martial arts than fighting? Or indeed, a more appropriate question perhaps: given that martial arts practice often consists entirely in endless training sessions without any actual fighting on the horizon, what more is there to "martial" arts than fighting without fighting?

But perhaps we have already moved too fast. For, if martial arts can equally easily be more and less and other than "fighting" (and all at the same time), then surely the *first* question to be asked is what actually are martial arts? This may seem obvious: an unnecessary question. But, as Hegel cautioned, "What is 'familiarly known' is not properly known, just for the reason that it is 'familiar'…. [For, familiarity itself] is the commonest form of self-deception."[4] Stephen Chan gives a clear account of the crisis that scratching the surface of apparent obviousness can precipitate when he explains that "a UNESCO survey of the world's martial arts" that he was involved with had to be abandoned "because the various authors could not agree on the nature of the project."[5] They could not agree on a workable definition or delimitation of their shared object of study, "the martial arts." In other words, this putatively obvious and stable referent immediately turned out to be a rather deceptive signifier, something that can be drastically differently construed depending on one's standpoint. The UNESCO group was unable to agree on *how* to conceive of the martial arts: how to contextualise them, how to establish and assess their limits, their "essence," and indeed how to ascertain what constitutes their "reality." They were especially unable to agree on whether the "reality" of martial arts should include or exclude the myths, fictions, fantasies, and fabrications that constantly blur the edges and muddy the waters of this subject.

2. "My Style?" The Disciplined Production of Difference

Chan's area in the UNESCO study was to have been Japanese martial arts. On this topic, he offered the view that "mythology plays a large role in the internationalization of Japanese martial arts."[6] However, this proposition, he observes, "seemed particularly contentious" to the other authors; who, holding different notions of what constitutes the reality of a martial art (and implicitly therefore a different notion of what constitutes reality as such), wanted to downplay or ignore myth. According to Chan, however, "little progress seem[s] possible in separating histories from mythologies," when it comes to martial arts.[7] This is because in their formation, dissemination and proliferation, myth demonstrably often trumps history. We might merely consider the explosive impact that a film like *Enter the Dragon* had on the fantasy life and martial arts practice the world over to see Chan's point: namely that when it comes to the martial arts, myths and fictions can be far more influential and orientating than truth.[8]

It is widely known that the choreography seen in *Enter the Dragon* has little direct relation with the "real" Shaolin kung fu that the character of Lee in *Enter the Dragon* "would really" have practised; just as the "celluloid" cinematic choreography in Bruce Lee films had little in common with the interdisciplinary *bricolage* of different approaches to combat actually developed and taught by Bruce Lee himself (of which more will be said in due course).[9] But it was not just Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema that unleashed "myth" by manipulating fantasies worldwide, conjuring up spurious yet putatively ancient arts (now called "wushu" and "wire fu," namely, the dramatic athletic kung fu of film choreography). Chan himself lists a whole host of Japanese martial arts that are often deliberately represented, exported and consumed as if they are authentically

Given the multiple dimensions of "martial arts," the question is: what sort of a paradigm could possibly hope to be adequate to the task? The problem here is that any approach will privilege certain dimensions and subordinate, be ignorant of or otherwise exclude others. Every version of "interdisciplinarity" cannot but be led by a *particular* disciplinary preference, and so will differ from other possible versions of interdisciplinarity, and therefore produce different (often utterly contradictory forms of) knowledge. Omniscience is not possible. Every account or manner of "understanding" will be enabled and limited by a particular partial bias.

Given Chan's argument about the ensnarement of Japanese martial arts within a commodifying process, then, from a Marxian perspective, such as that recently (re)developed by the influential Slovenian cultural critic, Slavoj Žižek, Chan's observations might immediately be taken to be the start and end-point—the *culmination*—of an argument. That is, from the perspective of Marxian economism (the view that the dictates of the economy determine in the last instance the beliefs and practices of culture and society), then the point about commodification may be regarded as the last word on the matter—as if proving that culture has been decisively colonised by capitalism, and that all beliefs and practices are ideological (because they are commodified myths that we have bought into), and that cultural practices like martial arts are simply a kind of modern "opium of the masses."

However, Chan himself is evidently neither a Žižekian nor any other kind of economic reductionist, as he does not propound such a view. On the contrary, he contends that whilst, on the one hand, one cannot simply or uncritically believe all of their "history" ("Much of what seems to be antique is not"),[12] on the other hand, martial

arts cannot just be viewed as commodity pure and simple. In this respect, he gives examples of martial arts in "African shanty townships," where karate has become "an alternative source of values and cultural shelter to those shut outside the wealth of the Western economy, and who have been divorced by location and the exigencies of poverty from a deep indigenous sense of culture."[13] Here, there is something strongly "cultural," indeed even *political* about martial arts. They become bound up in identity, in identification, in organic community, and can be construed as taking on a place and significance that is far from simply consumerist.

