

CONTRIBUTOR

Kyle Barrowman is an Adjunct Instructor of Film Studies at Columbia College Chicago and the College of Lake County. He received his PhD from the School of Journalism, Media, and Culture at Cardiff University. He has published widely on film history, aesthetics, and philosophy, and his research interests in martial arts studies include the genre of martial arts cinema and the sport of MMA. He also serves as an editorial assistant of Martial Arts Studies.

BRUCE LEE AND THE PERFECTION OF MARTIAL ARTS (STUDIES): AN EXERCISE IN ALTERDISCIPLINARITY

KYLE BARROWMAN

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ABSTRACT

This essay builds from an analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of Bruce Lee's jeet kune do to an analysis of the current state of academic scholarship generally and martial arts studies scholarship specifically. For the sake of a more comprehensive understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of jeet kune do, and in particular its affinities with a philosophical tradition traced by Stanley Cavell under the heading of perfectionism, this essay brings the philosophical writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ayn Rand into contact with Lee's writings during the time that he spent formulating his martial arts philosophy. Additionally, this essay uses the philosophical insights of Emerson, Rand, and Lee to challenge longstanding academic dogma vis-à-vis poststructuralist philosophy, the methods of academic intervention, and the nature of philosophical argumentation. Though pitched as a debate regarding the content and the status of Bruce Lee and his combative philosophy, this essay endeavors to inspire scholars to (re)examine their conceptions of Bruce Lee, martial arts, and martial arts studies.

INTRODUCTION

An Angel came to me and said, 'O pitiable foolish young man! O horrible! O dreadful state! Consider the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself to all eternity, to which thou art going in such career'. I said, 'Perhaps you will be willing to shew me my eternal lot & we will contemplate together upon it and see whether your lot or mine is most desirable' ... The Angel said: 'Thy phantasy has imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed'. I answer'd: 'We impose on one another' ... Opposition is true Friendship.

- William Blake [1793/1994: Plates 17-20]

Following the 'Bruce Lee's Cultural Legacies' conference which occasioned this special issue of *Martial Arts Studies* (organized by myself and Paul Bowman and held at Cardiff University in July 2018), Luke White provided a conference report to *Kung Fu Tea* in which he observed how the Bruce Lees, plural, that emerged over the course of the conference, in the different contexts of the many fascinating presentations from scholars coming from myriad disciplinary positions and perspectives, were 'multiple and in many ways contradictory'. On this proliferation of Bruce Lees, White elaborated:

Lee remains an enigma. Was he a plagiarist or a genius? Does he belong to Chinese or Western culture? Does he offer us emancipatory or conservative images of masculinity or ethnicity? Did his films change or reinforce the ways East Asia had been imagined in America and Europe? Does he exemplify cosmopolitan mixture or ethnic specificity? Was he an entrepreneurial individualist fighting his way to the top of a competitive marketplace for celebrity, or is he a countercultural 'Third World Warrior'? Was he the martial artist who did away with 'classical mess', or an expert whose brilliance was built on thousands of hours of traditional form practice during his early studies? ... In this regard, Lee has taken on for fans and interpreters alike something of the quality of scripture, which is always, of course, selectively read. [White 2018]

As near as I can tell, the question there about whether or not Bruce Lee was an 'individualist fighting his way to the top' has as its reference point my presentation at the conference, which was entitled 'Dragon Seeks Path: Bruce Lee and the Way of Perfectionism' [Barrowman 2018a]. As described by White, my presentation was 'striking' not merely for the way that it endeavored to steer the conversations to be had about Bruce Lee 'away from the concerns of the left-liberal scholarship that dominates' academia generally and academic investigations of Bruce Lee specifically, but, more pointedly, for the

way that it 'problematize[d] the "countercultural" Bruce Lee in whom many [fans and scholars] are invested' [White 2018]. Indeed, as I stated very clearly at the start of my presentation, my overriding intention was to steer the conversations to be had about Bruce Lee and his many legacies into what I hoped would be unfamiliar and uncharted territory – and not merely for novelty's sake, but precisely as a corrective to the selective reading problem rightly identified by White.

The specific territory into which I took my presentation was the philosophical territory that Stanley Cavell spent the latter portion of his career exploring and to which he gave the name *perfectionism*.¹ As traced by Cavell, the perfectionist lineage runs throughout the history of Western philosophy, from Plato and Aristotle through John Locke and John Stuart Mill all the way up through (most saliently for Cavell) Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau [see Cavell 2004]. In my own work, I have added to this list Ayn Rand and her philosophy of Objectivism [see Barrowman 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d]. Obviously, for academics invested in left-liberal (to say nothing of Marxist/communist/socialist) idea(l)s, the very mention of Rand, if not also Emerson, will set off any number of alarm bells for any number of reasons.² While it is worth having conversations about how and why mentioning Rand and/or Emerson sets off so many academic alarm

1 For more elaborate discussions of the concept and the lineage of perfectionism, see Cavell [1972/1981; 1989; 1990; 2003; 2004; 2005].

2 Relevant to this point is an observation once made by the American political commentator Ben Shapiro, who rightly observed the sad fact that, in any given university course, the chances are that, if you want to do well in the course, 'citing Ayn Rand probably [will not be] the best strategy' [Shapiro 2013: 30]; in a similar vein, on an episode of the political talk show **The Rubin Report** for which Dave Rubin had on as his guest Yaron Brook, the present Chairman of the Board at the Ayn Rand Institute, Rubin observed how 'just by saying "Ayn Rand" a certain percentage of people go bonkers' [Rubin in Rubin and Brook 2016]. Speaking from personal experience, devoting a PhD to Rand's philosophy of Objectivism was not without its hurdles, including being told at one point very straightforwardly by a remarkably uninformed academic that it seemed to him that using 'her "philosophy" (and I purposely use inverted commas here) is ... akin to using the statements of, say, Woody Allen or Jerry Bruckheimer as [one's philosophical] bedrock'. These sentiments reflect what might be called the 'reception' of Rand in academia, though I think that 'repression' would be more accurate. Yet, what I find most interesting about this is how, in the responses (as ignorant as they are vitriolic) with which the mere mention of Ayn Rand tends to be met, this academic repression of Rand replicates that which Cavell found with respect to what he diagnosed as the longstanding academic repression of Emerson. To Cavell's mind vis-à-vis Emerson – and I would argue that the same holds true vis-à-vis Rand – 'it does not follow from [Emerson's and Rand's] institutionalized silencing that [they] failed to raise the call for philosophy'; on the contrary, 'the fact of [their] call's repression would be the sign that it has been heard' [Cavell 1995: 210].

bells, the important question to ask in the present context has nothing to do with politics, at least not principally. Rather, it has to do with Bruce Lee, and it can be formulated as follows: Can one actually make a plausible case for Bruce Lee's philosophical writings having a profound affinity with the philosophical writings of such arch-individualists as Emerson and Rand?

In my presentation, I tried to make such a case with reference to Lee's film work, and to *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) in particular [Barrowman 2018a]. In this essay, I will try to make the case with reference to Lee's martial arts writings, and to his articulation of the principles of jeet kune do in 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' [1971a] in particular. In the course of making my case for a perfectionist Bruce Lee, I will have occasion to confront 'another' Bruce Lee, namely the one who emerges in the groundbreaking work of Paul Bowman.³ Ahead of this confrontation, I would like to acknowledge the uniqueness of my position and the dilemma with which I am presented, which, having in mind Jacques Derrida's critique of Michel Foucault, I will refer to as *the disciple's dilemma*:

Having formerly had the good fortune to study under Michel Foucault, I retain the consciousness of an admiring and grateful disciple. Now, the disciple's consciousness, when he starts, I would not say to dispute, but to engage in dialogue with, the master, or, better, to articulate the interminable and silent dialogue which made him into a disciple – this disciple's consciousness is an unhappy consciousness. Starting to enter into dialogue in the world, that is, starting to answer back, he always feels 'caught in the act', like the 'infant' who, by definition and as his name indicates, cannot speak and above all must not answer back. And when, as is the case here, the dialogue is in danger of being taken – incorrectly – as a challenge, the disciple knows that he alone finds himself

³ To date, all my dealings with Bruce Lee have also featured dealings with Bowman's work on Lee [Barrowman 2012; 2013b; 2014a; 2014b]. Though he is often my whipping boy of choice, this should not imply my harboring towards Bowman any sort of hostility or antipathy. On the contrary, my relationship with Bowman's work is akin to the relationship Noël Carroll confessed to having with the work of Monroe Beardsley: 'My use of Monroe Beardsley ... as my leading foil also shows the influence of George Dickie, since it was Dickie who taught me always to consult Beardsley's work for the most worked-out and authoritative position on any subject in aesthetics, even if, in the end, I wound up criticizing it. There are more ways than one to stand on the shoulders of giants' [Carroll 2001: 2]. Analogously, I always find myself consulting Bowman's work for the most worked-out and authoritative positions on any subject pertaining to Bruce Lee, even if, in the end, I often wind up criticizing it.

already challenged by the master's voice within him that precedes his own ... The disciple must break the glass, or, better, the mirror, the reflection, his infinite speculation on the master. And start to speak.
[Derrida 1964: 36-37]

Having spent the better part of a decade in a virtual dialogue with Bowman via his writings on Bruce Lee – not to mention three years in an actual dialogue with Bowman as my PhD supervisor at Cardiff University – that to which Derrida is here giving voice is relevant insofar as I do retain the consciousness of an admiring and grateful disciple and have for many years been equally inspired and challenged by Bowman's voice within me as I have thought about and written about Bruce Lee. However, I must distinguish my own dilemma from Derrida's in two important ways. First, unlike Derrida, speaking does not frighten me, nor do I think that it should be conceived of as frightening [Derrida 1963: 9; cf. Barrowman 2017: 168-182, esp. 175-176]. Second, the virtual and actual dialogues into which I have entered with Bowman and his work absolutely take the form of, and are intended to be, a challenge, though, importantly, a challenge to myself as much as, if not more than, anyone else, Bowman included.

