CHAPTER 3

Martial Arts and Media Supplements

Martial Bodies

As described in the previous chapter, when we speak of martial arts, we are never referring to a simple, stable or fixed entity. Rather, 'martial arts' is a constellation conjured up from clusters of ideas that play, drift, transfer across and transform within different media. Our senses of martial arts refer to what early semioticians like Roland Barthes might have termed 'martial art-ness' (Barthes 1972; Bowman 2017b; Wetzler 2017; Judkins 2017), and this derives from key coordinates of a contemporary cultural discourse: Reiterated images, signs, tropes, conventions, clichés, and of course innovations, interminglings and hybridizations, moving from one medium to another, across geographical, linguistic, generic and other borders.

Perhaps the key anchor (or what theorists from Jacques Lacan to Ernesto Laclau called the key 'point de capiton' [Laclau and Mouffe 1985]) in discourses about martial arts is the body – or rather, a range of contingent, conventional, motivated or interested constructions of the body. Certainly, the notion of 'the body' has an overdetermined relation as both foundation and keystone of 'martial arts'. The body is seemingly always implied in the term 'martial arts'. This is so even though a long and powerful line of thought, from Sun Tzu's The Art of War to Chris Hables-Gray's Postmodern War and beyond, all but ignores the individual body and focuses only on all of the other technical, technological, tactical, logistical, strategic, political and ideological arts of war-craft (Gray 1997; see also Cooling et al. 1972 and Turner 1997). Yet, when we evoke 'martial arts' today, the term almost always implies the body.

We should pause to reflect on this contemporary configuration of meaning. Has the term 'martial arts' really always referred to the body? Or is this a false universal – an example of a false sense of eternality that Althusser regarded as the very definition of an ideological view? Of course, we might nonetheless note that, even in works that seem to take a far broader view of the art of

the martial, the body is not actually absent (Gray 1997). It is always strongly implied. And if there is always reference to a martial body when martial arts are evoked then we might enquire into the forms that the martial body takes.

Studies of the figures of what we might call 'the martial body' as they emerge and circulate in different discursive contexts would be extremely rewarding. To refer this back to my argument in the previous chapter, I would propose that exploring such constructions and figurations would be more worthwhile in martial arts studies than the production of any more definitional lists and hierarchies of what supposedly is and what supposedly is not a martial art. For, if we were to pick out the contour lines of the discursive figures, configurations and representations of martial bodies in different contexts, then we would be able to reflect on how these constructions reflect back on or illuminate the contexts in which they were produced. Or, put differently, such textual analyses might help us glean more about the ideological contexts and discourses within which the texts and figures have been produced – much more so than dreaming up and trading in disputations around definitions.

Figures and figurations of the martial body are multiple. Yet, they may not be all that numerous. Figures of the martial artist vary from place to place, but they frequently include the following familiar figures and forms. First, within Western orientalist discourses, we have the martial artist as the oriental (Iwamura 2005; Frank 2006). Then, we have the martial artist as the soldier, police officer, or agent of the law (Chong 2012; Bowman 2015a; Barrowman 2015a, 2019). (This figure appears in many, perhaps even *all*, cultures). Also, the martial artist as underdog is a staple of both Hollywood and Hong Kong traditions (Morris 2001). Then there is the martial artist as the wanderer or drifter (Bowman 2013b). We also have the figure of the woman warrior, from Yim Wing Chun to Buffy the Vampire Slayer and beyond (Funnell 2014; Channon and Matthews 2015). And then the warrior monk, a figure that has been much appropriated in Western orientalist texts and discourses but who is not exclusive to them, as it is also popular in Eastern cultural texts and discourses (Iwamura 2005). We also have the gangster, whether triad, yakuza, mafia, or generic 'hard man' (Park 2010). And a cluster of intermingling figures that might be called the shaolin ninja Jedi superhuman, along with the cousin species, the superhero (Judkins 2016a; Goto-Jones 2016). There is also, of course, the competitor, ideally the Olympic athlete (Channon 2012), and the bodybuilder (at least in the modern Western imaginary the martial body has long been connected with athleticism, which itself has even longer been connected with often impossible images of mesomorphism [Spatz 2015; see also Krug 2001]). Then, conversely, the flipside of the hyper-visible martial body: The invisible man or woman, the surprising, unexpected expert, who has skill without physical markings, the master of pure technique rather than muscular hypertrophy.