So, an over-economistic or reductively Marxian take on culture as capitalist-colonised seems limited. What alternative paradigms are available that we might bring to bear on martial arts? Any answer will already be biased and therefore in every way "partial." But, from the point of view of the contemporary interdisciplinary arts and humanities, there is "obviously" much that is psychoanalysable in martial arts (given the palpable presence of masculine desire, fantasy and fear, as well as cultural projections about "the other," for instance). There is also much that seems to cry out for Foucauldian styles of analysis of the body in discourses and relations of power—not forgetting post-Foucauldian and post-colonial considerations of "orientalist discourse." Martial arts phenomena demand historicisation, too, of course. But even if something "universal" is discerned in the impetus to begin martial arts training—perhaps the sense of "lack" that might crystallise in the subjective desire to become powerful or invincible—such a "symptom" can of course be treated in many manners: reiterated or recurring "symptoms" need not necessarily be approached through Freudian or Lacanian optics. There are vastly differing ways to interpret even a "universal" or "general" feature, from the most positivist,

behaviourist or essentialist paradigms to the most relativist, postmodern or deconstructive. In terms of the latter, for instance, Jacques Derrida's ruminations on death and its relation to questions of responsibility in *The Gift of Death*[14] almost call out to be applied to a consideration of the martial arts. Or, to put this another way: surely consideration of the martial arts should be accorded the dignity and seriousness of philosophy, especially insofar as they seem so closely related to questions of death,

indeed many other underclass martial practices worldwide—including those of Europe and the UK),[21] *capoeira* in Brazil was actually illegal until the 1920s, until the force of various militaristic and nationalist discourses led to its incorporation into military, police, and educational syllabi.

Although Downey does not use such language in his study of the complexity and uncertainty of *capoeira*'s ontological status and its ensnarement in always politically motivated contexts, what his study nevertheless points to is the *undecidability* of *capoeira*. What is it? What is being done, and why? What does it *mean*, what does it *do* – in *any* register? He convincingly argues that *capoeira* does not fit into any of the dominant categories for classifying and dealing with physical activities, and that because of this difference (or divergence, or excess), regular "efforts by the state (and other nationalist institutions) to co-opt, control and recast [it] as a sport have failed repeatedly."[22] However, despite its demonstrably politically-charged status—first a slave activity, then an illegal underclass practice, then subjected to various politically motivated efforts of institutional appropriation and domestication—Downey wants to criticise the academic tendency to leap to the conclusion that therefore there must be something fundamentally political about such activities. Against this impulse he contends: "these projects failed not because of politically-motivated 'resistance,' but because of growing boredom, dissatisfaction and disinterest in sporting projects" among *capoeira* practitioners. Thus, he suggests, "the case of capoeira may point to a more widespread pitfall in macrosocial interpretations of historical events as political processes."[23]

of untold numbers of people the world over. This cinematic tipping-point is widely known and has been much remarked upon, as a "real mythic" event. But in what way might this origin relate to other origins—as it were the historical and cultural conditions of possibility for such a "mythic" emergence?

Bruce Lee's senior student, a Philippino *eskrimador* called Dan Inosanto, gives this account of the formation, birth, and baptism of "jeet kune do," the martial art that Bruce Lee devised:

> It all began in the early part of 1968 while Bruce and I were driving along in the car. We were talking about fencing, Western fencing. Bruce said [that] the most efficient means of countering in fencing was the *stop-hit*. A stop-hit is when you do not parry and then counter, it's all done in one step. When the opponent attacks, you intercept his move with a thrust or hit of your own. It is designed to score a hit in the midst of the attacker's action, and is the highest and most economical of all the counters.
>
> Then Bruce said, "We should call our method of fighting the 'stop-hitting fist style,' or the 'intercepting fist style.'"
>
> "What would that be in Chinese?" I asked.
>
> "That would be Jeet Kune Do," he said.
>
> Jeet Kune Do means the way of the stopping fist, or the way of the intercepting fist. So, instead of blocking and then hitting, our main concept is to dispense with blocking completely, and instead to intercept and hit. We realize that this cannot be done all the time, but this is the main theme.
>
> Up until 1967 our method was called "Jun Fan" Gung Fu, which was a modification of various techniques from Northern Praying Mantis, Southern Praying Mantis, Choy Li Fut, Eagle Claw, Western Boxing, Hung Gar, Thai Boxing, wrestling, Judo, Jiu Jitsu, and several Northern Gung-Fu styles. [But] It is obvious that Wing Chun was the main nucleus and [that] all the other methods evolved around it.
>
> [….]
>
> In later years he became sorry that he ever coined the term Jeet Kune Do because he felt that it, too, was limiting, and according to Bruce, "There is no such thing as a style if you totally understand the roots of combat."

