



Instituting Reality in Martial Arts Practice

Paul Bowman

Cardiff University

Email: BowmanP@cardiff.ac.uk

Twitter: [@MAstudies](https://twitter.com/MAstudies)

Keywords

Reality Martial Arts

Institution

Discipline

Pedagogy

Keysi Fighting Method (KFM)

Taijiquan

Abstract

This article explores the relations between the desire for reality in martial arts training and the inevitable emergence of institutional styles. It argues that since at least the time of Bruce Lee's influential 1971 article 'Liberate Yourself From Classical Karate', there has been a growing effort in Western martial arts circles to escape from the constraints and strictures of 'artificial styles' and to achieve a kind of emancipation that would reflect a direct engagement with the 'truth' and 'reality' of combat. As problematic as such notions are, they nevertheless feature prominently in martial arts discourses. Accordingly, this article identifies and engages with some of the key structuring terms and enduring problematics of contemporary martial arts discourses in the West. It does so chiefly via a consideration of Keysi Fighting Method (KFM) – a (post)modern 'reality martial art' that is in many respects a modern iteration the anti-institutional impulse of Bruce Lee, and also an exemplary case of a wider contemporary 'reality martial arts' movement. This 'movement' stretches from mixed martial arts (MMA) at the sporting end of the spectrum to military martial arts like krav maga. The article considers, first, KFM's spectacular emergence around 2005, thanks to the DVD-extras of the film *Batman Begins*, second, its mediatized proliferation, and, third, issues connected to its demise and reconfiguration in 2012. It asks what we might learn from the spectacular example of KFM about the relations between mediascape, embodiment, reality martial arts and 'institution'. The paper argues that there is an inextricable and inevitable entanglement of, first, the eternally returning desire for 'reality' in martial arts and, second, an attendant invention of institution and style. It connects the formation of institutions to the necessity of pedagogy and discipline, and in doing so proposes a way to approach martial arts that recasts the relations between modern 'realist' martial arts and 'traditional' or supposedly 'unrealistic' martial arts like taijiquan. The purpose of this endeavour is to propose a set of terms and concepts that might prove useful in developing the discourse of martial arts studies beyond existing disciplinary vocabularies, concepts and problematics and into a reconfigured ontological and epistemological terrain.

Contributor Note

Paul Bowman teaches cultural studies at Cardiff University. He is author and editor of many books, journals, chapters and articles on diverse aspects of film, culture and politics. Among his works on martial arts are *Theorizing Bruce Lee* (2010) and *Beyond Bruce Lee* (2014). His next book will be *Martial Arts Studies* (forthcoming in 2015). He has varying degrees of experience of a wide range of martial arts, occasionally teaches taijiquan and kung fu, and is currently learning escrima.



Introduction: The Reality Drive

In late 2012, news emerged of the break up of a martial arts institution that had seemed to be taking the martial arts world by storm (Holland 2012). Keysi Fighting Method (or KFM) had been founded by the Spanish Justo Dieguez and the English Andy Norman. Before inventing KFM, both Dieguez and Norman had been qualified Jeet Kune Do (JKD) instructors under Bruce Lee's senior student, Dan Inosanto (Fig. 1). Through this institutional connection, they had met and trained together on an associated international Jeet Kune Do circuit (Norman n.d.).



Fig. 1: KFM co-founder Gusto Dieguez [left] with JKD guru Dan Inosanto. The photo appears to be dated 1986. Screen grab from YouTube clip.

Within this context, and by working together regularly, Dieguez and Norman came to devise an approach to self-defence training that became regarded as a new and discrete fighting system; one that went on to be touted, by themselves and others, as revolutionary.

However, in elaborating their new approach, the shared Jeet Kune Do past of Dieguez and Norman was consistently downplayed. Their names were removed from the list of JKD instructors on Dan Inosanto's website, and they almost never mentioned JKD or any of their other martial arts training in any of their public statements about KFM, whether in interviews, articles or on their website. In

fact, both Norman and Dieguez seemed actively intent on distancing themselves from any institution of any kind, and instead on presenting KFM as a practice of and for 'the street'. Certainly, in all public discourse, KFM was consistently said to have been developed 'on the street' and 'for the street'.¹ In other words, its own actual institutional history and formation was obscured from view, pushed out of the way and replaced instead by a powerful mythology, which said: this is not an *institutional style*; this is *real*.

This 'reality drive' (that is so often coupled with the disavowal of institutionality) is the focus of this article. It is certainly not something that is exclusive to KFM. It is arguably central to many – if not all – martial arts. It is certainly central to a whole movement of modern 'reality martial arts' – a movement characterised heavily by the explicit rejection of ideas like 'tradition' and 'style'.

However, the way KFM spokespeople like Norman and Dieguez formulated their own rejection of style is significant, and helps to historicize and characterize its discursive context. At the very least, there is a certain irony in their downplaying or disavowal of KFM's Jeet Kune Do origins. This is because, in distancing KFM from 'institutional style' and aligning itself instead with what we might call 'street reality',² KFM actually (wittingly or

¹ When Norman did briefly mention his former martial arts training, it was only as something that he discovered the hard way 'did not work', and hence as something he rejected in devising KFM 'on the street'.

² I have deconstructed the widespread obsession with 'the street' before, with specific reference to 'politicized academia'. There I referred to it as 'street fetishism' (Bowman 2008). Many similar obsessions circulate in martial arts discourses. Indeed, in all manner of discourses – academic,

unwittingly) repeated the very rhetorical gesture used by Bruce Lee in his articulation of Jeet Kune Do in the late 1960s: this is not an *institutional style*, said Bruce Lee; this is *real* (Lee 1971; Bowman 2010, 2013).

The conscious or unconscious reiteration by KFM of Bruce Lee's famous disavowal of style in the avowal of a commitment to 'reality' is what leads me to single it out as a representative of contemporary 'reality martial arts'.³ There are other equally significant potential examples that could have been studied. Indeed, part of my argument is that much of what we can learn from the case of KFM can be applied to other examples and can enrich our understanding of martial arts in/and/as culture more broadly. However, KFM also appeals particularly because surely few (if any) other examples of 'non-styles' both reiterate and replay Bruce Lee's renunciation of formal martial arts styles so completely, whilst at the same time being so directly and absolutely indebted to Bruce Lee's own anti-institutional approach. The founders of KFM had previously been certified Jeet Kune Do instructors, after all.

However, in any case, the ultimate concern of this article is a consideration of the eternally returning martial arts desire to *achieve reality* in combat training. Going hand in hand with this will be questions of institution and institut-

political, activist, martial arts, etc. – the term 'the street' works as a metonym of and for 'reality'.

³ There are other reasons too: I spent some time over a period of years 'learning KFM', with no formal instructor, and only some downloaded MPEGs, some training partners, and a load of enthusiasm and excitement. During this period my former taijiquan and kung fu instructor asked whether I had 'gone Ronin'. I agreed that I had.

ionalisation – which, it seems, always hound this primary concern.

Indeed, a first thing to be said about this desire is that it constantly seems to be frustrated. It is as if *any* established mode or manner of training for combat will always – sooner or later, here or there – come to be deemed at best *asymptotic to reality* (approaching it but never getting there) or at worst as *leading away from reality*.

Moreover, it appears that 'phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny' in martial arts too: Martial arts seem constantly to be devised and revised, invented, rejected and reconfigured, in attempt after attempt to measure up to the perceived demand of capturing and mastering reality. At all times, as sure as night follows day, what occur are splits, factions, revolutions and heresies.⁴ Aside from 'political' institutional disputes, the reasons given for breaks and rejections often boil down to contentions that the old institution wasn't managing to measure up to reality. Bruce Lee said this if not first then certainly most famously vis-à-vis his 'rejection' of all traditional martial arts (Tom 2005). Unfortunately, however, the new institutions themselves seem destined to follow the same trajectory, never quite

⁴ My focus here is clearly very Western. Time and space do not allow for a consideration of institutional transformation in martial arts contexts that are heavily 'tradition-centric', such as China, Hong Kong, or Japan. However, my hypothesis is that similar logics and processes operate in all contexts, and that differences are differences of degree and temporality, rather than of kind. For further consideration of Chinese contexts, see Lorge (2012), Shahar (2008), Palmer (2007), Wile (1996, 1999), or the very important ethnographic work of Frank (2006). For Japan, see Chan (2000). For Korea, see Gillis (2008). For the relations between Japanese and US institutions and transformations in that context, see Krug (2001).

becoming or remaining 'real'. Even JKD instructors peel off and invent their own styles. Practitioners become dissatisfied with established approaches. Revolutions occur and recur. And each revolution attempts or claims to bridge the reality gap.

