neither is it necessary to challenge or undermine the social constructionist approaches that are common in the social sciences, semiotics or discourse studies. This is far more complex than a simple nurture-nature debate, and cultural studies (more specifically, martial arts studies) should avoid slipping towards an inherent scepticism towards science. Science does not have to be seen as an inevitable threat to our common conceptual paradigms in cultural studies. Quite the opposite.

David Williams points out that in the process of Jung struggling to link his description of archetypes to science he ended up dabbling in every kind of pseudo-science and mystical explanation to account for archetypes [2012: 8]. Hence, Williams argues, ‘Jung’s insight to the existence of archetypes is still relevant: the causes were just wrong’ [11]. He goes on to show how myth scholars such as Campbell and Frye provide valid insights but either flirt with mysticism or fail in their efforts to be scientific. Interestingly, Williams returns to structuralism, in the work of Levi-Strauss, to argue that principles of universality – such as the archetypes – in shared theoretical paradigms between academic disciplines of mind and culture could benefit from a structuralist grounding in a Darwinian approach. He quotes biologist E.O. Wilson, who says, ‘the structuralist approach is potentially consistent with the picture of mind and culture emerging from natural sciences and biological anthropology’ [11]. Without meaning to casually cause a stir in cultural studies, there are some significant discussions to be had in this respect. Whilst the nuances of post-structuralism and post-modernism have made valid contributions, it might be that our current paradigms prohibit us through a lack of necessary flexibility that could account for both cultural complexity and biological tendencies and potentials of the mind. As Yuval Harari [2014a], from a polygonal perspective of historical and scientific perspectives, puts it:

The real difference between us and chimpanzees is the mysterious glue that enables millions of humans to cooperate effectively. This mysterious glue is made of stories, not genes. We cooperate effectively with strangers because we believe in things like gods, nations, money and human rights. Yet none of these things exists outside the stories that people invent and tell one another. There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money and no human rights – except in the common imagination of human beings. You can never convince a chimpanzee to give you a banana by promising him that after he dies he will get limitless bananas in chimpanzee Heaven. Only Sapiens can believe such stories. [2014b]

I am not suggesting a naïve move towards dogmatic structuralism in cultural studies. But to continue analysing the complexities of culture through a grounding that enables us to understand more about the psychology and biology behind culture can only be progressive. Returning to Williams [2012], he makes a strong case for the humanities to engage more with biology and psychology through the paradigm of neuroscience, evolution and narrative in his analysis of trickster mythology – or, as he calls it, the ‘trickster brain’. This is a valid vision and it warrants attention since it can strengthen the contribution of cultural studies.

Either way, for cultural studies a strong focus must remain on ideology; a point which Williams himself goes on to acknowledge. Understanding more about the what, why and how of human nature and culture does not seek to excite or condone destructive ideologies or what Jung referred to as the shadows of humankind. It is the contact between mind and culture where ideology operates. Cultural studies is well-equipped to continue its work in this respect, but as Williams points out, there is the potential to enhance its analytical scope and claims. I argue that stories must still be analysed from the perspective of what they say, how they are told, how they can be read, and what purpose they serve. As philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett states: ‘Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don’t spin them; they spin us’ [1991: 418]. Non-reductive materialism enhances the philosophical clarity of affective mythologies as a theoretical framework and the directional developments it is making towards more radical interdisciplinarity. Not only does this position provide sound opposition to dualism but it sees consciousness as being intrinsic to natural processes, evolution and universal qualities in the human psyche. In other words, like our brains, our stories are part of who we are and how we have evolved.

The main reasons for establishing this position are threefold. Firstly, to move beyond any perceived endorsement of Jung’s mysticism...
whilst demonstrating Jung's applicability in contemporary academic interdisciplinary research across the humanities and biological sciences. Secondly, to explicitly oppose dualist philosophies of mind and consciousness, which, from a materialist position, enhances the critical scope of DMA's analytical approach to affective mythologies and ideology. Thirdly, taking this interdisciplinary position into the case study shows how this approach to affective mythologies - from a revised Jungian perspective - enhances our understanding of the what, how and why behind stories and popular culture. A recurring theme in the McGregor case study is visualisation (the law of attraction), which demonstrates why this materialist approach to consciousness is necessary. The myth of the law of attraction binds various mythological conventions together through multiple thematic and archetypal qualities of McGregor's journey.

**CASE STUDY**

**CONOR MCGREGOR, VISUALISATION AND THE HERO’S JOURNEY**

As Bowman [2017: 5] points out, Barthes suggested that we move in and out of belief systems through the entertainment of cultural spectacles. Rather than being duped and brainwashed by ideology through culture, we can be lured in and enjoy the spectacle without committing to an ideological system that a text might endorse. However, from the Jungian perspective adopted in this analysis, it might even be the case that rather than being lured in, we actively seek out spectacles of fighting because of the archetypal forms that resonate through it.

In this case study, I argue that the essence of the story is what audiences find alluring beyond the material glamour, lifestyle and public image of McGregor. I will analyse some of the archetypal conventions that contribute to McGregor's persona, which include: monomyth and the journey of the humble hero; mythical trickster figures; and the myth of the fighting Irish. Whilst the analysis is divided into three thematic sections, these themes inevitably overlap throughout.

The analysis examines multimodal texts from online videos, short films, news articles, books and podcasts that provide examples of the cultural and psychological phenomena that I theorise herein. They provide a rich and varied account of qualitative data but are by no means intended to provide a quantitative or representative sample of any particular discourse or representation. Through a vast selection of texts that I have collected, the case study provides a rigorous analysis of discursive, semiotic and psychological phenomena - it oscillates between theorisations of representational and non-representational forms.

Affective Mythology and ‘The Notorious’

**CONOR MCGREGOR**

**Darren Kelsey**

This opening section will show how McGregor’s journey reflects the archetypal traits of Campbell’s monomyth. This is not to simply highlight a familiar narrative: it should reflect the essence of this myth, which operates as a vehicle for communicating characteristic qualities and cultural and domestic values. Because of the flamboyance and bravado in many of McGregor’s social appearances, he is often accused of being arrogant and disrespectful. However, there are other instances when McGregor tells his story through attention to humble qualities that reflect other moral values. As McGregor said to Ariel Helwani, he is ‘ruthless’ in the UFC but he is humble in his gratitude towards family and friends [https://youtu.be/1eVJMJBoWkk]. As I show throughout this analysis, McGregor’s persona reflects an intriguing tension in the way that he oscillates between these contradictory characteristics.

McGregor’s coach, John Kavanagh, has written a book called *Win or Learn* [2016]. Kavanagh recounts the time early on in McGregor’s career when he suffered his first defeat. McGregor was devastated and did not return to the gym after the fight. McGregor’s mother eventually called Kavanagh and asked him to come around and speak to him because she was concerned about the direction his life was heading. Despite owing him money for the previous fight fee (which McGregor had spent), Kavanagh put faith in McGregor and gave him another chance. From this moment on, McGregor’s career begins to build and the story becomes one of hard work, focus and success. Even at this early stage, Kavanagh’s account is compelling. It is compelling because it reflects an essential dynamic of storytelling and those transpersonal, archetypal qualities with which we are collectively familiar.

Filmmaker Guy Ritchie sees the journey of ‘mastering your own kingdom’ (discovering your true self and full potential) as the essential narrative dynamic of all storytelling. He uses the parable of the Prodigal Son as an example of the need to lose yourself in order to find yourself by pursuing a journey that will eventually transform you. When reading Kavanagh’s book with the knowledge of where McGregor’s journey has taken him and what he has become, this archetypal convention provides a significant building block in the McGregor mythos. Even in Kavanagh’s case, there is a reason why he would have felt compelled to write the book in this way and provide accounts of particular moments – like the one at McGregor’s house, where he supported McGregor emotionally, helped him reflect and learn from his experience, before McGregor began his journey of transformation. This

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[8] The latter is a slogan that Kavanagh’s gym and team endorse for a positive mind-set. Whenever a fighter in their team is defeated they identify what they have learnt from the fight and use it to their benefit in future training.
The pursuit of greatness and the work that goes into training is something that McGregor and Kavanagh have talked about. A popular quote of McGregor's says: 'There's no talent here, this is hard work. This is an obsession. Talent does not exist, we are all equal as human beings. You could be anyone if you put in the time. You will reach the top, and that is that. I am not talented, I am obsessed'.9 Before the Aldo fight, echoing similar words to Bruce Lee, McGregor said: 'There is no opponent. There is no Jose Aldo. Who the fuck is Jose Aldo? There's no no-one. You're against yourself'. In an interview with Ariel Helwani in 2014, McGregor also said: ‘Excellence is not a skill. Excellence is an attitude’ [https://youtu.be/e3jwYzxnqV0]. These are significant monomythical conventions. Without the dedication to a cause that is pursued from an equal beginning to all other humans, the salience of the monomyth is compromised. If the essence of all storytelling is the journey of discovering one’s true self, then this pursuit of greatness through excellence as an attitude (not a skill) and obsession (not talent) tells a powerful story.

This is not to suggest that we all believe in the same stories in the same way – culture and ideology are more complex than this. Multiple audiences might be indifferent to and completely unaffected by McGregor’s story. Equally, others find themselves riled and irritated by the hype and confidence of McGregor. But it is the essence of the story (the journey), especially for those who believe in it, which resonates. Through the qualities that we see in McGregor’s journey and his personal philosophy, which I explore below, a Jungian process of individuation10 is evident through those monomythical qualities. The monomyth can be played out in many ways, but the story McGregor chooses to tell is significant to the moral journey he is seen to pursue.

In the build up to the Mayweather fight, McGregor was interviewed by Ariel Helwani [https://youtu.be/1eVJMBoWkkk]. There are some significant comments throughout the interview where McGregor reflects on his journey. Sitting on the edge of a boxing ring with the McGregor Sports and Entertainment logo in the middle, McGregor responds to Helwani's opening observation of the ring and logo:

Every day I get in that ring and stare at it. It's some logo, isn't it? With the big lion's head and the crown and McGregor Sports and Entertainment next to the UFC. ... It's been some journey, an absolutely amazing journey, and I am very proud of myself and very proud of everyone that's been with me. ... The distance we have come in such a short space of time through such hard work. I'm very happy.

Helwani states the symbolic significance of McGregor Sports and Entertainment given the fact that just over two years earlier McGregor had been talking about this project and said he would be in this partnership. As Helwani points out, it sounded crazy at the time. In agreement, McGregor responds: 'How many times have I said I am going to go and do something and I do it? It wouldn't be the first time and certainly won't be the last'.

In the same interview, McGregor responds to other questions that relate to the monomythical qualities of his journey. He explains how he pays homage to his past but without letting it define him in the present – similar to those traits of Jungian individuation and the complexes we develop through archetypal dynamics in our psyche. For example, Helwani asks McGregor about the boat he owns, which is called 188, and how it shows he does not want to forget where he came from. McGregor responds:

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9 In a motivational sporting context, this quote was used by basketball star James LeBron. A Fox Sports article by Teddy Mitrosilis said: ‘LeBron James will be remembered as one of the best basketball players ever and perhaps the greatest athlete overall in his generation. Given that, he undoubtedly serves as an inspiration to a ton of people. But even the all-time great athletes need sources of inspiration, too, so who do they turn to when in need of motivation? Other all-time greats, of course. For LeBron, that guy right now appears to be UFC star Conor McGregor. LeBron posted this awesome McGregor quote to Instagram on Wednesday...’ [Mitrosilis 2016].

10 Individuation is sometimes referred to as self-realisation or self-actualisation [Stevens 1994]. This explains the integration between the personal and collective unconscious and the conscious self – enabling, for example, a more integrated understanding of one's own shadow complex, critiquing their less admirable qualities and challenging their ideological biases and prejudices in order to live a more fulfilled life by changing how those affective qualities of the shadow previously shaped their own behaviours and attitudes. Zweig and Adams adopt the following definition here: ‘Individuation – the process of a person becoming whole and unique – aims at embracing the light and dark simultaneously to create a constructive relationship between the ego and the self (our personal symbol of individual wholeness)’ [1991: 240]. So it is firstly important to understand that by confronting the personal shadow we can manage those less desirable human traits that affect our behaviour and personality.
McGregor explains how he had his fun on his boat for a day and passed it on to his dad as a gift. Whilst much of McGregor’s rhetoric reflects self-actualising qualities and visualising achievements through material wealth, we can see that this is not necessarily individualistic narcissism in a materialistic, gluttonous or selfish sense. Some critics might see it in this way, as nothing more than a materialistic, monetised driven commercial narrative. But I argue that McGregor’s love of money and wealth is only one aspect to the story. The cultural spectacle around McGregor’s journey shows how we can tell and understand the essence of stories within those sporting and commercial systems – they operate more deeply, yet not in isolation from, the macro ideological societies of which they are a part. In other words, archetypal conventions emerge from our collective unconscious regardless of (albeit shaped and influenced by) the cultural and economic system in which they operate.

McGregor directs some attention to this in his role as a father and the fact that his son will be born into financial security. Continuing with the Helwani interview, this was a case where audiences saw a different side of McGregor compared to the bravado and hyperbole of pre-fight press conferences and weigh-ins. The personal complex McGregor reflects in his experience of fatherhood is one that fits positively into his journey – one of reflection on his own journey, which in turn informs his choice to teach his son a particular set of moral values based on the necessity to pursue greatness. For McGregor, money and privilege should not override the essence of the monomyth, i.e. the quest for greatness.

In McGregor’s post-fight speech at UFC 189 after he defeated Chad Mendes for the interim UFC Featherweight title, he said: ‘I honestly believe there is no such thing as self-made. I believe that is a term that does not exist. For me it certainly doesn’t. The people who have been around for my whole career have helped shape this moment. This night and this moment is for them’. Campbell talked about the hero with a thousand faces. The monomyth might be a familiar archetypal pattern and we culturally might be overly familiar with the cultural clichés of hero stories [Lule 2002]. But heroes take on endless forms and they need to be believable. They are often pitched as products of a greater struggle beyond their own personal gain and worth – we see this in the complexities of McGregor’s persona within and beyond this analysis. In this case after the Mendes fight we saw McGregor as a humble hero who, on the one hand, always strives for further greatness, but through a sense of gratitude. In June 2015, before he had either of his world titles, he tweeted: ‘Be grateful with everything you have and you will be successful in everything you do’.

But McGregor is not always predictable. We never quite know what to expect, especially during pre-fight theatrics. This unpredictability combined with the mystical qualities that the law of attraction myth brings to McGregor’s persona relate to another archetypal convention. McGregor has referred to himself as ‘Mystic Mac’ when he has predicted outcomes of fights with audacious precision. The divided opinion over McGregor and the mysticism he constructs through his journey can be understood through some attention to the trickster archetype.

11 One user comment on YouTube, in response to this interview, said: ‘I appreciate it when rich people address the fact that yes they’re rich, but they still want to maintain a mindset of hard work and not letting the wealth get to their head. I’m so happy he touched on the fact that he doesn’t want his son to feel privileged and he still wants him to have motivations and a mindset of working hard in life’.
**Mystic Mac: Notorious Trickster Transcends UFC**

As discussed earlier, tricksters play around with established orders. They do the unexpected. They challenge perceptions and expectations in ways that simultaneously stimulate excitement, shock, awe and even resentment. They can be clever, they can be foolish. They are somewhat paradoxical. There are many ways in which we can discuss trickster traits in relation to McGregor. Even when tricksters ‘fail’ they have the ability to make a point or interrupt systems or beliefs and perceptions that previously went unchallenged. They find a way of grinning back at us when we laugh at them [Radin 1956; Kelsey 2014, 2017]. The trickster archetype is among the most complex of all archetypal traits since, as Williams [2012] argues, it is the product of our contradictory trickster brains – it is a neurological mechanistic pattern that has evolved in human consciousness. We can see these qualities in McGregor and the spectacle that unfolds around him.

McGregor often speaks of visualising what he will do and predicts it out loud. In a 14-minute video compilation called, ‘How I used the law of attraction to visualize my success into reality’, we see numerous examples of McGregor talking about visualisation [https://youtu.be/e3jwYzxnqv0]. After the Aldo fight McGregor said in the press conference: ‘I said his right hand would get him into trouble. It’s the shot I predicted. I said he’d overload on his right hand, I said I’d slip, I said I’d bang the left hook and that’s what happened’. In response, a journalist asked, ‘How do you do that? How do you predict these things?’ Pointing at his head and holding his hand on his heart he said:

> If you can see it here and you have the courage enough to speak it, it will happen. I see these shots, I see these sequences, and I don’t shy away from them. A lot of times people believe in certain things but they keep it to themselves, they don’t put it out there. If you truly believe in it and you become vocal with it, you are creating that law of attraction and it will become reality.

In another interview the same evening, Helwani acknowledged this prediction in diachronic relation to the monomythical pattern discussed earlier: ‘Conor, in February of 2013 we spoke for the first time. You didn’t have a car, you didn’t have a pot to piss in, all you had were blueberries. Now here you are with the undisputed gold. Enjoy it my friend. You deserve it, you called it’. McGregor responds: ‘Yeah, from nothing to something to everything’. In the 2013 interview that Helwani refers to here McGregor had said: ‘I am an Irish legend, I am a living legend, I see myself as the champ already. … I see myself as the champ from day one. Before I even started training I always saw myself as the champ. That’s how I see myself, I visualised myself already there. I visualise everything’.

Once McGregor defeated Alvarez, he had duplicated his Cage Warriors success and concurrently held titles in two different weight classes. And he had predicted he would do this and he made a point of the fact that people laughed at him for saying it. In another Helwani interview, he said:

> I’ve done everything I said I was going to do. I was laughed at, I was literally laughed at … When I first came in [and said] I was going to win these two world titles, I was laughed at. That’s never going to happen … I said I was going to win the two world titles and I won them. I’ve done everything I said I was going to do. Every move is a calculated step.

Of course, predictions and self-belief are common in combat sports. But McGregor has made a point of making numerous accurate predictions in ways that resonate through his story and persona. The Irish theme in the quote above is significant since it contextualises McGregor’s journey within a form of national narration through which the Irish are the previously oppressed, fighting against the odds. There are distinct trickster-hero traits at work here: to be laughed at and doubted because of your own audacity, only to go and defy expectations and disprove your doubters.

Even on those occasions, like the Mayweather fight, when it does not work out for McGregor, he has still been able to capitalise on any perceived ‘failure’ to his own benefit. He has pointed to the fact that he is the one breaking boundaries as a UFC fighter – managing the situation to invoke his superiority over his peers in the UFC. Despite the outcome, his story is often told in a way that pitches setbacks as trials and tribulations on a greater journey. Either way, for many audiences, the Mayweather fight was audacious. The ability to make it happen carried distinct trickster-hero qualities. This effects the way that the spectacle is played out – it shapes the perceptions and responses of audiences, critics and pundits. To be a McGregor fan or critic in this respect is beside the point. The story resonates with many fans and it riles many critics. Hence, McGregor reflects significant cultural and psychological traits of trickster mythology. There are powerful affective qualities to this persona and McGregor’s defiance.

In terms of financial gain, McGregor has made no secret of the fact that the Mayweather fight has made him very rich because it was a contest and spectacle that so many people wanted to see. In a tweet after the Mayweather fight he posted a picture of himself before the walk-out, pulling an animalistic pose, commenting: ‘The captured Orang-utan who obeyed the rules of a Circus and got filthy rich from it’. McGregor got rich as much from those who wanted to see him lose as his own fans who wanted to see him win. This tweet was another case of McGregor...
embracing the chaos, as the trickster does, and using it to his advantage. It is a reminder to his critics that they might hate him but they still make him money. As we often see with trickster figures, when we laugh at them, they grin back.

These traits also appeared after the Nate Diaz saga. After McGregor’s first UFC defeat against Diaz, he faced an inevitable onslaught – many critics of McGregor had waited for this moment: McGregor expressed his feelings after the fight in the following manner: ‘This is the game. We win some we lose some. I will never shy away from defeat. …

This is part of the game. … I took the fight, it didn’t pay off, this is the fight business, it’s another day, I’ll come back’. In an interview with Chris Eubank, Helwani described this moment as McGregor’s finest hour because of the way that he accepted the defeat with dignity. In agreement, Eubank said McGregor behaved like a champion: ‘The fact that he lost like a gentleman tells you something about his code: he has honour’ [https://youtu.be/HerZ-jO_Cv0].

McGregor won the rematch and took the opportunity to prove a point, leaving the arena on crutches, shouting: ‘You all doubted me! Doubt me now!’! In his post-fight press conference, he made a point of saying that the money and standards of the UFC have increased because of him, yet people still celebrated his demise after defeat and it lit a fire in his belly. When asked why this rematch and victory meant so much to him, McGregor responded:

This was one hell of an important fight for me. Everyone from the media to the fighters wrote me off this one. … They tried to say if I lose this one I’m done. They tried to discredit the fact I am going up in weight – he was 25-30 lb heavier, I don’t care what anyone says, he was a big boy in there. … But I learned from the last fight … The whole lot of it brought out the best in me. … It was a war. I’m glad it went that way. I got to show my heart in there.

The trickster puts everything on display for all to see. Within the persona and narrative that McGregor constructed, he has personified success and greatness for his believers whilst refusing to give any ground to his critics after defeat. Even for his critics he plays a paradoxical role – he is the giver and negator, the creator and destroyer [Radin 1956; Kelsey 2017].

In an exchange with Rafael dos Anjos, McGregor once said: ‘I can make you rich, I can change your bum life. When you sign to fight me it’s a celebration. You ring back home, you ring your wife, ‘Baby we done it, we’re rich, Baby, Conor McGregor made us rich, break out the red panties’ [https://youtu.be/BV57_OEDU1s]. This is another example of the tension I mentioned earlier between the contradictory characteristics of McGregor’s persona that switches between spaces and environments. As Kavanagh [2016] and McGregor have both alluded to, there are calculated strategies to pre-fight exchanges in the ‘psychological warfare’ that is part of the process of winning a fight. 12 In this instance, rather than the humble hero, a paradoxical trickster-hero occurs. The UFC and other fighters benefit from McGregor’s profile, commercial success and contribution to the sport, but many of them resent his presence, bravado and persona. The oscillation between humility and provocative bravado is something McGregor has acknowledged himself. For example, in January 2017 McGregor held a live interview event with an audience of 5,000 fans. Dressed in a suit on stage with a custom-built Rolls Royce, McGregor showed his appreciation for the support he has received: I’m so grateful for every single one of you. … I truly mean that. … I know I’m a cocky motherfucker, and I know you love me for it, but I am truly humbled and truly grateful for every single person in this room’ [https://youtu.be/zmpS09DgWrM].

During this event McGregor made further comments about his continually advancing journey transcending the UFC in other commercial ventures, which were again played out through visualisation:

It’s only January of 2017, I am already the face of the UFC, I am already the face of boxing, I am already the face of the WWE, and I am already the face of Hollywood. … In the media I stated many times … it was a dream to climb up that cage and raise those two belts. That was in every interview I ever done … That Dennis Siver situation when I grabbed the two belts was before I even got one belt … that’s how strong the power of visualisation is. I wasn’t even a UFC world champion at that time, and already I was grabbing two of them, and flaunting it in everybody’s face. I believed it was going to happen, I put the work in for it to happen, and it happened. It’s a strong thing, the power of visualisation, that motherfucker’s been a part of my shit since I was 16.

Not only was this before the Mayweather fight had been announced, but it relates to a developing rumour about the WWE. Within 10 months of this interview talks between McGregor and the WWE were reportedly happening. This is another case of McGregor doing what he

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12 As BJ Penn (one of the only other UFC fighters to ever hold championship belts in two different weight classes) has put it: ‘McGregor has been able to carefully find weak spots in his opponents’ mental psyche[s], which he then uses to get them emotionally invested in the fight, making them more likely to be overly aggressive and reckless come fight-night’ [Penn quoted in Bell 2016].
had previously done before he had won a world title, telling a story in which he has already achieved future goals that he has visualised. The Hollywood rumours of McGregor landing a major film contract are ongoing, with McGregor apparently being approached by Hollywood stars proposing potential projects. His recent documentary, Conor McGregor: Notorious, has also become the highest grossing Irish-made documentary of all time at the Irish box office.

The point about the WWE is significant since the spectacle and semiotics of wrestling that Barthes talked about operate through the persona of McGregor, whose theatrics reportedly draw on elements seen in WWE. A source in The Sun said: ‘Conor is a huge wrestling fan. His entire persona on stage he has developed from watching performers like Ric Flair and The Rock. These are the top dogs at self-promotion and trash talk. He watched these guys when he was younger. This is something he’s always wanted to do’ (Higgins 2017).