Bruce Lee was such that the biographer, as he puts it, "an Englishman… was able to begin learning a Chinese martial art from a Welshman."[38] This otherwise quite mundane observation—that Bruce Lee, thanks to the Hollywood cinematic apparatus, could popularise the main art he studied, Wing Chun kung fu, all over the world—is not insignificant. In fact, as Lee's biographer goes on to suggest, Bruce Lee could in this and many other respects actually be said to have "bridged cultures [and] revolutionized the martial arts." At the same time he explicitly "taught a fierce philosophy of individualism,

now exoticised other. And do films really “bridge cultures”? Or do they divide a culture from itself, replacing a possibly traditional self-perception with a Eurocentric celluloid simulacrum?

studies are completely ideological: i.e., in the service of the inexhaustible commodification processes of capitalism. Any "celebration" of such "multicultural encounters" is, for Žižek, straightforwardly wrong. This is precisely why Žižek disavows what he calls "politically correct cultural studies" approaches and adopts instead a stalwart Marxist perspective: he regards all anti-essentialism and multiculturalism as mere indices, symptoms and signs of the success of capitalism's neoliberal ideology. The supposedly "radical" insights of cultural studies are, he argues, merely the forefront of neoliberal commonsense and are as such necessarily false.

In this paradigm, all the multicultural hybrid, East-meets-West identity-

Buddhism, “New Ageism,” the neoliberal ideology of “tolerance,” and so on, are all best seen as equivalent reaction formations to, and in the service of, a relentless capitalism. The job of such practices and belief systems is to keep us shopping and “tolerating” and “respecting difference”—as long as that difference is merely the difference of different types of shopping, and not the rejection of consumerism. Hence: Feng Shui good; Islamicnd iecl(e)-10(..a)4(

the political implication seems clear. Deconstruction, cultural studies, and Bruce Lee are equivalent lapdogs of neoliberalism; both culture and academia are "political" or have "implications" only insofar as they are hapless indices or symptoms of capitalism's unfettered reign. The popularity of martial arts is fetishistic, phantasmatic, and an unfortunate displacement away from authentic political acts or practices.

6. "Show me some of it!" The Way of Authenticity

In this, the Žižekian position is not only crudely Marxian (not dissimilar to the Adorno of "The Culture Industry") but—surprisingly, perhaps—also philosophically Heideggerian. The relevance and significance of this claim will hopefully become clear. For Heidegger, as is well known, was deeply interested in the texts of oriental philosophy, in particular the *Tao Te Ching*. Specifically, as is extremely pertinent here, Heidegger was very interested in the question of whether there could be an authentic *philosophical* "bridging" across cultures—and, hence, whether there could be a "genuine" or "authentic" multiculturalism ungoverned by a capitalist logic of commodification.

We see this interest most clearly in Heidegger's "Dialogue on Language: Between a Japanese and an Inquirer."[46] In this Socratic Dialogue-style essay, the Inquirer character ("Heidegger") argues that "a true encounter [between East Asian and] European existence is still not taking place, in spite of all assimilations and intermixtures." Translated into the terms of this discussion, such a claim would be as much as to argue that Bruce Lee did not "bridge" anything. To this assertion, Hm wi 7 28.ha(a)-202(i)-ces

"Europeanization" —namely, the "modern technicalization and industrialization of every continent, [from which] there would seem to be no escape any longer."[48] As such, this is *like* Žižek's point about capitalism. But Heidegger takes it elsewhere. Indeed, interestingly, the Žižekian position is actually contained within and "sublated" (i.e., completed and superseded) by the Heideggerian argument. For Žižek's argument is that capitalism is the condition of possibility and therefore of *impossibility*, and the motive force, of cultural (non)encounters today. However, for Heidegger, the fundamental problem—more fundamental than Žižek's capitalism—is what the "Dialogue" calls "European conceptual systems."[49] In the "Dialogue" these are claimed to be essentially different from East Asian conceptual systems. But the difference is also material, as well as aesthetic. In fact, for Heidegger, here, the "European conceptual systems" are said to be most pointedly present in that synthesis of "Western" aesthetics and "Western" technics: the film camera.