The recurrence of paradigm shifts and revolutions in martial arts – or, indeed, the persistence of what Roland Barthes called the 'jolts of fashion' (Barthes 1977: 154) in martial arts – and the apparent impossibility of realising Bruce Lee's dream of a world in which there would be no martial arts styles – suggests that the reality gap (the distance between training becoming a style and the perceived demands of real combat) is never decisively bridged, even if the gap can be papered over or decorated in ways that satisfy different people for different reasons at different times.⁵ But what always bubbles away beneath, around and within – and what always threatens to erupt within and subvert – any given martial art at any time are *challenging* discourses, structured by the evocation of an art's unsatisfactory position in relation to 'reality'. The potential worry, suspicion or challenge is always that this or that style is, in Bruce Lee's words, nothing more than a 'fancy mess' of 'organised despair' (Lee 1971). When this idea gains the upper hand, it can cause practitioners to quit training,

⁵ For recent contributions to the long running debate about how and why practitioners come to 'believe in' their martial arts training activities, see Wetzler (2014), Berg and Prohl (2014) and Downey (2014), all in the *Martial Arts Studies* issue of *JOMECS Journal*. Kath Woodward has also provided an alternative recent engagement with this problematic, exploring a wide range of ways to understand practitioner belief and investment in pugilistic training, specifically boxing – but her insights extend beyond boxing (Woodward 2014).

switch teachers or clubs, change styles or break away to invent their own new (or 'authentic') approach.

All of this might be recast philosophically as a set of problems caused by the unknowability and unpredictability of the *event* of real combat. Because such an event could take place anywhere, and involve any of an infinite range of variables, the problem faced by martial artists is always one of how to train so as to stack the deck in one's favour. Even after pondering probabilities, improbabilities, and making decisions (or 'guesstimating') about likely 'real scenarios', training will always be limited. This is so even though some styles – such as KFM, or (more famously) krav maga – specialise in training for evermore different combat environments and scenarios. Such approaches to training ultimately seek to 'emancipate' the practitioner, in the sense of aiming to turn them into someone who can function dynamically, efficiently and even creatively within ever more different contexts.

Arguably, the styles of training developed in approaches such as KFM and krav maga exemplify a general paradigm shift or revolution that has been taking place in martial arts practices in the West at least since Bruce Lee popularised the idea of interdisciplinarity, or indeed antidisciplinarity (Bowman 2010). That is to say, rather than being based on training the body via endless repetition (as in 'classical' karate classes, which 'traditionally'⁶ involve large groups of students marching in formation and performing set techniques or kata (Fig.

⁶ Ironically, so-called 'traditional' martial arts pedagogies are rarely older than the 20th century (Krug 2001). It was certainly during the 20th century that karate was institutionalised into the forms recognisable today. (See Fig. 2.)

2)), they often start not from training the *body* to be able to perform certain movements (blocks, strikes, kicks, throws, etc.), but rather from training the *mind* to be able to perceive threats and to handle the shocks and stresses of violent situations.



Fig. 2: 'Traditional' karate pedagogy famously emphasizes standardized repetition of forms. However, this is actually a 20th century approach to teaching karate, produced by its institutionalisation in universities, schools and the military. Image taken at Shuri Castle, c.1938. Source: Wikipedia.



Fig. 3: 'Reality' martial arts often emphasize scenario-based and psychological training.

Thus, rather than the implicit logics of traditional martial arts training, newer self-defence approaches often base themselves on an *explicit* psychological theory, in which the training of mind, attitude, perception and emotion are emphasised from the outset. This new

psychological approach is something that can be distinguished from what are called 'classical' or 'traditional' approaches to martial arts training. The latter do not necessarily have an explicit or univocal position on the subject, even if many are clearly informed either by an ethos that internalises 'toughening up' through punishing training, or one focused on developing an 'indomitable spirit', or 'remaining calm under pressure', etc.

Nevertheless, even in the most dynamic types of scenario-based training, a certain paradox will not go away. This is because, in any training, *repetition* is essential. And, as many practitioners of such approaches to self-defence and martial arts have suggested, the risk is always that repetition can lead to what Jacques Rancière would call 'stultification' – namely, the reduction of a practitioner's capacities to the robot-like repetition of a set of institutional strictures (Rancière 1991).⁷

In other words, the pedagogical situation can be regarded as the scene of an essential problem. Repetition is *necessary*, and enabling, but it is also *limiting*. The expert will be trained to master many possible situations and scenarios, but the consequence of the training (or disciplining) of the practitioner's body is that it will come to move and behave *only* in the ways that are trained into it (Foucault 1977).

⁷ For an influential, albeit controversial, discussion of the theoretical relations between stultification and emancipation in pedagogy, see Rancière's book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière 1991). I have discussed Rancière's work in relation to martial arts elsewhere (Bowman 2009), but return to it again here because it is extremely stimulating in thinking about pedagogy and institution.

This is related to a second paradox – one that has been much debated in different ways by both philosophers and martial artists. This paradox relates to the fact that *training for reality* must always involve and rely on, at some level, *unreality* or ‘simulation’ (Baudrillard 1994). The self-defence author Rory Miller refers to this as the inevitable ‘built in flaw’ of all training (Miller 2008). You cannot ‘go 100%’ in training, because of the inevitability of injury or death were you to do so.⁸ Equally, you cannot ‘know 100%’ about reality, because the context in which an event of violence could occur cannot be predicted with 100% accuracy. The most one can hope is that the training simulations one has been taught to master approximate to the key features of the event of combat. In Aristotelian terms: *certainty (apodicticity)* is impossible; one has to work with probability (*phronesis*).

Put differently, if one really is concerned with questions of violence and reality, then the *decision* to commit to one style of martial arts as opposed to any other involves a leap of faith (For an important reflection on the place of faith and uncertainty in decisions, see Derrida 2001, 1996). The hope is that the training will prove adequate in reality, if and when required. The fear is that one is deluding oneself, or being satisfied with simulations. The problem is that, in any eventuality, all roads are leading to institutionalisation. This is because *ways of training become styles* (institutions) –

⁸ Reviewers and readers have raised questions about this claim. However, Miller’s point is simply that if a martial art is designed to be lethal, or even to inflict serious damage, then you obviously and necessarily *cannot* go 100% in training, unless you are prepared to end lives or permanently incapacitate yourself or your training partners. Hence Miller’s contention that all martial arts training involves a necessary and ineradicable ‘built in flaw’.

disciplines that produce the bodily propensities, reflexes and dispositions that sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant have called ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1979; Wacquant 2004), or, more specifically, a ‘martial habitus’ (Brown and Jennings 2013). Significantly, then, if we understand bodily training like this, the other side of ‘emancipation’ is always going to be ‘stultification’ (Rancière 1991). This means that despite the hopes of evangelical thinkers of emancipation, such as Bruce Lee, advocates of movements such as MMA, and even perhaps Jacques Rancière (the key theorist of ‘pedagogical emancipation’ that I am drawing on here), liberation or emancipation *from* style, on the one hand, and stultification *by* style, on the other, seem to emerge reciprocally and to be opposite sides of the same coin. Put differently: even if it may be the case that at some level the desire to ‘master reality’ is what prompts such activities as martial arts training in the first place,⁹ the end result is always a kind of *disciplining* and hence *institution-alisation*.

In a psychoanalytical register, Slavoj Žižek illustrates the problem like this:

let us imagine an individual trying to perform some simple manual task – say, grabbing an object that repeatedly eludes him: the moment he changes his attitude, starts to find pleasure in just repeating the failed task (squeezing the object, which again and again eludes him), he shifts from desire to drive. (Žižek 2005: 10)

⁹ But this is a simplification: consider the common scenario of children being taken to martial arts classes by their parents. Their motivations can hardly be assessed in the same way as those of, say, a victim of assault who is seeking a way to ward off its recurrence.