Across multiple publications, I have encouraged scholars – in light of what I will demonstrate over the course of this essay is the fundamental philosophical gesture of jeet kune do – to conceive of scholarly discussions as confrontations in which, in addition to confronting an interlocutor, scholars are also confronting themselves, in which they are subjecting to scrutiny their own potentially longstanding, even cherished, premises and presuppositions [see Barrowman 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014a; 2015; 2017; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2019a].⁴

In keeping with this theme, my challenge in this essay will be to argue for what I have conceived of as a perfectionist Bruce Lee over and against that which Bowman has conceived of as a poststructuralist Bruce Lee, but to do so with respect as the foundation, honesty as the touchstone, and (self-)knowledge as the goal of the confrontation. With any luck, this confrontation may serve to exemplify not only a responsible investigation of the philosophical underpinnings of jeet

⁴ As the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget observed: 'Anyone who thinks for himself exclusively and is consequently in a perpetual state of belief, i.e. of confidence in his own ideas, will naturally not trouble himself about the reasons and motives which have guided his reasoning process. Only under the pressure of argument and opposition will he seek to justify himself in the eyes of others and thus acquire the habit of watching himself think, i.e. of constantly detecting the motives which are guiding him in the direction he is pursuing' [Piaget 1928/2002: 137].

kune do which does not succumb to the selective reading problem identified by White, but also the types of dialogues and debates that are still to be had in martial arts studies and in academia more broadly.⁵ Indeed, I hope to put into practice the theory of *alterdisciplinarity* which has served as the motor in Bowman's own work in/on martial arts studies [Bowman 2015; 2019]. To the extent that my endeavor in this essay is predicated on the intention to alter the ways that scholars think – principally about Bruce Lee but also, secondarily, about martial arts studies – my first order of business, prior to running headlong into a discussion of Bruce Lee, will be to consider in greater detail the philosophical scope of my endeavor vis-à-vis alterdisciplinarity.

ALTERDISCIPLINARITY WHOSE INTERVENTION IS IT ANYWAY?

The concept of alterdisciplinarity was first articulated by Bowman in a 2008 essay [Bowman 2008a] and then elaborated in his book *Deconstructing Popular Culture* [Bowman 2008b]. Inspired, broadly speaking, by Jacques Derrida and certain tenets of deconstruction [see Derrida 1967/1997, 1972/1981, 1992/1995a, 1992, 1996/1998, 1997/2001], political theorists such as Ernesto Laclau [Laclau 1977, 1990, 1996a, 1996b; Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2001; Laclau, Butler, Žižek 2000] and Jacques Rancière [1987/1991, 1995/1999], and the critiques of institutions and disciplines provided by the likes of Samuel Weber [1987/2001] and John Mowitt [1992] respectively, Bowman conceived of alterdisciplinarity as the epistemologically and ethically ideal form of academic intervention.

Born of twin dissatisfactions – first, dissatisfaction with the ossified conception of 'critique' that he identified as subtending most work done in the humanities and the social sciences, and second, dissatisfaction with cultural studies and the inability of its scholars to supplant the ossified conception of critique with a new mode of intervention that was sounder epistemologically, superior ethically, and more effective politically – the concept of alterdisciplinarity signals the need for checks and balances at the institutional level to guard against the pathologizing of hierarchies and for relentlessly honest introspection at the individual level to guard against the sedimentation of dogma. This is the 'inward' direction of alterdisciplinarity; it is Bowman encouraging scholars to look inward and, on both institutional and individual levels, 'to re-examine and to be prepared to retheorise ... in order to try to avoid becoming dogmatic stalwarts' [Bowman 2008a: 95].

The lion's share of Bowman's attention, however, is devoted to the

5 For another debate in this vein, in which questions and issues crucial to the ongoing evolution of martial arts studies arose, see the debate between Alex Channon and I on violence and MMA [Barrowman and Channon 2018].

'outward' direction of alterdisciplinarity. Insofar as 'the academic "condition" is one of unavoidably heterogeneous language games in a web of disciplinary differences' which have produced 'disciplinary enclaving, mutual unintelligibility, and disarticulation' [Bowman 2008a: 93], the issue with which scholars who are keen to affect change in academia are faced is 'one of establishing the conditions of possibility for intervention into' a given disciplinary space. In other words, it is one of establishing how a given scholar, from 'outside', can get on the 'inside' of a given disciplinary space and, once inside, navigate the 'foreign' language games therein to affect real and lasting change [Bowman 2008a: 105].

To his credit, even though he acknowledges that no alterdisciplinarity endeavor 'will [ever] be easy' [Bowman 2008a: 105], in addition to articulating the goal of alterdisciplinarity, Bowman also outlines the means of achieving it. Emphatically, Bowman stresses the need to reject the 'narcissistically assumed relation' between *calling for* change and actually *enacting* change. As he soberly avers, 'calls can fall on deaf ears, be drowned out, unheard, misunderstood, ridiculed, or ignored' [Bowman 2008a: 99; see also McQuillan 2001]. What emerges in the place of such narcissism is something like what Cavell would have called a 'claim to community'.⁶ Given the depth of his insights and their importance, I will quote Bowman's own words on what constitutes alterdisciplinarity and how to properly conceptualize alterdisciplinarity intervention before proceeding further:

Rather than critique from a distance ('we here' critiquing 'them there'), perhaps it would be better to move in, close the gap, and join with the other ... Whether carried out in the pages of cultural studies journals or in broadsheets or on high-brow talkshows, critique does not change the status of those involved from simply being dismissible as busy-bodies, from elsewhere, busy-bodies that do not matter. Instead of this, my suggestion is that what 'we' now need to overcome is precisely the compulsion to repeat the gesture of critiquing the other (*as other*) – and that we need to do this with the aim of inventing a [new] kind of critique ... The aim, [in other words], is to intervene *directly*, 'there' – namely, within the very academic contexts wherein 'that' knowledge is produced

6 I have in mind here the following passage from Cavell: 'The philosophical appeal to what we say, and the search for our criteria on the basis of which we say what we say, are claims to community. And the claim to community is always a search for the basis upon which it can or has been established. I have nothing more to go on than my conviction, my sense that I make sense. It may prove to be the case that I am wrong, that my conviction isolates me, from all others, from myself. That will not be the same as a discovery that I am dogmatic or egomaniacal [for] the wish and search for community is the wish and search for reason' [Cavell 1979: 20; see also Barrowman 2015; 2018b: 199-203].

and legitimated ... [For example,] if one's object of concern is with, say, the deleterious ethical or cultural consequences of, say, managerialism or economic or educational policy, then one's preliminary task would be to ascertain the disciplinary and institutional sites of the production and legitimation of the knowledge and rationales to which reference and appeal is made in the organisation of micro- or macro-policy implementation ... This linguistic and conceptual abyss can be bridged only through mastery of the other(s) criteria, the other(s) language, the other(s) logic, in the other(s) 'context'. Thus, the point is precisely to intervene into and to alter *other* disciplinary discourses and their productions (knowledges) not by critiquing them but by intervening into the disciplinary spaces of their production and legitimation – that is: getting inside knowledge, undoing methodologies, and arguing in the other's language for other conclusions ... To publish within one's own well-institutionalised field is not to have intervened into anything other than that field. Of course, if that's what you want to alter or contribute to, then fine (as here). But all faux-radical pseudo-political tub-thumping and soap-box pontificating should be recognised for what it is. Rather than this, what is required is to move with the other's moves, to analyse, read, 'connect' with, and deconstruct their connections in *their* language in order to make critiques that 'make sense' *there*, where making new sense might reorient *that*. [Bowman 2008a: 104-106]

Bowman's articulation of alterdisciplinarity is commendable on multiple counts. Not only is his conviction admirable, the clarity and the strength of his convictions are expressed brilliantly and persuasively. This is not to imply, however, that there are no problems attendant to the notion/practice of alterdisciplinarity. On the contrary, there are several problems that jump out immediately.

First and foremost, Bowman's conception of alterdisciplinarity is optimistic to the point of naivete; it necessarily assumes on the parts of journal editors, editorial boards, publishers, etc., an honorable willingness to welcome all voices and all arguments with no regard for their own (real or imagined) institutional/ideological legitimacy. There are any number of instances ready to hand capable of bursting this bubble. To take an example from the history of my 'home base' discipline of film studies, I can recall the controversy subsequent to Noël Carroll's publication of *Mystifying Movies: Fads & Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* [1988]. Carroll's book featured extensive and powerful critiques of Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva, among others, as well as the theoretical orthodoxy based on their work which was instituted primarily through the efforts of the influential British film journal *Screen* and which was often

referred to as 'Screen Theory'. Upon its publication, *Screen* published a thoroughgoing refutation of the ideas and arguments in *Mystifying Movies* written by Warren Buckland [1989], yet they refused to publish a response from Carroll in defense of his ideas and arguments. As Carroll ended up writing in his response, which was ultimately published in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 'whether *Screen* rejected [his response] as a result of a judgment that it [did] not sufficiently address significant methodological issues or as an attempt to repress alternative voices in the predictably Stalinist manner of Lysenko is a question for the reader to resolve' [Carroll 1992: 199].

In short, Bowman underestimates the machinations of academic institutions to the detriment of his conception of alterdisciplinarity. But we can table the issue of publication politics for the time being – especially since martial arts studies has admirably operated with the academic equivalent of an open-door policy, welcoming and encouraging virtually all scholarship provided that it features a genuine engagement with the problems and possibilities of the field.