There is also another figure that interests me quite a lot: The Janus-faced figure of the martial artist who also amounts to a kind of psychiatric patient-in-waiting. I am thinking here of the 'troubled' or 'damaged' figure who needs

the 'therapy' of pugilistic training to be 'saved' (think of a figure like Robert Downey Jr. here, whom I have written about before [Bowman 2017b]). But, at the same time (on the opposite face of the Janus-mask), we also have the supposedly serene hippy, the new ager, or the modern mindfulness practitioner, moving and meditating via taiji and qigong but whose need for such practices ultimately suggests the presence of a previous or underlying problem – for who needs therapeutic practices to attain serenity unless serenity has been missing or lacking? (I reflect on the problematic discourse of 'martial arts as therapy' more extensively in my book *Mythologies of Martial Arts* [2017].)

The figures on this surely incomplete list might be categorised and organised in many ways, perhaps clustered into three groups. First, people in films; second, people of moral fibre; third, degenerates. Such a grouping seems apt to conclude or summarise the list – encompassing as it does, first, media or representational simulacra; second, figures of supposed social improvement; and third, supposed agents of social decay. And if the figure of the martial body can encompass such a range then it should be possible to pose and test many hypotheses about whether martial arts are (to be) regarded as socially righteous or socially deleterious, and also to come up with any number of possible conclusions.

Martial Movements

However, being attentive to the construction of such figures via reiterations and reconfigurations of imagery and textual features that travel across cultures and across media suggests that the study of martial arts requires a different kind of attention. One kind of attention would be the approach that Rey Chow proposed in her 1995 essay 'Film as Ethnography; or, Translation between Cultures in the Postcolonial World' (Chow 1995). In this essay, Chow advanced both a theory and a method that she proposed any scholar of film, cultural, media or literary studies concerned with questions of cultural crossovers or cultural translation should take on board.

To develop it, Chow reads (among other things) Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator' (Benjamin 1999) with a view to instituting premises and protocols of cultural analysis that grasp from the outset the extent to which 'translation between cultures' already takes place a great deal of the time in our 'postmodern', media-saturated 'postcolonial world'. Crucially, Chow proposes that translation between cultures takes place neither simply nor even primarily by way of conscious or linguistic translation. Rather, *cultural* translation, in the sense Chow conceives it, proceeds by way of the movement across borders and from context to context and media to media of material objects, commodities, techniques, technologies and practices (Chow 1995; Bowman 2013a). She does this 'in order to highlight the problems of cross-cultural exchange – especially in regard to the commodified, technologized image – in the postcolonial, postmodern age' (Chow 1995, 182).

When it comes to the question of the relations between martial arts culture and media culture, this kind of approach is arguably not merely desirable but necessary. For, in the (notional) West, at least, and accelerating exponentially throughout the 20th Century, 'martial arts' have arguably always been both mediatized and overwhelmingly represented as 'Asian' (Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011). Their emergence and proliferation throughout the 20th Century was always bound up with their media representations, and these overwhelmingly tended to make at least some reference to their putatively Asian 'origins' or 'character'. Indeed (and although there may be exceptions), it seems reasonable to propose at the outset that, in many cases, and certainly for most practitioners (other than, say, police, security and military personal), media representations of martial arts came first, and that these representations very often involved reference to 'Asia'.[1]

However, there is more to the global spread of 'Asian martial arts' than a simple anticipatory structure of orientalist desire. That is to say, there is more to this than seeing, then wanting, then doing. For, if we consider the global dissemination of what we might term for convenience 'East Asian martial arts', one thing to note would be *all of the other things – everything else – that is carried, transported and transferred along with them. Asian martial arts bring with them modified worldviews, outlooks, philosophies, ideologies, exercise principles, posture modifications, dietary considerations, lifestyle changes, sartorial choices, ethical norms, aesthetic tastes, cultural and intellectual interests, and so on. In fact, so much 'baggage' comes along with Asian martial arts that it is effectively impossible to disambiguate the primary from the secondary, the essential from the add-on, or the inside from the outside. Inevitably, therefore, the question always waiting in the wings is that of what we even think we are referring to when we refer to martial arts or when we evoke the movement of Asian martial arts from the East to the West (Chan 2000).