In addition, Stephanie McMahon, WWE chief brand officer, also said: ‘I think Conor would be a perfect fit for WWE. He certainly has the personality, the athletic ability, the appeal. He speaks his mind, he is very genuine and authentic and he has a hell of a Vince McMahon swagger’. The latter is a reference to the ‘Billion Dollar Strut’ that McMahon does in WWE, which McGregor has replicated both inside and outside of the Octagon. Despite the UFC’s differences to WWE in a sporting sense, it still features a familiar cultural spectacle to engage its audiences. We often hear fighters in the UFC paying respect to portrayals like Ric Flair and The Rock. These are the top dogs at self-promotion and trash talk. He watched these guys when he was younger. This is something he’s always wanted to do’.

The Aldo and Alvarez conferences were distinct examples of this. On both occasions officials had to step in to break up a fight on stage after McGregor took the championship belts from his opponents to suggest he was already champion – reinforcing the vision he previously symbolised when lifting two belts before fighting Dennis Siver. Pre-fight press conferences become another space in which the performance and spectacle of the trickster continue to shock and defy established orders.

The way in which McGregor attends press conferences has become a feature in itself. He is often late and turns up dressed in spectacular style, distinguishing himself from the other fighters around him. The calmness is a stark contrast to the chaos of press conferences and weigh-ins. This contrast is an interesting characteristic of McGregor’s theatrics and popularity have arguably overwhelmed some of the most experienced fighters he has faced. Kavanagh [2016] recalls the build up to the Diego Brandao fight and the divisive persona McGregor had already brought to the UFC: ‘The people who admired him got behind him fervently. Those on the opposite side of the fence couldn’t stand the sight or sound of him … Brandao was receiving social media messages asking him to ‘Put some manners on McGregor’ and ‘Shut that Irish guy up’ …’. But Kavanagh explains how the pressure and provocation got to Brandao psychologically. He recalls Brandao saying: ‘When we have the rematch in Brazil we’ll see how much of a tough guy you are then’. This comment was a sign to McGregor and Kavanagh that Brandao was already defeated in his mind-set. McGregor had noticed Brandao’s emotional state and Kavanagh [2016] recalls him saying: ‘He’s emotionally invested in this contest already. This isn’t going to end well for him’.

In contrast, McGregor has spoken of the calmness and freedom he feels when it’s time to fight: ‘When I make that walk, I am unshackling chains off me. I simply [get in there] and do it as I feel. The closer the fight comes there is no face, my face becomes blank. Back on the world tour I acted in that moment. But now war is on us and I am calm, cold, ruthless’. The Irish Independent described the contrasting manic and mellow manners of McGregor and quoted him describing the zen that he feels when he trains in Dublin:

‘I am in a state of zen right now’, he said, the manic replaced by the mellow. ‘My mind is calm, composed. I am prepared and happy. This must be close to 15 press conferences that I have done without fighting this man. I’m ready. Training at home does something to me. I am here in a moment of zen and I am ready for the fight of my life’.

These descriptions of calmness are interesting. Even if one does not believe them to be true accounts of McGregor’s emotional and psychological state before a fight, they are part of the persona he constructs. The calmness is a stark contrast to the chaos of press conferences and weigh-ins. This contrast is an interesting characteristic since it reflects trickster tensions [Kelsey 2017] in the Apollonian and Dionysian qualities that simultaneously operate through trickster stories and figures. On the one hand, Dionysus would embrace the chaos in order to mix up the established order of things; on the other hand, there...
McGregor's trickster qualities reflect someone conquering an economic system that was previously impenetrable to him and remains elusive to others from his background. Despite McGregor's enormous personal wealth, his story, his persona and the essence of his journey are culturally and ideologically significant because they support the feeling that he is still grounded and in touch with his past. McGregor has made a point about in interviews:

I’ve been listening to them laugh my whole career. … An Irish man win [an MMA] world title? Hell no. An Irish man? An Irish man win a fight in the UFC? Hell no. Laughs, laughs all round. OK, he got a win, but now he wants to win a world title? Hell no. He's all talk, he's all hype, he's a joke. Laughter all round at the joker. Then the joker goes and wins the world title. Then he wants to win a second world title. More laughter. … The sound of laughter and the sound of doubt motivates me. … I’m enjoying that.

[https://youtu.be/1eVJMJBoWkk]

This account consciously entertains the underdog dynamic of the monomyth and the journey that unfolds as the trickster continually breaks through to defy expectations. There is no reason to suggest this is not how McGregor genuinely feels. But even if it is only a mask to construct a particular persona, it is still significant that this is the story he chooses to tell. This story contributes significantly to the image of greatness that resonates with fans and audiences.

McGregor’s fights and press conferences have always been attended by large Irish crowds who create a distinct atmosphere. A quote that can often be seen on Irish flags and McGregor memorabilia, says: ‘We’re not just here to take part. We’re here to take over’. Joe Rogan describes the immensity of McGregor’s following:

This guy has thousands and thousands of people fly from Ireland to Vegas every time he fights. The weigh-ins, it seems like you’re in Dublin. It’s fucking crazy, man. When

I interview him at the weigh-ins at the UFC in Vegas, you look out and you see nothing but Irish flags. You see people screaming and cheering and singing. Mandalay Bay during the Floyd Mayweather fight, which was not even the venue where the fight was being held, was packed bumper to bumper with Irishmen, walking down the hallway cheering and singing songs in sync.

[https://youtu.be/PP9ogcnM8BA]

This reflects the affective qualities I previously discussed [Kelsey 2017] in relation to football crowds being in sync and sharing the same passion for the same moment, acting in unison. People connect through a shared perception of the figure, the moment, the team, or the cause they are following. In this instance, McGregor has struck a chord with the Irish people as a symbol of national pride. I previously used murmurations [Kelsey 2017: 168-172] as a metaphor to describe how culture and ideology operate through groups who share similar perceptions and feelings through particular stories that resonate with them. In this instance, McGregor’s journey is metaphorically compatible with the national narration of Ireland. Instances like this result in synchronised behaviours, feelings, movements and beliefs – not for everyone, of course, but for large and significant groups of a given society or societies. McGregor’s status, success and story for many Irish people has become a proud building block of national narration.

In January 2016, the Oireachtas committee in Ireland considered a petition that had been submitted requesting McGregor’s face to be put on the €1 coin. The Irish Times reported that whilst the request had been rejected the committee were positive about the petition, with one member describing McGregor as a phenomenon and also stating: ‘There’s huge public interest in the suggestion because there’s a slightly more serious issue at stake, which is, how do we and should we pay tribute or commemorate or honour people in this country who have excelled’. McGregor tweeted about the petition, saying: ‘It would be a true honour for me to be immortalised on the €1 coin! Thank you to my fans for the petition! Let’s go Oireachtas! Vote YES’. He then tweeted a photo of the coin with his face on it and said: ‘The boom is BACK baby!!! #FuckTheRecession’.

McGregor’s trickster qualities reflect someone conquering an economic system that was previously impenetrable to him and remains elusive to others from his background. Despite McGregor’s enormous personal wealth, his story, his persona and the essence of his journey are culturally and ideologically significant because they support the feeling that he is still grounded and in touch with his past. For example, in the interview before the Mayweather fight, Helwani asked McGregor about the people of Ireland – whether his grounded personality and attitude explains why he has such a strong following back home – especially...
Hope and inspiration are recurring themes in McGregor’s story. The humble hero, who was bullied as child, did not come from a privileged background but nevertheless achieved greatness. Dialogical mechanisms stimulate those intertextual connections that large audiences make between themselves, their imagined communities, and a shared iconic figure to whom they feel they can relate.

As the examples above show, McGregor’s persona and Irish identity are not just based around the love that Irish fans have for him, but also the love he continually expresses for Ireland. He is regularly seen with the Irish flag in the Octagon or in pre-fight events. The Irish fans participate in the Barthesian spectacle that we often see before fights. For example, before the Aldo fight, UFC President Dana White (who was dressed in an Ireland football shirt) opened the press conference up to the audience in Ireland [https://youtu.be/1HsRyaV7GDI]. McGregor entered to cheers and a chorus of Irish fans singing. He threw his Ireland football shirt into the crowd as a sea of camera phones and Irish flags faced him on the stage. Aldo entered, carrying his belt over one shoulder and a hand tapping his chest to a chorus of boos and cheers of ‘Who are ya? Who are ya?’ and ‘Conor’s gonna get ya’. The fighters performed moral roles for their respective audiences. The Dublin audience revelled in the spectacle as Aldo answered the first question with deliberate provocation, playing into his role as villain: ‘I came here, I am the King of Dublin’. McGregor responded with his feet up on the table, pointing at himself: ‘You’re looking at the King of Dublin’. It was at this moment when McGregor leapt up, reached across and took Aldo’s belt. The crowd celebrated as McGregor lifted the belt in the air – in the moment of the spectacle, for the Dublin audience, a moral victory ensued for the audacious hero, as McGregor responded to Aldo’s taunts and a frustrated Aldo demanded his belt back.

Kavanagh [2016] says that there is always a method to McGregor’s madness at the press conferences and weigh-ins – he knows exactly what he is doing. His rhetoric, persona and broader semiosis always rally the Irish crowd. In the Alvarez pre-fight press conference, McGregor turned up late wearing a long white mink coat, bright red roll-neck t-shirt and chequered red trousers, dancing across the stage to take Alvarez’s belt and put it next to his. After shouting, ‘Sorry I’m late, I just don’t give a fuck!’, McGregor was asked what he thought about Alvarez saying he was disappointed in the country of Ireland. He said: ‘I don’t give a fuck what Eddie says. Who gives a fuck? The Irish are back. We’ve taken back control of New York City. I run New York City. I’m a fucking pimp, rocking Gucci mink! Without me, this whole fucking ship sinks!’ This speaks to the mythology around the Irish in New York and the mid-19th century when they made up a quarter of the City’s population. It is another story about the Irish struggle – when millions fought against the odds for survival, leaving Ireland for America during the potato famine.
Irish mythology and the myth of the Fighting Irish does not resonate only with the people of Ireland. Before the Mayweather fight, Chris Eubank provided interviews on his views and predictions for the fight. He felt McGregor stood a chance because of the ‘Irish spirit’. In one interview his description of the Irish spirit reflected post-colonial connotations of struggle and in-built qualities of survival that transcend the individual through the transpersonal spirit of a nation:

Everyone is forgetting that he is an Irishman and an Irishman has a spirit ... The Maori, the Maroons, we can liken them to the Jamaicans. They are a special people ... I'm not talking about Conor McGregor, I'm not talking about an MMA fighter, I'm talking about an Irishman. An Irishman is always to be respected. And that is where it is ... possible that Mayweather Jr has taken his eye off the target. What is he fighting? [He's] not fighting an MMA fighter. [He’s] not fighting a guy who is limited in professional boxing. [He’s] fighting an Irishman. ... He's an Irishman, so this fight is a very interesting fight. Not because of ability but because of spirit.

Eubank draws on his experience against Steve Collins, who beat him twice, when he talks about the Irish. In another interview with Helwani, he compared himself and Collins with Mayweather and McGregor respectively: 'There was no way this guy had a chance of beating me. He just didn’t have the talent, the ability, the skill, the punching power. But because of that ghost-like spirit, he was able to do the impossible. Ireland rejoiced for months'. As Eubank continues, he refers again to the spirit of the Irish through a metaphor depicting a supernatural dynamic of consciousness that this spirit operates through: 'In war-like situations they do have spirits, which are able to enter a different paradigm. He may be able to bring this paradigm into this particular fight'.

These comments about the Irish spirit might be as much about Eubank managing his own ego and persona through an honourable story – he proceeds to explain how he accepted defeat like a champion and the defeat was a triumph for him because of the dignity he showed. For Eubank, there is an affective function to the metaphor. For many Irish fans who find themselves ‘in sync’ before fights or celebrating victory, the metaphor resonates and the national narration continues through those affective qualities. It is significant how Irish mythology plays out in this manner – it fits a coherent narrative of struggle and resistance against the odds. This is a recurring trait in the ‘greatness’ that has been constructed around McGregor.

In a clip titled ‘Joe Rogan & Russell Brand Discuss Conor McGregor’s Greatness’, Brand proposes his understanding of McGregor’s mythology. I quote Brand at length here since his comments reflect some of the theoretical and analytical principles that have been applied throughout this case study:

Their myth aligns with his myth. The myth of the Irish people being oppressed by British colonialism and having to fight for their freedom. It resonates with what this man represents. And perhaps this is always what happens with figures of greatness within the realm of sport ... or politics; temporarily a person captures a particular mood, a particular energy. And this is what again I think is to do with unconsciousness. I don’t think people are ... aware of these kinds of feelings. It's stimulated on a level that’s not about thought. This is one of the things I'm very interested in: what lies beyond the rational? ... There seems to be some ingredient, even in Conor McGregor, that you can't quite pin down. Yes, there's the greatness as a boxer, yes the Irish people, but there's also some flavour that is being caught. I wonder if you can ever pre-empt or understand these things. I wonder if you can ever drill down. But the work of Joseph Campbell, the work of Carl Jung, ... these people who say there are unconscious archetypes, there are unconscious themes, there are stories that are running below the surface – patterns [and] co-ordinates that can be connected to.

Brand’s commentary points to the relevance and significance of affective mythology as an analytical position containing those theoretical approaches of scholars such as Campbell and Jung. As my previous analysis [Kelsey 2017] of Brand showed, some of his curiosities around the unconscious, God and the work of Jung move towards a more dualist philosophy of mind and consciousness. Nonetheless, Brand’s comments here at least apply to my argument that the semiotic, in its broadest communicative sense, can be understood through psycho-discursive analysis that oscillates between representation and non-representational forms. The cultural and transpersonal semiosis that operates around national narration, identity and, more specifically, Irish mythology resonates here in the case of McGregor through those complex dynamics of affective apparatus. Affective apparatus helps us construct, understand, feel and experience the myths that we are part of.
CONCLUSION
UNDERSTANDING MCGREGOR’S GREATNESS

I have conducted this analysis as a McGregor fan. Of course, critics of McGregor would provide a different take on this case study. However, the archetypal traits are distinct. My analysis was not about the wrongness or rightness of any given myth. It is not that one reading is positive and one is negative either. Mythologies stir different emotions within different audiences – or, to take this nuance further, they stir different feelings amongst the same audiences at different moments of time under different cultural circumstances. As Brand’s closing point alluded to, there is a current moment in which McGregor has captured a mood and provided a resonant story. But there is also something beyond those factors that is difficult to define. That is because semiosis, psychology and culture simultaneously operate within the ‘illusionary’ [Dennett 2012] wonderments of consciousness that are currently beyond even our scientific knowledge of brain, body and mind. But that does not make them unknowable. As the likes of Dennett would say, science and its ontological questions around mind and consciousness do not pursue the unknowable, they are just working on it. Following Brand’s point, perhaps the desire to ‘drill down’ further is where future work between cultural studies, philosophy, neuroscience and other biological sciences can work together.

This case study has broken down some of the mythological characteristics of Conor McGregor. Attention to these qualities has helped to understand the essence of the story around McGregor’s journey through the cultural and psycho-discursive mechanisms of storytelling. Through his persona, we have seen how McGregor’s commercial value and profile have transcended the UFC – continually breaking boundaries and expectations. These powerful traits have helped us to understand McGregor’s aura of ‘greatness’ and especially how this resonates in Ireland. In doing so, I have paid some attention to the role of visualisation and the myth of the law of attraction. A non-reductive materialist approach to consciousness understands how this myth functions metaphorically, as both a semiotic and psychological (internal/embodied) mechanism, as opposed to that of any external force, power or entity. This enabled me to critique dualist notions of visualisation and the law of attraction, which literalise those metaphors as mystical truths about the universe and human consciousness. This was not to undermine McGregor’s use of visualisation but rather to understand it as a plausible affective mechanism in its metaphorical form.

13 Much like my analysis of Nigel Farage [2017], the archetypal essence of his story is distinct regardless of the affect it has, which is dependent on ideology.

Affective Mythology and ‘The Notorious’ Conor McGregor
Darren Kelsey

Whilst many audiences will take issue with McGregor’s materialistic attitude towards money, fame and glamour, we have also seen complexities in his character as he acknowledges the importance of gratitude and generosity. I have been more interested in the emotive and affective nuances of McGregor’s persona rather than fixating on one aspect – such as money and wealth – from one ideological perspective. As we have seen, McGregor is not exclusively a case of ruthless, narcissistic, money driven materialism that lacks any grace, as his critics might suggest. Many of McGregor’s social appearances could be interpreted in this way; however, we have also seen examples where this public performance is contradicted by personal insights and moral values that tell a different story through a humbler narrative. Through the monomythical qualities and paradoxical tensions of the trickster-hero, this analysis has shown that the essence of McGregor’s story (his journey) runs deeper than the materialistic flamboyance and provocations that audiences often see.

Mythology is not limited to representation. Mythology is part of who and what we are as humans. The study of martial arts involves the study of cultural, social, political, economic, commercial, psychological, biological and transpersonal phenomena. The UFC provides a spectacle through which the intensity of MMA is fused with popular culture, which is simultaneously stimulated by and through MMA. Through the characters, personas and spectacles of the UFC, moments and spaces open up for pre-existing cultural mythologies to be recontextualised through the fighters, fans and commentators of the sport. The intensity and genuineness of its competition escalates the emotive and affective qualities of those mythologies as they are played out through the semiosis of the UFC. Building on legacies of other charismatic fighters and orators from the past such as Muhammad Ali and Bruce Lee, Conor McGregor has carved another narrative path in martial arts and cultural mythology. His legacy will inevitably influence the style and evolution of future fighters and figures within martial arts and popular culture.
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Affective Mythology and ‘The Notorious’ Conor McGregor

Darren Kelsey


ABSTRACT
Interminable ritual repetition of set movements (taolu) has resulted in Chinese martial arts facing trenchant criticism as being useless in fight sports, mixed martial arts, and actual combat. In Singapore, the neglect of body-callousing or conditioning methods in Chinese martial arts may render them unfit for unarmed combat. This led me to ask whether the entire edifice of set practice in the martial arts is based upon a false connection. Researching Hong Shen Choy Li Fut, a Chinese fighting style notoriously infested with gangsters in the red-light district of Singapore, I was informed that all Chinese martial arts and lion dance associations are triads. Nevertheless, even here I was shown curious dancelike interpretations for martial arts moves taught. Does the endless repetition of sets captivate the performer into a delusional belief that they are becoming a better fighter? Are the audiences of such sets, performed in dramatic rendition, similarly held captive in a false connection?

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CAPTIVATION, FALSE CONNECTION AND SECRET SOCIETIES IN SINGAPORE
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CITATION
MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

What is originally open becomes secret, and what was originally concealed throws off its mystery.

Georg Simmel [1906: 467]

This article considers Chinese martial arts, secret societies, and the Republic of Singapore as part of a broader research project to illuminate the social implications of martial arts, ritual, practice, and performance. My task here is to describe and explain key findings from a decade of field research with martial arts groups in Singapore and Southeast Asia, during which time a vibrant academic literature on martial arts has arisen [Zarrilli 1998; Morris 2004; Downey 2005; Frank 2006; Boretz 2011; Cox 2011; Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011; Lorge 2012; Garcia and Spencer 2013; Bowman 2015].

A peculiar technique du corps I encountered while observing a Chinese martial art led me to question mala fides in the transmission of martial skills [Maus 1979: 107]. Psychoanalysis has long stimulated anthropological thought [Gammeltoft and Segal 2016; Hollan 2016]. Applying the psychoanalytic notion of ‘false connection’ to a secret society in the Republic of Singapore presents the opportunity to reformulate the anthropological theory of ‘captivation’. ‘False connection’ refers to a ‘negative hallucination’ produced when the ego is unable to access repressed, unconscious material, yet is compelled to fill the ‘gap’ in consciousness with some invention [Burgoyne 2003: 195–6]. ‘Captivation’ is psychological entrapment, where artworks function as ‘embodiments or residues of complex intentionalities’ to compel the fascinated stare of the viewer [Gell 1999: 213; Farrer 2015a: 40].

In my fieldwork, discussed below, ‘represse material’ is analogous to secret, hidden moves, or sequences of moves (taolu or quanta), contained in martial arts sets. The taolu is the ‘artwork’ that captivates the performer/audience in a false connection, repeated in ritualized training, possibly for generations. Actual fighting experience, accompanied by training to make the body tougher, more agile, faster, and stronger through ‘body callusing’ methods, is required to acquire the skills (gong), and not simply the techniques (fa) necessary for combat [Spencer 2012: 96; Nutty 2017]. Provided taolu are trained as part of a comprehensive package of partnered, agonistic fighting skills, they are useful to disseminate combat skills, including tried and tested historic methods of assassination, bodyguard techniques, self-defence applications, and body-conditioning methods. All too often in the contemporary practice of ‘traditional’ Chinese martial arts, however, in Singapore and elsewhere, the combative essence of Chinese martial arts skills seems lost in the ritual repetition of form.

Examining the Republic of Singapore via a case study of diasporic Chinese martial arts raises delicate issues in an authoritarian regime that touts economic success as the Realpolitik key to its social evolution [Tan 2012]. The fundamental premise of Singapore is that one-party rule is necessary to ensure the continued economic and moral survival of the nation. Defined via its ‘monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within in a given territory’, the state has eclipsed the martial arts association, or militia, as the modern vehicle for community self-defence [Weber 1946: 78]. With regard to survival, control, containment, and the implementation of violence, the police, military, prisons and security services relegate traditional martial arts to the dustbin of history. Nevertheless, martial arts groups, many of which are simultaneously lion dance associations, thrive in Southeast Asia. In Singapore, lion dance associations are concentrated in Geylang, a notorious ‘red-light’ district [Warren 1993/2003]. Evocative ‘thick description’ of martial arts, prostitution, and secret societies disrupt the squeaky-clean, taken-for-granted Singaporean government script [Geertz 1973; Scott 1990]. In Geylang, a key informant explained to me that ‘the triads are the martial arts groups and the martial arts groups are the triads’. Anthropologists must interpret the ethnographic materials arising from participant observation, acknowledging difficulties that arise when ‘local knowledge’ is ambivalent, doubtful, or credulous [Geertz 1983/2000].

SECRET SOCIETIES

Chen proclaims: ‘The secret society (mimi shehui) is an ambiguous concept’ [2005: 77].¹ The term ‘secret society’ may include criminal gangs of varying degrees of organization, bandits, religious cults, fraternal groups, and underground revolutionary political organizations [see also Ward and Stirling 1925; Comber 1959]. Outlawed under British legislation in 1889, the prohibition against triads continues under the Singaporean postcolonial regime [Fong 1975: 47]. Chin reports that there were 110 known gangs and 37 ‘active secret societies’ in Singapore in the 1970s, mostly ‘confined to “red-light” districts’, thereby suggesting that they were mainly employed to protect prostitutes, brothels and bars [1980: 17]. Criminal organizations prohibited in Singapore under the Organized Crime Act 2015 include illegal triad groups (sanhehui), the 14K, and ‘Wo Shing Wo’. To follow the ethnographic materials, I examine the claim that triads are martial arts groups and that martial arts groups are triads (albeit this claim was subsequently hedged, as seen below). My interlocutor’s point was that a broad social interpretation of ‘triads’, as community organizations, juxtaposes the narrow legal definition of triads as criminal secret societies. The community definition is a ‘logic bomb’ bursting the categorical seams of the colonial legal-rational definition of triads [Virilio 2004: 204].

¹ Chinese terms occur in the text in Mandarin or Cantonese, depending on local usage (for example, shifu [Cantonese, or Guangzhouhua, not shifu [Mandarin], translated as ‘teacher; tutor; master’).