An even deeper and more pressing problem is traceable to the idea, expressed by Derrida and quoted by Bowman, that 'there is no metalanguage, no locus of truth outside [of a given] field, no absolute and ahistorical overhang; and this absence of overhang – in other words, the radical historicity of [any given] field – makes [every] field necessarily subject to multiplicity and heterogeneity' [Derrida 1997/2001: 12; cf. Bowman 2008a: 96]. I have called the argument that logically follows the postulation that there is no metalanguage *the paradigm subjectivity argument* and I have critiqued it extensively elsewhere [see Barrowman 2018b: 176-177; 2019a: 20-21]. I will have occasion later in this essay to return to the paradigm subjectivity argument, but I am bringing it up here because it is a key component in Bowman's articulation of alterdisciplinarity, and the effect that it has on the coherence of his argument provides a useful initial example of how all arguments rooted in poststructuralism inevitably terminate at a logical dead end.

Since two of the fundamental presuppositions of poststructuralism are that the concept of objectivity is an illusion and that the corollary concept of truth is a 'metaphysical' (in the pejorative Derridean sense of the term) concept deployed exclusively by repressive power regimes, ideologically nefarious 'scientific' (or 'pseudo-scientific', or 'scientistic', or what have you) discourses keen to 'hegemonize' knowledge, etc. [cf. Bowman 2007: 10-25], there obviously *cannot* be a metalanguage, there *cannot* be a locus of truth outside of a given field, for, if there were, if it were possible for two people from different disciplines informed by different paradigms to effectively communicate their apprehensions of reality and correctly determine their objective validity or lack thereof, then the wheels of poststructuralism would instantly grind

to a halt. Moreover, since another fundamental presupposition of poststructuralism is that, at bottom, the motive force which subtends existence is power, any and every field is encumbered by an 'irreducible *polemos*', and 'those who are inscribed in [a given] field are necessarily inscribed in a *polemos*' [Derrida 1997/2001: 12]. Yet, for a final turn of the screw, another key component in Bowman's articulation of alterdisciplinarity is the postulation that alterdisciplinary interventions 'will be all the better the further [they are] from appearing to be polemical denunciation' [Bowman 2008a: 105; see also Bowman 2007: 79-80].

Try as he might, Bowman cannot have his alterdisciplinary cake and eat it. Something has got to give: *Either* all (inter/alter)disciplinary endeavors are necessarily/irreducibly/inextricably inscribed in *polemos*, per Derrida, which means that it is not possible for an (inter/alter) disciplinary intervention to take the form of anything *other* than polemical warfare, *or* all (inter/alter)disciplinary endeavors are *not* necessarily/irreducibly/inextricably inscribed in *polemos*, which means that it *is* possible for an (inter/alter)disciplinary intervention to take the form of something other than polemical warfare.

The question is: Can Bowman refute a claim made by Derrida? This is a frequent problem for poststructuralists. To the extent that the writings of such authorities as Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, etc., are treated like Holy Scripture, poststructuralists are as a rule incapable of refuting the claims or revising the arguments of their chosen deities.⁷ Worse still, even if Bowman were able to simply and straightforwardly reject Derrida's position on (inter/alter)disciplinary activity as necessarily/irreducibly/inextricably polemical, there is still the metalanguage problem. If there is no metalanguage, if there is no locus of truth beyond the confines of a particular discipline to which scholars, both disciplinary insiders and outsiders alike, can refer, then *all that remains* is *polemos*.

In sum, Bowman is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. Once again, something has got to give: *Either* there *is* a locus of truth beyond the confines of a particular discipline to which scholars, both disciplinary insiders and outsiders alike, can refer, thereby grounding (inter/alter)disciplinary discussion and obviating the need for polemics, *or* there is *not* a locus of truth beyond the confines of a particular discipline to which scholars, both disciplinary insiders and outsiders

7 This phenomenon was pointed up long ago by Robin Wood in the course of a mordant critique of poststructuralism: 'It is precisely the phenomenon of unquestioning acceptance – the illusory and misguided search for an oracle who reveals "truth" – that I have always profoundly mistrusted in the [poststructuralist] tradition ... The sense of Divine Revelation ... [and] the parade of gods – Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida – has become embarrassing' [Wood (1988) 1988/2002: 8].

alike, can refer, which means that all (inter/alter)disciplinary discussion is a groundless Hobbesian war of all against all fueled solely by a quasi-Nietzschean Will to Power.

Near the end of his articulation of alterdisciplinarity, Bowman uses a point made by Wittgenstein – 'Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic' [Wittgenstein 1951/1969: 81e] – to illustrate what happens when discussions across disciplinary divides and paradigm allegiances are initiated in disregard of the principles of alterdisciplinarity. To the extent that Bowman allowed his conception of alterdisciplinarity to be informed – or, more accurately, *corrupted* – by poststructuralism, the Wittgensteinian scenario of mutual unintelligibility and dismissal is the *best* possible outcome that he can hope for; the *worst* possible outcome is all-out Hobbesian war resultant from the perversely Babel-esque communicative confoundment which poststructuralism regards as axiomatic and insuperable.⁸

To begin to articulate a way out of this poststructuralist deadlock, consider this problematic from the perspective of Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, which, contra poststructuralism, is predicated on the acknowledgment of objective reality and the existence of a locus of truth beyond the confines of a given discipline:

If a man believes that [issues of right/wrong, good/bad, just/unjust, etc., are merely] matter[s] of arbitrary, subjective choice, [then any and every one of those issues] becomes, for him, an issue of: *my* feelings or *theirs*? No bridge, understanding, or communication is possible to him. Reason is the only means of communication among men, and an objectively perceivable reality is their only common frame of reference; when these are invalidated ... [then] force becomes men's only way of dealing with one another.
[Rand (1965) 1967: 22-23]

Poststructuralists always bridle when saddled with the charges of promoting relativism and relying on performative contradictions to carry off self-refuting arguments – even when their arguments explicitly advocate 'subvert[ing] the notion of objectivity and challeng[ing] the authority of discourses claiming to be objective' in light of the (objective?) fact that objectivity is (objectively?) 'not naturally occurring but is rather something that [must allegedly be] *forcefully established*' [Bowman 2007: 20]. But when objectivity is declared an illusion and truth is declared an ideological construct then relativism is the only game left in town and performative contradiction is the name of the game.

8 To wit, Barthes spoke jubilantly about the 'pleasure of [a] sanctioned Babel' [Barthes 1973/1975: 4].

This is why I have argued elsewhere that, in every poststructuralist argument, it is only a matter of time before the poststructuralist in question writes himself into a corner, and that, as a consequence, it is therefore only a matter of time before that same poststructuralist avails himself of the logical fallacies of *concept stealing*, *package dealing*, and *context dropping* in his last-ditch attempts to extricate himself from that corner and slip out the backdoor of his self-refuting argument.⁹ The first step towards proper alterdisciplinary scholarship, then, is to refuse to countenance performative contradictions or to confer rationality onto self-refuting arguments. Bowman believed that the first of the many problems that he would be able to solve with his conception of alterdisciplinarity would be the ‘regression’ of academic discussions ‘from poststructuralist-informed theories’ [Bowman 2008a: 93]. Contrariwise, I have tried to demonstrate in this section that poststructuralism is incapable of solving *any* problems because *poststructuralism is one of the problems*.

Obviously, then, the next step towards proper alterdisciplinary scholarship is to transcend the limits of poststructuralism due to the preponderance therein of performative contradictions and self-refuting arguments. To do this, scholars must be able to acknowledge that there is an objectively perceivable reality that serves as our common frame of reference, after which they must be able to acknowledge that *we are* capable of communicating across disciplinary divides and paradigm allegiances with reference to the locus of truth beyond the confines of our respective disciplines and paradigms. The catch here is that a certain degree of alteration is prerequisite to grasping the fecundity of alterdisciplinarity; that is to say, in order for a given scholar to take even one of these steps, he must already be of a certain moral fiber, he must already have the courage, as Bowman himself acknowledged, to ‘relinquish [his] comfortable disciplinary identity’:

Rather than disciplined repetition, [alterdisciplinarity] requires yielding to the other discourse, the other protocols, the other language, the other scene, through a renewed emphasis on listening *to*, engaging *with*, connecting *with* the other, on other terms ... [In other words, it requires] taking the notion of interdisciplinary dialogue *seriously*, rather than relying [misguidedly] on the enclave comfort of ‘our spaces’. [Bowman 2008a: 106]

Funny enough, having previously characterized Bowman’s conception of alterdisciplinarity as optimistic to the point of naivete, I find myself

9 These three fallacies were identified by Rand and I have demonstrated their ubiquity across poststructuralism in several other publications [see Barrowman 2017, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a].

wondering now, as I prepare to commence efforts to alter the ways that scholars think about Bruce Lee, martial arts, and martial arts studies, if that was not a case of the pot calling the kettle black.¹⁰ It should be clear from this section that, in spite of the problems that I have with Bowman’s articulation of alterdisciplinarity vis-à-vis poststructuralism, I consider the concept and practice of alterdisciplinarity to be a powerful reconceptualization of academic intervention. It should also be clear that commitment to alterdisciplinarity requires, in a Cavellian register, a considerable amount of courage: To make a claim to community requires a willingness to suffer charges of naivete, foolishness, dogmatism, unprofessionalism, truculence, and any and all other conceivable charges, in the hopes of inspiring alterdisciplinary discussions. Having said that, I will now open myself up to such charges in an attempt to create an alterdisciplinary space in which to discuss fundamental concepts and principles in martial arts studies generally and the study of Bruce Lee specifically, and I will begin with the concept of perfectionism.