So, if I am hungry and trying to catch a fish by thrusting my hand into a river or pool, I am acting on my desire. I desire to catch the fish. However, the moment I start to take pleasure in the act of thrusting my hand, or take pleasure in the refinements of my technique, I am moving from *desire* and into *drive* – and drive, in this context, is all about the pleasure to be generated from a potentially endless and possibly pointless repetition. Catching the fish, or grabbing the real thing, threatens to become, in a perverse way, *less* important than going through the motions of ‘trying’ – and ‘trying well’ or ‘trying properly’.

This has an obvious parallel in the criticisms made of ‘classical’ arts that emphasise forms, drills and katas, rather than the unstructured, free sparring or constantly experimental approaches of modern sport and reality martial arts. However, as Žižek’s formulation suggests, there may be no escaping the drift and switch from desire to drive. Even if we enter a martial arts class because we fear attack, sooner or later we will want to know how to do things *properly*, and we will more and more police ourselves and take *pleasure* in doing things ‘properly’. And *taking pleasure in propriety* is arguably a key aspect of institutionalisation (Douglas 1986; Bowman 2007). Given this, we should enquire further into the place of reality, unreality and institutionalisation in KFM and other reality martial arts.

Visibility, Physicality and Mediated Reality

KFM became globally visible when it was thrown into the spotlight by the box office success of the 2005 film, *Batman Begins* (directed by Christopher Nolan). Norman and Dieguez’s fighting system

had been selected to feature prominently within the fight choreography of *Batman Begins* because, according to online interviews with co-founder Andy Norman (Norman n.d.)¹⁰ and also interviews on the DVD-extras with the director, the star (Christian Bale) and the film’s fight choreographer,¹¹ the look and feel of the techniques and movements of KFM were very different to anything that had been used in Hollywood movies before.

Accordingly, KFM was employed as a way to help make the film look excitingly ‘different’. The key features of this visual difference hinged on the fact that KFM looked rough, raw, and brutal, in ways that Hollywood had not really explored or exhausted before. There were no big kicks in KFM; there were not even many extended techniques, neither the swinging arm techniques seen in some styles of kung fu, like Hung Gar, Shaolin or Choy Lee Fut, nor even the long straight punches of karate, taekwondo or boxing. Rather, everything was close-in, compact and brutal. KFM was all elbows, head-butts, shoulders and knees. The image used by its founders was that of a bull – indeed, the basic defensive-aggressive posture (and core) of KFM is a position one might adopt if one were to do an impression of a bull. This they called ‘the pensador’, or ‘thinking man’. In it, the palms are held on the head, the body is hunched, and the elbows are

¹⁰ This interview no longer appears to be available online. Its original location, The Martial Edge, appears to have mutated from a mono-website-based format into a more multiple form, Hydra-like, with no one location, but rather several: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. Older material, such as this interview, seems to have been a casualty of this mutation.

¹¹ At the time of writing, parts of these DVD-extras about KFM can also be found online. For instance, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFQWXn0MvtU>.

used as both shields and battering rams against (and for) all forms of attack (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: the pensador [right] is a 'defensive' position from which powerful elbow attacks can be delivered.

This posture was selected as the core defensive-aggressive position of KFM for a double-pronged reason: on the one hand, it is very close to the position people seem *automatically* or *naturally* to adopt when being beaten, especially by more than one attacker; and on the other hand, this position is also strangely ideal for launching a range of very close-quarter and very destructive counter-attacks, especially with elbows, knees, and head. Of course, this propensity is *only* a propensity to the extent that you have been *trained* to perceive or to 'realise'¹² this movement-possibility, and if you have practiced diligently so that your body can successfully move in

¹² In her book on pedagogy, the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses Zen and other forms of Buddhist pedagogy, which emphasise the importance of 'realising' as a crucial form of perception and propensity. In one scenario discussed, a walking Zen practitioner bumps into a tree. When asked why she didn't see the tree, she replied that she had *seen* the tree, she just hadn't *realised* it. A similar situation exists in martial arts: one may *know* where hands and feet, my body and your body, targets, threats, openings and points of resistance, etc., *are*, but 'realising' them as possibilities – being able 'spontaneously' and 'naturally' to act on them – is quite another matter (Sedgwick 2003).

accordance with this realisation in highly stressful and painful situations. Learning how to move such that the pensador can become an effective block and attack position is not actually as easy or as 'natural' as KFM discourse seems often to suggest.

KFM certainly helped add to the novelty and appeal of *Batman Begins*.¹³ Subsequently, it went on to appear in many other Hollywood blockbusters. However, other than its actual appearance within the film fight choreography, what was crucial to its global visibility was that a range of interviews, 'making of clips and other extras' appeared on the DVDs, and subsequently on the internet, all focusing on what went into the choreography of the film. It was *this* visibility – itself a possibility arising hand in hand with the institution of DVD-extras¹⁴ and the circulation of snippets of pre-, para- and extra-texts on the internet – that gave Dieguez, Norman and KFM enough exposure to make KFM internationally known (Bowman 2013).

KFM took off in the wake of this exposure. However, allegedly because of the high number of companies in the world also called KFM (including many radio stations), the acronym eventually came to be dropped. Consequently, the name was changed simply to Keysi.

This is pertinent because it was around the time of this name change that the partnership between Dieguez and Norman broke up. In fact, it seems likely

¹³ Jane Park deems *Batman Begins* to be part of a movement in Hollywood aesthetics that is borrowing increasingly from the visual styles of Hong Kong cinema (Park 2010).

¹⁴ For a discussion of some of the implications of DVD extras, see Leon Hunt's article 'Enter the 2-Disc Platinum Edition: Bruce Lee and Post-DVD Textuality' (Hunt 2014).

that the moment of the name change from KFM to Keysi was also the moment of the breakup of the Norman and Dieguez partnership. Henceforth, other than being indelibly tattooed on the bodies of some of its original students and teachers, from late 2012, KFM, as was, was no more.

Dieguez continued with a style now called Keysi. Norman became involved in a number of projects, including a UK-based one called Defence Lab. The activities of the other people who appear in the early KFM training videos are not as well known, but some of the 'ambassadors' (instructors) who appear in the early KFM training videos continue to pop up here and there on the internet, sometimes in videos associated with Dieguez, sometimes with Norman, and sometimes fronting their own schools and/or new styles or systems.

Clearly, the partnership may have ended for any number of reasons – personal, financial, ideological, philosophical, logistical, pedagogical, theoretical or practical. There is no need to speculate on personal or financial matters here. But it may be of more than anecdotal interest for a cultural study of KFM to note that Norman and Dieguez were said to have separated because each wanted to pursue a different business model: Norman wanted to develop a franchise system, whilst Dieguez reputedly wanted to remain small-scale and hands-on. This, in itself, might signal the presence of different ideological and theoretical-pedagogical biases, rather than just different ideas about how best to make a living from KFM.

But whether the split was led by financial concerns, or personal matters, or – more interestingly – by a differing theory or ideology of pedagogy and knowledge dissemination, what should not be

overlooked is the significance of the initial (post-*Batman Begins*) way that Norman and Dieguez had disseminated the training methods of KFM. If they had operated exclusively small-scale and hands-on before *Batman Begins*, after this film their 'teaching' moved quickly into the realm of online 'courses' that took the form of DVDs and downloadable MPEG videos, each containing a different 'belt' level. As one progressed through the levels, the cost of the next DVD or MPEG increased. The black belt course was the most expensive.

Accordingly, given KFM's early use of computer mediated communication in the dissemination of its syllabus, it seems somewhat unfair to go on to frame a disagreement between the two founders in terms of one founder wanting to 'remain' more hands on and intimate with students (presumably in order to 'maintain standards'), whilst the other founder is framed as having somehow transgressed some 'initial-authentic' intimacy by wanting to *materialise* and embody the initial DVD and MPEG mode of dissemination by setting up a franchise system based on the production and establishment of actual human 'hands on' instructors in physically present schools. What is most important here is that foregrounding this situation might help us to identify and isolate the paradox not only of KFM discourse, but also that of *all* 'real', 'practical', or 'no frills' martial arts in a media-saturated world. The paradox is this: on the one hand, such martial arts are resolutely and absolutely 'about' the physical, the 'hands on', the 'real'; but, on the other hand, and to a much greater extent, they are known, disseminated, and circulated by various media – film, DVD, VCD, MPEG, YouTube and Torrent sites. The vicissitudes of this paradoxical situation deserve some attention.