² For the Singapore legal code, see: https://sso.agc.gov.sg/.
In my research, conducted in Singapore, Hong Kong, London, Malaysia, Southern China, and Thailand, it was apparent that illegal triads, secret societies, and Chinese martial arts associations are homologous. This finding is backed up historically; Cheung Lai Chuen (1880-1966), the creator of Pak Mei (White Eyebrow), for example, led the triad group known as 14K [Juddkins and Nielson 2015: 125-129]. Organized in rigid hierarchical structures, triads and Southern Chinese martial arts groups share origin myths from the fabled Fukien Shaolin temple and a performative tradition of cult-like rituals to enter discipleship (jyu moon diji, lit. ‘enter the door disciples’) to specific masters, pledging oaths of lifelong, exclusive allegiance [Comber 1959; Elliot 1998; ter Haar 2000; Boretz 2011; Farrer 2013: 152]. Practitioners must apprentice in the martial art for several years prior to the honour and responsibility of discipleship. The appropriate waiting time is important. Once committed there is no way out except expulsion or death. For sociologist Mak Lau Fong [1975; 1981], given ‘indirect rule’ in the colonial era from the seventeenth century onwards, the kapitans (communal leader) utilized the kongsi (secret society) in the socio-political organization of the diasporic Chinese community (comprised of mixed, Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, and Hainanese residents). Fong’s highly significant conclusion reveals that ‘the indirect rule system presented the early Chinese kapitans with a problem of effective control of their own people, and the triad organization provided the solution for it’ [1975: 56].

Singapore is a long-term social experiment in Overseas Chinese state capitalism, which was ignited during the British Empire and accelerated by Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015), who maintained close ties with the British secret services MI5 and MI6 [Davies 2004; Walton 2013]. Triads, secret societies, and the state engineer and profit from ‘gangster capitalism’ in Asia and beyond [Woodiwiss 2005; Kaplan and Dubro 2012]. Capitalism comes into the world dripping head to foot in blood. It may be said that staunch anti-corruption ideology, combined with the legal artefact of outlawed secret societies, masks the State in its becoming-pimp/triad/gangster. With the emergence of President Trump, the analysis of gangster capitalism is especially pertinent in the United States, but this is a subject for another paper. For now, following a note on methods, I outline notions of capture, false connection, captivation, and the Singaporean social context before returning to the question of the validity of taolu for self-defence. The topic of false connection and captivation in the social structure is implicit throughout the following text concerning prostitution, secret societies, martial arts, and the state.

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork for this research was conducted within three martial arts ‘schools’, including classes with several grandmasters from the Chin WOo Athletic Association, Sifu Ge Chun Yan’s Cheng style baguazhang and xingyiquan class, and with the Singapore Hong Sheng Koon Chinese Koontow and Lion Dance Society (henceforth ‘Hung Sing’). Research occurred during nine years of residence in Singapore, from 1998-2007, with a one-month follow-up in 2013. For 30-months, I apprenticed (niul) to Ng Gim Han, an Eagle Claw master. Field notes, photographs, and video footage were gathered in Singapore, augmented by multiple research trips to Malaysia, China, Thailand, and Hong Kong. Nine months before departing from Singapore, I gained access to Hung Sing, a ‘closed-door’ fighter’s group.

Where the body is considered a site of knowing, or an epistemological starting point, ‘embodiment’ provides a ‘methodological device’ [Zarrilli 1998; Csordas 2002; Mroz 2011]. Embodiment here means studying martial arts with ‘somatic modes of attention’ and regarding the body as the existential ground for experience [Csordas 1993: 138; Downey 2005: 98]. In martial arts performance ethnography, the researcher learns martial arts skills as an apprentice [Zarrilli 1998: 255 n6; Wacquant 2004; Downey 2005: 51; Mroz 2011; Sieler 2015: 2]. As shown in academic investigations of boxing and capoeira, apprenticeship in Chinese martial arts is a collective endeavour [Wacquant 2004: 16; Downey 2005: 52].

This research was possible because of the active collaboration of elders from the Chin WOo Athletic Association, jingwu, or the ‘pure martial arts association’ [Morris 2000; 2004]. After I had intensively learned over fifty armed and unarmed sets, jingwu masters introduced me to Chia Yim Soon, sifu of Hung Sing, so that I might experience a fierce Chinese fighting school. Jingwu practitioners helped to translate deep concepts, and advised me during each stage of the research, from the initial commencement to fieldwork withdrawal. With jingwu, I became part of a community of martial scholars and expert practitioners,

5 Koontow, typically spelled kungfu (Hokkien ‘head/fist’), refers to Chinese and Malay mixed martial arts in Southeast Asia [see also Davies 2010: 312-317].
6 In Singapore I became fluent in Malay and Singaporean Chinese, or ‘Singlish’, a fusion of Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantoneses, and other Chinese ‘dialects’ with loan words from Malay, English, Thai and elsewhere. Yang Feng, a martial arts practitioner for three decades, was my occasional translator, collaborator, and training partner.
7 By ‘embodiment’, I do not mean the body as a ‘container’ for spirit, essence, or agency in the sense dismissed by Ingold [2011: 10; 2013: 94].
8 On research methods in martial arts, see Farrer [2015b].
and I was provided the opportunity to discuss and train martial arts with grandmasters, masters, and students in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, China, and Hong Kong. Following a black sash in East River Southern Praying Mantis and a decade of research into silat, the jingwuj experience greatly augmented my knowledge of the skills and techniques of Chinese martial arts.

My involvement with Hung Sing was a profound ethnographic encounter, a martial arts master class rather than a finalized apprenticeship. Hung Sing is a fighter’s club. The exercise was not undergone for health, longevity, spiritual awareness, or the cultivation of better selves, albeit such outcomes might result from ‘disciplining the body’ in Asian martial arts [Foucault 1988; Wetzler 2015; Goto-Jones 2016]. Students joining Hung Sing do so for a variety of reasons, especially the practical desire to learn to fight, as well as to perform lion dance with a renowned school. Alternative reasons for joining, such as to become a member of a ‘gang’, fraternity, or ‘social club’ may be evident for some associates who never train martial arts, let alone perform lion dance. Mostly elders, these associate members regularly play mah jong in the kwoon, accompany the group on foreign holidays, and support the club fighters during competitions abroad. Some turn up for occasional nights out drinking beer in Singapore. During one trip, the international network of practitioners and associates turned up for a black dog ceremonial dinner in China, followed by massage, clubbing, and karaoke to celebrate the opening of a new school in Guangzhou.

To interpret the ethnographic findings presented here, the anthropological theory of ‘captivation’ is presented. Captivation adapts to, and is itself reconfigured by, the psychoanalytic concept of ‘false connection’ [Gell 1998; Burgoyne 2003]. In Singapore, captivation and false connection are facets of the ‘apparatus of capture’, where the state, martial arts associations, and triads capture bodies, minds, attention, time, resources, and commitment.

**APPARATUS OF CAPTURE**

According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘apparatus of capture’ is the foundation of the state, a machine to hold people captive through credit, land, rent, rates, taxes, and especially debt [Deleuze and Guattari 1980/2002: 437, 443; Graeber 2011]. Singaporeans are enmeshed in a complex overarching state apparatus of COE, HDB, maids, compulsory National Service, CPF, ERP, Medicare, and they routinely suffer endless debts, bills, tickets, coupons, and fines. For most, this is ‘normal’ and hence uncritically accepted. The stuffing and oppressive atmosphere of ubiquitous government control and containment, known locally as ‘rock fever’, leads expatriates, or ‘ex-pats’ (polite Singaporean parlance for wealthy immigrants), to flee the country in droves, every weekend, to Malaysia and further afield. Nevertheless, for multimillionaires, Singapore is a giant fortified bank in ‘shopping paradise’ where money buys the freedom to purchase anything from designer narcotics (so new they are yet to be banned) to underage Russian girls [Chua 2003].

For millennia, martial practitioners, warriors, outlaws, and secret societies supplied ‘war machines’ to alternately challenge or facilitate the state in Asia [Deleuze and Guattari 1980/2002: 351–423; Shi and Guanzhong 1980/2007; Lorge 2012]. In time, states branded, hunted, and destroyed these war machines as criminal, terrorist, anti-structural entities. Eventually, the state’s military, police, and diplomatic (as well as theatrical, sportive, ritual and celebratory) offices absorbed the war machines. Contemporary states exhibit an uneasy relationship to the martial arts groups in their midst. Control of the war machine is central to the apparatus of capture, which is the defining attribute of the state.

Beginning in 1974, all martial arts groups in Singapore had to be registered under the Martial Arts Instruction Act. Groups that fell under the act were organized as corporate enterprises with a CEO at the helm, chairing a committee of shareholders. The list of incumbents included a treasurer, secretary, and martial arts instructor(s). The 2003 repeal of the martial arts ordinance may signal the quantitative and qualitative demise of Chinese martial arts in Singapore, the achievement of a policy goal with small, self-organized, and registered groups practicing insignificant martial arts that no longer require overt monitoring or legislation.

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9 Certificate of Entitlement, a government surcharge necessary to register, purchase, and drive a vehicle in Singapore, currently $36,000 [http://bit.ly/2nlikKb].
10 Housing Development Board. At least 80% of Singaporeans live in government housing [http://bit.ly/1Vehh2y].

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FALSE CONNECTION

The idea of ‘false connection’ developed from the study of the peculiar behaviour of subjects in hypnosis. The classic account goes like this: A person is hypnotized and told that a table occupies the middle of a room, although no table is present. Instructed to forget the implantation of the suggestion, the subject, upon ‘awakening’, is summoned across the room. Avoiding the direct route, the edge of the room is traversed. Afterwards, when questioned why they took a roundabout route, they say, for example, ‘Oh, there is a radiator on the side of the room and I felt cold so I walked around to warm up’. Such experiments demonstrate false connections, ‘crossed wires’ between remembering and forgetting, betwixt unconscious behaviour and conscious explanation. In psychoanalytic literature, false connection is mostly discussed in reference to transference, when the analysand (patient) makes positive attributions in the economy of desire, or falls in love with the analyst.

According to Burgoyne, false connection occupies a central place in psychoanalysis ‘at the heart of the functioning of consciousness’ [Burgoyne 2003: 195]. Freud paired false connection with ‘the hypotonic phenomenon of negative hallucination in which a person can be induced to fail to perceive consciously what on some other level they can actually perceive’ [Burgoyne 2003: 195-196]. Burgoyne continues:

Freud rapidly extended this phenomenon from the hypnotic domain to the realities of everyday life, by establishing that the defence of repression produces exactly the same effect. Unconscious knowledge and perception, once created by production, produce the conditions for a conscious failure to perceive. In this situation, to find the real connection between events in consciousness often demands an access to inaccessible material; this real connection is then unavailable, and the ego confronts a gap in consciousness. Freud claims that the ego seems to be impelled to a compulsive filling-in of such gaps, and that when such real connections are unavailable the ego fabricates connections – fictive and distorting accounts of the world – simply because it cannot bear to construct an account that bears more closely on the real nature of the world. [Burgoyne 2003: 196]

For anthropological purposes, the concept of false connection needs adjustment. An electrical analogy of a wired consciousness inside the head is problematic. Consciousness may be understood as an arc from the individual to the group over time [Bateson 1972/2000: 135]. Beyond individual psychological phenomena, false connection operates in social domains, practice, and discourse. To claim that everybody is under some collective hypnotic spell, misremembering, offering ex post facto pseudo-rationalizations for their behaviour (even if such spectacles as mass consumerism or fanatical religious action may indicate otherwise), misses the subtlety of Freud’s formulation, where ‘everyday consciousness fabricates realities which misrepresent the nature of the world: that underneath such errant reality lies the structure of the unconscious’ [Burgoyne 2003: 196].

CAPTIVATION

Captivation means to hold or charm an audience’s interest and attention, where the verb ‘charm’ may be substituted for enthrall, enchant, bewitch, fascinate, beguile, entrance, enrapture, delight, attract, allure; engross, mesmerize, spellbind, or hypnotize. Switching from the aesthetics of beauty to the paralysis of fear results in ‘transfixiation’. In Art and Agency, Gell [1998: 68-72] relates how an artwork exerts ‘agency’ to ensnare the viewer in a ‘cognitive trap’ [Farrer 2008]. To illustrate, by way of example, Gell [1998: 84] argues that kōlam (geometrical patterns of lines and dots drawn with flour by Indian women on doorsteps) function as ‘demonic fly-paper’. The demon becomes captivated while trying to decipher the complex twists and turns laid down in the design, and thus fails to cross the threshold. The upshot is that Gell’s [1998: 84-90] ‘apotropaic patterns’ might be useful to explain Celtic funeral ornaments and the labyrinth design found at Knossos and elsewhere.

Ingold [2007: 56] dismisses Gell’s ‘areal perspective’ from a ‘demon’s eye view’, arguing that the labyrinth is hidden from sight under the surface in tunnels underground, with the dots among the lines (threads) perhaps signifying entrances to the underworld. Against agency (which Ingold [2011: 28] ridicules as ‘magical mind-dust’, supposedly embodied in a design that captivates the viewer), Ingold suggests that ‘the kampi kōlam more likely exercises its protective functions by catching them in the labyrinth, from which they can no more escape than ghosts in the world of the dead’ [2007: 57]. The same theory applies to the Devil caught up in Celtic knot work [57].

Regarding the kōlam pattern as the ‘captivation’ of a demonic viewer underground by design, however, seems of little use to explain taolu, and further analysis is needed to develop the theory of captivation. Viewed via the anthropology of performance, from the embodied practice of Chinese martial arts, patterns are performed and danced by practitioners [Turner 1988]. Albeit they may be practiced in quietude, taolu are frequently performed in dramatic procession. A fiery spectacle of drums, cymbals, gongs, stamping feet, and vocalizations combine with movement to enthrall, enrapture, and captivate the audience. Simultaneously, the whirling performer may experience an ecstatic state through vertigo or ilinx [Turner 1998: 127; Callois 2001].
Pattern performance is ubiquitous in national demonstrations of martial prowess in China (wushu), Korea (taekwondo), and Japan (karate). In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Kalarippayattu practitioners learn martial arts sets towards actor training in kathakali theatre. Further research is required to confirm how such patterns relate to the kolam. But beyond lines, threads, or agency, adept bodily movement provides a clue to interpreting these mysterious designs.\textsuperscript{17} Martial arts sets are polysemous and relate to mythological themes, the ouroboros, celestial configurations, religious symbolism, and historical occurrences; including political assassinations, social upheaval, and community uprisings [see also Mroz 2017].\textsuperscript{18} Yet, martial sets also register at another level of performance in restorations of violent behaviour versus their premeditated responses.

Conceiving false connection and captivation situated within the apparatus of capture (social structure) generates the following hypothesis: If the displaced logic of symbols ‘captive’ individuals in embodied structures of false connection, then the symptoms appear beyond the level of speech/text in bodily movement (habitus) [Bourdieu 1977; Burgoyne 2003; Wacquant 2014]. Given that state capitalist regulation and control affects the capture of the body into systems of economic dependency and exploitation [Foucault 1979], the problem is to move beyond captive, apparatus of capture, and false connection perceived as structures of unconscious, misplaced symbolism, or logic, to question how and why such phenomena persist at the level of the body [Kleinman and Kleinman 1994]. A preliminary answer is: Because the state gets under your skin. Turning to martial arts, prostitution, and secret societies illustrates false connection and captivation embodied in the apparatus of capture.

SINGAPORE CONTEXT

Singapore is an island nation where selves are ‘crafted’ within the confines of a multinational, corporate, capitalist culture, facilitated by the oligarchic, technocratic, bureaucratic state [Kondo 1994]. The conformist environment boasts full employment for supposedly brainwashed citizens content with one-party ‘sub-fascist’ authoritarian rule [Haas 1990].\textsuperscript{19} Truncating a phrase from colonial cricket, in Singapore, religion, race, and politics are ‘OB Areas’, considered out-of-bounds for discussion. Singapore is a testing ground for the latest innovations in state intervention, surveillance, and control. Ubiquitous CCTV monitoring, electronic road pricing, the paperless office, and plastic banknotes were pioneered in Singapore years before their uptake in the United Kingdom. ‘Soft dictatorship’ ensures the rule of law and order, elite economic control, and individual acquiescence, thereby minimizing resistance to corporate hegemony [Neumann 1957]. Beyond Gibson’s [1993] ‘Disneyland with the death penalty’, however, Singapore is no ‘community of Saints’, and does possess a deviant, criminal element that is itself, of course, subject to the definitional policies of the State.

Singapore’s land area of 719.9 sq km has a total population of 5,612,300 and a population density of 7,796 per sq km.\textsuperscript{20} According to government statistics, the Chinese comprise 74.3% of the population. Singaporean legislation prohibits a multitude of ‘offences’ including chewing gum, jaywalking, spitting, failing to flush a public toilet, littering, walking around naked at home, fellatio, and the supposed ‘gross indecency’ of same-sex relations.\textsuperscript{21} Homicide, treason, rape and the possession of sufficient quantities of illegal drugs with the intent to supply incur the death penalty. Obey the rules, or else. Caning, fines, and freezing-cold cell detention are routine. Local newspapers regularly display headshots of executions carried out with the long drop hanging method. A former prison guard told me of a caning specialist at Changi Prison, a ‘Malay midget’ whose massive girth belied his sheer athleticism, spinning through 360 degrees to strike inmates with a thin, flexible rattan cane. Blows repeated up to 36 times carve a precise incision across the spine, risking paralysis.\textsuperscript{22}

Democratic constitutional rights, freedom of association, and freedom of speech are absent. Government critics are sued for libel, fined, and jailed. The iron cage eviscerates discourses of difference, albeit regulations are phrased in polite legal-bureaucratic terminology. Uninterrupted in power since 1965, the People’s Action Party (PAP) rules Singapore with a white cotton glove stretched over a steel fist. The starched white uniforms of this self-avowed ‘national socialist’ party symbolically renounce the ‘social disease’ of corruption. Meanwhile, the ministers rake in million-dollar pay cheques. Companies owned through a string of familial ties related to the highest echelons of the billionaire leadership control business interests in SingTel, Temasek Holdings, NTSC supermarkets, the shipping container port, taxi firms,

17 By extension, religious iconographic statues in temples of the 10,000 Buddha’s are not frozen postures but pre-filmic configurations of mystical movement.

18 See also the debate between Holcombe [1990] and Henning [2003].

19 On state-directed capitalism, see [http://www.economist.com/node/21543160].


22 See Dahl [1984: 47-50].
Changi airport, Singapore Airlines, lucrative law firms, and research laboratories in science, technology, and genetics [Barr 2014].

Yet, this strictly regimented city-state tolerates prostitution. Formerly a triad run criminal activity, regulated prostitution operates under the auspices of the state. Doctors who are undergoing compulsory National Service have the unsavoury task of testing sex workers for sexually transmitted diseases. Yellow tags worn around the neck are issued monthly to sex workers who pass the medical. In Singapore, the legal/state apparatus of capture jealously guards all permissions and prohibitions, yet turns a pragmatic blind eye to prostitution, a sex-capitalist apparatus of capture. Sex workers are captive to pimps, ensnared in debt, medical bills, and drug habits (their own or significant others’). For the punters, or ‘Johns’, the economic pursuit of carnal pleasure violates the possibility of genuine loving relationships. Meanwhile, ‘promoters’ (pimps) are captive to the triads, and all are captive to the state, through taxation, medical screening obligations, and licensing.

HONEY TRAP

The ‘evil’ part of Geylang consists of forty streets (lorong) that fishbone the main road [Warren 1993/2003]. One hundred years after the coroner’s records from which Warren distilled his ‘people’s histories’ of Singaporean prostitution, three of the ‘four evils’ prevail, including prostitution, gambling, and drinking (opium has since been replaced by methamphetamine sulphate or ‘ice’) [Warren 1986/2003; 1993/2003: 239].

Teeming with coffee shops, bars, and brothels, Geylang boasts over one hundred lion dance associations. With lower cost rents than other parts of Singapore, much of Geylang’s architecture consists of pre-war Chinese shop-houses, with steep front and back staircases leading into narrow three-story houses emblazoned with Chinese signs. Hordes of men gawp at sex workers throughout the night [fig. 1].

Geylang is the best place in Singapore to observe police raids, triad gangsters, and street fights. In a squalid back street at 2.30 a.m., I observed a drunken British expatriate shout, ‘Come on then, I’ll take you all on!’ Six men entered the fray, one with a punch, dodged; another launched a flying kick that missed. The man slipped and fell, dropping his bottle of beer as another foe wrestled him onto the tarmac. Rolling on broken glass, blood stained through his white shirt. Three uniformed policemen approached as the crowd melted into darkness. Because real fights so frequently end up on the floor, Brazilian jiu jitsu and MMA practitioners as well as street fighters typically reject traditional Chinese martial arts as useless for self-defence. Regarding kung fu with contempt, a professional American MMA trainer/fighter I met in Singapore told me that traditional martial arts (TMA) are ‘rubbish’.

With vibrant coffee shops open 24-hours, Singaporeans visit Geylang to order food or drink beer anytime, day or night [Farrer 2011: 222]. Tens of thousands of sex workers travel to Singapore from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, India, Eastern Europe, and Russia. Young women are lured by jobs in the ‘entertainment industry’, only to find themselves undergoing a ‘hellish initiation of drugs, rape, and beatings’ to transform them into prostitutes. Around midnight, writing fieldnotes at a coffee shop after practice, by chance I met the abbot of Shuang Lin Monastery: a thick-girthed giant in orange robes.


Hung Sing is a branch of choy li fut kun (califoquan), a Chinese martial art founded by Chan Heung in 1836 in Guangdong Province, Southern China. An amalgamation of three Chinese martial arts, choy li fut emerged during the peasant rebellion and warlordism of the 1900s. Chia sifu initially learned jow ga as a teenager growing up in Singapore. Outnumbered in a street fight, Chia and friends received a thorough beating. Chia asked his sifu how to improve his fighting skills, but the jow ga master said: ‘Next time, run away’. Exasperated, Chia left jow ga for choy li fut. Nowadays, Hung Sing kwoon, unarmed forms and weapons sets from jow ga and choy li fut are taught, with Chia’s emphasis on aggressive, practical fighting applications.

Captivation, False Connection and Secret Societies in Singapore

D.S. Farrer

Figure 2: Sifu Chia Yim Soon

26 As living off the income of prostitutes or pimping is illegal in Singapore, pimps may be referred to as ‘promoters’ [http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/vice-vice-paradise].

27 For jow ga particulars, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jow-Ga_Kung_Fu].

28 For choy li fut particulars, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choy_Li_Fut].

Geylang’s ‘honey trap’ forms a semi-legitimate ghetto, a working prison for temporary migrants held captive in a brutal sex economy. In ‘fish tank’ displays of ‘abject pathetic aesthetics’, women have numbers on discs pinned to their bikinis [Chua and Wong 2012]. After the number is selected and the fee paid, the ‘customer’ follows the woman into her cell, where she lives, eats, sleeps, and works, seven-days a week, for eighteen-months at a time [Ng 2011]. Extraction is difficult for victims ensnared in the sex-economy. Significant cash earnings attract the attention of organized criminals. The members of some martial arts associations regard their role as ethical, anti-triad, and may see their role heroically, perhaps aiding victims to escape. Meanwhile, the triads continue to oversee the sex and drug economy.
WEAR ONE SHIRT

At dusk, I met Zhou sifu and Yang Feng in a coffee shop on Lorong 14. A rat scurried into an open drain as they consumed prawn noodles. ‘How was it?’ I ask. ‘Lousy’, said Yang Feng. ‘Not bad’, replied Sifu. Yang Feng looks perplexed, backtracking to say, ‘OK’, to be in line with Sifu. During the next thirty minutes, they discussed Chia sifu’s absolute, oft-repeated rule that to learn his style the student must first become a disciple. Yang Feng explained:

You know the meaning of ‘wear one shirt’? … Wear one shirt means a code of loyalty; they are not exactly the same as triads, except you take on a discipleship, swear an oath of loyalty and have to turn up to all and any events as they call you – otherwise they will fuck you up. I am not sure how they will fuck you in modern Singapore, but fuck you they will and for good [Fieldnotes, 24/01/2007].

Visiting Guangzhou, China, with members of Hung Sing, I filmed a choy li fut discipleship ceremony. Two kneeling men offered tea to the master, exchanged red packets containing money, swore thirty-six oaths, and kowtowed to the sifu and the altar. The crowded room was thick with smoke from six-foot tall joss sticks offered to Lord Guan. Disciples swore not to reveal the secrets of the society and to uphold their master’s teaching passed down through the generations. Only those who ‘wear one shirt’ make it to the memorial wing to be remembered and honoured after death [fig. 3].