Despite saying this, I do not want to return to the debate around how to define martial arts discussed in the previous chapter. As I have already argued, academic study does not oblige us to plough all of our efforts into the taxonomic and judgemental labours of deciding what is in and what is out, what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, etc. Rather, because 'martial arts' is always essentially a *discursive construct*, it seems better to explore the *ways* that martial arts are constructed in discourse – the ways they are evoked, tacitly understood, recognised, represented, talked about, fantasized, stereotyped; the ways practitioners self-identify, how they dis-identify and differentiate; what it is that fans or practitioners (think and/or say they) are

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[1] Such reference of course is neither essential nor eternal. Even quite quickly after the demise of Bruce Lee and the first 'kung fu craze' of the 1970s, Western martial artists and actors began more and more to disassociate themselves and their representations from 'Asia'. Sylvia Chong, for instance, discusses the exemplary example of Chuck Norris, who moved from discussing his films in terms of Asian martial arts towards discussing them in terms of the tradition of John Wayne movies (Chong 2012; see also Krug 2001 and Bowman 2015a).

fans or practitioners of; and so on. From such a perspective, it seems reasonable to suggest that when people say 'martial arts' they tend to think of a relatively limited range of images: Either of people, wearing something like white or black pyjamas, in training halls, practicing punches, kicks, holds and throws, or other intelligible or perhaps inscrutable movements; or of the dramatized representations of skilled fighters in action film, comic book or computer game contexts. Between these two realms – between the one we might witness or experience at the local sports centre and the one we might witness and experience on TV – I propose that more people will regard the former (the lived practice) as 'primary', 'real', 'true' or 'actual', and therefore think of the specific scenarios of people training, or trained people fighting, as being the principal object of or referent for 'martial arts'. The common belief might therefore be formulated like this: Martial arts reside immanently as skills and propensities within trained people and they are revealed or actualised only in certain spectacles, such as fights (dramatized, sporting or spontaneous), or when people train (practice, repeat, reiterate, explore and experiment) in self-defined martial arts movements, techniques and principles, in pedagogical environments and relationships. Conversely, therefore, my proposal is that most people will therefore regard the media images of martial arts as 'secondary', 'false', 'fake', 'parasitic', or, at best, 'supplementary'.

I indulge in such generalising statements not in order to legislate or adjudicate anything, but rather to show why the types of complex, material, technological, textual and often deconstructive approaches of scholars like Chow (in a different context), Tim Trausch, Chris Goto-Jones, Benjamin N. Judkins, and others, can help us to move on from simple schemas like Eastern versus Western, past versus present, or the inside versus the outside of 'martial arts'. For, in line with their broadly deconstructive approaches, I want to reiterate: 'Martial arts' cannot actually be neatly circumscribed or demarcated, nor can 'primary' be simply or neatly separated from 'secondary'. (Nor does this matter – although showing how and why we should move on from this discussion is an important and consequential matter, as discussed in the previous chapter.)

Moving from Primary to Supplementary

As mentioned, from the beginning, if we evoke the global spread of East Asian martial arts such as judo,[2] taekwondo and styles of karate and kung fu, then we inevitably evoke much more than the spread of specific training techniques, practices and skills in isolation. Rather, the movement of the practices went hand in hand with the movement of clusters of ideas, values, ideologies, and

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[2] Judo, however, was a very 'Westernized' innovation from its inception, at least to the extent that its founder both studied and advocated Western(izing) and modernizing principles in its development (Law 2008).

myriad material objects, either directly or indirectly associated with martial arts – whether taking the form of a taste for green tea or kimchi, meditation or *wuxia pian* in film or literary tastes, as well as different fashion, design and other aesthetic and lifestyle choices, from haircuts to tattoos to ways of speaking to comportment to demeanour.

Moreover, if we organise our thinking according to the terms of the familiar import/export or 'movement' narrative, in which East Asian martial arts were 'exported' to the West – or 'Eastern things' moved West – then we should be aware of the possibility that there were at least two other attendant movements – and that these movements were not simple or unidirectional transfers. Rather, these *transfers* involved *transformations*. For, first, as mentioned, other things also moved West, along with 'martial arts', and second, correspondingly, things moved (transformed) in the West. Such movement/change can be regarded as both a precondition and consequence of the importation, adoption or appropriation of 'East Asian martial arts' in the West (Krug 2001; Barrowman 2015b).