Mind, Body and Mediascape

Just as it is eminently reasonable to argue that Brazilian JiuJitsu (BJJ) and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) exploded into widespread visibility as a result of the televising of the Ultimate Fighting Championship/Competition, the UFC (Downey 2014), so one might say that KFM came to have the visibility and stature it did *solely* thanks to its incorporation into the choreography of the film *Batman Begins*, and the space devoted to discussing KFM in the DVD-extras and promotional behind-the-scenes clips that became available around the feature film itself. In other words, BJJ, MMA, KFM and arguably now many other martial arts all share certain key characteristics, and a paradox: *all of them champion 'bare/brute reality', but all are constituted by and cannot but operate and exist within and according to the terms of the mediascape*.¹⁵

Increasing academic attention is being given to televised 'combat sports', such as MMA (Spencer 2011; Downey 2007). But, here, I am more interested in institutions like KFM, which represent a different but equally important aspect of the reality movement in martial arts. Approaches to combat such as krav maga and KFM may seem to be 'the other' of sporting martial arts (even MMA), because they have very different discourses and attitudes towards 'reality' and 'combat' than combat sports. Indeed, reality martial arts such as KFM and krav maga regard themselves as *more radical* or *more real* than even extreme combat sports, such as BJJ and MMA.

¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of the intertextual relations between the UFC and gladiatorial films, see Bolelli (2014).

Yet, despite its claim to 'street' credentials, KFM remains as wedded to the mediascape as MMA. It is certainly indebted to it for its popularity. Krav maga, however, is rather different. Being born in a Jewish ghetto in World War II and subsequently being institutionalised as the name of the hand-to-hand combat training of the Israeli military and security forces, krav maga has a very different history and discursive existence to KFM. The latter was born on the Jeet Kune Do circuit and was designed with European nightclubs, pub car-parks and city streets in mind, rather than highly securitized military situations (for krav maga see Cohen 2009).

Most importantly, though, as well as different histories, different pre-suppositions about 'real situations' and different *ethoi*, krav maga and KFM also have different relations to media and mediatization. KFM's relation to media is closer to MMA's than krav maga's, even though it orientates itself differently in important respects. Ultimately, however, even though reality martial arts like KFM may wish to align themselves more with krav maga than MMA, there are crucial differences between krav maga and KFM and important similarities between KFM and MMA. These boil down to the role played by the mediascape for their existence. Put bluntly, Krav maga does not 'need' the media, whereas the popularisation and dissemination of KFM was entirely determined by what we might call 'DVD-extra visibility'.

In any case, the point to emphasize is that the mediascape is the disavowed but constitutive supplement to many reality martial arts. In Derrida's sense, the mediascape is a 'dangerous supplement' for reality martial arts because the putative fakery of mediatization is at once part of their conditions of

possibility for existence and yet their declared antithesis (Derrida 1976). Film is fake, remember, while MMA and KFM insist they are 'real'.

Thrills, Frills and Institutional Stills

The problem that reality martial arts discourses have with the cinema is not unrelated the problem they have with classical or traditional martial arts. This relates to 'frills'. Cinema has frills. Showy, spectacular and 'traditional' martial arts all have frills. But, the crucial question for 'realists' in martial arts is this: does reality have frills?

The consensus among non-traditional martial artists always resounds in the negative. The reality of combat is overwhelmingly defined in some way as having 'no frills'. But, again, such a position quickly becomes grey and uncertain. How does one define a frill? Is a head-kick frilly? Or a side thrust kick? Is an arm-bar frilly? Or the whirling sinawali (the criss-crossing figure-8 pattern) that is the core of stick and knife fighting arts like escrima? Proponents of fighting at kicking distance and proponents of ground-fighting, as well as proponents of knife fighting, and so on, are all *equally* likely to be accused by each other of living in a reality-denying dream world – because any of these practices can be deemed 'too risky', or 'too unreal', for various reasons.

Interestingly, in the case of KFM, during the last few years of the Norman-Diequez relationship, there were more and more blog posts, comments, discussions, stories and opinions circulating on the internet among practitioners and former practitioners of KFM who reputedly came to feel disgruntled with the development of the KFM syllabus. At first, so these

stories went, KFM had been radically practical and entirely pragmatic. But as time went on, showy frills and frilliness, in the form of more spectacular or less plausible techniques, sequences, tactics and strategies, were added to the system.

Whether this is true or not, it raises a question connected to any focus on 'reality'; namely that of syllabus development. For, if *any* martial art presents itself as *already* being able to do what it says it can do, then how can change be legitimated? Given the implications of any discursive positioning which involves a claim of *already knowing*, then any 'development' within the syllabus is likely to throw up some problems. This is because, on the one hand, the martial art claims to have *already* identified, and to have *already* conceptually, physically and strategically mastered the problems and possibilities of certain sorts of physical encounters. Each art or system claims to be a unique approach to such situations. It claims *to know*, already. How, then, can change justifiably (non-hypocritically) happen?¹⁶

In the case of KFM, its training videos regularly reiterate the maxim that no student or practitioner should ever say or think anything like 'yes, I've got that, I understand that; now, what's next?' This is because, as the course narrator (Andy Norman) informs us, believing you have mastered something – believing you have 'done it' or 'finished learning it' – is

¹⁶ Subscribing to such a position is surely what prevents change from happening legitimately or publicly within 'traditionalist' martial arts. To innovate or alter an inherited tradition implies that 'you think you know better than the founders or past masters'. Combat sports, such as MMA, fare better, as innovation and improvement are fundamental to their discourse. We will return to the significance and implications of such discursive differences, below.

an arrogant mistake that could cost you dearly in a real situation. *The basics* must be ingrained and regularly repeated, regularly trained.

However, in the next breath, KFM discourse states that the system is ongoing, unfinished, evolving; that practitioners can and should explore and improvise; and that no one but you/the individual can really come up with the right answer to any problem or 'question'. Even if the same attack were directed at everyone, each individual should really have explored and experimented in training in order to feel confident that their response will work for them. This is because, if an attack is regarded as the posing of the question 'how are you going to deal with this?', then the answer, we are told, could vary infinitely or infinitesimally from person to person. In this, KFM discourse closely reiterates Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do discourse (Inosanto 1994; Bolelli 2003).

On a first reading, these two sorts of statements seem to contradict each other. For, taken together, the statements seem to say: you must drum these movements into yourself, and never move away from trying to perfect them; whilst, at the same time, you should constantly experiment, or at least understand that your system is liable to change in response to the results of the experiments and explorations of your teachers or the founders.

However, on an *institutional* level, the two statements are not contradictory. Indeed, they sit quite comfortably together in the tacitly assumed context of an institutional hierarchy. The implicit logic is as follows. One needs to have internalised and naturalised the movement skills *of* the system (the movement skills that *are* the system) before one can experiment with it *properly*. I emphasise

again the word 'properly' because although it is theoretically possible that anyone could knock anyone else out, and although any wildly flailing novice may indeed manage to land some strong blows on a trained martial artist, the point is that *one is not doing KFM if one is flailing wildly*. One is not doing any 'system' or 'art' if one moves outside of the rules of its movement principles or logics. One is not doing capoeira if one is breakdancing or 'tricking'.¹⁷ Equally, one is not doing capoeira if one is doing taekwondo or judo. In other words, one must learn a system 'mechanically' in order to learn how to play with it 'artistically' or to come to attain the competency to know that you are actually in possession of what you are experimenting with.¹⁸

Thus, although the system may not be absolutely or classically 'hierarchical', in the negative sense of students not being allowed to question teachers, it is hierarchical in the sense of operating according to the assumption that time and properly guided effort in learning the mechanics, strategies and tactics – the *discipline* and the *language* – of the system will result in increasing competence over time. Thus, the assumption is that 'beginner questions' can be answered easily within the terms of the system itself, whereas more 'advanced questions', or problems that probe at the

¹⁷ On the fascinating connections between capoeira and the origins of breakdancing, see Assunção's work on the history and spread of this Afro-Brazilian art (Assunção 2005).