PERFECTIONISM IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

To say that the number of Bruce Lee biographies and documentaries in existence is staggering would be a considerable understatement. Given Lee’s proliferation over the last half-century across every conceivable print and digital medium, I have no intention in this essay of chronicling Lee’s life and times.¹¹ Instead, I will concern myself exclusively with uncovering the perfectionist ethos at the core of Lee’s philosophical enterprise. As many biographers and scholars have observed, much of Lee’s philosophical efforts consisted of working his way through the ideas of famous thinkers, from Plato and Descartes to Carl Rogers and Alan Watts, as well as ideas from Taoism and

10 Interestingly, I think that it would be quite easy to make the case that alterdisciplinarity is in a profound sense fueled by a perfectionist ethos, in which case it would not be inaccurate to say either (a) that poststructuralism creates problems for Bowman’s articulation of alterdisciplinarity because alterdisciplinarity is essentially perfectionist and poststructuralism is anathema to perfectionism or (b) that I disagree with Bowman’s poststructuralist positioning because poststructuralism is anathema to perfectionism. The veracity of these claims will be borne out in the following two sections.

11 Especially since Matthew Polly has recently done all of us Bruce Lee fans and scholars the enormous favor of providing the definitive chronicle of Lee’s life to which we can refer [Polly 2018]. Additionally, for a more philosophically-focused chronicle, see John Little [2001]. As for documentaries, I have in mind chiefly **The Curse of the Dragon** (1993) and **Bruce Lee: A Warrior’s Journey** (2000).

Confucianism to Buddhism and Zen.¹² In extant philosophical exegeses of Lee's writings, his indebtedness to Eastern philosophy has been the primary area of focus for biographers and scholars alike. As a corrective to this overemphasis on Lee's inheritance of Eastern philosophy, I would like to balance the philosophical scales a bit and focus on Lee's affinities with Western philosophy, in particular on his position in a long line of perfectionist philosophers.¹³

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Cavell has traced a perfectionist lineage that spans the history of Western philosophy. Though Cavell considers Plato's *Republic* to be the first real 'portrait' of perfectionism [Cavell 2004: 317], it was Aristotle who articulated, explicitly and comprehensively, the first proper philosophy of perfectionism. With reference to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cavell asks, 'Who could put the general issue of perfectionism more strongly, or with deeper reference to what is central in philosophizing at large, than Aristotle's saying "we are in so far as we are actualized, since we are in so far as we live and act"?' [Cavell 2004: 352]; as he expounds, 'Aristotle emphasizes myself, this individual, the development of my character, as the touchstone of goodness and rightness – so forcefully and continuously that some [such as, most notably and pertinently in the present context, Rand] have found his theory to be an ethics of selfishness' [Cavell 2004: 357; see also Rand 1964]. Elsewhere, I have posited an essential connection between Rand's (primarily Aristotelian) conception of perfectionism and Cavell's (primarily Emersonian) conception of perfectionism [e.g. Barrowman 2018a; 2018b]. That connection is discernible here, on this point regarding the importance in perfectionist philosophy of individualism, of self-reliance, and of self-actualization in the quest for, in Emerson's phrasing, one's 'unattained but attainable self' [Emerson 1841a: 125].

Emerson, of course, was vociferous in his emphasis on self-reliance and the sovereignty of the individual. In a distinctly Aristotelian register vis-à-vis the development of one's self as one's empyrean task, Emerson proclaimed:

12 For more on Lee's broad philosophical dealings, see, among many others, Bruce Thomas [1994/2002], Little [2001], Daniele Bolelli [2003/2008], James Bishop [2004], and Bowman [2010a; 2013].

13 Obviously, my distinction between Eastern and Western philosophy is not meant to be mutually exclusive or to conjure up an unbridgeable gulf, especially since a large part of Lee's endeavor was to facilitate communication across and understanding between such divides. For intriguing discussions of important shared traditions and 'archetypes' between these two traditions, see Carl Jung [1969; 1991] and Joseph Campbell [1949/2004]. As for Lee's perfectionist position between East and West, see Barrowman [2019b].

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion ... I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the doorpost – *Whim*. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation.
[Emerson 1841b: 148-149]

Another interesting Aristotelian notion evident in Emerson's work is the notion of *character*. Cavell observes that, for Aristotle, it is 'as if each thing that exists is striving to become what it is, to realize itself' [Cavell 2004: 313].¹⁴ Emerson glosses this idea in the following manner:

A character is like an acrostic or Alexandrian stanza; read it forward, backward, or across, it still spells the same thing ... Let me record day by day my honest thought without prospect or retrospect, and, I cannot doubt, it will be found symmetrical,

14 Though I will expound on Lee's position in this perfectionist matrix in the next section, I think that it is worth pointing out here that Carl Rogers, one of the most profound influences on Lee's thinking [see Little 1999: 70; Bishop 2004: 96, 185; and Polly 2018: 108], made a similar observation, albeit in more explicitly scientific terms: 'The individual has within himself the capacity and the tendency, latent if not evident, to move forward toward maturity ... Whether one calls it a growth tendency, a drive toward self-actualization, or a forward-moving directional tendency, it is the mainspring of life ... It is the urge which is evident in all organic and human life – to expand, extend, become autonomous, develop, mature – the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism to the extent that such activation enhances the organism or the self' [Rogers 1961: 35]. Brian Thorne, meanwhile, adds that it was important to Rogers to acknowledge that his notion of an actualizing 'drive' was the opposite of unique; it was obvious to the point of self-evidence. As Thorne explains, conceptions of this 'drive' are evident 'through all of [Abraham] Maslow's writings [as well as] in the work of biologists such as [Albert] Szent-Györgyi, who concluded that there is definitely a drive to perfection in all living matter' [Thorne 1992/2003: 27]. Bishop was the first person (to my knowledge, at least) to connect these particular intellectual dots vis-à-vis Bruce Lee, and, after doing so, he concluded that Lee's interest in self-actualization was 'a simple realization of [the] truth of organismic development' [Bishop 2004: 95]. Of course, this leaves open to investigation the role of **volition** in human being and its importance in **activating** this drive. Though a discussion of the centrality of volition in human being is beyond the scope of this essay, see, for useful discussions in the context of Objectivism, Rand [1957], David Kelley [1990/2000], Leonard Peikoff [1991], Chris Matthew Sciabarra [1995/2013], Allan Gotthelf [2000], Neil K. Goodell [2007], Lachlan Doughney [2012], Roger E. Bissell [2015], and, for my own take, Barrowman [2018a; 2018d: 14-20].

though I mean it not and see it not ... [for] character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.
[Emerson 1841b: 152]

This is, like much of Emerson's writing, a deceptively dense passage that requires a bit of unpacking. It may appear that Emerson considers each individual *fated* to a given character from which he cannot escape and which he is powerless to change. By and large, because certain people 'do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment' – that is to say, because certain people delude themselves into believing that they are capable of pulling a fast one on reality and of getting away with being irrational, immoral, weak, (self-)destructive, etc. – it may *seem* as if they are fated to a given character.¹⁵ Due to this grave error, such people will never so much as begin the work of *changing* their character.¹⁶ Emerson articulates the way out of this deadlock in his felicitously-titled essay 'Fate':

Forever wells up the impulse of choosing and acting in the soul. Intellect annuls fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free ... 'Tis weak and vicious people who cast the blame on Fate ... 'Tis the best use of Fate to teach a fatal courage. Go face the fire at sea, or the cholera in your friend's house, or the burglar in your own, or what danger lies in the way of duty, knowing you are guarded by the cherubim of Destiny. If you believe in Fate to your harm, believe it [instead] for your good.
[Emerson 1860: 27-29]¹⁷

15 As Jordan B. Peterson has put it (with reference to Jung): 'Any internal state of contradiction, unrecognized, will be played out in the world as fate' [Peterson 1999: 347]. Commenting on this sense of the 'fatedness' of character, Rand once recalled a friend's remark to her to the effect that 'today's attitude, paraphrasing the Bible, is: "Forgive me, Father, for I know not what I'm doing...and please don't tell me"' [Rand 1960: 59].

16 In a similar, but more sympathetic, vein as the remark of Rand's friend cited in the previous note, Eric Hoffer, another one of the most profound influences on Lee (indeed, so taken with Hoffer's writings was Lee that, beyond merely jotting down notes, he would transcribe entire paragraphs from Hoffer's work verbatim – transcriptions which were then, unfortunately, published as if Lee's own words, as in, for example, Lee [1975: 205-207] and Little [1999: 240-244]), observed: 'To become different from what we are, we must have some awareness of what we are. Whether this being different results in dissimulation or a real change of heart, it cannot be realized without self-awareness. Yet, it is remarkable that the very people who are most self-dissatisfied and crave most for a new identity have the least self-awareness. They have turned away from an unwanted self and hence never had a good look at it. The result is that the most dissatisfied can neither dissimulate nor attain a real change of heart' [Hoffer 1954: 93].

17 As if this quote is not serendipitous enough, I would like to point out that, as detailed by Polly, the infant Lee survived the cholera outbreak that was 'ravaging' Hong Kong at the time [Polly 2018: 24].

Far from condemning people to their lot in life – and thereby absolving people of their responsibility to actualize themselves and seek their unattained but attainable selves – Emerson encourages a perspectival shift from pessimism to optimism according to which what human beings are 'fated' to do, if we are 'fated' to do anything, is to commit ourselves to being as intelligent and as virtuous as we can possibly be.¹⁸

In philosophical terms, this is merely one of the many remarkable affinities between Rand and Emerson; however, despite their many affinities, Objectivists would likely bridle at this pairing given Rand's professed antipathy towards Emerson. In addition to unpacking Emerson's position on self-reliance and self-actualization and demonstrating its many affinities with Objectivism, I must also right a longstanding wrong within Objectivist circles vis-à-vis Emerson the source of which is Rand herself. Over the course of a denunciation of a number of what she found to be deleterious philosophical notions polluting ordinary life, Rand referred to Emerson's line in 'Self-Reliance' about how 'consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds' [Emerson 1841b: 152] and denounced Emerson as 'a very little mind' [Rand 1974a: 5].¹⁹ The full passage from 'Self-Reliance' from which that extract was taken runs as follows:

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today ... There will be an agreement in whatever variety of actions, so they be each honest and natural in their hour. For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem. These varieties are lost sight of at a little distance, at a little height of thought. One tendency unites them all. The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself and will explain your other genuine actions.
[Emerson 1841b: 152-153]

18 Echoing Emerson on this point, Peterson has poignantly and provocatively asked: 'What if it was nothing but our self-deceit, our cowardice, hatred, and fear, that pollutes our experience and turns the world into hell? This is a hypothesis, at least – as good as any other, admirable and capable of generating hope. Why can't we make the experiment, and find out if it is true?' [Peterson 1999: 469].