As poststructuralist political theorists would say, we must enquire into the 'conditions of possibility' of any event or situation (Derrida 1997; see also Laclau 1996). What conditions of possibility enabled the emergence of such things as Chinese or Japanese martial arts classes in the West? One of the key ingredients for the possibility of the emergence of martial arts classes in the West was the prior circulation of images and ideas. The idea of doing karate or kung fu came first, for most non-military Westerners. And such ideas always come from images: Media images; images in newspapers; images of exotic Asia; images in comic books, travellers' tales, war stories, serials and novels.

The two themes I have so far picked out – the strange primacy of the supposedly secondary image and the inextricability of 'martial arts' from their entanglement in clusters of putatively peripheral objects, practices and values – can be approached fruitfully according to some of the arguments offered by Jacques Derrida. The two most relevant aspects of Derrida's thought for approaching martial arts and (or within) media culture are his intertwined arguments about what he called 'supplementarity' and the 'metaphysics of presence' (Derrida 1976, 1982, 2001). These are relevant in terms of this discussion of martial arts because, although we tend to prioritise and hierarchize in terms of what Derrida regarded as our ('metaphysical') presuppositions or ('metaphysical') biases – in which we place living, embodied presence first, and non-living, non-embodied non-presence second (or last) – it often turns out on closer analysis that the things we had deemed secondary, derived, supplementary or inferior are in fact strangely primary. Think here of all of the things 'around' martial arts that we so easily regard as 'peripheral', inessential, extra, added-on – or, in other words, supplementary. Where would we be without them? They constantly refer to, evoke, conjure up, allude to something else, some other essence or entity, somewhere else: Martial arts. Martial arts paraphernalia constantly refers away from itself, (as if) to that certain something else, somewhere else,

that thing that 'really is' martial arts. But if we try to look for this essence, this evoked essential entity, we can never seem to find it. It's always somewhere else. Even one instance or example of it is not fully or truly or decisively 'it'. Derrida famously called this effect *différance*.

Différance is even active in what we might like to think of as reality. In other words, it's not just martial arts paraphernalia and quirky consumer goods that incessantly refer away from themselves to the elsewhere and elsewhen of some true essence and identity of martial arts. Différance is also active in the realms of actually-existing martial arts practices themselves. This or that dojo refers incessantly to Japan, this taiji class refers relentlessly to China. But which or where or when 'Japan', and which or where or when 'China'? This martial arts style or club or that martial arts practice does not seem to encapsulate or cover everything that seems essential or proper to 'martial arts'. But they allude to it, they try to approach it, to actualise it. Yet, what is the 'it'? It's never quite there and never quite that.

This is the very definition of différance. Mostly, rather than a referent, a sense of a 'spirit' is conjured up: Spectres of Funakoshi haunt us, spirits of Zhang Sanfeng inspire us, and so on and so forth (on 'haunting' in this sense, see Derrida 1994). In other words, always absent presences are conjured up in the rituals, rhetorics, concepts, imaginings, objects, evocations, terms, and other paraphernalia of the practices. But, more than this, it is surely even the case that any one dimension of the cluster of practices only ever refers to the others, needs the others, and none can ever, in and of themselves, amount to the essence of the practice, entity or identity. At this point, everything starts to seem secondary, supplementary, peripheral, partial, incomplete…. This is why critics of deconstruction argue that it is problematic to follow such a style of thinking all the way: Because deconstruction seems to make everything impossible. However, this is a nihilistic way of relating to deconstruction, because, rather than denying things, deconstruction merely insists upon the supplementarity of things – their constructedness, the contingency of their constructedness, and hence the potential for transformation and change in all things. In this sense, deconstruction is essentially optimistic and always interested in constructive change. To quote Derrida on this point once again:

> All that a deconstructive point of view tries to show, is that since convention, institutions and consensus are stabilizations (sometimes stabilizations of great duration, sometimes micro-stabilizations), this means that they are stabilizations of something essentially unstable and chaotic. Thus it becomes necessary to stabilize precisely because stability is not natural; it is because there is instability that stabilization becomes necessary; it is because there is chaos that there is a need for stability. Now, this chaos and instability, which is fundamental, founding and irreducible, is at once naturally the worst against which we struggle with laws, rules, conventions, politics and provisional hegemony, but at the

same time it is a chance, a chance to change, to destabilize. If there were continual stability, there would be no need for politics, and it is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible. Chaos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other. (Derrida 1996, 84)