¹⁸ In studies of both martial arts and of cultural studies, I have often suggested that his point connects things as diverse as general academic criticisms of 'interdisciplinarity' and criticisms of Bruce Lee's innovations (JKD). This is because interdisciplinary innovations of all kinds receive the same kind of reception: hostility and a claim that the innovators don't know enough about what they are doing to do it 'properly'.

limits of the system in its present form could challenge the present form of the system. These would apparently necessarily have to be formulated by more advanced participants, or advanced challengers from outside of the system.

So KFM is (or was) an institution. But given its DVD-extra and rather freely flowing mode of online distribution (it is still possible to download many of the KFM training videos for free, albeit illegally – see figure 5), one might wish to ask, what kind of institution is it, was it, does it continue – ‘hauntologically’, ‘spectrally’¹⁹ – to be?

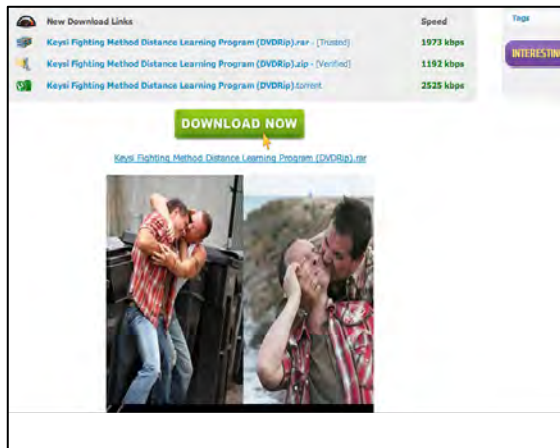


Fig. 5: Screen shot: many websites continue to offer KFM courses for free and presumably less than legal download.

Post-DVD pedagogy as body technology

All institutions change. Sometimes institutions change at a glacial pace. Sometimes they have very visible revolutions and reconfigurations. And sometimes historical and ideological processes obscure the points of

¹⁹ These terms come from Derrida (1994), and are helpful for (among other things) rethinking ontology in a media saturated world

invention, mutation or transformation.²⁰ Keyai Fighting Method came and went very quickly. But the dynamics that we can see at play here, I think, can be seen to be at work in many martial arts institutions at different times. Indeed, perhaps the very rapidity of the formation, proliferation and fragmentation of KFM can be treated as a kind of ‘hyperreal’ instance exemplifying wider principles and movements. It is likely that it all happened so fast for KFM because it was catapulted into the limelight via its association with Hollywood films. This is certainly why and how the world came to know it. And the significance of this deserves some consideration.

Of course, ‘knowledge’ of almost all martial arts in the West has long been closely connected with their cinematic representation (Krug 2001). But ‘knowledge’ of KFM was not circulated in the same way that ‘knowledge’ about other martial arts had been circulated, prior to DVD and the internet. Rather, with KFM, fans were not merely trying to mimic the martial moves they had seen in the movie. Rather, the DVD-extras offered little insights, pedagogical documentaries, and signposts to further pedagogical resources to come – resources that Dieguez and Norman quickly went on to provide, with their range of training MPEGs.²¹

²⁰ For instance, for the shady case of the simultaneous invention and obscuring of the invention of taekwondo in the 1950s, see Gillis (2008). For the 20th century evolution of taijiquan into its present forms, see Frank (2006). For the mythological rewriting of modern Japanese arts as ‘ancient’ see Chan (2000).

²¹ For an illuminating discussion of the cultural significance and effects of instructional videos on the dissemination of martial arts, see Frank (2006: 225-7)

This is important because it illustrates the fact that this type of DVD-pedagogy differs from earlier forms of cinematic dissemination and hence suggests a different form of what Morris calls 'popular cultural formation' (Morris 2004; Morris, Li, and Chan 2005). The types of popular cultural formation explored so well by Morris involved fandom that often featured a certain kind of mimicry of the cinematic spectacle, whether via cinema or VHS reception (see also Morris 2001; Brown 1997).

What KFM's difference suggests is that, even though it is 'yet another' case of a fashion that is almost entirely 'cinematically' constituted, mediated and disseminated, it is one that is unique enough to call for a further – and perhaps ultimately quite different – consideration of the relationship between bodily practices and institutions. This is because the 'post-DVD textuality' (Hunt 2014) at play in this case involves a specific pedagogical interpellative mode, which is a species or relative of – whilst remaining different from – either fiction film or documentary. And the effects of this DVD and post-DVD pedagogical interpellation are potentially profound.

KFM and other such training videos are of course 'merely commodities'. However, they are also active in the production of identification and even a kind of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991; Spencer 2014). When acted upon, they become body technologies, transformative of lived bodily ethos, topos and habitus. When consumed and explored by *existing* martial artists, their lessons become supplementary to and potentially subversive or deconstructive of existing forms of martial arts practice. This is because, unlike certain other forms of dissemination, demonstration,

discussion, idea-sharing and community building that take place *within* a style, KFM primarily *arrived from the outside*, and amounted to an approach and set of principles and techniques that supplemented and even subverted extant practices.²²

The 'challenge' posed by KFM to other martial arts styles devolved on offering a different set of propositions about the reality of combat. Its distinguishing and definitive proposition was that, contrary to most martial arts practice, which is based on the idea that combat involves facing one opponent (and hence involves training for one-to-one combat,) KFM proposes that it is most likely that it will be *more than one* assailant that will attack you. Hence, runs the reasoning, the core of training should always start from the assumption of multiple attackers.



Fig. 6: KFM presumes multiple attackers and concludes that the pensador is the natural defensive position and hence the logical starting point and core for training.

Changing the assumptions about the context and organisation of violent events changes understandings of, or beliefs about, combat, and thereupon training methods and practices too, because of the reconfigured sense of the

²² For a discussion of pedagogical sharing and community building via YouTube, see Spencer (2014).

character of reality, and hence what is 'natural' or 'essential'.

As such, we are thereby obliged to engage with the question of the 'nature' of combat, as assumptions or theories about it feed into the form and content of martial arts practices and discourses. Indeed, there is no escaping from the question of 'nature' or 'the natural' in martial arts discourse. They are terms whose meaning is defined in close connection with understandings of reality. In fact, the status of ideas about 'nature' in martial arts discourses of all kinds run deep.

The Reality of Combat

A number of traditions of sociological and anthropological work strongly suggest that bodily propensities, dispositions and capacities are more often than not strongly *cultivated* (Mauss 1992; Bourdieu 1979). Accordingly, the idea of 'the natural' (or indeed the universal) becomes correspondingly problematic. Specifically, what becomes problematic is the connection of ideas like 'the natural' or 'the universal' to ideas like the essential, the timeless, or fixed and unchanging reality.

The inexorable proliferation of evermore paradigms and approaches to hand-to-hand combat, and the ongoing development of individual styles themselves, all demonstrates that there is no single theory of the reality of violence or combat. Different styles are implicitly or explicitly organised by different theories of how combat works, and how to master it. They are each, in

effect, performative interpretations of their implicit or explicit theories.²³

The question 'which theory is right' is the eternally returning question of the anxious martial artist. As is well known, Bruce Lee believed there was only one reality of combat: simplicity and directness (Lee 1971). For Lee, any approach that complicated things any further than this was veering away into confusion, floweriness, frilliness, and ultimately, despair. Of course, Bruce Lee's thinking was arguably organised (indeed, 'hegemonized') by his teenage training in Wing Chun kung fu, and this clearly influenced his thinking and approach even after he had gone on to declare that he no longer had any connection to any style.²⁴

Rather than holding Lee's position, then, it seems better to say that rather than being 'fixed', the reality of combat or violence is always produced in the encounter between two or more combatants in a specific physical and cultural context. The 'reality of combat' between two untrained fighters will be very different to that between two people trained in boxing, or one trained in boxing and one trained in wrestling, or a judoka and a karateka, or if the ground is wet or dry, flat or uneven, etc. Furthermore, the 'reality' is fundamentally experiential and always therefore radically perspectival. It has no simple univocal objectivity. Rather than looking for one, a more pertinent thing to note in the context of this discussion is that martial arts institutions (re)train bodies to behave in particular ways. Human

²³ On the notion of 'performative interpretation' – and its connection with a theory of ontology, indeed the ontology of the event – see Derrida (1994).