19 For an intelligent (though, to my mind, still mistaken) defense of Rand's denunciation of Emerson, see Richard Lawrence [1999].

It is plainly evident in this passage that Emerson's problem is not with consistency *as such* but with *foolish* consistency. Rand was understandably perturbed by what appeared to be an indifference to, even a welcoming of, contradiction, but she and Emerson were on the same page vis-à-vis self-actualization. When Emerson says 'let me record day by day my honest thought without prospect or retrospect, and, I cannot doubt, it will be found symmetrical, though I mean it not and see it not', his point is that concerning oneself with one's 'shadow on the wall' will only hinder one's progress towards one's unattained but attainable self, whereas a commitment to self-actualization fueled by 'genuine action' will invariably yield a different, higher order consistency.²⁰ On this point regarding genuine action, Rand is in perfect harmony with Emersonian perfectionism:

Live and act within the limit of your knowledge and keep expanding it to the limit of your life. Redeem your mind from the hockshops of authority. Accept the fact that you are not omniscient, but playing a zombie will not give you omniscience; that your mind is fallible, but becoming mindless will not make you infallible; that an error made on your own is safer than ten truths accepted on faith, because the first leaves you the means to correct it [whereas] the second destroys your capacity to distinguish truth from error. In place of your dream of an omniscient automaton, accept the fact that any knowledge man acquires is acquired by his own will and effort, and that *that* is his distinction in the universe, *that* is his nature, his morality, his glory. Discard that unlimited license to evil which consists of claiming that man is imperfect. By what standard do you damn him when you claim it? ... Man has a single basic choice – to think or not – and *that* is the gauge of his virtue. Moral perfection is an *unbreached rationality* – not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind; not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute.
[Rand 1957: 1058-1059]

20 Worth noting here is a certain Jungian homology vis-à-vis the notion of 'psychic death' [see Jung 1968, 1991; see also Campbell 1949/2004: 83-88; Peterson 2016: 02:12:52-02:15:15; 2017a: 00:03:28 - 00:06:07; 2017b: 02:14:15-02:17:14], which is profoundly captured in Cavell's pithy observation that 'knowledge of the self as it is always takes place in the betrayal of the self as it was' and that the pain entailed in this process is the reason that the perfectionist path is 'so rarely taken' [Cavell 1971/1979: 160; see also Cavell 1990: xxx-xxx].

PERFECTIONISM AND JEET KUNE DO

Having brought into alignment Rand and Aristotle on the one hand and Cavell and Emerson on the other, thereby establishing the most basic terms of perfectionism, the question that I must now answer is: Where does Bruce Lee stand? In attempting to answer this question, I think that the first point worth making is that the one thing about Lee that has never gone unremarked is his resolute individualism.

Bruce Thomas describes Lee's philosophy as 'a fierce philosophy of individualism' [Thomas 1994/2002: xi] in which Lee insists, in an Emersonian/Randian spirit, that 'self-mastery should be the goal of all human endeavor' [Thomas 1994/2002: xii]. Daniele Bolelli argues that, in his formulation of jeet kune do, 'Lee took the bull of group identity by the horns and challenged the sensibility of the human desire to belong'; 'too afraid to bear the weight of choosing on their own, many people hide behind the security of a group that provides all the answers. According to Lee, however, this is a way to hide, not a way to live' [Bolelli 2003/2008: 170-171]. James Bishop puts the point most succinctly when he observes that Lee 'seemed to be the type for whom the term "individual" was coined' [Bishop 2004: 1]. Lee himself, in his lifelong commitment to relentless introspection, often gave voice to an unmistakably perfectionist drive. In a letter written in 1962 (to Pearl Tso, his 'high school sweetheart' [Polly 2018: 66]), the at-the-time 21-year-old Lee wrote the following:

When you drop a pebble into a pool of water, the pebble starts a series of ripples that expand until they encompass the whole pool. This is exactly what will happen when I give my ideas a definite plan of action. Right now, I can project my thoughts into the future, I can see ahead of me. I dream (remember that practical dreamers never quit). I may now own nothing but a little place down in a basement, but ... I am not easily discouraged, readily visualize myself as overcoming obstacles, winning out over setbacks, achieving 'impossible' objectives ... I feel this great force, this untapped power, this dynamic something within me.
[Lee 1962: 249]

More than a decade later, Lee, reflecting on his journey now on the other side of success, reaffirmed, across a series of journal entries, that, 'ever since I was a kid, I have possessed within myself this instinctive urge for growth and daily expansion of my potential' [Lee 1973a: 226]; that, to his mind, 'the function and duty of a human being – a quality human being, that is ... is the sincere and honest development of his potential and "self-actualization"' [Lee 1973d: 237]; that 'there is no end or limit to this, because life is simply an ever-going process' [Lee 1973a: 227]; that he thought that the moral strength required 'to take

responsibility for one's actions, good and bad', was a strength that every individual must cultivate daily [Lee 1973b: 230]; that, for 'the lazy and hopeless, they can forget it and do what they like', but, for the self-reliant individual willing to shun the lazy and hopeless, he must learn to 'stand on his own two feet and find out his cause of ignorance' [Lee 1973a: 228]; and that, in his personal perfectionist quest, he was able to report a profound sense of accomplishment and fulfillment insofar as he was consistently 'growing, daily and honestly' [Lee 1973e: 238]. In Objectivist terms, this may be described as Lee's perfectionist *sense of life*; for his perfectionist *philosophy of life*, the most illuminating source is his essay 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate'.²¹

Certainly, the most philosophically sophisticated examinations to date of the terms of Lee's intervention in the discourses of martial arts study and practice have come from Paul Bowman. Given this fact – as well as, of equal importance, the fact that Bowman is a poststructuralist and has tried to make the case that Lee's philosophy has deep affinities with poststructuralism – my engagement with Lee's famous essay will be at once an explication of Lee's philosophy as well as a refutation of Bowman's poststructuralist engagement with it. I will discuss Lee's essay in relation to what I will demonstrate are its two main thrusts: First, a declaration of the sovereignty of the individual supported by a philosophical conception of martial arts study and practice that is resoundingly perfectionist, and second, a critique of 'classical' martial arts study and practice that runs along very similar lines to my own critique of what I have characterized as the paradigm subjectivity argument [Barrowman 2018b: 176-177; 2019a: 20-21].

Regarding the sovereignty of the individual, Lee begins his essay by proclaiming himself to be 'primarily concerned with the blossoming of a martial artist' [Lee 1971a: 25]. Recalling Bolelli's point about how Lee 'took the bull of group identity by the horns' and subjected it to critique, Lee elaborates that his conception of 'a martial artist' is 'not a "Chinese" martial artist or a "Japanese" martial artist'; to Lee, 'a martial artist is a human being first', and 'just as nationalities have nothing to do with one's humanity, so they have nothing to do with martial arts' [Lee 1971a: 25].²²

21 For discussions of Rand's conceptions of a sense of life versus a philosophy of life, see Rand [1969/1975: 15-19] and Barrowman [2018b: 198-199].

22 In one of his earlier drafts of this essay, Lee was even more dismissive, writing (in a discernably Krishnamurtian vein) that combat is 'definitely not dictated by your conditioning as a "Chinese" martial artist, a "Korean" martial artist, or "whatever" kind of martial artist you are' [Lee 1971b: 123; see also Krishnamurti 1962, 1967, 1977].

Right off the bat, it is clear that Lee would have had absolutely zero patience for contemporary identity politics, which, to him, would have represented precisely the type of 'mumbo jumbo' that he rejected as a pathetic 'protective shell' that prevents individuals from 'relat[ing] directly' to the world [Lee 1971a: 25].²³ In stark opposition to this problematic herd mentality, Lee ends his introduction with a virtual transcription of the creed of the protagonists in Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957): 'I seek neither your approval nor to influence you toward my way of thinking. I will be more than satisfied if, as a result of this article, you begin to investigate everything for yourself and cease to uncritically accept prescribed formulas' [Lee 1971a: 25].²⁴

Having thus established his emphasis on the sovereign individual – or, in Lee's own words, on 'man, the creating individual' [Lee 1971a: 25] – Lee moves on to consider the creating individual's relationship to a particular style, or method, of combat. The problem, as Lee sees it, is that the creating individual 'cannot express himself fully' if he is 'imprisoned' by a single style or method. He warns that, 'should your responses become dependent upon any single [style or method], you will react in terms of what "should be" rather than to the reality of the ever-changing "what is"' [Lee 1971a: 25], and that, should this happen, the creating individual's chosen style or method will become a "crutch" that limits or blocks [his potential] growth [as] a martial artist' [Lee

23 On this point, Keiko Nitta has observed that, to many biographers and scholars, Lee is shockingly and affrontingly regarded on the contrary as 'the **master** of identity politics' [Nitta 2010: 379, my emphasis; see also Bowman 2013: 130-135]. It is hard to imagine more damning proof of Bishop's claim that many people 'miss even [Lee's] most obvious lessons' [Bishop 2004: 170].