Loyalty and dedication is the key to the ‘wear one shirt’ dictum. Commitment is demonstrated by attending events, at Chinese New Year, and on feast days such as Lord Guan’s birthday. For Chia, that only one person from the club was available to attend a funeral wake indicated that the school was in decline. Learning Chinese martial arts in Singapore involves full participation in actual and fictive kinship groups.29 Clan membership helps to secure mortal needs, bury the dead, tackle malicious enemies, seize opportunities, gain employment, and secure accommodation when travelling [Watson 1982]. But where does the individual turn when their clan turns against them? In situations involving intra-clan violence, the martial arts kwoon comes into its element. Martial arts fictive kinship ‘star groups’ provide support networks, protection, and succour for those who have become dislodged or alienated from their clan membership, especially the poor and disadvantaged [Turner 1988: 44-45; Judkins and Nielson 2015].

29 Sifus are surrogate parents to groups of uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, and nieces and nephews [seniority is accorded for time spent in the group].
DO YOU KNOW HOW TO DANCE?

The stylized movements of Chinese martial arts sets are ‘strips’ of movements, ‘restorations’ of combative behaviour and their premeditated responses [Goffman 1974: 10; Schechner 1985: 35–36]. During instruction, the moves are taught as named individual positions, or ‘stances’. A common set of recurrent motifs pervades different schools or styles, such as horse stance, tiger, and leopard motifs. Tong members display martial arts stances in everyday life to signify triad allegiance (for example, taking a seat by swinging a leg over a chair with horse stance [mahu]). Martial postures are strung together in various sequences depending on the taolu’s design and purpose. Exponents must discover how to apply the moves in combat, though some taolu sequences depending on the taolu’s design and purpose. Exponents horse stance 

According to Chia sifu, Hung Sing can produce a competent fighter in three months, a sentiment echoed by his ‘cha cha cha’ body turning skills, with a chuckle, Chia sifu asked, ‘Do you know how to dance?’ According to Chia sifu, Hung Sing can produce a competent fighter in three months, a sentiment echoed by one of the disciples, who said this is the best style to learn for those pending imprisonment. Other martial arts require years of practice to develop pugilistic abilities, with decades of training needed to produce a black belt. Nevertheless, Chia sifu says Hung Sing is ‘dying out’ because today’s Singaporeans lack the necessary commitment, and are too busy at work and school.

Anyway, upon hearing this story, Chia sifu stood up to ‘cross hands’ (spar). Nearing 70 years in age, Chia sifu remained lean, agile, and astonishingly quick. After a few parries, he slapped me with a deafening palm strike across my right ear. He tried to rub my ear as I pulled away. Chia sifu asked: ‘Why did you hold back?’ I answered: ‘Because I’m here to do research, not to fight you!’ and because Yang Feng, watching, had given me a profound telling off for ‘beating up’ the other master and to Yang Feng, ‘Ask [sifu] for a machete. This guy is not going down otherwise’. Panicked, Yang Feng said: ‘I can’t ask him that!’ Revealing his concealed ability to understand English, Chia sifu laughed, and disengaging, I joked to Yang Feng, ‘Ask [sifu] for a machete. This guy is not going down otherwise’. Panicked, Yang Feng said: ‘I can’t ask him that!’ Revealing his concealed ability to understand English, Chia sifu laughed, and slipped into his office. He emerged carrying a green cushion with a black sash folded upon it, awarded to me in honour of fighting his students. The black sash was the beginning of my instruction.

Confucian etiquette forbids the student to contradict the teacher. In martial arts training, once taught, the moves must not be altered. To offer counter moves, or raise questions based upon alternative scenarios, is impolite, potentially resulting in loss of face. From the outset, however, Chia sifu encouraged me to show him the best techniques I know, learned during two decades of practice. Beyond taolu, Hung Sing dispenses with ‘blocks’ to go straight for the kill. Offence and defence are built into each strike. Strikes are designed to kill or disable the enemy. A simple, fast, and effective technique is to raise the lead arm using a slight jabbing motion to sink the fore-knuckles into the opponent’s throat. The ‘leopard paw’ skill is taught with footwork and body movements in a matter of minutes. Showing his ‘cha cha cha’ body turning skills, with a chuckle, Chia sifu asked, ‘Do you know how to dance?’ According to Chia sifu, Hung Sing can produce a competent fighter in three months, a sentiment echoed by one of the disciples, who said this is the best style to learn for those
Chia sifu teaches me a set from jow ga and shows the application outside in the street behind the brothel-hotel. The only application I dislike in this form is the double ‘blocks’ to kicks. This is not well thought through. In fact, I showed him a better application (pulling the opponent down and punching the back of his head) for one of his techniques. I could see the surprise and recognition momentarily [dawn] on his face and in his eyes, but the mask dropped again instantly as he said I was wrong (or he would lose face in front of his students). [Fieldnotes, 26/04/2007]

Chia sifu shook his head when I showed him some moves from baguazhang, yelling, ‘You’ve been had!’ while unleashing a kick at my front, straight knee. Although I learned ‘the face’ in Southern Mantis, the principle, called zhuan (adhering), also appears in baguazhang [Liang and Yang 1994: 171]. The skills (gong) learned in Southern Praying Mantis provided the application for techniques (fa) learned in baguazhang, yet taught to me in Singapore minus the application (jingyong).

EPILOGUE

Do traditional martial arts, with their inherent secrecy, elaborate ritual, and training method of repetition to perfection of complex, elaborate forms (taolu), necessarily obscure the fundamental mechanics of effective physical combat? Bruce Lee said taolu is as useless in real fighting as ‘land swimming’ is to someone drowning [Lee [1998] 2016: 110]. The rejection of martial arts that promote taolu, as opposed to free sparring, rolling, and body callusing has assumed racist proportions against Chinese martial arts in Mixed Martial Arts circles [Spencer 2012: 96]. Fighters from Brazilian jiu jitsu, boxing, and wrestling dismiss Chinese martial arts as a fraudulent waste of time [Farrer 2016]. The Singapore government’s lifting of the martial arts ordinance may reflect a similar dismissal of the agonistic potential of traditional martial arts. So, are Chinese martial arts primarily ritual, theatrical, or mnemonic devices, gangs, or social clubs, and not legitimate methods to learn self-defence? [Phillips 2016] Is tajiquan’s promotion of Chinese martial arts as gentle health and fitness comme il faut? We have seen that Chia rejected jow ga for choy li fut when told to run away rather than fight. Chia does teach effective methods for combat, such as throat strikes, but finger press-ups done across benches and other hard ‘body callusing’ exercises are rarely taught to Singaporeans too busy with employment and education to commit to traditional Chinese martial arts [Spencer 2012: 96]. Thus, it may be feared that Chinese martial arts in Singapore face extinction, as urban youth in Asia depart ‘from the traditional norms of their culture’ [King and Wilder 2003:305]. This does not mean that set training is necessarily a waste of time, however; only that set training alone is insufficient to produce a competent fighter. To this effect, Yang Feng points out that Bruce Lee named his style of mixed martial arts Jeet Kune Do, or ‘way of the intercepting fist’, after the athletic jingwu fundamental routine called ‘intercepting fist’ (’Mandarin, jiéquán’), which he had learned.

The Hung Sing diktat that a practitioner may only ‘wear one shirt’ resonates with the wider political sphere. The ruling People’s Action Party is a one-shirt organization, proscribing all and any genuine political competition. Of course, one shirt always has two sides, with corporate sponsorship on the back (literally, on the Hung Sing uniform T-shirt). Captivation is to be locked into false ideas, in an eternal return of the same, where no political alternative outside the status quo is to be conceived [Nietzsche 2000]. The ritual, repetitive practice of martial arts sets may perpetuate the false connection that effective martial abilities can result purely from dance-like training. Nevertheless, beyond captivating apotropaic patterns, a performative approach to set practice reveals the development of technique, footwork, bodily movement, balance, power, agility, and the visualization of combative responses to violent encounters. Trained with body conditioning methods, together with the revelation of effective applications, the fore-knuckle throat punches of Hung Sing prepare the exponent for prison, not the sporting arena. In the one-party rule of Singapore, the ‘netizen’ (virtual citizen) is powerless to resist the dominant regime and their corporate sponsors, and must work long hours in order to survive. ‘In Singapore, you work or you die’, as one of my silat teachers said.

When the colonial grip was relinquished from Empire, the British did not simply abandon their imperialist agenda in Southeast Asia. British authorities continued to project their power through covert means, via capital, business, diplomats, officials, and spies, to implement the executive mandate of the State. Moreover, the historical legacy of British colonial legislation in defining social spheres as illegal continues into the present [Freedman 1979; Farrer 2009: 83]. The British defined ‘triads’ as criminal secret societies, a colonial legacy that continues in postcolonial Singapore and elsewhere. That some Chinese martial arts are closely affiliated with violent criminal triad gangs is indisputable. Equally, other groups are anti-triad, existing side-by-side in secret, ritualistic, fraternal organizations, however embedded in brothels, coffee shops, bars, restaurants, massage parlours, and the police and military apparatus [Boretz 2011]. Colonial definitions operating in present day regimes may offer important examples of false connection,
where narrow legal terms obscure wider, more complex socio-historic lifeworlds. The British, colonial, one-sided, reductionist legal definition neglects to perceive triads as a fundamental Chinese (criminal or non-criminal) form of social organization that mediates between the individual and the clan when the clan turns against the individual. According to my Singaporean interlocutor, 'all [Chinese] martial arts are triads'. That all Chinese martial arts are criminal, however, does not follow.

Ultimately, the ethnographic materials recounted here can provide no straightforward or definite answer concerning whether the endless repetition of sets captivates the performer into a delusional belief that they are becoming a better fighter, and whether the audiences of such sets are similarly held captive in a false connection. Just as in Singapore we can see an inherent ambiguity in that triads are and are not criminal organizations, my research reveals that Chinese martial arts are both useful and not useful for actual fighting. The casual dismissal of Chinese martial arts as useless for actual combat itself results from a false connection.

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THE INFLUENCE OF COMPETITIVE CO-ACTION ON KATA PERFORMANCE

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CITATION


ABSTRACT

Social facilitation is a phenomenon that can help explain performance outcomes in competitive sports. Previous research has shown that performing in the presence of others may increase physiological arousal and that performance can be either facilitated or inhibited depending on the skill level of the performers and the complexity of the skill performed. Although extensive research on this phenomenon has been reported in the sport psychology and related literature, previous findings have not focused on individual differences in terms of how social facilitation influences performance, and very little research has focused on martial arts. To bridge these gaps in knowledge, we investigated how a co-action situation would affect performance among 17 participants performing karate kata routines at a regional competition in SE England, comparing outcomes across age and sex variables. Expert judges awarded scores to each participant in both solo and co-action settings. Results showed higher performance scores in the co-action setting across the entire sample, with female karateka and older performers appearing to benefit the most. We argue that more research is required to explain this phenomenon, specifically with respect to understanding the apparent effects of age and sex on social facilitation.
Despite issues surrounding the contextual model developed by Zajonc [1965], purporting that individual performance significantly improves on simple, well-learned tasks when in the presence of others (audience and/or co-actors or competitors), authors still retain a research interest in the phenomenon often labelled social facilitation (SF) [Rhea et al. 2003; Grindrod et al. 2006; Corbett et al. 2012]. This interest dates back to the late nineteenth century; seminal research by Triplett [1898] investigated the effects of the presence of other bicyclists on performance times, concluding that faster times were achieved as a result of the presence of co-actors making individual cyclists more competitive [Strauss 2002].

These results were repeated with young children winding in fishing reels, and this effect initially became known as ‘dynamogeny’ [Triplett 1898, cited in Strauss 2002]. Of particular note is a more recent and fascinating publication entitled ‘The Truth About Triplett, But Nobody Seems to Care’ by Stroebe [2014], where the description of Triplett’s experimental task (in this case, with fishing reels), the findings of the social psychology experiment, and the historical status of Triplett’s work are seriously questioned. Stroebe [2014: 54] argues that ‘the experimental task was described wrongly and the evidence for social facilitation overstated’. However, despite this alluring read into such misrepresentation, as well as further misgivings associated with Zajonc’s theoretical explanations of SF, Stroebe [2014: 56] still acknowledges that Zajonc’s ‘empirical generalisation is generally accepted’.

Zajonc’s [1965] research has identified task difficulty as an important factor for SF. The presence of others, Zajonc reasoned, was either facilitative or debilitative depending on task difficulty. Simple, well-rehearsed tasks, when performed in the presence of others, were performed better, while complex tasks performed in the presence of others showed declines in performance. Alport [1924] was the first to label this social psychological research area as social facilitation, and throughout most of the last century it became a major research area [Henchy and Glass 1968; Chapman 1973, cited in Strauss 2002].

A good example of this interest manifests itself in the study of above-average and below-average pool players conducted by Michaels, Blommel, Bracato, Linkous and Rowe in 1982 [cited in Strauss 2002]. Skilled players were classified as those who made at least two-thirds of their attempts at potting the ball (66%) and unskilled players were those that missed at least two-thirds (66%) of their shots. The present others (in this case, the audience), upon moving closer to the pool tables to continue watching, noticed a performance increase for the skilled players (14%) and a performance decrease of over 30% for the unskilled performers.

These findings have been corroborated by research incorporating psychophysiological measurements. Blascovich and colleagues [1999] showed that differences in cardiovascular responses while performing in front of others could be predicted by task difficulty [Blascovich et al. 1999]. They deemed the interpretation of tasks as either challenging (well-rehearsed task) or threatening (unrehearsed task), where challenging tasks would show an increase in heart-rate arousal with a decreased vascular resistance, while threatening tasks would show an equal heart-rate arousal but with an increased vascular resistance. Results confirmed their hypothesis and strengthened SF findings by applying this biopsychosocial model.

Recent findings, however, show that SF can be explained by different factors than Zajonc’s [1965] theoretical explanation. Researchers [e.g., Uziel 2007; Stein 2009] have identified individual differences that have higher moderation effects on performance when performing in the presence of others. These factors include extraversion, neuroticism, and self-esteem. More specifically, Huguet and colleagues posit a ‘cue utilization hypothesis’ to explain SF results [1999: 1020]. Cue utilization can be defined as how one interprets being observed by a potentially evaluating audience [Bruning et al. 1968 in Huguet et al. 1999] and can provide an alternative explanation to SF research. Results show that cue utilization can explain both social facilitation and inhibition [see Huguet et al. 1999 for discussion]. Cue utilization theory can explain results in single, competitive and co-action situations.

Developmental and individual differences, as well as social demographic variables such as age and sex, must be also taken into consideration when discussing SF, as these may help explain how individuals engage in cue utilization. For instance, Albion, Fernie & Burton [2005] have shown that age positively moderated effects on proactive behaviours that include positive attitudes and coping styles. Factors indicating participants’ experience (i.e., age and belt rank in a martial art) could therefore have an effect on SF. Specifically, older/more experienced participants may perceive social cues in such ways that could lead to increased performance, either through facilitation as described by SF, or through increased arousal caused by the presence of others.

With respect to sex, Gneezy, Niedele and Rusticini [2003] showed that females were on average less competitive than males when completing a range of tasks, displaying lower levels of performance in mixed competitions, but displaying higher performance under same sex conditions – this may be due to perceiving males as dominant and more competitive, and therefore not performing to their best ability in mixed settings. Van Vugt and colleagues [2007] support these results through what they term the ‘Male-Warrior Hypothesis’. These authors suggest that males are more likely to perceive intergroup/interpersonal competition (with other males) as a form of confrontation – a response less likely among females when in competitive situations with others of the same sex.
However, sex differences are not always evidenced in other studies. Rhea and colleagues [2003] examined the effects of a presence of an audience on thirty-two recreationally trained weight lifters. All lifters performed a one-repetition maximum (1RM) bench press under three different conditions (co-action, competitive co-action, audience effect) and results demonstrated significant differences in performance for both men and women (p<0.05) under all three conditions, enabling Rhea and colleagues [2003] to conclude that performance of a 1RM significantly increases when an audience is present and when a competitive situation exists. Grindrod and colleagues [2006] investigated whether total distance covered by males and females in a six-minute walk test significantly changed between two specific conditions, either walking alone or walking in a group of four on two separate occasions seven days apart. They concluded that distance covered increased significantly for both the male group (p<0.05) and the female group (p<0.01) under the co-action condition and that ‘psychological factors have an effect on the (performance execution) of the test’ [2006: 877].

While the phenomenon of SF has been a topic of much research in the sport psychology literature, there has been relatively little work done applying the concepts outlined above to martial arts. This present study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring how performances in a specific martial art activity – competitive kata performance in karate – can be affected by the presence of co-acting others. Before outlining our study, we offer a short, contextualising explanation of what kata performance involves.

**Competitive Kata Performance**

The globally popular martial art of karate, as practiced in Western societies such as the United Kingdom today, is generally imagined to have roots in the traditional martial arts practiced on the Southeast Asian island of Okinawa. However, it is difficult to confidently speak of karate's origins in any concrete terms, given that Chinese, Japanese and, in more recent years, Western cultural influences have all shaped the practice of the art in significant ways, both within and beyond its Okinawan ‘home’ [Krug 2001; Tan 2004; Mottern 2010a].

As karate began to develop in its modern form throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, schisms within its leadership and the impact of external political forces resulted, in part, in the proliferation of various different styles of the art. The global spread of karate in the latter part of the 20th century drove further diversification and change [Tan 2004; Wedlake 2010]. Among many important outcomes of this process, and similar to other Asian fighting arts, karate’s globalization has seen the incorporation of competition formats derived from Western models of sport within its various different schools/styles [Hamaguchi 2006; Mottern 2010b].

As with many Asian martial arts disciplines, the practice of kata (or ‘patterns’ or ‘forms’ in some arts’ vernaculars) is a routine element of training, being one manner in which ‘traditional’ techniques of the art can be passed across generations. However, kata performances also feature as an aspect of karate competition today, organized and evaluated by judges, in a similar manner to aesthetic sports such as gymnastics and figure skating. Here, choreographed sequences of movements are employed in order to demonstrate a karateka’s mastery of the art. As Tan writes:

> In essence, kata practice is a pedagogical exercise that encompasses the honing of physical skills and a state of mind in which one is supposed to perform an idealized combative encounter … One is then expected to mentally project the application of these techniques as if they were being executed against a real attacker.
> [Tan 2004: 171]

The notion of performing kata ‘as if’ one was actually fighting marks competitive kata out from the free sparring (kumite) competitions in which karateka might otherwise engage. Here, rather than overcoming a resisting opponent through the efficacious use of techniques, karateka must produce communicative performances to demonstrate that they are both able to perform specific techniques and also understand how to perform them in ways which illustrate a specific conception of martial competence. Thus, kata performances must be effectively ‘sold’ to judges in line with specific sets of grading criteria.

In this sense, the social context, along with the physical and mental skills required to succeed in karate competitions, are different to those found within kumite. Here, practitioners are essentially performing for, rather than against, a specified other – in this case, a judge/judges instead of an opponent, whom they must persuade instead of defeat. As such, an audience is always a presupposed element of competitive kata practice, underscoring its very purpose. Exploring how certain types of audience presence influences kata performances thereby becomes an interesting avenue for unpicking how the modern transformation of martial arts (i.e., the ‘sportization’ of kata practice) impacts upon the ways in which they are performed by their practitioners and helps form the contextual backdrop for the present study.

In previous research on psychological factors impacting karate performance, Bell and Yee [1989] undertook an investigation into the skill level (skilled: 12 male, 4 female; unskilled: 13 male, 4 female)
Eight participants were excluded from this study due to lower ability investigating the effects of social facilitation [see Bell and Yee 1989]. Differentiating among participants on this basis, considered crucial for this provided a means of considering to be a marker of ability level, this provided a means of for the skilled group under the audience condition; however, a statistically significant reduction in frequency of kick accuracy was noted for the unskilled group when the audience were present.

In a similar approach to our present study, Layton and Moran [1999] investigated the effect of what they classified as 'group spell' upon Shotokan black belt performance of the Heian kata. Eleven male karate black belts (average age of 15.8 years) were required to perform the kata’s series of set moves as a group. Layton and Moran [1999: 494] concluded that the timing of certain movements increased in consistency when movements were performed in a group setting.

Based on the findings of this previous research, as well as a lack of attention paid within it to individual differences, we decided to investigate the effects of social facilitation by taking into account both sex and age of practitioners in competitive kata performance. We predicted that a co-action situation would lead to better performances across a sample of intermediate and advanced karate practitioners (H1), performing a task with which they were reasonably familiar (i.e., one they had practiced ahead of attending a competition), as in previous research noted above. Additionally, we anticipated that female karateka (H2) and older performers (H3) may benefit more from a co-action situation than male karateka and younger performers respectively.

**METHODS**

Data were collected at competitive events held within the Southeast of England during 2015. Participants in the study consisted of club-level karate practitioners (i.e., not elite performers) who train at local clubs in the Southeast of England. According to information provided by participants, these clubs included members of various ages, experience levels and ability, and all included both male and female karateka.

Originally, the participants in this study consisted of 15 male and 10 female karateka. Four of these held at least a first-degree black belt, with the remainder holding lower belt grades. Because belt grading in karate is considered to be a marker of ability level, this provided a means of differentiating among participants on this basis, considered crucial for investigating the effects of social facilitation [see Bell and Yee 1989]. Eight participants were excluded from this study due to lower ability (belt degree under orange) or young age (under 14). This gave a final cohort of 17 participants (males = 9, females = 8; under 16yrs = 6, 16yrs and above = 11).

To test the effects of social facilitation on kata performance, each participant performed a pre-rehearsed kata under two conditions. Firstly, in the ‘alone’ condition, the participant performed the kata with one judge watching. The name of the kata was announced and then performed with no other communication being made. Secondly, under the ‘co-action’ condition, the participants performed the same kata again, although this time alongside at least one other competitor, of the same sex, performing the same kata at the same time, and in the presence of a small audience as well as the same judge as before.

In each case, the kata performances were judged by two experienced competition referees in accordance with the World Union of Karate-do Federation rules [WUKF 2014]. These rules are widely used for judging kata competitions, and while they cannot eliminate individual judges’ subjective biases entirely, they do provide a standardized framework around which judgements can be made. Because the principal purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of co-action and audience presence on performance, judges did not vary for any participants between the two conditions outlined above.

Following these rules, each performance was examined on the basis of two major sets of criteria – basic performance and advanced performance. While points were awarded for correct/effective demonstrations, points were subtracted for corresponding errors/omissions. Furthermore, disqualifications were considered in accordance with WUKF rules. A written evaluation of each kata was also produced by the competition referee(s) with respect to the consistency of performances across the ‘alone’ and ‘co-action’ conditions, to supplement the scoring produced under the WUKF rules. The results of either evaluation were not provided to the participants until after the completion of the second performance.

Lastly, statistical analysis was done with SPSS v.22. All variables were centred and standardized for analysis. Action and co-action scores were entered as dependent variables, while age and gender were used as predictor variables. Alpha (a) levels for hypothesis testing was set at the .05 level (two-tailed).

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1 ‘Basic performance’ includes judgements on the following points: Correct kata sequence; control of power; control of tension and contraction; control of speed and rhythm; direction of movements; understanding kata technique; showing proper understanding of the kata bunkai (how the kata strikes and blocks would be used to put down an opponent); co-ordination; stability and balance; pauses; kiai (attack cry); breathing; concentration; and spirit. Meanwhile, ‘advanced performance’ is evaluated on the basis of mastery; degree of difficulty; and demonstration of the budo attitude.
RESULTS

All variables showed accepted variance and parametric tests were used to test all hypotheses (see table 1 and 2).

H1 Results
To test the first hypothesis, a paired sample t-test was performed and supported the hypothesis. The group (N=17) had an increase in judged performance in the co-action situation (t (16)=4.123, p=.001; CI L: -.30 U=.10), as the co-action situation scored higher (M=7.43; SD=.74) than in the alone condition (M=7.23; SD=.73). The effect size was small according to Cohen’s descriptions (Cohen’s d = .27).

H2 Results
To test the second hypothesis on sex differences, two analyses were done. To test sex differences, an independent sample t-test was performed followed by a paired sample t-test for within sex comparisons. Scores between sexes did not significantly differ in both conditions (see table 3). To test for sex differences, a paired sample t-test was performed. Both sexes did have a significant effect from the co-action condition (Males Mdiff = -.20, SD=.26; CI L: -.40 U:.00; Females Mdiff= -.20, SD=.12; CI L: -.30 U:.10), but females had a greater effect size whilst performing with others (Cohen’s dmales= .22; Cohen’s dfemales= .50), suggesting at least some difference in social facilitation according to sex, partially supporting the hypothesis.