²⁴ I have discussed this at length elsewhere (Bowman 2010).

bodies and their capacities and propensities are moulded, produced and policed by institutions. In Foucault's vocabulary, *institutions discipline bodies*. Institutions *produce* disciplined bodies.²⁵

One of the implications of Foucauldian arguments about the relationship between bodies and institutions in a disciplinary society is that we have to *de-naturalise* our understanding of human physical propensities. We have to denature the body. This idea may seem slightly peculiar, but it is an active element of the teaching and learning practices of a great deal of martial arts: wherever learning requires the repetition of an 'unnatural' technique, movement or movement-system, until it *becomes* natural to the practitioner. This is both banal and yet important to emphasise, because the becoming-natural of movements or movement principles might also helpfully be thought of as the becoming-institutionalised of the body.²⁶ The point at which the unnatural or initially non-spontaneous movements of the martial arts become internalised, such that the practitioner does them naturally, is the point at which they have developed, in a Foucauldian sense, a disciplined or 'docile body' (Foucault 1977).

'Docility', in Foucault's usage, refers to a lack of bodily resistance to a power system or institution, rather than sedentariness. A body is docile in

relation to an institution, as seen when it acts without resistance or smoothly in accordance with the principles of the institution. Thus, the soldier who has been trained to react in a certain way when hearing gunshot (for example, immediately drawing their own weapon and charging forward in response to this or other sights, sounds and signals, rather than behaving differently, like, say, screaming in fear, running away or cowering in a doorway), just like the pugilist who senses as soon as the opponent is in range and strikes automatically, or the 'internal' martial artist who senses, yields and redirects the incoming force without thinking, can all be said to be 'docile'. Docile means disciplined, and disciplined means entirely part of a movement system. The martial arts master of an established traditional system would thus be a prime example of a Foucauldian docile body.

Of course, saying this much is merely to reiterate the relatively commonplace point that 'the natural' in bodily movement is almost entirely an effect of training. 'Natural movement' is institutionally constructed. On one level, this is uncontroversial when applied to many aspects of our lives, including martial arts practice. After all, one *learns* a movement system and it *becomes* 'second nature'. But there is more to the notion of 'nature' as it functions within and structures many aspects of various martial arts discourses, and as it works to institute various senses of 'reality'.

The Two Natures

At one end of the spectrum of martial arts discourse, 'nature' is distinguished from 'institution' or 'style' (Lee 1971, 1997, 1975; Miller 2000). Nature is valued as good, real, true, superior, etc.

²⁵ Notions like 'enculturation' or 'habitus' do not to my mind offer either the descriptive or the analytical possibilities that Foucault's focus on institutional discourses enables. So in the following, preference will be given to a Foucauldian approach to the relationship between institutions and bodies.

²⁶ See Farrer and Whalen-Bridge (2011) for a collection of essays each in its own way addressing the question 'of what is a body capable?' vis-à-vis martial arts.

Style is regarded as limitation, stultification, stricture, convention, etc. (Bolelli 2003). The exemplification of this would be the 'modern' (post-Bruce Lee) dictum of 'discover your own natural movement'. This position sounds all very well and good. However, in Foucauldian terms, closer inspection of this position suggests that it is organised by a 'repressive hypothesis' (Foucault 1978). By this what is meant is that the implication is that styles or institutions are 'repressive', that they 'repress' something that therefore needs to be freed or emancipated (nature). In Bruce Lee this argument has a clear countercultural resonance (Bowman 2008, 2010). But even when it is disconnected from any kind of countercultural discourse, we can perceive the presence and effects of a 'repressive hypothesis' in the attitudes of many modern non-traditional and anti-traditional approaches to martial arts. For them, 'styles stifle nature', and nature is what arises naturally and spontaneously. Your nature and my nature may well differ. Hence, in this discourse, nature is individualistic.

At the other end of the spectrum of uses of nature, would be the 'ancient', 'timeless', 'essential truth' perspective, in which 'nature' is the truth and reality that was discovered by Taoist ancients. This perspective is often *allochronic* (Fabian 1983), *orientalist* (Said 1995), 'self-orientalising' (Frank 2006) or 'Western Buddhist' (Žižek 2001). In this perspective, nature is universal, timeless, and essential – to be discovered by individuals, indeed, but it will always be the same nature. Here, institutions are *necessary* for showing the way. They are not repressive; they direct (Ronell 2004).

These two ends of the spectrum of the uses of 'nature' in martial arts discourse

are often presented as if they are opposites and antithetical to each other (Bolelli 2003). But are they? Certainly, both positions share the term 'nature' yet disagree about what this term means or what a martial art's relation to nature is.²⁷ But what role does nature play in each position?

On the one hand, we might group contemporary 'scientific' or 'verificationist' martial arts into one group. Bruce Lee spearheaded this approach to martial arts in the west (Bowman 2010). The key principle of this approach is to establish what works best and most efficiently, based on systematic research and individual experience. However, even if verificationist martial arts aspire to be 'scientific' in approach, that scientific approach is often closely tied to a belief in 'discovering the natural' in terms of establishing and cultivating individual propensities. This position is based on a belief that every body has its own 'natural degree zero', and that the best thing to do is to 'find' that nature for oneself, rather than joining an institution and having an artificial system imposed upon the body (Miller 2000). This 'natural' is regarded as individual, contingent and bodily. *My* natural movement may be different from *your* natural movement, but we will both have 'natural movement'. It may be unnatural for me to try to mimic your style of movement, because we may be different sizes and shapes and have different histories or 'primary habitus' (Hilgers 2009). This is the 'find your own truth' version of nature. It is often anti-institutional and

²⁷ For an account of this notion of 'disagreement', in which disagreement is formulated not as a dispute in which one party argues white while another argues black, but rather as a situation in which both parties argue white but mean different things by it, see Rancière (1999). See also Arditi (2008).

overwhelmingly verificationist (Bolelli 2003).

The putative polar opposite position of the supposedly modern verificationist martial arts approach would be that occupied by the 'ancient and timeless' camp. This might be exemplified by the contemporary 'Taoist' taijiquan and qigong nexus, the discourse or ideology of which insists that 'nature' is constant, timeless and universal (Wile 1996; Frank 2006). Admittedly, 'constant' here refers to a constant state of change in the interplay of yin and yang, but the point is that in contradistinction to modern 'evolving' martial arts and combat systems, the discourse of 'Taoist' martial arts is one which values tradition and institution.

All martial arts have their traditions, of course, and all martial artists have their places within and their relations to traditions. But the point to be emphasized here is that vis-à-vis 'nature' or 'reality' there are at least two different pedagogical paradigms in play: verificationist approaches to martial arts seek to advocate experimentation and development: you find out what works for you; you can take advice or not take advice: the choice is yours. But traditionalist approaches hold that the wisdom is encoded within the traditional forms, kata and training exercises (such as step sparring, technique sparring, push hands, sticking hands, or even in standing qigong, meditation, and so on).

More precisely, in traditionalist martial arts, one *may* experiment, but only in terms of applying principles. Transgression of the principles is transgression of the wisdom encoded in the martial art. Thus, in taijiquan push-hands, it would simply not do to smash into your partner with punches and kicks that force their way through your

partner's posture or moves – unless one were doing so deliberately in order to help the partner to practice taiji principles against a non-taiji opponent. But essentially this would be force against force, which is anathema to taijiquan principles. So, doing this would mean that you weren't doing taijiquan.

In other words, and to recap: there are two senses of nature in play here, both with different sorts of institution around them. The nature to be discovered in modern verificationist martial arts will always be singular or particular to the individual. The nature to be discovered in traditionalist martial arts will be regarded as universal or timeless. Both senses of nature involve a different sense of 'institution'. 'Nature' in taijiquan discourse takes the form of timeless universal principles, which translate into timeless natural biomechanical principles. Because of this, institutions are regarded as necessary and necessarily to be respected. This is because the student must be conformist in order to learn how to embody and actualise universal principles in prescribed movements and logics of interaction. The pedagogical institution is one of simultaneous cultivation *and* stripping back or removal of encultured 'mistakes' (resisting or meeting force with force being a prime example). This discourse affirms that what is being taught is natural, but that our everyday lives have made us forget how to move, act and react 'naturally'. Paradoxically, 'natural movement' is (re)learned by perfecting the most unnatural-looking of movement sequences, such as a taiji form.