24 For comparison, the creed of the protagonists in *Atlas Shrugged* runs as follows: 'I swear – by my life and my love of it – that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine' [Rand 1957: 1069]. Clearly, Lee is here aligned with the Objectivist perspective outlined by Rand in the following terms: 'We do not tell – we **show**. We do not claim – we **prove**. It is not your obedience that we seek to win, but your rational conviction. You have seen all the elements of our secret. The conclusion is now yours to draw. We can help you to name it, but not to accept it – the sight, the knowledge, and the acceptance must be yours' [Rand 1957: 735]. For Lee's part, his adoption of this position was likely the result of insights gleaned from the work of Fritz Perls. In an undated journal entry titled 'Notes on Gestalt Therapy', Lee quotes Perls' mantra: 'I do my thing and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you and I am I. And if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful; if not, it can't be helped' [Lee n.d.: 72].

1971a: 27].²⁵ 'In fact', Lee solemnly observes, 'quite a few practitioners develop such a liking for and dependence on their "crutch" that they can no longer walk without it' [Lee 1971a: 27].²⁶ In light of this observation, Lee, in language that is strikingly Emersonian and Randian, laments:

Unfortunately, most students in the martial arts are conformists. Instead of learning to depend on themselves ... they blindly follow their instructors, no longer feeling alone and finding security in mass imitation. The product of this imitation is a dependent mind. Independent inquiry, which is essential to genuine understanding, is sacrificed. Look around the martial arts [or, in the context of this essay, around academia] and witness the assortment of routine performers, trick artists, desensitized robots, glorifiers of the past, and so on – all followers or exponents of organized despair ... The most pitiful sight is to see sincere students earnestly repeating those imitative drills, listening to their own screams and spiritual yells. In most cases, the means ... are so elaborate that the students must give tremendous attention to them, until gradually they lose sight of the end. The students end up performing their methodical routines as a mere conditioned response rather than responding to 'what is'.
[Lee 1971a: 27]

25 In another one of his earlier drafts of this essay, Lee added that to think that there exists, much less to try to create, one single style or method capable a priori of dealing with 'the ever-changing "what is"' is 'pretty much like putting a pound of water into wrapping paper and shaping it, although many futile arguments exist today as to the choice of colors, textures, and so forth, and so on, of the wrapping paper' [Lee 1971d: 138].

26 In a similar vein as Lee's invocation of the 'crutch' that 'limits or blocks' the freedom of one's intellectual 'movement', Emerson invoked the handkerchief that obstructs one's vision: 'A man must consider what a blind-man's-buff is this game of conformity. If I know your sect I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side, the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation. Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four, so that every word they say chagrins us and we know not where to begin to set them right' [Emerson 1841b: 150-151].

The Emersonian and Randian echoes are almost too numerous to count. First, Lee's lamentation at the state of conformity and his assertion of self-reliance as its aversion is a virtual transcription of 'Self-Reliance'; second, critiquing the sense of 'finding security in mass imitation' echoes Emerson's complaint about society as a 'joint-stock company' in which individuals 'surrender [their] liberty' and Rand's castigation of individuals for whom 'the moral appraisal of [oneself] by others is [the] primary concern which supersedes truth, facts, reason, [and] logic' [Rand 1964: 101];²⁷ third, Lee's claim that 'independent inquiry' is 'essential to genuine understanding' aligns precisely with Emerson's postulation that 'nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind' [Emerson 1841b: 148] and Rand's conception of the source of ethical action as being located in 'the independent mind that recognizes no authority higher than its own' [Rand 1957: 1030]; fourth, and most remarkably, Lee's dismay at the convolution of the 'means' resulting in the occlusion of the end dovetails with Rand's extensive critique in the context of academic scholarship of what she described as the 'unreadable', which similarly confuses rather than enlightens and results in stultification rather than liberation [Rand 1973a: 117-118; see also Barrowman 2017: 155-156].

Continuing on this perfectionist path, Lee's solution to the organized despair of classical martial arts study and practice took the form of encouraging martial artists not to seek 'security', not to seek out that which "satisfies" their particular desires' [Lee 1971b: 125], and to use their study and practice instead 'as a mirror for self-examination' [Lee 1971a: 27]. As I indicated in the Introduction, this is the fundamental philosophical gesture of jeet kune do. This gesture is not only ubiquitous across Lee's writings, it even provides the thematic thrust for the climactic confrontation in the hall of mirrors in *Enter the Dragon*

27 On this point, there is a still deeper connection between Lee and Rand. In earlier drafts of this essay, Lee's designation for martial artists who refused, either in ignorance or denial, to use their study and practice as a means of confronting themselves and who used it instead as a means of finding security in conformity was, in a Randian register, 'secondhand' artists. In one draft, he even devoted an entire section to the 'secondhand artist' [Lee 1971f: 171-173]. For her part, Rand often directed criticisms at those to whom she referred as 'second-handers' [Rand 1943/2007: 633-636, 712-717; 1973b; 1974b]. In fact, so important was understanding this entity to Rand that her initial working title for her novel *The Fountainhead* was *Second-Hand Lives* [Sciabarra 1995/2013: 100; Berliner 2007: 44].

(1973).²⁸ In short, it was Lee's position that, as he put it in one of his earlier drafts of this essay, 'as [a given martial artist] matures, he [should be on his way to learning] that his kick is really not so much a tool to conquer his opponent [as it is] a tool to explode through his ego ... In fact, all [combative] tools are ultimately means for penetrating the depth of [one's] being' [Lee 1971e: 165].²⁹

In Lee's estimation, one of the most challenging hurdles to jump on the path to liberation is a manifestation of skepticism that I have critiqued elsewhere under the heading of the paradigm subjectivity argument [see Barrowman 2018b: 176-177; 2019a: 20-21].³⁰ Doubtful of the conceptual validity of objectivity, this is a radically perspectival and thoroughly subjectivist argument. As it manifests in film studies, for example, the argument dictates that, rather than the objective content of a film determining the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a given interpretive paradigm, the interpretive paradigm allegedly 'determines' the film's 'objective content'. This is obviously anathema to Objectivism; it is also anathema to *jeet kune do*. To clarify his philosophical perspective on combat, Lee offers in 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' the following thought experiment:

Suppose several persons who are trained in different styles of combative arts witness an all-out street fight. I am sure we would hear different versions from each of these stylists. Such variations are quite understandable, for one cannot see a fight (or anything else) 'as is' as long as he is blinded by his chosen

28 For a stirring account of an individual's experience with Lee's philosophical writings, and specifically with 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' and this perfectionist dimension of self-examination, in conjunction with *Enter the Dragon*, see Davis Miller's [2000: 43-47] account of how Lee clued him in to the fact that 'I was an individual. Or at least I could become one' [Miller 2000: 45].

29 This particular formulation was put down on paper by Lee around 1971; however, this had long been Lee's attitude towards his martial arts study and practice. One of his friends and sparring partners during the 1960s, Leo Fong, once reported a conversation with Lee in which Lee conveyed to him this important insight in a slightly different form: 'As I look back, I realize [that] what Bruce imparted [to] me was not totally about physical combat; it was about life ... I got a glimpse of that when he said, "I practice martial arts so I can knock the hell out of my fears and insecurities" ... What Bruce showed me and taught me was the need to develop inner strength and **self-reliance**' [Fong in Bishop 2004: 12, my emphasis].

30 For terminological clarification, my invocations of skepticism henceforth are in reference not to what has been characterized in philosophical circles as 'ordinary incredulity', which does not exceed the realm of the rational, but to what has been characterized as 'radical doubt', which does exceed the realm of the rational [Klein 2015; see also Wittgenstein 1951/1969; Austin 1961; 1962a; 1962b; and Cavell 1979; 1988].

point of view, i.e. style, and he will [instead] view the fight through the lens of his particular conditioning. Fighting, as is, is simple and total. It is not limited to your perspective or conditioning ... [Contrariwise,] true observation begins when one sheds set patterns, and true freedom of expression occurs when one is beyond systems.
[Lee 1971a: 25]

In addition to implicitly acknowledging vis-à-vis metaphysics what Rand termed the primacy of existence, as well as implicitly acknowledging vis-à-vis epistemology the axiomatic status of the concepts of existence, identity, and consciousness, Lee is unmistakably critiquing the paradigm subjectivity argument. Sensing this – and, by extension, sensing its hostility to poststructuralist philosophy, which has elevated the paradigm subjectivity argument to dogma – Bowman takes Lee to task for what he considers the arrogant presumptuousness of Lee's critique:

[Jeet kune do is] what [Lee] regarded as a 'scientific' or pragmatic search for efficiency in martial arts ... Of course, this 'science' took the form of a rationalized or rationalistic approach (one that desired to be fully Rational) ... [which] sounds very slick ... [but embedded in which are] any number of aporias and problems ... First is the assumption that this rationale is rational. For (second), is it really possible to *know*, or to *decide*, with certainty, what might be 'useful' and what might be 'useless' in advance of having studied a particular style for the requisite period of time in order to have mastered it? Can one know in advance? How does one decide? Thirdly, although this is all part and parcel of an engaging humanist and individualist critique of institutionalization, the problem with Bruce Lee's pragmatic, ostensibly anti-theoretical, anti-institutional stance is [that] ... like so many anti-institutional projects Lee evidently misrecognizes the fact that *his* understanding of what he calls the 'actual reality of combat' is precisely that – *an* understanding, and moreover, one which 'stands under' his overwhelming identification with the principles of one particular theoretical paradigm – namely, the strategies and principles of *wing chun kung fu*.
[Bowman 2010a: 186-187]³¹

31 I think that it is worth noting that, despite Bowman's attempts to portray Lee as some kind of fighting poststructuralist [Bowman 2010a: 54-57, 175-176], the frequency of such lamentations in his work about how Lee 'failed' to 'live up' to the 'ideals' of poststructuralist philosophy – most notably in his essay 'Deconstruction is a Martial Art' [Bowman 2010b], in which he explicitly argues that, if deconstruction is a martial art, then it is necessarily **opposed** to *jeet kune do* and, by extension, to Lee's philosophy – should go a long way towards indicating the considerable **distance** between Lee and poststructuralism.