H3 Results
To test for differences in age, a 2-way ANOVA was performed with the alone and co-action condition scores entered as dependent variables and age as the predictor variable. Age did have an interaction with strong effect sizes in both conditions (FAalone= 9.443 p=.008 η2=.386; FCo-action=6.602, p=.021, η2=.306), supporting the hypothesis. We further investigated the influence of age on performance by dividing the participants’ ages into younger (under 16, n=6) and older (16 and older; n=11) in accordance with the AACAP definition of adolescent groups [Spano 2004].

An independent sample t-test was then executed and effect sizes were calculated. The older participants showed significant differences in both conditions compared to the younger participants (Alone Mdiff = .97, t(15)=-3.39, p=.004; Co-action Mdiff=.88, t(15) -.28, p =.014). Older participants had better effects in both the alone and co-action conditions (Cohen’s dalone= 1.64; Cohen’s dco-action= 1.33). We further tested to see how the two conditions would influence the different age groups on how they differ in their benefits from performance between the conditions. The younger group had no significant effect of co-action (Mdiff= -.28 (.36) t(4)=1.723 p=.160 CI LL: -.73 UL: .17) but the older group had significant effects of performing with others (Mdiff= -.17 (.08) t(11)=7.42, p=.001 CI LL : -.22 UL: -.12 Cohen’s d=1.64).
The Influence of Competitive Co-action on Kata Performance
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DISCUSSION

The results showed a high degree of correlation (Table 2) between the alone and co-action scores, but the changes can be attributed to performing in the presence of others and thus confirm our first hypothesis. As in previous research on social facilitation [Corbett et al 2012; Grindrod et al. 2006], we found that co-action performance in kata significantly improved scores from experts. In line with the classical research from Zajonc [1965], kata performers showed significant improvements in performance under the co-action condition versus the individual condition, but this was mitigated by age. Younger participants did not show any significant benefit. Even though the findings were significant for older, more experienced practitioners, effect sizes were small (d=.27).

While males and females both performed better under co-action situations (hypothesis 2), females demonstrated somewhat greater effects (d=.50) than males. Our findings of medium effect sizes (d=.50) are similar to those in the study conducted by Gneezy and colleagues [2003] (converted r to d: .40) but higher than those of Rhea and colleagues [2003] (d=.23-.29). To be clear, while both males and females did improve during co-action situations, the females in this study experienced greater benefits.

While our data do not allow us to confidently ascertain why this is, one possible explanation could be via the notion of cue utilisation differing between groups. It is possible that the women in our sample interpreted the presence of others as a form of social support as found by Gneezy and colleagues [2003], whilst the men may have experienced some inhibition due to a perception of confrontation, in line with the ‘Male-Warrior Hypothesis’ as outlined by Van Vugt and colleagues [2007]. That is, women may use different psychological strategies for managing arousal in co-action scenarios that do not rely on viewing others as threatening competition, which may benefit their performance more [Blanchard-Fields et al. 2004].

Either owing to different modes of socialisation into sport, socially-learned gender scripts, innate psychological factors, or perhaps a combination of all, women may be more adept at using emotional-situational factors that focus on social support – particularly when co-acting with other women – to help performance. This may stand in opposition to men who, for the same reasons, may be more likely to interpret and experience same-sex competitive co-action in a more confrontational manner, which may be a less beneficial approach when it comes to managing arousal and achieving peak performance. Such a hypothesis cannot be confirmed by our data though, meaning more research is needed to both extend the size (and thus generalisability) of our sample as well as add qualitative dimensions to the data in order to flesh out possible explanations for the small but notable difference observed.

Older participants (both male and female) also benefitted more from co-action situations than their younger counterparts. Effect sizes were large in this instance (Cohen’s alone= 1.64; Cohen’s dco-action= 1.33). This may be due to participants’ skill levels in karate. Although all participants included in the study were judged by the authors to be at either an intermediate or advanced skill level, skill differences within the sample were nevertheless associated with age, as participants in the 16 and above category held higher belt grades than the younger competitors.

The older age group could also be considered more experienced not only through skill level, but also through cognitive development [Spear 2000], making up for the significant differences in terms of karate-specific as well as more general psychological skills. However, as with

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| Table 3: Comparison of Means between gender |

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the noted differences by sex, our data do not provide conclusive answers as to why differences by age exist in the effects of social facilitation, inviting further research on the interaction of these factors.

These findings show that social facilitation is a complex phenomenon. Experience through interaction with one’s environment may lead to using others to help facilitate performance. Experience is a necessary factor for expertise development [Ericsson 2006], and this entails understanding how the presence of others may help or hinder performance. With respect to demographic variables, our findings repeat those of some previous research [e.g. Gneezy et al. 2003] by showing that females received greater benefits of facilitation from competitive co-action compared to males. This might be explained by different ways of interpreting co-active conditions, principally as either supportive or confrontational. These cognitive interpretations might explain the small differences observed between the sexes, but require more research to substantiate.

Our study does have certain limitations. The age of the participants is young (all under 20), meaning other developmental aspects may also be used to explain some of the differences observed here, while the assumptions made about the impact of age on experience may not be true for all in the sample. For instance, some of the younger participants in the sample may have spent longer training at the kata being performed in this study than the older participants, even if those older participants may be more experienced overall. Likewise, the fact that participants were not all performing the same kata may have influenced the results, even if it is a safe assumption that each participant was familiar with the kata they performed, having elected to perform it at a competitive event.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that, while belt degree rankings give some indication of skill level, this is not a perfectly accurate measurement of actual skill in karate, since different schools award them in different ways; therefore, our use of this variable to define a threshold skill level for the inclusion of participants does not guarantee that our sample were all as skilled as we have assumed. Additionally, our study also has a very limited sample size, although the effect sizes and confidence intervals show that type I errors are limited. And last of all, we only investigated kata in this study, while other forms of karate performance (such as kumite) might show other results.

Despite these limitations, though, the study has some key strengths. Performance was rated by experts within the field. Directed hypotheses were used with conservative alpha levels (two-tailed) and results were both significant and in the predicted direction. Furthermore, the study’s results have raised interesting questions for further research into the impact of competitive co-action on martial arts performance.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown how individual differences, in the form of experience and gender, are necessary to include in future social facilitation research on martial arts as well as other sports. Previous research has tended to omit these factors. Future studies within this field will also need to account for psychosocial measurements of individual differences (i.e., personality, self-efficacy) to investigate whether individual factors may mitigate or aggravate the effects this phenomenon. These findings suggest that social facilitation is not just a matter of producing a dominant response in the presence of others, but a complex cognitive evaluation of the situation and understanding of how one can use the presence of others to facilitate one’s own performance. This involves a meta-cognitive understanding of situational factors not yet investigated in this field.
REFERENCES


The Influence of Competitive Co-action on Kata Performance
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This article relates the training of gendai budō/mudo to theatrical performance. While there are already studies that discuss theatricality in martial arts, the aim of this paper is to provide a systematic overview of the theatrical structuring of elements of martial arts training. This could be further developed in the study of different martial arts and in comparative case studies. For this purpose, Andreas Kotte’s theory of scenic processes is used to arrange different phenomena in martial arts training systematically, representing the constitutive aspects of theatricality as derived from theatre and performance art. Gendai budō/mudo are used as cases to elaborate a systematic approach to the analysis of martial arts as theatrical performance. These examples were chosen because of their emphasis on aesthetics and technical expertise, rather than practical fighting applications. While theatricality in martial arts is usually seen as something for enjoyment or possibly to improve and display athleticism, it is argued here that theatricality has to be viewed as a mode of communication to convincingly elevate and spread information. It is therefore possible to trace ideological features such as norms, values, and ideals in the theatrical staging of martial arts training.
**COMBAT AND PERFORMANCE**

**AN INTERCHANGING RELATIONSHIP**

The boundaries between martial arts and performance arts, such as theatre and dance, are fluid. Some readers might find this claim surprising if they believe that the goal of martial arts in general is to deal effectively with physical violence. Axel Binhack describes Kampf (German for combat) as a focused form of physical interaction driven by the aim of speedy resolution [Binhack 1998: 31]. From a cultural-theoretical point of view, martial arts in fact serve a much broader range of purposes than only as preparation for physical combat [Bowman 2015, Wetzler 2015]. As Sixt Wetzler argues, martial arts practice can be given a range of orientations, such as preparation for violent conflict, play and competition, performance, transcendent goals, and health care [Wetzler 2015: 26]. Different martial arts can involve one or more of these roles, while a single martial art can also serve various purposes depending on the practitioner. This paper focuses on martial arts as performance, and, more precisely, as theatrical performance.

The empirical basis of this paper is built upon the author’s own martial arts practice. The research, however, has not been conducted in a systematic manner and instead draws from the continuous practise of different types of martial arts in several schools and contexts. This not only includes the training itself, but also informal discussions with teachers and students alike. While the author’s martial arts training began in 2002, the intentional self-reflective practice of martial arts research started in 2010. Since 2002, the author has continuously trained in kukki-style taekwondo under different teachers in Germany, Austria and South Korea, while also training in other styles for varying periods of time. Some training went on for several years, while other training only lasted for a few sessions. The styles which were practised for a longer period of time include lee gar kung fu in Germany (3 years), haidong gundo in Germany (2 years), capoeira in Turkey and Germany (2 years), shorin ryu seibukan karate in Germany (ongoing since 2017), and MMA in Germany (ongoing since 2017). Other martial arts were participated only briefly. These include taekkyon, judo, modern wushu, jeet kune do and wing chun. All observations regarding modes of structuring training sessions and specific exercises that are not explicitly cited from pre-existing studies refer to the author’s personal experience. Given the aim of this paper, which is to provide an introduction to a possible mode of viewing and analysing martial arts, such an approach seems adequate and legitimate.

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1 Not to be confused with the Southern Chinese family-style of lee gar kung fu (李家功夫).

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**PERFORMANCE AND THEATRALITY**

**AN OVERVIEW**

Performance and theatricality, as used in this paper, are both terms that are drawn from the academic fields of theatre and performance studies. They are now used in a broad spectrum of academic fields and disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, religious studies, gender studies, and cultural studies. Since these terms are widely used, their definitions tend to vary depending on the discourse in which they are embedded. Scholars from many different academic fields, however, agree that performance can be defined as a mode of physical action in a social context which, to a certain degree, relies on an interaction between performer and spectator, which can also be unified in one person [Klein and Sting 2005; Kotte 2005; Fischer-Lichte 2014].

Performances rely on the principle of ‘restored behaviour’ [Schechner 1988], which means that performances are always an interplay of previously appropriated behaviour and spontaneous adaption. Performance can apply to art as in stage productions, as well as to different cultural performances such as rituals, ceremonies, feasts, and other cultural events. Performance may also apply to social performances in everyday life, as in such (academic) expressions as ‘performing class’ or ‘performing gender’. Theatricality describes the totality of heterogeneous material that makes up what is called theatre. As well as referring to institutionalised theatre, it is used to describe phenomena in everyday life that employ similar modes of (re)presentation: costume, requisites, gestures, and acoustic signals [Goffman 1959, Burns 1972]. Additionally, Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the use of signs of signs as an elementary characteristic of theatricality. What is used in theatre is to be viewed as a sign which again refers to a sign, one that is already employed in a specific cultural context [Fischer-Lichte 1983a]. What I call theatrical performance is an intentionally staged and aesthetically sophisticated system of heterogeneous signs, which can be analysed through a phenomenological and semiotic approach [see Fischer-Lichte 2014: 55ff].
MARTIAL ARTS AND PERFORMANCE

There already exist a few publications that focus on the historical connection between martial arts and performance. Most of the publications on the history of martial arts, especially on the Chinese styles, at least mention an interdependency between martial practices and performance arts. The most notable historical argument in the literature is probably the essay ‘Theater of Combat: A Critical Look at the Chinese Martial Arts’ by Charles Holcombe [Holcombe 1992], which explicitly focuses on the links between the martial arts and Chinese theatre. In his recent book Possible Origins: A Cultural History of Chinese Martial Arts, Theater and Religion [Philipps 2016], Scott P. Philipps goes so far as to state that what is now divided into these three categories was once a single entity. In his essay Taoic Credibility and Decipherability in the Practice of Chinese Martial Movement’, Daniel Mroz argues the same hypothesis with reference to Holcombe [Mroz 2016: 44].

One thing is clear: Traditional combat systems have played an influential role in historical stage arts as well as in contemporary global works on stage and screen. In Asian traditions like the Beijing or Cantonese opera, or Japanese kabuki, the display of martial arts is comparable to the role of ballet in classical European opera or the French comédie ballet. Martial arts, especially fencing, were also important in European theatrical traditions. Apart from the historical staging of classical plays, martial arts still enrich onstage performances. Choreographers like Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui [Sutra 2008] and Ferenc Fehér [Tao Te 2015] use Asian martial arts while searching for new modes of aesthetic expression. Others, like Daniel Mroz [2011] and Philipp Zarilli [1993, 2000], use Indian and Chinese martial arts in the basic training of their actors. In other words, they use martial arts in the same way as Wsewolod Meyerhold, who included boxing in the training sessions of his actors in the 1920s [Engel-Braunschmidt 2001: 156].

This paper explores the regular and routinized training of East Asian martial artists, particularly in what is known as budō, as a theatrical performance. When speaking of East Asian martial arts, I mostly refer to the martial arts of Japan, Korea, and China. However, instead of trying to include the whole variety of East Asian martial arts, the focus in this study lies upon the Japanese gendai budō (現代武道) and the Korean mudo (무도). These arts heavily imply or explicitly state a focus on character development – most often represented by the suffix do (道) as in ju-do (柔道), karate-do (空手道), aiki-do (合気道), iai-do (居合道), ken-do (剣道), taekwondo (태권도), hapki-do (합기도), and so forth. Some of these arts, such as judo, kendo, and taekwondo, also display a strong emphasis on competition. This fact cannot be neglected, but apart from the purely technical training of martial athletes, the competitive aspect of these styles makes up only one aspect of the art as a whole. In fact, in orthodox schools of budō/mudo, a sporting focus is frowned upon. This broader view of budō/mudo is used throughout this paper.

A direct Chinese equivalent for the term budō/mudo does not exist, although characteristics of budō are also present in modern systems such as the Chin Woo Athletic Association (精武体育会)’ as well as the Guoshu (國術)’ movement. The core principle is the idea of character development through the physical practice of martial arts, both individually and (even more importantly) as part of a social group. From this point on, I will refer to gendai budō and related martial traditions only as ‘martial arts’. The central question is: What are the different features of training that make it a theatrical performance? Answering this question may help us to develop a fruitful way of understanding martial arts training as theatrical performance. After addressing this issue, I will demonstrate how such an understanding can be applied to our analyses and understandings of the martial arts in/and society as a whole. In other words, understanding what makes martial arts training a theatrical performance might help enrich considerations of the social dimensions and ‘relevance’ of martial arts.

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2 Depending on the organization, this martial art is spelled either taekwondo (Kukki/WTF), taekwon-do (Chang Hon/ITF), or occasionally tae kwon do. In this essay however, I will use taekwondo as a generic term.

3 Chin Woo Athletic Association is not a martial art system itself, but rather an organization, that combines and promotes different systems of Chinese martial arts. Their total approach to martial arts however, using them as a collective pedagogical tool, is very similar to that of Japanese gendai budo, or Korean mudo.

4 As with the Chin Woo Athletic Association, the Guoshu movement does not refer to one system or style, but rather a specific approach towards the practice of martial arts.

5 It would also be short sighted to say that budō and mudo are just two words in different languages for the same phenomenon. The milieu these arts were shaped in has led to the emergence of substantive differences. Nevertheless, in this case I shall focus on commonalities rather than differences.
TRAINING AS PERFORMANCE

Looking at martial arts training as performance is not entirely novel. However, scholarly works following this approach are rare. The most explicit attempt has been an essay by Deborah Klens-Bigman with the programmatic title of ‘Towards a Theory of Martial Arts as Performance Art’, first published in the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* in 1999, and later republished in the book *Combat, Ritual, and Performance: Anthropology of the Martial Arts* (2002). Klens-Bigman’s theory has not gone unchallenged [Harrison 2007]. Nevertheless, she was the first to establish a comprehensive theory of the theatrical elements within martial arts training.

To do so, Klens-Bigman used a theoretical framework formulated by Richard Schechner (1988, 1993) to analyse the process of training and rehearsal in theatre and performance. She then located core principles of actor training in the practice of martial arts, specifically iaido. She showed that, similar to workshops in actor training, martial arts practice also provides a safe space where actions can be elaborated and experimented with [Klens-Bigman 1999: 10]. On the physical performance of technique, she states that, especially in the practice of solo forms, the martial artist has to act as if fighting actual opponents to express a ‘truth of action’ [Klens-Bigman 1999: 13]. In conclusion, she points out that martial arts training has to be viewed as theatrical performance, and establishes hypotheses for further study. However, she does not provide a systematic framework for this kind of analysis.

Another approach to the problem of martial arts as performance has been provided by D.S. Farrer. A cultural anthropologist, Farrer has studied several martial arts from (South) East Asia, especially *chow gar* southern mantis kung fu, *seni silat haqq melayu*, and *jingwu* while conducting ‘performance ethnography’ research [Farrer 2015: 35]. He uses the term ‘performance ethnography’ in the same way as Philipp Zarrilli, who had for his part undertaken similar studies of the Indian martial art *kalarippayattu* [Farrer 2009, 2013, 2015; Zarrilli 2000]. Both describe a methodology where a researcher ‘joins in and learns a martial art from the ground up as a basis for writing and research’ [Farrer 2015: 35]. This view does not necessarily postulate that the training itself is a theatrical performance, but rather that it is a social performance in the sense widely used in contemporary social and cultural theory.

In his paper ‘Efficacy and Entertainment in Martial Arts Studies: Anthropological Perspectives’ [2015], Farrer takes a further step towards theatricality as part of martial arts practice. Here, he introduces Schechner’s ‘infinity loop model’ to describe relations between the aesthetic and the practical aspects in martial arts. The infinity loop model was introduced by Schechner to describe the interdependency between what he calls social *drama*, an actual social conflict, and aesthetic *drama*, or ritual and eventually theatre. According to him, both flow into each other. Themes and topics from an actual drama in social life are displayed and reflected upon in aesthetic drama. This gives relief and conveys implicit knowledge on the solving of future social conflicts [Schechner 2006: 75].

Farrer uses this model to describe how martial technique can flow between combative application and aesthetic expression. Martial technique can be derived from actual combat and transformed into tools of aesthetic expression. For him, problems occur if the emphasis in this interchanging relationship is too far slanted on the aesthetic side, i.e. if there is too much focus on the aesthetics while actual combat is neglected. This may result in the spread of false assumptions regarding the application of martial technique. In this context, he introduces the terms *efficacy* and *entertainment*. For him, martial arts contain both, to different degrees. While Schechner uses these terms rather polemically to differentiate between contemporary (Broadway) theatre and socially relevant rituals, Farrer uses them to differentiate between martial arts as fighting and stage arts [Farrer 2015: 37f]. He concludes that there is an ever-present aesthetic aspect within martial arts practice. However, it must be viewed as such, and not mistaken for practical fighting skills.

Reciprocally, it should be noted that there is also a kind of practicality within the aesthetic realm. The aesthetic is the mode in which martial arts function as cultural phenomena. When defining martial arts as cultural frames for social actions, the aesthetic has to be viewed as a mode through which information is communicated. Thinking about *budo/mudo*, which employ a pedagogical approach, raises questions about the role of aesthetic images in the transmission of norms, values, and ideals.

How can this process be studied in martial arts training? A systematized model of martial arts training as theatrical performance could facilitate further in-depth studies. Andreas Kotte’s model of *scenic processes* [*‘Szenische Vorgänge’* Kotte 2005: 15ff] is a useful theory when applied to martial arts training because of its comprehensiveness. Kotte defines *scenic processes* as the most fundamental criteria for theatre and theatricality. They consist of two factors, which are *accentuation* (Hervorhebung) and *decrease of consequences* (Konsequenzverminderung) [Kotte 2005: 45]. *Accentuation* is a mode of display that Kotte describes as elevation or alteration from the ‘ordinary life’ or ordinary behaviour. It creates an aesthetic interaction between actor and spectator. In the case of martial arts training, both roles are immanent in each disciple. The disciple acts, and simultaneously observes him or herself, the other disciples, and the master. *Decrease of consequences* means reduced consequences while performing an action, thereby creating a safe atmosphere for the performance of *accentuated actions*. 
MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING AS SCENIC PROCESS
DECREASE OF CONSEQUENCES AND ACCENTUATION

One can simply look to the concept of ‘training’ itself to understand the decrease of consequences within martial arts practice. To create a situation in which physical actions can be explored, trained, and experimented with, a reduction of possible consequences is necessary. This decrease of consequences is in most cases accomplished by instituting specific rules which are either articulated or emulated. In martial arts training, this process can be observed in all kinds of training scenarios. The utilisation of specific pieces of equipment like heavy bags, kick shields, and mitts is an obvious mechanism for the reduction of consequences. In karate-do and taekwondo, a so-called ‘forging post’ is used as well. A forging post is an erected wooden plank that is fixed to the ground. In size, it measures to about the height of the practitioner’s shoulder, while the width is about 10 cm. The striking surface is padded either with rice straw or other materials. It is usually used for practising straight strikes, but can be used for a wide variety of techniques as well. All these props allow an execution of techniques with full force, without the danger of hurting a partner.

‘Basic technique’, which in this case refers to structured defensive and offensive moves, is known as kihon (基本), or kibon dongjak ( 기본 동작), and is initially learned in individual or solo practice, with students normally standing in rows. In this case, attacks and defences are withdrawn from their actual context, as is also the case in forms practice or in application drills with a (fully or partly cooperative) partner. The compliance of the partner eliminates any distraction from the actual execution of a technique, enabling unimpeded focus on aesthetic expression.

To a lesser degree, the concept of decreased consequences is also observable in the practice of pre-arranged sparring.7 In this case, it is forbidden to use full force on the partner. Additionally, all phases of attack and defence are predefined and rigidly structured. All of this is evident in the progression of attack and defence, which in taekwondo is initiated by the attacker by moving the right foot back in a low front stance (앞 굴이) and simultaneously executing a left sided low block (Arae Makgi, 아래막기) while executing a yell (Kiai, 기합).8 The defending person answers this with a yell as well, and indicates that the attacker can launch their assault. This is usually done with a straight punch to the chest while moving forward in a low front stance. Depending on the arrangement, the attacker can attack once or more while the defender has to deflect the attacks and counter with a prescribed combination.

The performance of forms in martial arts training also follows the same principle of decreased consequences. In martial arts such as karate, taekwondo and related arts, forms9 are performed exclusively in a solo manner. In others such as judo, forms are executed with a partner as a form of pre-arranged sparring. Forms as solo practice, however, allow for a different quality of decreased consequences. Not only does this mode of practice provide a secure context, it also enables the practitioner to execute techniques exclusively by the logic of aesthetics. In pre-arranged sparring, there is still a partner that might end up at the wrong angle or distance, and this will influence one’s execution of the techniques. In the practice of solo forms, as in budō/mudo, there is no such complication to disturb one’s aesthetic expression.

Accentuation, according to Kotte, includes spatial accentuation, gestural accentuation, acoustic accentuation, and accentuation by tangible attributes (örtliche Hervorhebung, gestische Hervorhebung, akustische Hervorhebung, Hervorhebung mittels dinglicher Attribute) [Kotte 2005: 28]. The spaces in which martial arts training takes place are accentuated in many ways. Mostly referred to as a dojo (道場) or dojang (도장), the space usually displays a variety of specific decorations. These can vary and often include cultural and nationalistic imagery, though one may also detect pop culture references. Recurring motifs include pictures of historical masters, contemporary idols, or specific calligraphies that include the style’s name, sayings of past masters or the school’s rules. National flags and different artefacts are used as well. Their function is to designate the space as a special one wherein personal or collective fantasies are experienced [Bowman 2015: 56ff].

Decoration, however, is only a part of this process. The symbolic nature of the space is also constructed by the performance of articulated rules and structured routines. Both entering and leaving the space is structured by predefined ‘social choreographies’ [Klein 2009]. In the

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6 While the Japanese term makiwara (巻藁) is used exclusively in karate, taekwondo uses different names, such as dallyeon mok (단련목), dallyeon joo (단련주), dallyeon dae (단련대). Dallyeon joo, however, is used most widely [Choi 1987; Milnes 2009].

7 In the current discourse, the term technique is used to describe what in martial arts would equal to the term style. Technique in Performance Studies refers to a whole systematised body of knowledge [Spatz 2015: 27ff]. Here, technique refers to the single movement, which in total makes up the body of knowledge of a style.