Verificationist martial arts are predisposed to regard such an approach to learning as conformist and stultifying – indeed, as a movement away from the

natural or from the proper nature of combat, without any proper return to it (Lee 1971). Tales abound, in the world of modern innovations into martial arts training, about martial artists discovering painfully that they had been deluded about the nature of combat by their 'classical' martial arts training; about how in their first 'real fight' fear and adrenaline made them freeze or made all of their techniques fail; about how they lost their balance or grip or coordination and couldn't compensate; about how they had never trained for being attacked by multiple opponents, and so on (Miller 2008; Miller 2000). Thus, a 'martial art' like taijiquan can and is often easily taken to represent the most fake and artificial of institutions.

Instituting Nature

However, according to the terms of my argument, neither traditionalist martial arts like taijiquan nor anti-traditional martial arts like KFM are necessarily any closer to the 'truth' or 'reality' of combat. They are both merely performative embodiments of different theories, organised implicitly or explicitly by different premises or presuppositions about the nature of the event. The natural in taijiquan and other 'internal' martial arts involves adopting a strong, relaxed posture with a straight spine, rounded shoulders (and '*qua*'), bent and relaxed elbows and knees, and so on, in order to enable the greatest sensitivity and smoothness of response and movement. (There are also 'philosophical', cosmological or esoteric and vitalist reasons given for the posture considerations of taijiquan – which refer to the circulation of *qi* – but insofar as it is approached as a martial art, the posture considerations of taijiquan relate chiefly to enabling sensitivity (listening,

sticking, yielding) and the ability to respond spontaneously.)

On the other hand, in a verificationist approach like Keysi Fighting Method, training such a posture would represent indulging in the height of artifice and inefficiency. In Keysi, 'the natural' refers to what you would be *likely* to do *spontaneously*, almost as an involuntary reflex, when attacked by multiple opponents; specifically, as discussed, putting your hands on your head and hunching down into a ball to protect your head, face, neck, chest, belly and groin.

Arguably, then, another key difference between taijiquan and KFM involves a different theory of the relation between untrained and trained reactions. That is to say, whilst many 'classical' martial arts clearly seek to train any kind of 'foetal position' reaction *out* of students, Keysi seeks to build upon it, and transform it into a robust response. As mentioned, this is based on the assumption that you will tend to curl up like this automatically, and that, despite its potential shortcomings, it can be modified slightly to become a good strong starting position for a counterattack. The putative proximity of the pensador position to 'untrained reactions' is precisely why the pensador becomes the basic and central stance. It is clearly very different to the 'natural' position of taijiquan. But in Keysi the pensador is accorded superiority because it is so close to what its theory states will come naturally to any untrained person anyway. What Keysi strives to do is to build strong strategies, tactics and movement principles from what comes 'naturally' to untrained people (and trained people, when overwhelmed in a fight).

Nevertheless, both Keysi and taijiquan movement principles require *cultivation*

to work at all. Both require quite precise forms of biomechanical coordination. Both also require a metaphorical coordination or alignment of the mind and the body. Without this, no 'technique' or other aspect of the martial art will 'work'. In fact, both require quite precise forms of cultivation.

Cultivation is a complex term. It refers to relations between the biological and the social or institutional. It clearly involves nature, but nature trained. 'Cultivation' is connected with 'culture', in all senses, and can be used with reference to anything from the earliest traces of the historical emergence of human society to the cellular contents of a test tube in the most contemporary of laboratories, as well as the most formative stages of infant development, any aspect of education, as well as the most avant-garde artistic installations, aesthetic or intellectual productions and experiences, and so on. As seems clear from many debates about the relations between technology and biology, in the modern world, trying to ascertain what is part of the natural and what is part of the artificial or the technological is very often a very grey area indeed. This is as much the case in martial arts as it is in agriculture, food science, sport, medicine, marketing or any other area involving 'cultivation'.

Moreover, in martial arts, we are dealing with the institutional management of different kinds of material, of different ontological and epistemological statuses: from hopes, fears and fantasies (or phantasies), to bodily propensities and pedagogical paradigms in particular technological environments and discursive contexts. In all of this, the idea of 'reality' in martial arts is always discursively constructed, in and by institutions that are born within and feed

back into these discourses.²⁸ This reality is always therefore in some sense irreducibly theoretical, and informed by narratives, myths and legends of all orders, from anecdotes about 'fights we have known' to YouTube clips we have seen. The theories are actualised in their performative elaboration; the dojo, kwoon and training hall act as laboratories where reality tests are run and re-run; habitus and *illusio* arise together; prompted by a 'reality' that exists as a future threat, a monstrous spectre, that demands to be warded off or paid off up front with blood and sweat and devotion; while pain shades into pleasure as we are seduced into believing that what we are doing must be real (Green 2011), and from desire emerges drive, and pleasure, pride, propriety and identity, each becoming entangled with the others and becoming indecipherable, inextricable; as institution wrestles with the enigma of reality, and each moves into focus and the foreground as the other moves out and recedes; as if the one is always yin to the other's yang, or each is the *différance* of the other.²⁹

²⁸ For a precise sense of what is meant by discursive construction see Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), and work informed by this school of poststructuralism.

²⁹ Some readers and reviewers of this article have voiced mixed feelings about my concluding sentences, here. Evidently, they may strike certain readers as too associative, evocative, enigmatic and hence imprecise, unclear or non-academic, and ultimately therefore *inconclusive*. However, I constructed these sentences by combining some key points that have both good credentials and currency in this context. I return to matters of desires and discourses, evoking key themes of *entanglement and capture* (Chow 2012), habitus and *illusio* (Bourdieu 1979), institution, experience and interpretation (Weber 1987), Derridean *différance* etc. It may strike some as a cliché to connect Derridean *différance* to yin and yang, but in this I follow Adam Frank's masterful study of taijiquan (Frank 2006), in which the

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank colleagues and reviewers who have helpfully commented on drafts of this article. In particular, in alphabetical order: Kyle Barrowman, Esther Berg, Daniele Bolelli and Samuel Chambers, as well as the anonymous JOME C Journal reviewers. I have not been able to act on every critical comment and suggestion made by these reviewers, but their input has been valuable to me. Thanks also to the other contributors to this special issue of JOME C Journal, whose work I had the pleasure of editing during the writing of this article, all of which enriched my thinking and analysis.



Fig. 7: Justo Dieguez [left] and Andy Norman [right], on the set of Batman Begins (2005). Christian Bale is rear and centre.

différance of yin and yang is used as the basis of both the theoretical and the methodological framework. As for the potential criticism that all of this reflects an overly theoretical post-structuralist penchant for linguistic play at the expense of 'proper study' or indeed 'reality', I refer the reader to Loïc Wacquant's recent rejoinder to Searle: 'I take the difference between pugilists and philosophers to be one of *degree and not one of kind*. The existential situation of the generic, run-of-the-mill agent is not ontologically different from that of the fighter and of the fighting scholar: like them, she is a sentient being of flesh and blood, bound to a particular point in physical space and tied to a given moment in time by virtue of her incarnation in a fragile organism. This porous, mortal organism exposes her to the world and thus to the risk of pain (emotional as well as physical) and injury (symbolic as well as material); but it also propels her onto the stage of social life, where she evolves in practice the visceral know-how and prediscursive skills that form the bedrock of social competency. Though carnal sociology is particular apt for studying social extremes, its principles and techniques apply across all social institutions, for carnality is not a specific domain of practices but a fundamental constituent of the human condition and thus a necessary ingredient of all action. For this reason, and until this methodological strategy is practically invalidated, I would urge social analysts to start from the assumption that, *pace* Searle, we are all martial artists of one sort or another' (Wacquant 2013: 198).