At the very least, deconstructive interrogation is useful to the extent that it asks us to challenge, test and sharpen the otherwise rough and ready hierarchies that it is easy to come up with, and so easy to be led by, in our thinking. This is relevant here because, as I have been suggesting, it is all too easy to assume that when we say 'martial arts' we are primarily referring to the living embodied formal pedagogical practices of conscious, living, striving human beings. To think like this is fine, in one sense. But the problem with such an assumption is that it necessarily carries the implication that therefore we are not referring to computer games, media fictions, cuddly toys or comedy caricatures. We may regard our image of the proper practice as primary and most of the paraphernalia that goes around it as secondary, derived, inferior. Obviously, we assign some of the 'paraphernalia' a different status: Training swords, staffs and other weapons, punch bags, kick shields, sparring mitts and so on are easily regarded as proper to the proper object or practice, whereas toy swords, foam nunchakus, and inflatable *Kung Fu Panda* punch bags are less easily regarded as proper to (nor the proper property of) the proper object or practice.

I am aware that these more or less deconstructive formulations around the idea of what is proper and what is improper to, or the property of, something may sound convoluted.[3] But I want to propose that ultimately they can help us to see further and more clearly, because thinking along such lines asks us to examine what we deem to be proper or primary to an object, field or practice, and what we conversely deem to be improper, secondary, derived, and inferior, or indeed a digression from, a perversion of, or aberration away from the proper (Bowman 2001). Asking such questions helps to reveal both our own and others' values, biases and orientations more clearly.

It is likely that there will long be a need to draw attention to the important status of 'media supplements' in studies of martial arts practices and discourses. This is because many of the disciplinary fields within which scholars operate and carry out studies of different aspects of martial arts remain 'metaphysical' in Derrida's sense – that is, subject-centred, often 'Cartesian', and quick to move on from the complicating dimensions that the media supplement threatens to introduce into any study of martial arts culture. So, this is a perspective that remains worth reiterating, repeating, and insisting upon. Indeed, without impressing upon people the strength of these arguments time and again,

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[3] In another context and with another focus I have written explicitly about the determination of senses and values of propriety and impropriety (Bowman 2001).

'media studies' and 'cultural studies' will always remain consigned to the status of being regarded as second-class academic citizens rather than as 'serious' subjects, 'proper' subjects, or fields in which proper things are studied properly. Not sociology, not history, not psychology, not politics, not economics, not anthropology – media and cultural studies have long been cast (out) as 'Mickey Mouse subjects' (Bowman 2003).

Much as those who work in media or cultural studies may baulk at the accusation of working in a 'Mickey Mouse' field, my argument here is that a strong response from media and cultural studies to such an accusation would not be to deny or disavow the place of 'trivia' like cartoons/animation, movies, enjoyment, playfulness, fantasy, childhood or childishness, consumerism or cuddly toys, and so on. Rather, there is a value in embracing the accusation and arguing strenuously for the importance and power of all the 'Mickey Mouse supplements' that we are surrounded by.

Such supplements are everywhere, and they are both big business and transformative of many things, including societies, histories, individual and group psychologies, politics, economies, and all manner of anthropological areas. To mention a few examples: We know that Bruce Lee films are responsible in large part for the global popularity and proliferation of wing chun, just as we know that they are equally responsible for the recent revisionist filmic hagiographies of Ip Man (Bowman 2013b). We know that the 1982 film *The Shaolin Temple* was directly responsible for a massive and immediate increase in international tourism to the Shaolin Temple and other areas in China (Frank 2006). And so on. In fact, it is easy to point to example after example of films intervening into – and even dramatically changing – other areas of reality, in all sorts of ways. I have discussed before the 'rediscovery' – in actual fact, the complete invention – of a new 'ancient' martial art in China, in the immediate aftermath of two key events: First, the massive international success of the Disney animation *Mulan* (1998), and second, the Chinese government crackdown on Falun Gong, the suppression of its practice and the arrest of many of its practitioners (Palmer 2007). As Adam Frank notes in his study of taijiquan in Shanghai (Frank 2006), after the crackdown on Falun Gong, hundreds and hundreds of practitioners of a hitherto unknown art called Mulanquan were literally bussed into Shanghai and other cities in China to perform it in the public parks, as they would otherwise have been empty, having been evacuated of qigong and Falun Gong practitioners by the police (I discuss this more fully in Bowman 2015a).