Readily discernible in this passage is, in Emersonian terms, the scoffing of a skeptic.³² Also discernible are several contradictions which demonstrate the irreducible irrationality of skepticism. First, over the course of his distinctly Derridean deconstruction of Lee's belief in (the human capacity to know) the essence of combat, Bowman appears to momentarily drop his poststructuralist context in order to ask if it is possible to determine the usefulness or uselessness of a given style or method of combat in advance of having studied it 'for the requisite period of time in order to have mastered it'. This question interestingly takes it for granted that there *is* a (presumably well-known and well-established) requisite period of study time, that it is objectively possible to *master* a style, and that it is possible to *know* that a style has been mastered (presumably on the basis of a correctly understood essence of combat). I will leave it to Bowman to untangle these knots with respect to the claims of poststructuralism vis-à-vis objectivity, knowledge, decision-making, and the like.³³

Further, Bowman is implicitly claiming here that insofar as an understanding of combat (or anything else, for that matter) is attributable to an individual human being – in this case, to Lee – it is, for that, *by definition* disqualified as knowledge. The (Kantian) implication here is that, because human beings must use their faculty of consciousness to perceive and conceptualize the facts of reality, *anything* that is produced by the use of that faculty is by definition antithetical to whatever the concept of 'knowledge' is that is being used to disqualify Lee's claim to it. I suspect that what Bowman would find most troubling is the corollary fact that, even if one were to concede to him the terms of this Kantian position, then, logically speaking, those terms would apply equally to him, which would force him to concede that the point that he is trying to make – that Lee's understanding of combat

32 I have in mind here the following passage from Emerson's essay on the 'Over-Soul': 'The mind is one, and the best minds, who love truth for its own sake, think much less of property in truth – they accept it thankfully everywhere and do not label or stamp it with any man's name, for it is theirs long beforehand and from eternity ... [And] we know truth when we see it, let skeptic and scoffer say what they choose. Foolish people ask you, when you have spoken what they do not wish to hear, "How do you know it is truth, and not an error of your own?" We know truth when we see it ... as we know when we are awake that we are awake' [Emerson 1841d: 267-268].

33 In the vein of Wittgenstein's observation that 'the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty' [Wittgenstein 1951/1969: 18e] inasmuch as 'the **questions** that we raise and our **doubts** depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn' [Wittgenstein 1951/1969: 44e], Todd McGowan has shrewdly pointed out that 'the problem with the project of radical doubt is that it can never be radical enough. No matter how diligently I work to put everything into question, there remains a point from which I put everything into question, and this point acts as [a self-refuting] anchor of certainty' [McGowan 2012: 197 n.14].

cannot be *a/the truth* because it is *Lee's* understanding – cannot, *itself*, be *a/the truth*, for Bowman's understanding (of combat and of Lee's understanding of combat) is only *his* understanding. And how can he, and on what grounds, possibly claim to 'know' *anything*?

Perhaps due to a Gramscian obsession with 'hegemony' and a Foucauldian focus on 'power' [see Bowman 2007; 2008b], Bowman, given his poststructuralist conditioning, cannot but (mis)understand Lee's critique of the paradigm subjectivity argument as an attempt on Lee's part merely to hegemonically (i.e. disingenuously and hypocritically) institute his own paradigm under the guise of an allegedly-but-impossibly 'rational' discourse of 'truth'.³⁴ Though it is interesting to ponder whether, having dubiously reduced all human activity to the aforementioned Hobbesian nightmare in which nothing exists but a quasi-Nietzschean Will to Power, Bowman believes his position as he 'intervenes' into Lee's philosophy to be the more honest and noble for *knowingly* seeking to 'dominate' and 'hegemonize' or whether he is unaware of the hypocrisy, what is clear is that Bowman's ultimate aim is to reject (in theory if not in practice) what Cavell has characterized as 'the arrogance of philosophy, its claim to speak universally' [Cavell 2004: 3; see also Cavell 1994]. The perfectionist rejoinder to this rejection of 'arrogance' is to clarify that such skeptical positions betray a fear of the responsibility of forthrightly facing and thinking through objective reality, or what Lee referred to as 'the reality of the ever-changing "what is"' [Lee 1971a: 25].³⁵

34 For his part, Bowman has postulated that any and every 'desire to educate' is **actually** (but, given his Kantian brand of skepticism, how could he [claim to] know this, or anything else, without refuting his own philosophical position?) a 'desire to dominate, alter, lead, or indeed to **hegemonize**' [Bowman 2008b: 43; cf. Barrowman 2018b: 199-203]. Leaving aside the incoherent Kantianism, the radical doubt vis-à-vis 'other minds' [cf. Austin 1946 and Cavell 1979], and the pernicious conflation of 'education' and 'domination', if this picture of education-as-domination is valid, then **Bowman's own** desires must be equally reprehensible – unless he is somehow exempt from this picture, in which case, redolent of Louis Althusser's incoherent critique of ideology [Althusser (1970) 1971; cf. Carroll 1988: 53-88], Bowman's 'desire to educate' not being reducible to a 'desire to dominate' would refute his own claim that any and every 'desire to educate' is actually a 'desire to dominate'. Once again, I will leave it to Bowman to untangle these knots.

35 As Cavell has framed the skeptic's dilemma: 'The alternative to speaking for myself representatively (for **someone** else's consent) is not speaking for myself privately. The alternative is having nothing to say, being voiceless, not even mute' [Cavell 1979: 28]. Or, as Rand framed it: '[Skepticism] is an act of annihilation, a wish to negate existence, an attempt to wipe out reality. But existence exists; reality is not to be wiped out, it will merely wipe out the wiper. By refusing to say, "It is", you are refusing to say, "I am". By suspending your judgment, you are negating your person. When a man declares, "Who am I to know?", he is declaring, "Who am I to live?"' [Rand 1957: 1018]. For more elaborate discussions of the fear at the heart of skepticism, see Rand [1957: 1009-1069], Cavell [1979: 236-240], and, for my own take, Barrowman [2018b; 2018c; 2018d].

In a previously quoted passage from Emerson's essay on the 'Over-Soul', Emerson sagaciously observes that skepticism often follows from fear. After all, Emerson did not merely say that 'foolish people ask you, "How do you know it is truth, and not an error of your own"', as if to say that skepticism is always and only an epistemological problem of knowledge; instead, and more pointedly, he said that 'foolish people ask you, *when you have spoken what they do not wish to hear*, "How do you know it is truth, and not an error of your own?"', which is to say that skepticism is often not just an epistemological problem of knowledge but also an ethical problem of *acknowledgment* [see Cavell (1969) 2002; 1972/1981; 1979; 1988]. As Cavell relates:

Acknowledging is not an alternative to knowing ... In incorporating, or inflecting, the concept of knowledge, the concept of acknowledgment is meant, in my use, to declare that what there is to be known philosophically remains unknown not through ignorance ... but through a refusal of knowledge, a denial or a repression of knowledge, say even a killing of it. [Cavell 1988: 51]

To add a perverse twist to this issue, that which skeptics and scoffers do not wish to hear, that which they refuse to acknowledge, that which they wish to kill, is *the truth*, for it is the concept of truth – and, with it, as corollary concepts, the concepts of objectivity and knowledge – that threatens to invalidate as irrational and immoral the skeptical indulgence in relativism and indeterminacy.³⁶ Hence Emerson's conception of 'genius' as the cultivation of self-reliance, i.e. of the moral courage that allows one to acknowledge the (conceptual validity of) truth:

36 As Slavoj Žižek explains in a Lacanian vein: 'Lacan as it were supplements Descartes' **I doubt, therefore I am** ... with another turn of the screw, reversing its logic: **I am only insofar as I doubt**. This way, we obtain the elementary formula of the [skeptical] attitude: the [skeptical] clings to his doubt, to his indeterminate status, as the only firm support of his being, and is extremely apprehensive of the prospect of being compelled to make a decision which would cut short his oscillation, his neither-nor status ... It is this inherent dialectical inversion that characterizes the [skeptical]: "officially", he strives desperately for certainty, for an unambiguous answer that would provide the remedy against the worm of doubt that is consuming him; actually, the true catastrophe he is trying to evade at any price is this very solution, the emergence of a final, unambiguous answer, which is why he endlessly sticks to his uncertain, indeterminate, oscillating status ... What he truly fears to lose is doubt as such' [Žižek 1993: 69-70; see also Lacan (1959-1960) 1992, esp. 19-34; (1963-1964) 1977, esp. 29-41]. Or, as Lacan himself put it in a discussion of the Freudian reality principle: 'The reality principle is presented as functioning in a way that is essentially precarious ... It is not that reality is called into question [by Freud]; it is certainly not called into question in the way that the idealists did so. Compared to Freud, the idealists of the philosophical tradition are small beer indeed ... Idealism consists in affirming that we are the ones who give shape to reality, and that there is no point in looking any further. **It is a comfortable position**. Freud's position, or that of any sensible man for that matter, is something very different' [Lacan (1959-1960) 1992: 30, my emphasis].