References

- Anderson, B. (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism - Revised Edition*, London: Verso.
- Arditi, B. (2008), *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Assunção, M. R. (2005), *Capoeira: A History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*, London: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1977), *Image, Music, Text*, London: Fontana.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994), *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Berg, E., and I. Prohl (2014), "Become Your Best": On the Construction of Martial Arts as Means of Self-Actualization and Self-Improvement', *JOME C Journal*, no. 5, 1-19, http://cf.ac.uk/Jomec/Jomecjournal/5-june2014/Berg_Prohl.pdf.
- Bolelli, D. (2003), *On the Warrior's Path: Philosophy, Fighting, and Martial Arts Mythology*, Berkeley, Ca.: Blue Snake Books.
- Bolelli, D. (2014), 'How Gladiatorial Movies and Martial Arts Cinema Influenced the Development of the Ultimate Fighting Championship', *JOME C Journal* no. 5, 1-15, http://cf.ac.uk/Jomec/Jomecjournal/5-june2014/Bolelli_Gladiators.pdf.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowman, P. (2007), *Post-Marxism Versus Cultural Studies: Theory, Politics and Intervention*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bowman, P. (2008), *Deconstructing Popular Culture*, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bowman, P. (2009), 'Aberrant Pedagogies: Jr, Qt and Bruce Lee', *Borderlands* no. 8 (2), Jacques Rancière and Queer Theory). <http://www.borderlands.net.au/issues/vol8no2.html>.
- Bowman, P. (2010), *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fantasy-Fighting-Philosophy*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Bowman, P. (2013), *Beyond Bruce Lee: Chasing the Dragon through Film, Philosophy and Popular Culture*, London and New York: Wallflower Press.
- Brown, B. (1997), 'Global Bodies/Postnationalities: Charles Johnson's Consumer Culture', *Representations*, No. 58 (Spring), 24-48.
- Brown, D., and G. Jennings (2013), 'In Search of a Martial Habitus: Identifying Core Dispositions in Wing Chun and Taijiquan', In *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports*, edited by R. S. García and D. Spencer, London and New York: Anthem, 33-48.
- Chan, S. (2000), 'The Construction and Export of Culture as Artefact: The Case of Japanese Martial Arts', *Body & Society* no. 6 (1), 69-74.

- Chow, R. (2012), *Entanglements, Or: Transmedial Thinking About Capture*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Cohen, E. B.-O. (2009), 'Survival, an Israeli Ju Jitsu School of Martial Arts: Violence, Body, Practice and the National', *Ethnography* no. 10 (2), 153-183.
- Derrida, J. (1976), *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1994), *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York & London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (1996), 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism', In *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. C. Mouffe, London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (2001), *Writing and Difference*, London: Routledge.
- Douglas, M. (1986), *How Institutions Think*, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Downey, G. (2007), 'Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in No-Holds-Barred Fighting', *Social Studies of Science*, no. 37 (2), 201-226.
- Downey, G. (2014), "'As Real as It Gets!' Producing Hyperviolence in Mixed Martial Arts', *JOMEK Journal*, no. 5, 1-28. http://cf.ac.uk/Jomec/Jomecjournal/5-june2014/Downey_MMA.pdf.
- Fabian, J. (1983), *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, N.Y.: Columbia U.P.
- Farrer, D. S., and J. Whalen-Bridge (2011), *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World*, Albany: SUNY Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1st American ed, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978), *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, London: Penguin.
- Frank, A. (2006), *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man: Understanding Identity through Martial Arts*, New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gillis, A. (2008), *A Killing Art: The Untold History of Tae Kwon Do*, Ontario: ECW Press.
- Green, K. (2011), "'It Hurts So It Must Be Real": Sensing the Seduction of Mixed Martial Arts', *Social & Cultural Geography* no. 12 (4), 377-396.
- Hilgers, M. (2009), 'Habitus, Freedom, and Reflexivity', *Theory & Psychology* no. 19 (6), 728-755.
- Holland, A. (2014), *The End of Keysi Fighting Method - Andy Norman and Justo Dieguez No Longer Working Together*, 10th November 2012 [cited 28th April 2014]. Available from <http://theselfdefenceexpert.com/the-end-of-keysi-fighting-method-andy-norman-and-justo-dieguez-no-longer-working-together/>.
- Hunt, L. (2014), 'Enter the 2-Disc Platinum Edition: Bruce Lee and Post-DVD Textuality', *JOMEK Journal*, no. 5, 1-12. http://cf.ac.uk/Jomec/Jomecjournal/5-june2014/Hunt_BruceLee.pdf.

- Inosanto, D. (1994), *Jeet Kune Do: The Art and Philosophy of Bruce Lee*, London: Altantic Books.
- Krug, G. J. (2001), 'At the Feet of the Master: Three Stages in the Appropriation of Okinawan Karate into Anglo-American Culture', *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* no. 1 (4), 395-410.
- Laclau, E., and C. Mouffe (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso.
- Lee, B. (1971), Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate. *Black Belt Magazine*.
- Lee, B. (1975), *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, Santa Clarita, Ca.: Ohara Publications.
- Lee, B., and Little, John (1997), *Bruce Lee: Words of the Dragon: Interviews, 1958-1973*, Boston: Tuttle.
- Lorge, P. (2012), *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty First Century [Kindle Edition]*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mauss, M. (1992), 'Techniques of the Body', In *Incorporations*, edited by J. E. Crary and S. E. Kwinter, 455-477. New York: Zone.
- Miller, D. (2000), *The Tao of Bruce Lee*, London: Vintage.
- Miller, R. (2008), *Meditations on Violence: A Comparison of Martial Arts Training & Real World Violence*, Boston, Mass.: YMAA.
- Morris, M. (2001), 'Learning from Bruce Lee', In *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, edited by M. Tinkcom, and Villarejo, Amy, 171-184. London: Routledge.
- Morris, M. (2004), 'Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema: Hong Kong and the Making of a Global Popular Culture', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* no. 5 (2):181-199.
- Morris, M., S. L. Li, and S. C.-k. Chan (2005), *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press/Hong Kong University Press.
- Norman, A. (2013), *Interview with Andy Norman on the Martial Edge Website* n.d. [cited 10 January 2013]. Available from <http://www.martialedge.com/articles/interviews-question-and-answers/andy-norman-of-keys-i-fighting-method-kfm/>.
- Palmer, D. A. (2007), *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*, [Kindle Edition] London: Hurst & Co. in association with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris.
- Park, J. C. H. (2010), *Yellow Future: Oriental Style in Hollywood Cinema*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rancière, J. (1991), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Rancière, J. (1999), *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Ronell, A. (2004), 'Koan Practice or Taking Down the Test', *parallax* no. 10. (1):58-71.
- Said, E. W. (1995), *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003), *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham and London: Duke.
- Shahar, M. (2008), *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion and the Chinese Martial Arts.*, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Spencer, D. (2011), *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment: Violence, Gender and Mixed Martial Arts*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Spencer, D. (2014), 'From Many Masters to Many Students: Youtube, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and Communities of Practice', *JOMEK Journal* (5):1-12. cf.ac.uk/Jomec/Jomecjournal/5-june2014/Spencer_BJJPractice.pdf
- Tom, T. (2005), *The Straight Lead: The Core of Bruce Lee's Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do*, North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.
- Wacquant, L. (2013), 'Homines in Extremis: What Fighting Scholars Can Teach Us About Habitus', In *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports*, edited by R. S. García and D. C. Spencer, 193-200, London, New York, and Delhi: Anthem Press.
- Wacquant, L., J. D. (2004), *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, S. (1987), *Institution and Interpretation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wetzler, S. (2014), 'Myths of the Martial Arts', *JOMEK Journal*, no. 5, 1-12, http://cf.ac.uk/Jomec/Jomecjournal/5-june2014/Wetzler_Myth.pdf.
- Wile, D. (1996), *Lost Tai Chi Classics of the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*, New York: State University of New York.
- Wile, D. (1999), *Tai Chi's Ancestors: The Making of an Internal Martial Art*, New York: Sweet Chi Press.
- Woodward, K. (2014), *Globalizing Boxing* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Žižek, S. (2001), *On Belief* London: Routledge.
- Žižek, S. (2005), *Interrogating the Real: Selected Writings*, R. Butler and S. Stephens, New York; London: Continuum.



This article was first published in *JOMEC Journal*

JOMEC Journal is an online, open-access and peer reviewed journal dedicated to publishing the highest quality innovative academic work in Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. It is run by an editorial collective based in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University, committed both to open-access publication and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and academic integrity. *JOMEC Journal* is peer reviewed with an international, multi-disciplinary Editorial Board and Advisory Panel. It welcomes work that is located in any one of these disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary work that approaches Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies as overlapping and interlocking fields. It is particularly interested in work that addresses the political and ethical dimensions, stakes, problematics and possibilities of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies.

To submit a paper or to discuss publication, please contact:

Dr Paul Bowman: BowmanP@cf.ac.uk

www.cf.ac.uk/jomecjournal

Twitter: @JOMECjournal

ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. Based on a work at www.cf.ac.uk/jomecjournal.