The impact of a media text is massive here. The choice of 'Mulan' as the name of the simulated and ersatz martial art of Mulanquan strongly suggests a deliberate Chinese state attempt to cash in on the success of the orientalist Hollywood film by supplying the demand it sparked in potential Western tourists for a new/ancient 'feminist' and hyper-oriental(ist) practice. Furthermore, the very fact that there was a perceived need – or strategic value – in ensuring the continued presence of a certain style or aesthetic of martial arts practice in China's parks speaks volumes too. (As Adam Frank argues, the aesthetic of taijiquan

appears to have been elevated to the very symbol of Chineseness – a key part of the 'brand' that puts a new twist on the meaning of the 'PR' in 'PRC'.) Clearly, martial arts fictions, fantasies, simulations and simulacra are big business; they impact on policies of all orders – not just Chinese policies, but those of other countries, as well, more and more of which have begun to elevate their 'indigenous' martial arts to 'national sport' or 'national treasure' status, following the lead set by UNESCO, with its attributions of 'intangible cultural heritage' to practices like wing chun kung fu in Hong Kong, and so on.

From this perspective, it is apparent that we have hardly begun to scratch the surface of the possibilities of media-focused martial arts research. Works in the emergent field of martial arts studies to date have begun the exploration and examination of martial arts as they exist within and across some, but not all, contemporary media texts and technologies, and have begun to unearth several rich seams and reserves of martial arts tropology that permeate and even orientate key dimensions of contemporary transnational media culture. But there is more to do. Without a principled focus on such supplementary matters, studies of martial arts could continue to ignore, downplay or exclude the media supplement and hence be skewed by a kind of myopic realism.

The obverse of this situation is equally problematic: Many film, TV, gaming and other media studies scholars are not prepared to take the step out of text-focused disciplinary discourse and into an exploration of the implications and consequences of their text- and technology-focused studies and insights in other contexts, such as lived bodily practices, social relations, para-textual ideological constructions, embodied martial arts practice, and so on. In a world in which cosplay and battle re-enactment enthusiasts have begun to research, study and develop discourses around such matters as how to use Jedi weapons like the Lightsaber properly, there is clearly room – and obvious starting points, staging posts, or gateways – for media studies to leap across and to become new and other forms of cultural studies (Judkins 2016a).

But there is a reluctance to do so. The people who are looking into cosplay martial arts from academic perspectives are currently less likely to be media studies researchers than they are to hail from disciplines such as history, dance or theatre studies, or scholars and hobbyists with a focus on such topics as Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA). But such innovations are opportunities, linking points, potential bridges, between the supposedly discrete realms of media and body, or between textuality and corporeality. As such, they are crying out for the attention of creative thinkers, experts, researchers, scholars and analysts of media.

In other words, the situation arguably remains effectively the same as it was when I proposed – as a call to arms – in a 2014 journal issue editorial (Bowman 2014a) that if film, media and cultural studies scholars do not jump into this new field then it will be hegemonized by approaches that more than likely will downplay or exclude the media supplement. By this I meant, and mean, approaches

that are limited by the absence of, and that often even actively militate against, any kind of deconstructive, media or cultural studies paradigm or approach.

The key question is: Why is there reluctance – even palpable resistance – to crossing boundaries such as those between the media on the one hand and embodied practices on the other? Just as I have often grumbled that sociological studies of martial arts rarely venture seriously into the realm of the film and media that are obviously at the origin and heart of martial artists' fantasies and orientations, so the reverse is also true: Martial arts film studies rarely ventures into sociology. Forces of resistance are evidently active on both sides of the divide. Accordingly, we should give the divide itself some serious attention.

Disciplined Movements

For, what is the divide between, say, film studies and sociology, anthropology or psychology? It is a divide between disciplines. It is a disciplinary divide. This is why scholars are reluctant to traverse it: They have been *disciplined* in quite particular ways (Foucault 1977). As disciplinary subjects, they want to stay where they know that they know what they know and where they know how to find out and how to know what they don't yet know. This is what disciplines give us, and make us: Ways of knowing, ways of doing, ways of being. Different disciplines do things differently. Crossing into a new field is always a new beginning, it is always to start from scratch. Few of us have the patience, time, humility, or even desire to take such steps.