8 In karate-do and taekwondo, pre-arranged sparring is mostly referred to as: sebon-hanbon-kyorugi (세본/한본반구리), sambio-ilbo daeryeon (삼보일보대련), kihon-sanbon-/kihon-ippon-kumite (기본 삼본/기본 일본 Simmons). kihon-sanbon-/kihon-ippon-kumite (基本三本組手/基本一本組手).

9 In Japanese kiai (気合).

10 Kata (型)/poomsae (품새)/tul (등)/hyeong (형)/taolu (套路).
Klens-Bigman describes a very similar, but less extensive, ceremony in iaido. Here, the first bow addresses the main calligraphy of the training hall, the second is to the master, and a third one is directed toward a decorative sword [Klens-Bigman 1999: 10]. In taekwondo, a similar ceremony is performed to start and close the training session. As in Oehmichen’s example, the highest ranked student is the master of ceremonies. Everybody is lined up according to their rank, usually with the highest ranked student on the right side of the front row while the master stands in front of them facing the front of the hall. On command, everybody turns to the reverse side of the hall to adjust their clothing. They turn back to the front as commanded. This is followed by the command ‘Charyeot! Kakki-ye Kyongne!’, which can be translated as ‘Attention! Bow to the flag!’ On command, everybody stands at attention and bows to the flag. This is followed by the command ‘Charyeot! Salonnim-kke Kyongne!, which means ‘Attention! Bow to the instructor!’ [Minarik 2014: 97]

Gestural accentuation is defined as a mode of action where the body is used as a semiotic vehicle to create a separation from what would normally be described as ordinary actions [Kotte 2005: 25]. This is a very broad definition. Gestural accentuation can mean, for instance, performing everyday movements in an exaggerated manner. Richard Schechner states that stylized and rhythmic performance of movement are essential for theatre and also performance in general [Schechner 2006: 65]. While Schechner does not use the term gestural accentuation explicitly, he does refer to the corporeal dimension of theatrical performances, a concept which, in martial arts training, is quite evident.

The basic issue when using Kotte’s concept of gestural accentuation is how gestures in martial arts training differ from those in ordinary life. Fighting and the intentional practice of martial moves are to be mentioned as optional cultural factors. Especially in democratic, humanitarian societies, unregulated or non-consensual physical violence is seen as transgressive. Here, the sheer practice of martial technique can be seen as gestural accentuation. Apart from that, there is another possible conception. If combat, as a form of condensed interaction between individuals that strives towards its shortest conclusion, is postulated as ‘natural’, as part of ‘everyday life’, then the techniques of martial arts are to be defined as something that is elevated from this ‘everyday life’ through stylized, formalised, and rhythmic actions.

These are to be found in basic technique, forms, and pre-arranged sparring. The body of knowledge consists of motions that are executed in a wide range of motions and with an exaggerated chambering of actions. Chambering usually means to move the limbs involved in the opposite direction to the actual vector of action. This is also a concept that is described by theatre director and anthropologist Eugenio Barba

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11 In der längsten Variante stellen sich alle Trainierenden gemäß der Graduierung in einer Reihe auf ... In einigem Abstand vor dieser Reihe steht dann der Trainer oder Sensei ... Im Regelfall äußert der höchstgraduierte Schüler rechts außen die Kommandos, welche den jeweiligen Abschnitt der Ritualhandlung einleiten. Zunächst ist dies das Kommando ‘Musobi-dachi’, welches das Einnehmen einer bestimmten Stellung bedeutet, gefolgt vom Kommando ‘Rei’, was dann die Respekt bekundende Verbeugung meint. Danach erfolgt das Kommando ‘Seiza’, was das Absitzen aller einleitet. ... Im Normalfall beugt man erst sein linkes Knie, mit der Intention, sein Herz offen nach vorne zum Sensei zu zeigen. ... Nun erfolgt das Kommando ‘Shomen ni Rei’, daraufhin wird seitens aller Beteiligten eine Verbeugung vor der Halle als Sinnbild der Kunst ausgeübt. ... Nach dieser ersten Verbeugung setzt sich der Sensei zur Gruppe hin und der höchstgraduierte Schüler gibt das Kommando ‘Sensei ni Rei’. Danach erfolgt seitens der Schüler eine Verbeugung zum Meister; ... Der höchstgraduierte Schüler setzt sich nach Links hin um... und es erfolgt das Kommando ‘Otagi ni Rei’ als Verbeugung aller Schüler zueinander. Danach wird ein Kommando zum Erheben aller seitens des höchstgraduierten Schülers ausgesprochen. Der Sensei erhebt sich zuerst, daraufhin folgen von rechts außen in der Reihe alle Schüler und nehmen wieder die Stellung ‘Musobi-dachi’ ein. Als abschließendes Kommando erfolgt wieder ein ‘Rei’ und alle verbeugen sich erneut in Richtung der Hallenwand. [Oehmichen 2012: 60f]

12 At this point, ‘taekwondo’ explicitly refers to kukki taekwondo (WTF).
when outlining constitutive principles of bios, or the physical stage appearance of performers [Barba 1996, 2006].

The principle of opposition, as he calls it, is also to be located in the basic techniques of chen taiji quan [Mroz 2016: 46]. Also, by practising techniques in slow motion, with excessive chambering, it is clear that they are performed so as to become meaningful for each disciple by being decomposed into discrete phases to make their body mechanics more legible [ibid.]. All of this suggests what Barba calls the principle of equivalency.

Much martial arts training includes a wide range of kicking techniques, and some styles include many that can be regarded as exceptional kicking techniques [Minarik 2014: 126]. These are executed while jumping and/ or spinning, and are targeted above waist level. This can be viewed (as can throwing in grappling arts) as an example of what Barba calls the principle of balance [Minarik 2014: 118; Mroz 2016: 46]. The sum total of these accentuated gestures as techniques and choreographies makes up the explicit embodied knowledge of martial arts.

Acoustic accentuation in martial arts training is to be found in the previously mentioned martial yell, or kiai/kihap. The uttered sound may vary from disciple to disciple, but the main principle remains the same: To accentuate one's breathing during the technique. By explosively exhaling, the lower torso is contracted rapidly, which further enhances the force of the technique. The martial yell is also used to emphasise one's focus and presence with respect to a possible enemy, the other disciples, or oneself. From a cultural perspective, the act of yelling might be viewed as something that does not conform with the norms of everyday life. The use of unusual language, be it a foreign language or an antiquated one, serves a similar purpose.

The usage of stylized clothing, accessories, and artefacts can be viewed as accentuation by tangible attributes [Kotte 2005: 28]. In martial arts, the wearing of special uniforms is omnipresent. The dogi (道着) in karate-do or judo, the hakama (袴) in kendo or aikido, as well as the dobok (도복) in taekwondo or hapkido, are the most prominent examples of something similar to a costume in theatre. The martial dress creates a sense of community. In its semiotic dimension, it may also refer to certain philosophical concepts [Minarik 2014: 88ff], historical eras (historical dress), and social groups (e.g., historical warrior classes).13

The usage of historical weapons, primarily perhaps the Japanese katana (刀), can be seen as a materialization of a romanticised past; as the pinnacle of ultimate swordsmanship through the merging of courage, physical excellence, and wisdom. Apart from martial dress, there is typically a lot of emphasis given to wearing a special belt, which usually indicates the rank of the disciple in the hierarchy of the system. It is known as obi (帯), or ddy (띠), and can even take a role similar to a spiritual fetish [Böhme 2006: 17]. According to this belief, the belt absorbs the fighting spirit of the practitioner, which is generated through hard and diligent training. Therefore, one should abstain from washing the belt, to not wash out the fighting spirit. Apart from any spiritual meaning, the black belt bears a particularly heavy symbolic meaning. Both laymen and practitioners view the black belt as a symbol of mastery. In any case, the black belt marks a certain position in the hierarchy. By using golden stripes on the belt, the hierarchical categories are further delineated. Judo and most styles of karate-do use a red-and-white belt, and finally a red belt, to further distinguish the highest ranks.

Decrease of consequence and accentuation are constitutive aspects of martial arts training. It is an aesthetically staged form of interaction that occurs in a safe and accentuated environment, while including different manifestations of gestural, acoustic, and object-related accentuation. It therefore can be viewed as a scenic process, a form of theatrical performance.

Following Elam [1980/2002] and Fischer-Lichte [1983a, b, c; 2014], martial arts training can be seen as a coded form of aesthetic performance which can be deciphered, but only to a certain degree. However, when considering present debates in German theatre and performance studies [Klein and Sting 2005; Fischer-Lichte 2012; Klein and Göbel 2017], a purely semiotic-centred approach to martial arts training would be insufficient. Elements of gestural, acoustic, and object-related accentuation can be deciphered and analysed to some extent as signs that refer to specific cultural, political, and social entities. At the same time, signs can be de- and re-contextualized [Derrida 1972/1999]. Therefore, they cannot be unambiguously deciphered without considering the context of the specific training. This also includes activities and relationships that go beyond the training situation itself, and the social setting within which the practice is embedded. The elements of gestural, acoustic, and object-related accentuation must not be viewed solely as signs with a specific semantic correspondence, but also materialistically as entities by/through which meaning is created and re-shaped in the process of training.

As already mentioned, the theatrical staging of martial arts training varies. The decrease of consequence varies depending on the mode of pre-arranged sparring, or how much emphasis is put on the practice

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13 Most obviously, this refers to the Japanese Bushi, or Samurai. However, a very recent example is to be found in the Korean martial art of taekkyeon (대한태권도), where a research project was conducted to develop a taekkyeon uniform based on the cheoli, a dress worn by officials and soldiers of the Goryeo-Dynasty (918-1392). This uniform was adopted in 2002 [Rubbeling 2014: 149].
of basic techniques and form. However, the emphasis placed on these forms of practice is usually very high.

The type of accentuation also varies. The intentional accentuation of the space, actions, and clothing, and accessories may vary in appearance, but always occurs in one form or another. What does this have to do with the proclaimed emphasis of martial arts on personal and social development? Theatrical staging does not totally exclude the possibility of teaching techniques for actual combat in martial arts training. It does, however, put the emphasis on aesthetics, while simultaneously lowering the attention paid to the practice’s combat efficiency. This describes what Farrer would call a case of entertainment before efficacy [Farrer 2015]. The lack of combat efficacy, however, does not mean a lack of any effectiveness at all.

MARTIAL ARTS, SOCIETY, AND THE ROLE OF THEATRICAL STAGING

What is known today as the modern East Asian martial arts began to develop out of the massive changes that took place in those societies in the 19th century. This was due to the agglomeration of cultural, political, and social interaction that was forced upon the region not only by Western countries but equally by the political and social changes that took place within those countries themselves. In the cultural competition for global acceptance and regional domination, martial arts started to be employed as a means of physical education for the individual, social, and eventually body politic, embodying norms and values that were relevant at that time. While judo was meant by its founder Jigoro Kano (1860-1938) to be a vehicle to build strong and humanitarian individuals who would prevail on a global stage, kendo and karate were later used as pedagogical tools in times of imperialism, to implement an ethic of nationalism, militarism, and ultimately a form of fascism within Japanese society [Meyer 2014: 69]. Chinese martial arts were similarly restructured under the influence of progressive nationalist tendencies in the late Qing Dynasty and early republican era (end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century) by organizations such as the Jingwu Athletic Association (精武体育会) and later the Central Guoshu Institute (中央国术馆) [Filipiak 2001; Morris 2004; Kennedy and Guo 2005, 2010]. What they sought is very aptly stated by xinyi quan master Sun Lu Tang in the preface of his book The Study of Xinyi Boxing [1915]:

A strong country cannot be composed of weak people. We cannot make people strong without physical training. To brace up the people by physical training is the way to strengthen
CONCLUSION

The relationship between martial arts and performance art goes much deeper than many practitioners would like to admit. Martial arts have often played an integral role as cultural performances, as parts of rituals, and as social celebrations of different kinds. Martial arts have also had a deep impact on both historical and contemporary stage arts. The subject of this paper has been the training of gendai budō/mudo as theatrical performance. While there are already studies that discuss theatricality in martial arts practice, the aim here was to provide a systematic structuring of theatrical elements in martial arts training which could further be applied to the training of different martial arts in comparative case studies. For this purpose, Andreas Kotte’s theory of scenic processes was used to arrange different phenomena in martial arts training in a systematic structure, representing the constitutive aspects of theatricality as derived from theatre and performance art. It has been shown that the training of gendai budō/mudo consists of a decrease of consequences and a high degree of accentuation, namely spatial accentuation, gestural accentuation, acoustic accentuation, and accentuation by tangible attributes.

Gendai budō/mudo were used to elaborate a systematic approach to analyse martial arts as theatrical performance for their emphasis on aesthetics and technical expertise as opposed to practical fighting applications. However, while a high degree of theatricality is present in these systems, it is of course also seen elsewhere and not only in East Asian martial arts. In fact, with this model, it is also possible to determine the level of theatricality in martial arts training and their practice as a whole: Not only in obviously stylized systems, but also in less ‘traditional’ systems, and even in self-stated practical systems that claim to have dropped any outdated or unpractical theatricality in training.

While theatricality in martial arts is usually seen as something for enjoyment or possibly to improve and display athleticism, it has been argued here that it is far more than mere entertainment. Rather, it is a mode of communication to convincingly elevate and spread information. It is therefore not coincidental that the highly theatrical gendai budō/mudo were formed in an era where martial arts were being used as pedagogical tools for physical education. Under this paradigm, martial arts were restructured and aesthetically modified and reshaped. It is therefore possible to trace ideological features such norms, values, and ideals in the theatrical staging of martial arts training.

So, what kind of aesthetics do martial arts use now, and what kinds of norms, values, and ideals are being promulgated in the contemporary practice of martial arts training? These questions are currently being investigated in the author’s research on the practice of taekwondo in South Korea. An ethnographic case study of the training practice in a selected taekwondo school in Seoul has been conducted, along with additional surveys of the various manifestations of taekwondo in South Korea.

On the basis of this work-in-progress, it can be stated that generalizations concerning systems of martial arts, in this case taekwondo, should be avoided. Even in one system, as in the highly systematised kukki-taekwondo, there are a multitude of training objectives such as Olympic sparring, forms-competition, physical education, and self-defence training, which all have different training designs and incorporate different levels of theatricality. Valid statements on the theatricality of martial arts training, and consequently the staging of norms, values, and ideals, can only be given on the basis of particular case studies. Hence, the function of this paper is not the offering of a ‘complete’ theory of martial arts training as theatrical performance. Rather, it provides a framework by which individual case studies can be conducted.


TALES OF A TIREUR
BEING A SAVATE TEACHER IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN
SOUTHWOOD & DELAMONT

ABSTRACT

A tireur is a male practitioner of savate, a martial art relatively unknown in the UK but popular in France, Belgium and much of central Europe. Savate, which is also known as French kickboxing or boxe française, is very much a minority sport in contemporary Britain and Northern Ireland, and its enthusiasts have received little research attention from social scientists. This article is a collaborative case study of one tireur: James Southwood. It draws on ethnographic research on the classes taught by Southwood, a British teacher who is an international medalist. The interrelationships between this teacher’s pedagogy, his enthusiasm for savate, and his biography are explored, drawing on his life history and the events in his classes. The small world of savate in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in which teachers find it hard to make a living, and the success of this teacher as an international competitor, are contrasted herein. The article also introduces Bourdieu’s concept of habitus in a way parallel to the work of Wacquant on boxing.

KEYWORDS
Savate, assaut, coaching, ethnography, life history, habitus.
INTRODUCTION

It is a cold winter evening in Earshaze, a central London borough. In a brightly lit, noisy and busy commercial gym near a major railway station the ‘post work’ crowd is dispersing, and increasingly the machines are now idle and the laundry bin is full of discarded towels ready for the industrial washing machines. In the dance studio twelve men and four women are in pairs, practising a kick and the ways to block or evade it. The teacher, James Southwood, in a black singlet and tights, watches them, walking around the room, observing each pair and coaching them. In one corner stands an ethnographer, Sara Delamont, making notes.

This extract from field notes written originally at a savate (French kickboxing) class takes us to the heart of the case study reported in this article. James Southwood and Sara Delamont are the co-authors. It explores how Southwood’s career as a tireur (fighter) and as a teacher in savate has developed since 2004. He has a dual identity as a world champion and a recognised teacher. The latter is more central to this article, which explores his teaching philosophy and strategies. Southwood has been active in savate since he was an undergraduate at Templecombe University (a pseudonym) nearly twenty years ago. He is the most successful tireur Great Britain has ever produced, having been the gold medallist in his weight category at the World Championships held in Rome in 2014. British women and men had ‘only’ won silver medals before. Southwood has been active in savate since 1999, and Sara Delamont has been studying him since 2009.

This article has six sections. Three sections are contextual (vis-à-vis savate, research methods, and Southwood’s career) and three present findings on recruitment and retention (two of the practicalities of running successful classes), Southwood’s philosophy of teaching savate, and the pedagogy of Southwood’s classes. Southwood is the central figure in the article, with some other teachers briefly appearing, their names and locals being protected by pseudonyms. This is not an article about savate students in the UK. Few data have been collected on students, therefore the students in the classes and events observed are discussed only insofar as James Southwood reflected on their recruitment, retention and motivation to learn savate in conversations with Delamont. This project differs from Delamont’s earlier work on capoeira conducted with a sociologist who is a capoeira student (Neil Stephens), which focused equally on teachers and learners [Delamont, Stephens and Campos: 2017].

SAVATE

Savate, also called French kickboxing or boxe française, seems to be relatively unknown in the United Kingdom and the rest of the Anglophone world, either as a martial art or as a topic for scholarly attention. Reed and Muggeridge [1985] authored what remains the only British book on the art. Tegner [1960, 1983] provided the American equivalent and the only other English-language book. Both are slim paperbacks which introduce the basic moves for learners but do not include the history of the art in any detail. Nor is savate treated at length in picture books or encyclopaedias on martial arts. There is a small entry on savate in Crudeli’s [2008] coffee table book on martial arts, and a short piece about savate in France by Loudcher [2010] in Green and Svinth’s [2010] encyclopaedia of martial arts. Savate featured in Josette Normandeauc’s [2006] TV series called The Deadly Arts, as one of six disciplines that the heroine learnt, but has not been promoted in advertisements, cartoons, cult films, or computer games (as compared to kung fu and muay thai, for two obvious examples). There is no savate equivalent of The Karate Kid or Kung Fu Panda. It has not only suffered scholarly neglect but also remains invisible in the popular newspapers even when there is British success. The UK won four medals at the 2016 World Championships, a feat that received no mainstream press coverage in Britain. A search of internet sources and cable TV stations will produce some footage of savate, but an inquirer would need to know savate existed and to look with some diligence. Kit, especially the boots, has to be ordered from France or through a club.

Savate is essentially a form of kickboxing. There are two contemporary varieties taught in Britain, assault and combat, and both have international competitions. Many tireurs do both styles. Southwood specialises in the former, so it is the main focus of this article, which does not discuss the differentiation or origin of the two contemporary styles. In assault, the aim is to land the kicks and punches with skill and finesse – but as touches rather than blows intended to injure – on target areas of the opponent’s body to score points. Assault is elegant, technical and skilful, and the fighters should not hurt each other. Combat is, like kickboxing, designed to deliver blows that land with power and hurt. Southwood has neither trained in combat nor competed in combat tournaments. He reflects: ‘At several points in my career, I have asked myself seriously if I want to try Combat, if only to say I have done it’. But he has not. Southwood continues:

I know [combat] would not suit me well because I am injury-averse and not happy taking punishment in Assault, which pretty much disqualifies me from trying full-contact. I also note that all the full-contact fighters I know have medical issues related to their sport, and I do not want to follow them into that.
Those who tell the story that savate grew up in Marseilles stress an African influence (from North African sailors) and a maritime influence (from men fighting aboard ships, holding onto the rigging and using kicks). Both origin stories stress that in its early days boxing was not part of savate; in the nineteenth century, however, French men saw British boxing as a useful supplement to the kicks, and so modern savate was created.

There is no mythology or evidence that savate was ever used in warfare and it should be classified strictly as a duelling art rather than a martial art. Loudcher [2010], a French historian of savate, writes that contemporary savate developed during the nineteenth century and was demonstrated at the 1924 Paris Olympics. He says that, during World War II, the German occupation of France nearly destroyed savate and that it subsequently had to be recreated from the 1950s onwards. Loudcher is confident that since the 1970s it has grown in France so that in 2010 there were 37,000 licensed tireurs in France, twenty per cent women, and thirty per cent children.

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, savate began to spread in some countries that had been behind the iron curtain, such as the nations of the former Yugoslavia, Hungary and Bulgaria. There are British, European and World Championships, and, now that Paris has been awarded the 2024 Olympic Games, savate may well feature as a demonstration sport.

Men and women train and spar together in classes but competitions are sex-segregated and fighters compete in weight categories parallel to those used in boxing. Progress in the sport is marked by the award of the right to wear different colours of gloves (gants). The lowest glove colour is blue, the highest silver. Promotions to the next level are assessed by appropriately qualified teachers on the basis of candidates satisfactorily performing a specified set of attacks, defences, escapes and counter-attacks. Assessment for higher level gloves involves performing longer and more intricate sequences of moves which have to be memorised and demonstrated to judges. Assessment for the blue, green, red and yellow gloves is conducted in the UK, but the white and silver gloves can only be awarded in France.

This article focuses only on assaut, as James learnt, competes in, and teaches it. Delamont has not done any fieldwork on combat or canne classes, gradings or competitions.

In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, there is as of this writing savate in Scotland and Northern Ireland but not in Wales. In England, it is concentrated in the South and South East, with long-established clubs in Templecombe and Selchester that have existed for over 30 and 20 years respectively. Other clubs and classes are transitory, dependent on a teacher deciding to start and maintain them.

Southwood has been teaching in London since 2004 and currently most of his classes take place in the London district we call Earlshaze. There are combat classes elsewhere in London started much more recently (in 2013). Allingford has had classes since 2007. One leading UK figure has taught in two small towns (Fernhurst and Ludmouth) because his job took him there. Clubs in a northern city, a London suburb and a Midlands city have closed down during Delamont’s fieldwork, while two clubs in Scotland and on the South Coast of England are recent foundations (2014 and 2017) and, given the fluidity of the club landscape, may or may not survive.

Savate’s history is disputed and mythologised, which is typical of many martial arts [Bowman 2017]. Loudcher [2010] offers a brief account mostly focused on its development in France since 1944, emphasising the governing bodies. Most practitioners in Britain tell newcomers that it began in Marseilles or Paris and that its modern form dates from the period after the French Revolution when it was illegal to carry a sword, in response to which men used canes and kicks to defend themselves from street attacks by thugs.
A Typical Class
BLUE RIBBON GYM, EARLSHAZE
23 APRIL 2015

Sara Delamont had got to the gym at 6.35 p.m., an hour before class, and James Southwood arrived at 6.50 p.m. Since they had last spoken, Southwood had been reading Wacquant [2004] on Delamont’s recommendation, his first academic sociology monograph on a martial art, chosen as a possible model for their joint publications. Delamont wrote:

James arrived and we hugged each other. He had already said in an email he was enjoying Body and Soul: tonight he elaborated on that, saying he was ‘captivated’ by the pen portrait of Dee Dee – a model of the role of a martial arts coach he likes.

We caught up on news: he has enrolled with a boxing coach to improve his boxing, and the Allingford club has a new organiser, teacher and coach, as Ursula Graeme has got a new, very demanding, job and is moving house. The new man is Dutch, called Conrad von Trouten, and is a heavyweight (over 85k): so he is not in the same weight category as James or Alex Grierson of the Selchester club. Being Dutch, Conrad is not a competitor for their international fighting selection. The European combat event is imminent and James is going to be the trainer and corner man for Adelaide and Agnata, two women I know, who are competing. He explains that there can be knockouts in combat, although these are uncommon in fights between women in the lower weight categories (under 55K and under 59k) where the two British women compete.

There is to be a squad training event for the combat and assault UK team people only (i.e., ‘closed’), and later an open ‘train with the team’ event when people can pay to attend the same training as the best in Britain. Conrad has a friend who is a personal trainer and fitness instructor who is going to come and do a session with the squad: James is keen to see if there are some new ideas that this trainer will bring to the squad.