Accordingly, in Heidegger's text—or at least for his imaginary visitor—*all* film (even Kurosawa's film, *Rashomon*, which the two characters discuss) is an index of an unavoidable Europeanisation. This is because as soon as something—*anything*—is captured on camera, it is committed to a fully Western "objectness."[50] This "objectness," we are told, is apparently alien to all things essentially East Asian, because cinematic "objectness" demands conventions of representation and conventions of *reading* representations that are irreducibly European. Thus, as Stella Sandford points out, Heidegger's "Dialogue" is in fact fundamentally "preoccupied with the issue of the possibility or impossibility of an East-West dialogue."[51] Scholars like Reinhard May have read this text "as proof both of Heidegger's indebtedness to East Asian sources and

his attempts to cover this over."[52] But, argues Sandford, "it is equally plausibly read as a statement of Heidegger's belief in the fundamental and incommensurable *differences* between philosophical traditions, and of the extraordinary difficulty, if not the outright impossibility, of a true dialogue, despite the best intentions of the interlocutors."[53]

So, where does this leave us? It suggests that the fundamental problem with Žižek's position, despite the obvious moment of truth it contains, remains its economic reductionism—

that may have. If this seems too grandiose a claim, on a more modest note what it at least means is that a different theoretical paradigm is required for the cultural studies of martial arts than a Žižekian (non-)approach to culture. A straightforwardly *psychoanalytic* approach might tend to universalise and depoliticise, independent of context. A straightforwardly economistic approach is insufficient, to the extent that it descends into equally universalistic mantras about the delusions and simulacra of capital. Both of these mutually incompatible and ultimately incoherent failings are present—actually as the key ingredients—in Žižek's approach. As such, Žižek's approach to culture and politics is actually anathema to cultural studies (and political studies), even if on first glance his writings sometimes appear to be a kind of political or cultural studies. This is not to say that the insights of psychoanalysis or Marxism are to be rejected. On the contrary, they are necessary— "necessary but insufficient," a ,"bt w. a Tw 30 thaWoahe

Each man belongs to a style which claims to possess truth to the exclusion of all other styles. These styles become institutes with their explanations of the "Way," dissecting and isolating the harmonmeyiese-i(s)-1(ta)4(rn-1(s)-1(e)4(s)--4(6)10(2(n)--1(snt10(a)4(l)-1(sr

Brian Kennedy and Elizabeth Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals: A Historical Survey* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2005), 70-71.

[9] Both of these points are regularly clarified in the extensive literature on Bruce Lee. One good discussion can be found in Dan Inosanto, *Jeet Kune Do: The Art and Philosophy of Bruce Lee* (Los Angeles, Know How Publishing, 1980).

[10] Chan, 71. He aligns this with the postmodern condition, proposing that "These days you choose your own myths."

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 70.

[14] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[15] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 12.

[16] This can be seen played out in exemplary fashion in the film *Ghost Dog: The Way of The Samurai* (Jim Jarmusch, 1999). See also, of course, the similarities between G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Tsunetomo Yamamoto and William Scott Wilson, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai* (Tokyo and London: Kodansha International, 1979).

[17] See, for instance, Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2003); and Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril:" Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1993).

[18] The first testimonial on the cover of one edition of *The Book of Five Rings* reads: "Today's business people will find … [this] 350-year-old martial arts classic … compelling and tantalizingly relevant. Perseverance, insight, self-understanding, inward calm even in the midst of chaos, the importance of swift but unhurried action: Musashi's teachings read like lessons from the latest business management gurus. Who couldn't succeed in business by applying Musashi's insights on conflict and strategy!" Mayamoto Musashi, *The Book of Five Rings*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston and London: Shambala, 1994).

[19] Jian Xu, "Body, Discourse, and the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Chinese Qigong" (*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58.4, November 1999), 961-991. This is discussed further below.

[20] Greg Downey, "Domesticating an Urban Menace: Reforming Capoeira as a Brazilian National Sport" (*The International Journal of the History of Sport* 4, December 2002), 1-32.

[21] Terry Brown, *English Martial Arts* (Frithgarth, Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1997), 18. See also Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate- ' À 0 * (Tokyo, New York and / L I H

opposite direction; i.e., denoting the multiple, the partial, the incomplete and the amorphous, in its very plural vagueness, as opposed to denoting some putatively singular and definite identity.

[31] Quoted in Sam Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 106.

[32] Stuart Hall, David Morley and Kuan-