True interdisciplinarity has long been understood by theorists and those who have attempted to do it as being genuinely conflictual, and often conflicted (Mowitt 1992; Bowman 2003, 2007, 2015a). Academics and researchers cannot simply traverse disciplines the way that bits and pieces of Bruce Lee imagery, signs, ideas and tropes can traverse multiple texts and technologies in almost any media, region or language of the world. The movement of academics across fields is not quite like the movement of martial arts across media – even if the movement of some academic points and perspectives may have similar abilities to travel (and translate): Bits and pieces, fragments, terms, concepts, can be picked up and redeployed in multiple contexts. Just think of the after-lives of once-critical/theoretical terms, like text, discourse, postmodernism or, indeed, deconstruction. All of these words have had precise academic formulations in certain texts, and such terms and their meanings have been picked up, fleshed out, contested, expanded or contracted, modified and transformed, in various academic fields. Some have proved suggestive in other contexts – from journalism to cultural commentary, photography, dance or even more distant disciplines and fields; or, indeed, with words like 'deconstruction', in culinary conversations and cookery programmes (where we now have dishes like 'deconstructed apple pie', and so forth).

This suggests that the fruits of academic labours may indeed traverse myriad regions and realms. However, the form and direction of that movement is outside of the control of intentional agents (such as the nuncupators, neologists or theorists of the terms that travel). Moreover, their movement from one context to another and one medium to another inevitably involves transformations, both in the meaning of the term and in the context of its deployment. (It is doubtful that Derrida would ever have intended or accepted that 'deconstruction' could to refer to a dessert served inside out, for instance.)

Nonetheless, it seems likely that one of the reasons why terms like text, discourse, postmodernism, and deconstruction caught on in so many ways and in so many places is that they seemed useful and appropriate in helping to conceptualise and describe things. One of the things such terms help us to grasp and express is precisely the fragmented and porous character of contexts in a media-saturated (postmodern) world. This is doubtless why – even though disciplines still have fights at and about their boundaries – we currently seem to be living through the effects of the deconstruction of the erstwhile hermetically sealed or at least well-policed and sacrosanct borders of academic disciplines. People now talk about disciplines, like many other parts of life, as being more 'fluid' or 'liquid' (Bauman 2005). Some have proposed that we are now fully moving into an era of 'post-disciplinarity'.

'New' media technologies are clearly prime movers in some of this disciplinary deconstruction. The emergence of para-academic blogs, for instance, such as Benjamin N. Judkins' hugely popular *Kung Fu Tea* (which he has been publishing since 2012 at www.chinesemartialstudies.com), and a few others, including perhaps my own martial arts studies blog (http://martialartsstudies. blogspot.com/), have been key in drawing together both academic and non-academic researchers from multiple fields and disciplines in remarkably convivial and collegial discussions about martial arts and how to study them. So, whereas before the era of such blogs academics would operate in more isolated academic islands, today it seems hard not to perceive what others are doing. And, perhaps because the institution of the blog always stands midway between 'proper' academic scholarship and 'personal opinion', more readers seem more prepared to read more open-mindedly, for curiosity and pleasure. Hence such blogs have helped to generate a new sense of community. In the emerging field(s) of martial arts studies, disciplinary differences that might otherwise have precipitated antagonisms and passionate disagreements seem currently to be taking a back-seat to the shared interest in, love of or fascination with all aspects of martial arts – whether 'proper' and 'primary' or 'improper' and 'peripheral'.

Perhaps this is because of the newness of the field. Or perhaps it is because of the strange situation in which there is an obviousness and consensus around what is meant by 'martial arts' combined with a peculiar impossibility in terms of defining them rigorously, and despite the persistence of so much scholarship that always tries to define, demarcate, hierarchize and legislate on what martial

arts are and what they are not. For, despite such orientations, we all just feel that we know what martial arts are and what martial arts stuff is. There is, to use Raymond Williams' term, a 'structure of feeling' around martial arts in media culture; or, as many academics now prefer to say, economies or fields or structures of affect (Highmore 2011). Martial arts have many manifestations within shifting and multiple discursive formations. We understand the terms and we recognise the manifestations because there are regularities and repetitions, serial structures[4] and more or less predictable forms and contents, albeit often combined with newness, innovation, hybridisation and unpredictable aspects, in all of the iterations of martial arts signs, symbols, supplements, tropes, signatures, events and contexts, across the multiple institutions and discourses that supplement and are supplemented by martial arts in media culture.

This perspective raises questions about the status of some more established terms in the study of martial arts, such as 'the body', 'embodiment' and 'embodied knowledge'. It is to these questions and problematics that we turn in the next chapter.

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[4] For fascinating work on the force of 'seriality' in modern culture, see the work of Ruth Mayer (2013).