By 7.15 p.m., students both new and regular are arriving. Women hug each other and hug the men. Men either hug or shake hands with other men. The students ’check in’ with Southwood and pay if they need to for the single class or for the month, get changed, and catch up with each other. Southwood keeps the attendance and payment records on his phone. He goes to change himself at 7.20 p.m., asking Delamont to ‘keep an eye on my stuff’ while he is in the changing room. When greeting the students, Southwood urges them to put photographs of savate on their Facebook pages and to tweet about the classes. At 7.32,
the Zumba class that precedes savate ends and those customers leave the aerobics studio so that the savate people can go in and get set up.

James puts his stuff in the alcove, and the students put theirs in one corner. He puts some music on the CD player, and calls the class to order. They form lines facing him – there are 14 students, four women and ten men.

That is a common sex ratio in these classes, in which women are usually in the minority. A regular male student, who is training to be a savate teacher and is one of the advanced learners, Lawrence Todhurst, is not here, but Delamont knows he has a new job which sometimes involves evening shifts.

James begins by greeting the class and then says there is a ‘big competition’ on July 4th, and the visiting teams will include ‘14 Hungarians’, a Paris club who are sending ‘three top people’, some Belgians and another French club who are sending ‘novices’. James urges those present to think about fighting that day by saying ‘If you sign up now, I can get you a fight – a novice fight – at the right weight’.

James asked if anyone was interested in attending an all-night event at a pub to watch the Mayweather v Pacquiao fight for which he has already bought his (£20) ticket. This was a social event, he stressed, a chance for friends to enjoy an evening out together.

Then the class starts. First James instructs them to do individual shadow boxing, without gloves, facing a mirror (there are mirrors on all four walls), to ‘get your arms moving’ and ‘get your feet moving’. Then at short intervals the class are required to drop and do 10 press ups, stand and stretch their arms, and box alone facing a mirror doing three quick punches: 1 right, 1 left, 1 right. These are the first four elements of the warm up. Each element is either 10 of something (e.g., the press ups) or lasts one minute (the shadow boxing facing the mirror). James uses a timer which ‘bleeps’ and is louder than the background music.

The class move on to the next warming-up exercise. They drop to the floor and do ten squat thrusts, then stand up and stretch leg and ankle muscles, then solo shadow box facing a mirror again, this time ‘jab, cross, uppercut’. During that minute James walks round watching each student carefully and coaching some of them.

There are six more of these exercises alternating generic warm-up, stretching and fitness moves with core savate elements including the fouette (a kick used a lot in savate). Three more men arrive during those stretches, including a regular, Michael Staveling, who greets Sara. Because the ethnographic visits are not very frequent, only long-standing, committed students know Sara well enough to exchange greetings. Those who have been training for a year or so hug Sara or shake hands; more recent class members nod or smile. Visitors to the classes are not uncommon. Of the thirteen men and four women training that evening, all the students were in their twenties or older and the majority were Caucasian but for two S.E. Asian women and two African-Caribbean men. Five people were French, one American and the rest British. The largest class at this gym Sara has ever seen had 24 people training; the smallest had six. Caucasian men are usually in the majority.

It is now 7.45 p.m. James says ‘Get a drink and gloves, get a partner’. He does not say ‘put in a gum shield’ but everyone who has one does so. The regulars have their own gloves, some newer people get a pair from James’s kit bag which is kept in a large wall cupboard in the room. James sets up his camera, looking for good shots he can post on YouTube.

James calls Michael to be his demonstration partner. They demonstrate doing a left-hand jab and how to guard your face so your partner’s jab does not hit you in the face but on your gloved hands. Pairs train that for 1.5 minutes taking it in turns to jab.

Then James and Michael demonstrate the next sequence. One person now does two jabs, a fouetté (kick) and a third jab, while the other defends himself. The students do 1.5 minutes with one person attacking, and a second 1.5 minutes with the other combatant attacking.

Protecting the face with the gloved hands has two functions. One is simply protective: A savate assaut punch on the gloved hands does not hurt. The other is that in competitive bouts with judging a point is not awarded for landing a punch or a kick on the opponent’s gloved hands. When the bleeper goes for the end of the three minutes, the sequence is re-demonstrated, and the pairs do a further three minutes. James walks round saying positive things such as ‘That’s the speed I want’ immediately and offers advice later. ‘Use the angles, don’t just stand there, don’t just block’. The class went on with nine more such sequences, each one progressively more complicated, until 8.35. Then there was a water break, the room was sub-divided into four smaller spaces using the aerobic steps as dividers, and the second hour is for sparring. James coaches people in that hour but does not teach the whole class.
The basic structure of the first hour described here – announcements, stretching and warming-up, demonstrations, and paired practice – is typical of James’s routine lessons for non-beginners, although the detailed content varies. If there are beginners, the instructional part of the first hour is done with a divided class, and there are effectively two parallel classes in the same small studio. James demonstrates something basic for the novices, leaves them to practice it, goes to the more experienced, teaches something more elaborate and leaves them in turn to practice while he goes back to the newcomers. The basic pedagogic pattern is the same, however: Demonstrations of and drills for specific punches and kicks.

On April 23rd, there were no beginners in this class; the emphasis was on short sequences of punches and kicks that all the students present could be expected to know well enough to practice. A core part of savate classes, as in capoeira [see Stephens and Delamont 2006, 2014], is practicing short sequences in pairs. It is normal for the teacher to demonstrate the sequence with a student. First, the teacher will do the ‘harder’ part of the sequence, for example the two kicks, while the student blocks or escapes them; then, the roles are reversed and the student gets to do the two kicks; finally, the students pair up and practice while the teacher walks around carefully observing the pairs and coaching them. Beginners are helped simply to achieve the sequence while more advanced people get coaching on the finer details, such as how to make the kick harder to block, or to be more stylish, or how it can be used to score points in a competitive fight. If anyone is endangering themselves or their partner, the teacher will quickly go to that pair. Pairs are changed regularly and routinely, so that all students present will have the opportunity to train with as many people in class as possible.

A regular attendee who is alert and quick on the uptake is a good demonstration student, especially if they have learnt the names of the moves. The teacher can say ‘do a chassé bas with your left leg’ and ideally, with a student demonstrator who does that competently, the escape or counterattack can be showcased. Becoming a student who is chosen to demonstrate with the teacher is a sign of competence. James had the experience of being such a ‘trustie’ early in his career, to which we now turn. The case study of James begins with his biography as a tireur.

JAMES’S CAREER

The brief summary of James’s career in savate – his social trajectory – focuses on how he did the necessary work to pick up the craft and how invested in savate he became. James went to university in Templecombe keen to find classes in a martial art. He learnt that there was a Templecombe kickboxing club, and discovered that savate was taught, so he took some introductory lessons. He got ‘positive feedback’ from the teachers ‘a few months in’, partly because he ‘was more conscientious’ than some of his fellow students. That is, he focused hard on what was taught, practiced a good deal in his own time, and built a ‘solid technical base’. He felt able to see he was making progress when he ‘was chosen for demonstrations’ in the class by the teachers in his second year of training. James was picked out by Marjorie and Len, his first teachers, to demonstrate not only for his ‘solid technical base’ but also, he points out, because he was a similar height and build to both Len and Marjorie.

James’s initial enthusiasm and regular training enabled him to get his first, blue, gloves in 2000, within a year of beginning savate, and then the green and the red gloves in 2001. Many students do not progress that fast. James also learnt the rules of the sport, and had been trained as a judge and a referee in time to go to his first world championship, travelling as an official rather than as a competitor, in 2004.

Simultaneously, he took the training necessary to become a savate instructor, and became an initiateur in 2003. Once he had gained that status, James got insurance and began to teach his own classes, initially in an English seaside town and then in London from 2004. In the years after he graduated from Templecombe, he returned for savate gradings and competitions and took some classes in London with a man who later returned to France; for the most part, though, he recalls that he ‘taught himself’. James’s trajectory and social location were, after graduation, designed to change his bodily and intellectual dispositions, because by 2005 he was heavily invested in savate.

When he moved to London, James taught his own classes and trained in Selchester (a cathedral city in the London commuter belt) and Templecombe on alternate Wednesday evenings. His teaching career prospered and he became a moniteur in 2006 and a professeur in 2014. By 2008, he had gained the white and then the yellow gloves. When he was assessed as worthy of the silver gloves in 2017, he became only the third British tireur ever to achieve them.

Alongside his progression to professeur, James began to fight regularly at the international level, but, as the major championships only have one competitor of each sex per nation in each weight category, getting
selected is not easy. In the 2012 World Championships, he recalls, 'I was in a weight category that did not suit me'. In 2014, he was able to get selected for the British team in a weight category that suited him better – i.e., one in which he could make the weight limit without weakening himself by fiercely dieting down or by limiting his mobility and agility by bulking up. He won the competition, the first British man ever to earn a World Championship gold medal in savate.

His self-confidence as a fighter was much higher by 2014 due to other competitions in which he had done well. As he recalls, 'I realised – maybe for the first time – that I could win consistently at [the] international level'. There is a contrast James makes explicit in his reflections, comparing the speed with which he progressed so he was confident as an athlete and a teacher in savate and the ten years it took before he felt he was 'good in competitions as well'. Alongside the teaching and the fighting, James has also become a member of the group who run GB Savate and select the teams for the international championships. This is a time-consuming part of his life, but we have not explored it further in this article.

This summary of James's career illustrates the four properties of a pugilistic habitus [Wacquant 2004, 2011, 2013]. He has acquired the pugilistic habitus of a tireur, the set of acquired, not innate, dispositions. He changed his embodiment, learning things that are beneath the level of discourse and consciousness. That is, he had acquired skills and knowledge that are tacit, not explicit. By his own account, he is heavily invested in savate. James's involvement with savate is self-critical and reflexive, and that has led him to welcome Sara as an observer of his teaching, and to choose to write with her about that shared experience. Sara has been watching savate classes, competitions and grading events since 2009, but has never learnt it. The article now focuses on James's work teaching savate in Great Britain in three sub-sections: Recruitment and retention, philosophy, and pedagogic processes in class.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND OTHER PRACTICAL MATTERS

All self-employed teachers of dance, exercise and martial arts have to recruit students and retain a sufficient proportion of those they recruit in order to keep the activity alive. Hiring a space (gym, dojo, studio), travelling to and from teaching, buying equipment such as gloves to lend to novices, and equipping oneself with the correct shoes and clothing all cost money. Student fees have to cover those, before the teacher can eat or pay their own rent. James is the only savate teacher in the UK who tries to be full-time. In 2017, he was teaching three nights a week. All others have jobs, but James prefers to live cheaply and to devote time to preparing himself to compete regularly. In the years Sara has been studying him, he has alternated combining paid employment and savate with full-time savate.

Any savate instructor has to find a suitable venue. Savate needs a high-quality floor, but not the padded mats of a dojo. The space should be warm enough in winter and cool enough in summer for energetic exercise to be possible. The Blue Ribbon gym in Earlshaze, which is near a major commuter station in central London, has many features that make it attractive to students. The showers, changing spaces and lavatories are decent and clean, which may help to retain students. The gym is near a train station, an underground Tube station, on bus routes and has somewhere secure for bicycles, but not a car park. The environment feels safe after dark, and has a foyer where people can wait before the lesson. James has access to a wall cupboard in the Earlshaze gym where a large kit bag with boxing gloves in it can be left safely. The hall is a good size for the class, neither so small and crowded as to be dangerous and impede training nor so cavernous that the students feel ‘lost’. An over-crowded room can deter students, while a sparsely-attended class looks like an ‘un-cool’ place to be.

Both recruitment and retention play out rather differently in the various savate clubs. The Selchester club has a core of long-term members, including two men, Francis and Guy Kincross, who have done savate for over thirty years. Francis Kincross is the only other British man alive to have earned the silver gloves. The authors Reed and Muggeridge [1985] were central to the Selchester club for many years. Two other clubs in university cities, Allingford and Templecombe, have a rotating membership of students as well as some core members.

Most of the clubs other than James’s are in small cities, so once a person has made friends and got keen on savate they can come to class and train relatively easily. London is more problematic, and many potential students of savate live and work/study far from Earlshaze.

Being a Savate Teacher in Contemporary Britain
James Vincent Southwood and Sara Delamont
In London, savate can be ‘squeezed out’ by other interests, or a rent rise, or a move that makes the journey to class very prolonged, expensive and unpleasant. James has ‘lost’ advanced students to divorce, marriage, a move out of London, career moves outside the UK altogether and in one case to MMA. James has one advantage in recruitment. London is a global city, his are the only assault classes and, for French people, whether they are looking to make friends with other French people or to get fit, coming to James’s class is a convenient choice. He therefore recruits more students who already know savate and have a positive view of it than the other clubs do. However, these people are often transitory; their long-term life will not be spent in inner London.

Getting publicity is hard, time-consuming and expensive. When he began teaching, James found he would get more enquiries whenever television programmes about martial arts included anything on savate [such as Normandeau 2006]. In 2017, TV is not used that way by potential students, and such series are ‘found’ on YouTube, if at all. He featured in a national newspaper article in 2005, and one of the current students was interviewed in a different newspaper in 2017, but such exposure does not produce enquiries. Generally, new people come through word of mouth or having found the website.

James has a beginner package of five lessons, but it is hard to get novices to commit to the more serious, long-term training. Among the retention strategies James deploys are encouraging students to go for grading and to enter competitions. These are discussed in the next section.

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING

James is clear that ‘the purpose of training is to learn skills, gain self-esteem, keep fit, make friends and have fun’. This is what he makes explicit in his classes and his individual exchanges with potential students. What he says is not unique to savate. Teachers of other martial arts such as kung fu [Jennings et al. 2010] have very similar goals for their students. James is keen that students learn to do savate assault because they will get fit but not suffer injuries or long-term health problems unless they have a (very unusual) accident.

Because savate is intended to be stylish, and to be a mental competition as well as a physical one, the biggest or strongest person is not necessarily the best. So, James’s philosophy is to get people to train regularly and develop themselves as tireurs who know their own strengths and can deploy them with guile. The five other long-standing savate teachers in the UK have all explained to Sara that they share that general approach to teaching their students. That is, as Wacquant’s [2004, 2013] analysis suggests, pugilistic learning is based primarily on changing embodiment by intensive drill and practice as opposed to verbal instruction.

Students vary in their primary dispositions, in how adept at picking up a craft and how invested they are in savate. Motivating students to make a serious investment is one area where James’s philosophy of teaching is rather different from his original teachers, in particular Marjorie and Len. Marjorie and Len regularly tell Sara that they disagree with James’s enthusiasm for competition, and warn her not to think his approach is the dominant one in the UK. James does believe that competitions and gradings are motivating and therefore students who participate in those activities will progress in savate. So, all his goals (skills, fitness, self-esteem, fun and friendships) are reinforced by fights. Entering competitions reinforces those values, as James explains: ‘I think competition does all that and more, if introduced properly and followed well. The spirit of competition is a great thing to inspire a student’.

In James’s regular classes, there are announcements of future competitions and of the results from recent meetings. Students are exhorted to attend competitions in the UK and overseas as friends and supporters if not as tireurs themselves. Additionally, as James teaches he stresses that points can be scored by landing kicks and punches and, equally, that if escapes and blocks are done well the opponent will not score. In a typical class, such comments are publicly included in every paired sequence and are frequent in the quiet coaching remarks made to each pair as he walks round. James will say, ‘If you move your feet here, he’ll miss with his jab and you won’t lose a point’ or ‘If you can do that chassé faster you can probably score with it? Don’t pause!’. Thus, James’s teaching is suffused with the idea that everyone is training to compete and to score well, or at least to know how to compete and score even if they do not choose to do so. In short, for James, potential competitions (well-refereed and with appropriate opponents) are motivating and will enthuse students to train more seriously. Serious training will make savate more enjoyable and rewarding.

The same virtuous circle can be set in motion by a student focusing on getting a grading. James believes the hierarchy of gradings – the gloves – is also inspiring, or can be:

Gradings help by pointing out which technical accomplishments need to be mastered first from an ocean of possibilities. This offers reassurance to a student who otherwise can feel lost with so much to learn.
[Grading] also offers another marker of achievement, which adds to confidence, which itself will contribute to a better experience and better development.

The technical demands of Blue are such that most students are capable of it after a comparatively brief preparation so it depends more on their confidence. There is little point in putting them forward when they are still suffering from ‘stage fright’.

These aspects of James’s philosophy of teaching are obvious in his classes, although in this project we have not systematically asked students how far they ‘hear’ the messages. We suspect novices may be so focused on learning basic moves that they ‘learn’ little from the explanations offered. In the next section, the focus is on how transparent James’s goals are to Sara.

PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES IN CLASS

In his regular classes, James’s philosophy and experience are manifest for Sara and advanced students. While working through the phases of his classes, different aspects of enculturation into savate are emphasised. For many students, the class ‘begins’ before 7.30p.m., in the foyer area of the gym where there are sofas and tables and chairs. James is usually present by 7.00 p.m. and talks to students about past events, future plans and anything else they raise. They pay him, and if they are novices or new to his class, he gets them to complete a health questionnaire. There is also an opportunity for students to catch up with or get to know each other, James often talks about savate events past and future, especially if his students have done well. When he has fought himself, advanced students will want to know about his bouts in some detail, including commentary on the judging. During Sara’s fieldwork, one recurrent theme of such conversations has been referees who did not enforce the rules of assault and allowed physical contact more suitable for combat or MMA. Assessments are made of the standards of training, coaching, fitness and knowledge of the rules among officials and tireurs from other countries.

When the small studio is free, the class move into it and deposit their belongings. James has control over an alcove where the music centre is; the students put their bags, coats, etc., in a corner. The class begins promptly, with some announcements and exhortations from James, which display his goals. He wants the existence and attractions of savate publicised, because word of mouth, including on social media, is the best way to recruit new students (and audiences for competitions). If everyone present tells their friends about savate, it will grow. Good pictures may be shared more widely. James also regularly relays good news about success in competitions, which all present are enjoined to be pleased about, even if they do not ‘know’ the fighters. There is encouragement to attend future events, if not to fight simply to travel and cheer on friends. James’s claim that savate gives people new friends is manifest.

Once the class begins, the first phase is central to James’s aim that people will get fit, and is also designed to prevent injury. People need to get thoroughly warmed-up and to stretch all their muscles. Even if people do not stay in savate, they will have learnt how to stretch in preparation for exercise. The gym is cold in winter and so James starts classes between October and April with an extensive warm up (running, jumping, moving feet and hands rapidly). In summer, the gym can be hot, and stretching and warming-up the mind are all that is necessary. The warm-up and stretching blend into the savate moves, initially done alone, with both boxing and kicks. In the early savate phase, James emphasises being up on the toes and moving the feet continuously, as well as shadow boxing watching oneself in the wall mirrors. At this stage, boxing gloves are not worn; James wants students to get warm and ‘loose’, to get into the habit of being always moving and working the arms and legs together. Here, James is still leading things that would improve the fitness and alertness of anyone in the room.

The fifth phase becomes much more focused on savate-specific instruction and practice. Beginning at around 8.00 p.m., students are instructed to put on their gloves, put in gum shields, and if they have any jewellery not yet removed, or covered with plaster, that is done. A key marker of the seriousness of the rest of the evening, this phase also depends on mixing with other students, as sequences are practised in pairs. Because the pairings are regularly changed, most students will meet, in close physical work, everyone else in the room.

Savate is a dyadic activity, so this is the most important part of learning savate skills, because people train with partners of very different sizes and shapes. A 5’3” woman has to learn where to move to escape or block kicks from a woman her size, a 6’5” man, and all shapes and sizes in between. As savate is a martial art, being able to do moves alone in a drill is a building block, but only paired practice enables the student to become a tireur. Savate has to be done with other people who attack you and force you to escape from or stop your attacker. Solitary practice will improve technical skill, flexibility, and fitness, but it cannot improve the mental and interactive aspects of the sport. In our final section, we reflect briefly on the pugilistic habitus of savate.
DISCUSSION
SAVATE’S PUGILISTIC HABITUS IN FRANCE AND BRITAIN

This article has presented some data from the eight-year research project to show how James engages in pedagogical work to adapt the French pugilistic habitus of savate for his students. In his classes, there are people whose trajectories and social locations vary widely, and no one he teaches has his own single-minded determination and dedication to savate. No student he has taught has progressed as fast as he did, or been as successful, perhaps because no one has been as invested in savate as he was, and is.

This discussion draws on the theories of Bourdieu [1977, 1978, 1990a, 1990b], especially the concept of habitus as developed by Wacquant [2004] to explore the ‘pugilistic’ habitus of boxing. Southwood has himself acquired the habitus of savate, and simultaneously spent a decade opening up that habitus to his own students. Wacquant [2011] sets out four properties of Bourdieu’s original characterisation of habitus that made it directly relevant for his study of Chicago boxers and how they were taught and enculturated:

1) The cognitive and socially constructed aspects of habitus are changeable and can be transmitted by pedagogical work.

2) The concept of habitus rests on that fundamental premise that sets of dispositions (bodily and intellectual) can and do vary by trajectory and social location. Because people’s primary dispositions vary, they will vary in how adept they are at picking up a craft as well as in how invested they are in it.

3) Habitus is based on the premise that practical mastery is tacit – i.e., it operates beneath the level of discourse and consciousness. It follows that pugilistic learning has to be based on changing embodiment, for, without that, mental learning is of little help in acquiring it.

4) The previous three points underpin the fundamental idea that any bodily habitus is acquired. In other words, bodily habitus is a set of acquired, not innate, dispositions.

Southwood’s career in savate, as both a fighter and a teacher, exemplifies these four principles. Wacquant [2013:194] proposes three research strategies for investigating any pugilistic habitus, which are (a) synchronic and inductive (the approach Bourdieu [1989] uses in The State Nobility), (b) diachronic and deductive (mapping the social trajectories of agents), and (c) experiential, which is what Wacquant himself did in the Chicago gym. The second idea, which is the one we follow here, is mapping the social trajectory of agents. James is such an agent, and the sociological purpose of this article is using Southwood’s social trajectory to investigate the pugilistic habitus of savate in France and contemporary Britain.

The pugilistic habitus of savate is predominantly French. France funds savate teachers from government money, and there are subsidised training facilities. In the 2017 European Championships, France won the gold medal in every weight category, both men’s and women’s. The core documents of the sport are published in French, and that is the language of competition and grading. James has acquired that habitus, and feels ‘at home’ in it. In this case study of a leading British tireur, we have focused on how James has gained his status in savate as a fighter and teacher. We explore here how James, as an enculturated tireur (that is, someone who is fully immersed in its French-dominated pugilistic habitus), works with his colleagues and students to ‘translate’ that habitus for people in the UK.

Savate in the UK does not have its own culture. Rather, it operates in a relationship with the dominant, French, habitus. There are two areas where the habitus is apparent: Routine classes in the UK and international competitions. In everyday training, the pugilistic habitus is all about fitness (based on serious, regular training, flexibility, developing both sides of the body to kick with both legs, punch with both hands, and move clockwise and counter-clockwise, and style). Knowing the rules, so that fouls (kicks and punches to the ‘wrong’, ‘illegal’ areas of the body) are avoided, is also crucial. Keeping an even temper so that points are scored, but illegally strong blows are not delivered, is another valued asset. The good savate tireur needs a brain to compete cleverly and also needs to cultivate self-confidence.

Regular classes, as James teaches them, are designed to lead his students towards these goals, with gradings for gloves, learning to judge and referee, and appropriate fights with well-matched opponents to act as motivators and reinforce the teaching. If his students emulate him, then they will pay attention to their diet, drink moderately, and eschew drugs and tobacco. Their rewards for entering into this way of life are to find friends from many walks of life and to improve their mental and physical self-confidence, so they can be ‘at home’ in their own bodies.

Overlaid on both regular classes and competition (so it is fundamental for all students, even novices and their teachers) is a pride in savate’s internationalism. A student who travels with the British team to Bulgaria can meet a Canadian or a Finn who shares an interest in savate, become friends on social media, and agree to go to the same summer course in France, rejoicing in the pugilistic habitus they share, which transcends national identity.
Savate has been around in England for over thirty years, and James has become a leading figure in the shadow of pioneers, some of whom still teach and some of whom still compete. For James's generation, the modified pugilistic habitus that they co-create, perpetuate and develop has the following aspects. First, there is the challenge to French domination in the ring and in the organisation of British savate. The established French and French colonial domination of savate mean its language is French and the rules of progression and of competition are written in French and determined by French-dominated committees. James's generation have, de facto, challenged that domination by producing documents in English to organise the sport in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Those who represent the UK in competition inevitably define their success and failure partially as contrastive to the French rather than any other nationality.

In every competition, the French fighter at each weight is likely to be the favourite, because they have had to achieve selection by eliminating very good French tireurs in the French qualification events. The French fighters are envied because the tests for the highest gloves take place in France; there are big, well-funded clubs with specialist facilities; there are outdoor summer training camps and expert coaches; and all the kit is readily available from specialist suppliers. On the other hand, if a French competitor does not win the gold medal, it is known that they face severe criticism, which is not a burden for British fighters. For British competitors, anyone who defeats the French competitor is popular, if only because the route to a medal is thought to be more open. From this perspective, the French tireurs are unlike the British, who have none of the infrastructure or panache of the French. Beating the French is a success for the underdog.

However, there is another available perspective from which the British tireurs feel close to the French and the core of savate. This other perspective becomes apparent when British tireurs compete overseas. There is a strong resentment shown towards officials who appear not to know (or choose not to enforce) the rules of assaut, resulting in people getting hurt and transgressors going unpenalized. Allied to that is a contrastive rhetoric that the difference between assaut and combat is not being observed by some Eastern European teams nor policed by officials. The shared culture in the UK is therefore that we know the rules and we send properly enculturated fighters and officials into competitions. That is, British savate understands and upholds assaut as it should be done, and as it is done by the French.

James's career as a teacher, a competitor, and an organiser is therefore positioned between full membership of the French pugilistic habitus and his important role in GB Savate.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have explored the habitus of savate in the UK. We have used data from and about an experienced and successful savate teacher and competitor, James Southwood, collected by an ethnographer who is an anthropologist and a sociologist, Sara Delamont, to focus on a minority sport which deserves more attention from social scientists.


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On 30 June 2012, residents of Islington, London witnessed the unveiling, at 60 Thornhill Square, of a People’s Plaque to Edith Garrud. Sometimes known as Madame Garrud, she was the martial arts trainer of a team of bodyguards who helped prevent militant campaigner Emmeline Pankhurst from being rearrested by the authorities during the vigorous campaign for female suffrage in pre-World War One 1900s Great Britain. The plaque bears the script: ‘The Suffragette that Knew Jiu-jitsu’. Since then, popular and scholarly interest in Garrud and her contemporaries has grown. This is partly due to the publicity surrounding the imminent 100th anniversary of the passing of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, under which some women over thirty were given the parliamentary franchise. Another influence has been the film *Suffragette* [2015] in which Helena Bonham Carter, a descendant of the suffragettes’ arch-opponent Herbert Asquith, played martial arts instructor and fiery campaigner for votes for women, Edith Ellyn. Indeed, Bonham Carter had her character named Edith in honour of Mrs Garrud.

Most books and articles that mention Mrs Garrud’s name (and the ‘jujutsuffragettes’ she trained) are works that examine the British suffrage movement. There are some exceptions, including Gretchen Wilson’s admirable but imperfect classic *With All Her Might* [1996], an account of her Canadian great-aunt, Gertrude Harding, a member of Pankhurst’s elite bodyguard group. But such cases have been rare. Now, however, Wendy Rouse’s book *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women’s Self-Defense Movement* also provides a contrast to much existing scholarship, particularly in that her engaging study focuses on the emergence of women’s self-defence in the United States.

While other studies of the jujutsuffragettes are written with an eye for an international market, *Her Own Hero* focusses on the ‘Progressive Era’, which witnessed widespread reform and a growth of political activism in the United States from the 1890s to the 1920s. The book is written with a North American bias and readers may take issue with an early reference to the ‘militant English suffragettes’ [7] given that jujitsu-trained suffragette bodyguard Helen Crawfurd was Glasgow-born while Edith Garrud was proud of her Welsh family connections.

In its five main chapters, the book contends that the women’s self-defence movement arose in parallel with concerns over immigration and urbanisation, the health of the nation, the growth of the physical culture movement and the increasing demand for women’s social and political rights. The book’s unique selling point is its examination of women’s motivations to learn Japanese martial arts and the ways in which they used their training to forge a sense of their own identities.

Chapter One looks at the female boxer and begins with a discussion of the Muscular Christianity movement in America in the 1880s, the advocates of which argued that in order to be truly manly a man must...
be able to back up his principles by being able to fight if needed. Muscular Christianity was not confined to the United States, however. The movement flourished earlier in mid-Victorian Britain and a famous output was arguably Thomas Hughes’s novel *Tom Brown’s School Days* [1857]. Hughes’s suntanned, brawny and good-natured eponymous hero shifts his weight from foot to foot, poised awkwardly in the wings, hoping for a mention. A proponent of Muscular Christianity, Theodore Roosevelt felt that physically and morally tough nations should potentially be able to tackle adversaries. Eugenic fears over masculine weakness were countered with initiatives such as the founding of *Physical Culture* magazine courtesy of Bernarr McFadden to inspire an interest in bodybuilding. Male-only clubs and the YMCA served to combat fears over masculine unruliness and physical weakness. At the same time, Rouse argues, exercise was becoming more acceptable for women and boxing was made more palatable to critics provided the sport could be marketed as physical preparation for childbearing and domestic duties. Rouse writes that, when interviewed, female boxers frequently referred to the sport’s beauty benefits and drew attention to themselves as wives and mothers, thereby strengthening boxing’s link with traditional feminine ideals.

‘Jiu-jitsu symbolized the physical embodiment of the Yellow Peril’ [39], writes Rouse in Chapter Two, proposing that American fears over Japanese and Chinese immigration informed the reception of Eastern martial arts in the United States. The chapter argues that jujitsu, which was based on the idea that an opponent could be subdued through clever application of pressure to the joints, was widely considered underhand, as opposed to boxing. Roosevelt embodied an ambivalent stance towards jujitsu: He was both a keen student of Yoshiaki Yamashita and yet he also feared Japanese national and military might, responding with a nervous pro-American stance. Other negative responses to jujitsu included feminizing the martial art and describing Japanese instructors as irredeemably foreign. To counter any claims that jujitsu was a sneaky martial art, promotional literature referred to the Bushido code of honour, arguing that jujitsu was only used as a form of self-defence or defence of honour. In short, the literature argued that jujitsu was moral and manly. What is particularly noteworthy with respect to Her Own Hero is Rouse’s painstaking sourcing of stories featuring martial arts being used in everyday contexts, a task greatly facilitated by the rapid development of online newspaper databases in recent years. As she argues, the example of ordinary women – such as Hisaso Sota, who, in 1905 in Harlem, threw her attacker to the ground using jujitsu – challenged notions of female passivity.

However, I would like to have seen a reference to Edward William Barton-Wright, who introduced Japanese martial arts to a mainstream audience in turn-of-the-century Britain. Barton-Wright drew together experts from around the world to his Bartitsu Club and influenced the development of martial arts overseas. Barton-Wright’s Bartitsu, an early mixed martial art, embraced a variety of fighting styles including French *savate*, boxing and jujitsu. Bartitsu most famously appears, as a typo, in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Adventure of the Empty House* [1903] in which Sherlock Holmes tells a stunned Dr Watson, who believes Holmes is dead, that he survived his tussle with his greatest enemy using his knowledge of ‘baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling’. What I find compelling is that, of all the weapons Holmes uses in the stories, it is his knowledge of Japanese martial arts which he takes to his most significant fight. How does Rouse view Barton-Wright’s promotion of jujitsu? How was his work received in the United States? What were his attempts (if any) to counter claims of jujitsu’s supposed underhandedness?

In the next chapter, urban villains such as the masher, the white slaver and the rapist provide an impetus for upper-class women to learn martial arts and, as an extension of their philanthropic work, to teach shop assistants and working-class women how to defend themselves. When it came to the masher, which the press in Britain had dubbed the ‘male pest’, Rouse remarks that ‘the suggestion of impropriety undergirded every stare, remark, or touch’ [79], a statement which evocatively suggests that the frisson of encounters on the
street or at the workplace could be very much one-sided. In recent years, Laura Bates’s *Everyday Sexism* website and accompanying book documents the messages left on Bates’s site by women who have suffered from verbal or physical harassment and abuse in their daily lives. In the nineteenth century, newspapers provided a forum in which women could discuss their experiences, most notable of whom was the author Olive Schreiner, who in the 1880s was arrested by a police officer who suspected her of being a prostitute simply because she was out walking at night. *Her Own Hero* shows that the flurry of Victorian letter writing on everyday sexism was not confined to the British press. Sympathetic journalists in the United States, including Nixola Greeley-Smith of the *Evening World* and Laura Jean Libbey of the *Chicago Tribune*, discussed the tricky subject of sexual harassment and offered advice to readers. Looking at *Her Own Hero*, it seems that, in both the British and American press, women were advised to make themselves invisible so as not to attract attention. However, Greeley-Smith argued that women who wore makeup and walked proudly down the streets were not to blame for the sexual harassment they suffered. Women were encouraged to discuss their experiences. Their revelations still resonate today, particularly so in the light of the Westminster sexual harassment scandal of autumn 2017 in which numerous female employees had reported that they had been subject to inappropriate attentions from male superiors. The Fawcett Society, founded in honour of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who headed the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, a non-militant counterpart to Emmeline Pankhurst’s militant WSPU, responded with a campaign against the normalisation of sexism in the Houses of Parliament with the title ‘Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise’.

Indeed, Rouse recognises that the topic of self-defence encompasses more than just a discussion about hand-to-hand combat. Campaigners also fought for economic protection from employers, against the employers who might practice, as one newspaper put it, ‘the Capitalist Class jiu jitsu of ‘firing’ the girls and throwing them breadless, sprawling upon the street’ [Rouse 2017: 113]. This valuable observation is left hanging. Yet, the struggle for economic rights was a key factor in the militant campaign for the vote and became symbolically interlinked with physical self-defence. For instance, in her essay ‘The Woman with the Whip’ [1907], Teresa Billington-Greig of the Women’s Freedom League, which operated in Britain, discussed the ways in which a dog-whip which she had used to defend herself at a political meeting in 1906 was also a symbol of the fight against women’s oppression:

> The unfair marriage laws, the divorce and separation laws, the laws of parentage, the criminal offences laws, were seen in a new light. … There is no law of solicitation where men are concerned. There is one for women. A woman being approached insultingly by a man can only charge him with annoyance, and the charge is not made easy to sustain, as in the opposite case…. [M]en and women together can solve those terrible problems which man alone can never hope to solve. Then the dog-whip can be burned, and the memories it wakens be forgotten.

[Billington-Greig 1907/1913: 43-52]

Interestingly, Rouse maintains that martial arts training for women was acceptable to many white men on the basis that ‘self-defense training was seen as preserving white women’s bodies for white men’ [114]. What her chapter shows is that white men could be threats to white women, rather than being their perceived protectors, and that martial arts training provided white women with a means to counter this danger and presumably also any values inherent in hegemonic masculinities which could pose a danger to all women.

The book’s last two chapters explore the ways in which martial arts were promoted for self-defence in the home, and they consider the links between the suffrage and women’s rights campaigns on the growing adoption and social acceptance of women’s self-defence. Rouse also assesses the strengths and limitations of various approaches today. What is admirable is Rouse’s fresh perspective on the works of nineteenth-century
women’s rights campaigners Lucy Stone and her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, as well as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, all three of whom influenced suffragette campaigners of the 1900s. While Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that women ought not to rely on men to protect them and devise their own means of self-defence, Alice Stone Blackwell openly advocated boxing for women. Rouse also considers the ways in which women responded to Roosevelt’s very public espousal of jujitsu. For example, Washington heiress and critic of Roosevelt Martha Blow Wadsworth engaged Fude, the wife of Roosevelt’s trainer, Yoshiaki Yamashita, to teach a class of the wives and daughters of the Washington political elite. One of these students, Jessie Ames, became involved in the women’s suffrage campaign and the birth control movement. The increasing stigmatisation of violence in the long nineteenth century resulted in a revision of masculine forms of settling disputes, from the criminalization of duelling to the increasing acceptance of regulated boxing. Rouse’s book thoughtfully considers the ways in which ideals of femininity were re-sculptured in response to women’s new roles within changing societies. Hopefully the observations of Louise Le Noir Thomas, a contemporary of Jessie Ames, will provide further stimulus for research relating to physical culture and gender identity: ‘It is not unwomanly to protest herself – rather it is unwomanly to be overpowered by the assailant’ [125].

REFERENCES


Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books
Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst and
Timothy Dawson (eds.)
Brill, 2016
619 pages

As the field of martial arts studies has grown in the last fifteen to twenty years, there has been an upsurge of interest in the traditional martial arts of the late medieval and early modern periods. Unlike Asian martial arts, the practice of these arts has not been transmitted in an unbroken chain from practitioner to practitioner, nor have any national or traditional styles of combat dating to those times survived into the modern era [Clements 1998: 1-3]. As a result, much of the research into these martial arts has been conducted as an attempt first to understand them and then to reconstruct how they were practiced. One prominent direction of inquiry employs surviving textual sources as a key component of the reconstruction process. Perhaps the single most important genre in these attempts are the so-called ‘fight books’ – instructional texts focusing specifically on armed or unarmed combat.

These ‘fight books’ have drawn the attention of both academics and non-academics as a vector to understand, interpret, and possibly reconstruct early European martial arts. A first attempt at reconstructing these practices was undertaken near the turn of the 19th century [Peeters 1987], but this wave receded following the First World War. The next major development in the historiography of the fight books, at least in English, was taken up by researchers such as Sydney Angelo and John Clements, who began investigating the fight book tradition with the goal of reconstructing pre-modern combat techniques rather than the material culture of the fight books themselves.

The edited volume Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th-17th Centuries) represents a natural progression of investigation into the fight books and seeks to broaden the discussion and engage with a scholarly audience. The articles in the collection deal directly with these texts as well as the martial arts and martial cultures associated with them. The volume is the 112th in Brill’s History of Warfare series and has been edited by Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst, and Timothy Dawson. While the content may appeal to a wide range of readers, the high purchase price will limit its circulation to dedicated scholars and academic libraries.

Jaquet et al.’s volume seeks to combine several diverse methods of inquiry into a single volume, while simultaneously maintaining a sufficient level of academic rigor so as to appeal to scholars across a wide range of disciplines. While the collection’s title ostensibly focuses on the fight book tradition in Western Europe, the reality is that the volume attempts to advance a dialogue about martial arts through the lens of the fight book tradition. As such, the editors have not constrained submissions to any single school of thought, methodological approach, or academic discipline. Much of the research into the martial arts of Western Europe has come from a collection of
independent scholars, bloggers, or practitioners of Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) rather than from more traditional academic sources. *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books* gives voice to the contributions that these non-traditional scholars have made to the field of martial arts studies and places them in an academic dialogue.

The editors state that their goal is to start an interdisciplinary conversation on European martial arts generally and fight books specifically. The purpose of *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books* is ‘to foster further research in the new field of Historical European Martial Arts Studies by bringing it to a wide international academic audience, to open up sources to historians hitherto unaware of them, as well as to specialists in other fields of cultural and humanist study’ [17]. In order to achieve this aim, the collection’s articles represent a wide range of study – from linguistics to art history and from history to codicology. Other submissions come from teachers and practitioners of reconstructed European martial arts.

The articles within the volume deal with the material and the context of these fight books by investigating their material culture (manuscripts, collections, transmission history, etc.) as well as the text and images contained therein. The articles within the volume do not intervene in any single scholarly discussion or center on any single theoretical approach. Rather, this volume serves as a venue to combine a multitude of approaches, theories, and disciplines into a single work that outlines the full range of possible conversations about early European martial arts and martial culture.

A significant secondary function of this collection is to grant access to previous research to a broader scholarly community by combining several traditions into an English-language source. The majority of the research into the fight book traditions has been carried out in languages other than English, principally German, and many of the authors in this edited collection provide summaries and critiques of the state of scholarship in these languages. In this way, *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books* serves as an extended review article, outlining the state of the field.

The collection contains contributions from sixteen different scholars and practitioners, a detailed introduction, and a brief conclusion, as well as numerous images, diagrams, and tables. The articles range in length from fifteen pages to nearly eighty (with accompanying notes and appendices). Following the conclusion, the editors include an extensive bibliography of manuscripts and prints that comprise the corpus of medieval and early modern fight books. This is followed by a brief bibliography of important secondary works focusing on medieval martial arts, which serves as a supplement to the bibliographies included in each article.

The body of the book contains three subdivisions: ‘Fight Books and Methodological Issues through Disciplinary Lenses’; ‘From the Books to the Arts: The Fighting Arts in Context’; and ‘Martial Arts, Martial Culture and Case Studies’. Broadly speaking, each section aims to address a specific issue pertinent to the study of fight books and European martial arts. The first section deals head-on with the theoretical approaches to the fight books as well as case studies demonstrating the application of theory. The second section presents a historiographical overview of major works and authors of combat manuals in Germany, Italy, Spain, France, the Low Countries, and the British Isles. The final section presents four case studies which are better understood as examinations of martial culture during the period when the fight books were composed.

As can be expected from any edited volume of this length, there is a considerable amount of variation in the quality and utility of the articles. Perhaps the most useful articles for a general audience are those found in the second section, as these present a historiographical survey of the major existing fight books, their history, and the state of research. These articles speak broadly to the state of research in a limited field and require
little specialist knowledge to decode. At the other extreme of the spectrum, several articles speak narrowly to a single era, text, or disciplinary approach. Many of the articles are of little interest to a non-specialist or to those without specialist knowledge of linguistics, art history, codicology, etc. However, these highly-focused articles fit well within the editors’ broader project to engage scholars from different fields and to demonstrate the multiplicity of approaches possible when approaching European martial arts.

This is not to say that there are no editorial flaws that should have been addressed before the volume went to press. While not rampant, there are several typographical or grammatical errors that found their way into the volume, and certain articles are much more prone to errors of this type than others. Furthermore, there is no standard formatting when it comes to translations. Some authors present both the original language and translation in-text while others cite the original language in-text with translations in footnotes or vice-versa. Finally, the editors, in their introduction, discuss the term “fight book” along with other similar terms (in English and other languages) that have been used to describe a certain form of text. While they assert that the term “fight book” will be preferred over others, several contributors do not follow this convention. Complications such as these should have been addressed during the editorial process.

In spite of these few flaws, Jaquet et al.’s *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th-17th Centuries)* will likely remain a key text in the field for a number of years. The scope of the collection is broad enough to appeal to a range of academic and non-academic readers with interests in pre-modern European martial arts and martial arts studies. At the same time, the volume adds significant academic quality and rigor to a conversation that has often been restricted to practitioners and those on the fringes of the mainstream academy. *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books* will certainly not be the final word on the topic but it is a notable leap forward in the conversation.

**REFERENCES**


BOOK REVIEW

Embodying Brazil: An Ethnography of Diasporic Capoeira
Sara Delamont, Neil Stephens and Claudio Campos (eds.)
Routledge, 2017
244 pages

REVIEWS

Craig Owen is a lecturer in psychology at St. Mary’s University, Twickenham. His PhD research focused on the performance of masculine identities in capoeira and Latin and ballroom dance classes. Currently, he is collaborating on new research projects that explore the negotiation of gender identities in different social contexts.

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Searching for fieldwork sites to explore the performance of embodied masculinities, I found a video (Fig. 1) on the website of the capoeira group led by Claudio Campos (one of the authors and central informants in Sara Delamont and Neil Stephens’ Embodying Brazil):

Mesmerised by the athleticism, the acrobatic moves, the smoothness, and the playfulness exhibited by the men in the video, I instantly chose capoeira as a subject for my ethnographic research. During the subsequent four years, as I attended classes and learnt to play capoeira, my developing ethnographic understanding was supported by the growing academic literature on capoeira, of which the work of Sara Delamont and Neil Stephens was fundamental.

With a total of fifteen published journal articles and book chapters exploring various aspects of diasporic capoeira, Delamont and Stephens are leading scholars in the field. Embodying Brazil represents a culmination of their fifteen years of ethnographic research, and the authors should be lauded for producing the first full-length monograph exploring the culture and practice of capoeira outside of Brazil.

The authors locate their study as a ‘traditional people-based’ ethnography, built on a two-handed approach with Neil Stephens as participant, who learned to play capoeira, and Sara Delamont as observer, who attended 951 capoeira events and produced 196 A4 notebooks of field notes. The research primarily focuses on the classes and teaching practices of one capoeira master – Mestre Claudio Campos. His authorial role is to offer ‘expert’ commentary and to play the lead character in the text, alongside a handful of other masters who were observed or interviewed and play supporting roles.
The authors admirably balance the interests and requirements of different audiences. They provide a wonderful entry point for academic readers with little or no knowledge of capoeira. They eagerly introduce the reader to the histories and trajectories of the people, places, rituals and movements that make up typical capoeira classes and the more spectacular capoeira festivals. The book is rich in data, depicting everyday details of capoeira movements, interactions, music, dance, songs, culture, history and language. In the appendices, the authors also provide an extensive glossary of capoeira terminology and provide a comprehensive list of capoeira media that readers can explore at their own convenience.

*Embodying Brazil* will also be of value for lay capoeira practitioners. The integration of clear, succinct and accessible summaries of relevant sociological theories and concepts will offer them valuable tools to reflect critically on their own personal understandings of and engagements with capoeira. Readers seeking more in-depth engagements with theory are directed to the authors' previous publications.

As the title would suggest, processes of embodiment provide the central theoretical focus of the book, specifically how capoeira acts as an embodiment of Brazilian virtues and histories and how capoeira teachers enculturate students into the habitus of diasporic capoeira. Focusing primarily on the changing bodies of male students, the authors document the various strategies teachers employ to encourage male capoeiristas to acquire a more relaxed, self-confident and performative style of 'Brazilian' embodiment.

For academics well-acquainted with capoeira and the authors' previous publications, the authors 'freshen up' arguments outlined in previous publications, deploying primarily unpublished data from more recent fieldwork. The authors also explore a number of new issues including teachers' journeys as transnational migrants, the much-debated history of capoeira, and the opportunities offered by the mobilities paradigm to make sense of multiple movements in capoeira practice. The authors also identify pertinent avenues for future research, namely, to explore capoeiristas' experiences of injury; the transnational travels of esteemed capoeira masters to capoeira festivals across Europe; the experiences, challenges and role models of female capoeiristas; and the bourgeoning digital and multi-media engagement with virtual capoeira.

From my own perspective reading *Embodying Brazil*, I frequently experienced empathic embodied sensations, what Stake [1978] refers to as 'naturalistic generalisation'. Drawing on my experience as a capoeirista, I could clearly picture in my mind the complex series of movements and activities being described; I laughed aloud at the instances of capoeira *malícia* and trickery; in my ears, I heard the ‘twang’ of the berimbau; I heard the distinctive 'Brazilian' voice of the teacher instructing his students to 'make your *ginga* big and beautiful'; and I sang the capoeira songs the authors included in the text. That I experienced these embodied reactions is a testament to the vibrant and engaging writing style employed by the authors.

Readers new to capoeira obviously will not have this embodied knowledge and experience to draw on to help them comprehend, visualise or empathise with the ‘unusual’ bodily and cultural practices explored in the text. This leads me to question the limitations of *Embodying Brazil* as a traditional print-based ethnographic monologue, and to consider affordances digital dissemination might offer in terms of enabling the authors' written accounts to be supported and enhanced by different forms of multi-media. The affordances of photographs, video, audio soundscapes, or active hyperlinks to YouTube videos and websites, for example, might help readers more easily visualise images of capoeira bodies, movements and performances, hear the sounds of the instruments, the rhythms of the songs and the pronunciation of Brazilian Portuguese capoeira terminology, and even gain a mediated insight into the tacit elements of *axé, malícia* and *mandinga*.

The introduction of more multi-media forms would provoke challenging ethical issues, an obvious one of which is anonymity. This is not an insurmountable problem, however, particularly because the authors take
an innovative approach to anonymity which can work well with multi-media ethnographic representation. As such, the authors challenge the prevailing orthodoxy in qualitative research according to which anonymity is axiomatic [Walford 2005; Tilley & Woodthorpe 2011]. They include the real names of those they observed who had given their permission along with the real names of the core research sites and capoeira groups. The authors note that this move towards a more ‘publicly open’ form of ethnography becomes more viable and necessary with increased teacher and student visibility online and with the dissemination of locally produced capoeira media on various social media platforms.

These representational and ethical musings aside, *Embodying Brazil* unequivocally demonstrates how the increasingly popular bodily practice of capoeira can provide a rich and productive empirical site for social theorising about the body and performance.

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**REFERENCES**