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men – that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment ... [The genius of self-reliance is thus the ability] to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another. [Emerson 1841c: 145-146]

From this perfectionist perspective, rather than seeking to dominate or hegemonize, Lee seeks merely to 'speak his latent conviction', and to reject this perfectionist gesture as 'arrogant' is to betray a timidity of which Lee himself was well-aware. As he once conveyed to an interviewer:

We have a Zen parable that tells of a man who said, 'Master, I must seek liberation'. The teacher asked, 'And who binds you?' The student answered, 'I do not know. Perhaps I bind myself ... Each man binds himself; the fetters are ignorance, laziness, preoccupations with the self [i.e. foolish consistency], and fear. [Lee 1966: 46]³⁷

Approaching Lee's argument from beyond Bowman's timid and tempered poststructuralist prerogative, it becomes clear that, in

37 Beyond his affinities with Emerson, Rand, and Cavell vis-à-vis the fear that is part and parcel of skepticism (and, by extension, of poststructuralism/postmodernism), Lee is demonstrating further an affinity with Jung, who posited that 'the devaluation of the psyche and other resistances to psychological enlightenment are based in large measure on fear – on panic fear of the discoveries that might be made in the realm of the unconscious' [Jung 1957/2002: 35] and who added that 'this fear is nothing compared with the enormous effort it usually costs people to help the first stirrings of individuality into consciousness, let alone put them into effect' [Jung 1957/2002: 39; see also Jung 1968]. As for Lee's rejection of such fear-laden philosophies of life, he is once again in line with Rogers, who, for his part, discoursed on this point in astonishingly precise perfectionist terms: 'Einstein seems to have been unusually oblivious to the fact that good physicists did not think his kind of thoughts. Rather than drawing back because of his inadequate academic preparation in physics, he simply moved toward being Einstein, **toward thinking his own thoughts**, toward being as truly and deeply himself as he could. This is not a phenomenon which occurs only in [the likes of Einstein]. Time and again in my clients, I have seen simple people become significant and creative in their own spheres as they have developed more trust of the processes going on within themselves and have dared to feel their own feelings, live by values which they discover within, and express themselves in their own unique ways' [Rogers 1961: 175, my emphasis].

'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' and, indeed, with jeet kune do more broadly, what Lee sought to achieve was to encourage martial artists to concern themselves not with trying to determine what will (always, *a priori*) work in every combative context and to concern themselves instead with cultivating self-reliance in order to have the courage to enter into any combat situation confident in their ability to determine what will work *here* and *now* in *this* context based on *this* martial artist and *this* opponent. On this point, Dan Inosanto usefully elaborated:

It was Bruce's habit to forever expound the advantages and disadvantages of the various combat styles – none were overlooked. He counseled his disciples not to think in terms of East versus West, Chinese versus Japanese, Okinawan versus Korean, karate versus judo, etc., for the purpose of determining which was better; but, rather, to examine each method individually, find its pluses and minuses, then inquire of ourselves, 'When will this work for me?' In other words, if I have two weapons, a hand grenade and a knife, and someone asks which is superior, I'd reply, 'It depends'. [Inosanto 1976: 100]³⁸

Of course, by emphasizing the importance of context, Lee was all but inviting a counter in the form of a Derridean deconstruction of the concept of context.³⁹ Not one to miss a poststructuralist trick, Bowman tried to counter with exactly that:

There are *many* other different paradigms [beyond wing chun] which interpret 'the actual reality of combat' and the notion of being 'simple and direct' very differently. For example, t'ai chi ch'üan and aikido see 'simple and direct' as requiring circularity

(and *not* straight lines [as in wing chun]) and the truth and reality of combat as lying in the *other's* motion (*not* one's own). Then there are myriad styles of jiu-jitsu, chin-na, and grappling that privilege forceful leverage; there are pugilistic styles each with different approaches to delivering strikes, from whirlwinds to thrusts, spins, and twists using momentum, to those of boxing's Queensbury Rules; and from jumping/leaping styles to Dim Mak pressure point fighting. Different principles obtain if you are trying to kill, restrain, or escape; just as they do if there is one-versus-one, one-versus-several, several-versus-one, or many-versus-many; whether you or they are armed or unarmed; in a crowded pub or in a muddy field, and so on. The list of theories of what *sort* of directness or simplicity constitutes 'actual reality' and how this or that interpretation *should* be institutionalized is potentially endless. [Bowman 2010b: 43]

The radical doubt here vis-à-vis the 'potentially endless' proliferation of combative contexts and the allegation that such proliferation renders impossible (indeed, *nonsensical*) the acquirement of knowledge of the 'simple and direct' is the product of a logical fallacy that J.L. Austin called 'the fallacy of asking about nothing-in-particular' [Austin (1940) 1961: 26]:

Suppose that in ordinary life I am asked: 'What is the meaning of the word *racy*?' There are two sorts of thing I may do in response: I may reply *in words*, trying to describe what raciness is and what it is not, to give examples of sentences in which one might use the word *racy*, and of others in which one should not. Let us call this *sort* of thing 'explaining the syntactics' of the word '*racy*' in the English language. On the other hand, I might do what we may call 'demonstrating the semantics' of the word, by getting the questioner to *imagine*, or even actually to *experience*, situations which we should describe correctly by means of sentences containing the words '*racy*', '*raciness*', etc., and again other situations where we should *not* use these words ... And in the same way, if I wished to find out 'whether he understands the meaning of the word *racy*', I should test him at some length in these two ways ... Having asked in this way, and answered, ['What is the meaning of the word *racy*?'] ... we then try, being philosophers, to ask the further *general* question, 'What is the meaning of a word?' But there is something spurious about this question. We do not intend to mean by it a certain question which would be perfectly all right, namely, 'What is the meaning of (the word) 'word'? That would be no more general than is asking the meaning of the word '*rat*', and would be answered in a precisely similar way. No, we want to ask, rather, 'What is the meaning of a-word-in-general?' or 'of *any* word', not meaning '*any*' word *you like to choose*, but rather

38 The 'it depends' response typically leads poststructuralists to the Derridean notion of the 'undecidable' [see Derrida 1992/1995b and Bowman 2010: 172-175]. And the Derridean notion of the undecidable typically leads poststructuralists to yet another performative contradiction vis-à-vis deciding that everything is undecidable – a performative contradiction that Rand lampooned via one of her second-hander (and uncannily proto-poststructuralist) characters in *Atlas Shrugged*, who proclaims at one point: 'We'll be safe for the first time ... [because] we won't have to decide. Nobody will be permitted to decide anything. It will be decided once and for all' [Rand 1957: 543].

39 I am implicitly referring here to the terms of Derrida's critique of the work of J.L. Austin [see Austin 1962b and Derrida 1972] and the (in)famous debate between Derrida [1977; 1988] and John R. Searle [1977; 1983; 2000] that it engendered. For more on this critique and the debate that it engendered, see, among the many commentaries, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [1980], Jonathan Culler [1982], Christopher Norris [1990], Cavell [1994], Niall Lucy [1995], Gordon C.F. Bearn [1995, 1998], Stephen Mulhall [2001], Simon Glendinning [2001], Leslie Hill [2007], Toril Moi [2009], Raoul Moati [2009/2014], Judith Wolfe [2013], and, for my own take, Barrowman [2017: 193-194 n.39; 2018c].

no particular word at all, just 'any word'. Now, if we pause even for a moment to reflect, this is a perfectly absurd question to be trying to ask. I can only answer a question of the form 'What is the meaning of x?' if 'x' is some particular word you are asking about.

[Austin (1940) 1961: 25-26]⁴⁰

In the context (no pun intended) of the present dispute between Lee and Bowman vis-à-vis self-reliance and skepticism, Lee's position is resoundingly Austinian. To return to Lee's own thought experiment with the street fight witnessed by a number of practitioners of different martial arts styles, rather than wanting Lee to explain what would have worked best *in that context* – what, say, the *loser of that particular fight* could have done differently or more effectively – Bowman is demanding that Lee answer the spurious question, 'What would work best in no-fight-in-particular?' To expect an answer to this pseudo-question, however, betrays a misunderstanding not just of Lee's argument in 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' but of his entire philosophy insofar as it is a perfectionist philosophy.⁴¹ For Lee's concern in formulating jeet kune do was the establishment of the epistemological and ethical conditions of possibility for the blossoming of martial artists capable of acknowledging that, in contrast to the 'logic' of the paradigm subjectivity argument, the 'ever-changing "what is"' of reality is that which provides the 'precarious' ground (apropos Lacan *avec* Freud) on which to determine in a given combative context what will work best, and his goal was not to provide 'security' or 'comfort' but to inspire martial artists to cultivate self-reliance in order to brave reality.

40 On a related note, Cavell once remarked, with specific reference to Derrida's ubiquitous gestures 'toward an endlessness of deferral', that such gesturing always brought to his mind 'a complaint Austin made more than once vis-à-vis the allegedly 'infinite uses of language', the allegedly "countless" kinds of use' of language, and the allegation that 'the "context" of a use is infinitely complex', viz. that, to Austin, such gesturing amounted to nothing more than a transparent attempt 'to defer getting down to the business of counting them' [Cavell 1989: 74].

41 Well-aware that such misunderstandings were likely, Lee confessed in one of his earlier drafts of this essay: 'My reason tells me it is a vain hope, but I hope those who are steeped in solidified beliefs ... will read the following paragraphs with open-mindedness, leaving all the burdens of preconceived opinions and conclusions behind' [Lee 1971c: 128]. From a similar vantage point, Toril Moi [2009] deemed the hope of communicating across the divide of ordinary language philosophy and poststructuralism equally vain. Whether or not Lee and I are equally vain in our philosophical orientations is a judgment that must be made by each individual on his own, in answer to his own mind and his own conscience. For Emerson's part, he postulated that 'every man's words who speaks [in a perfectionist register] must sound vain to those who do not dwell in the same thought on their own part' [Emerson 1841d: 263].

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I began from a rather 'macro' perspective on academic inquiry before moving on to conduct a decidedly 'micro' analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of Lee's epochal essay 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' and his conception of jeet kune do. Though pitched as a debate between two scholars obviously invested in Bruce Lee, one of my overriding concerns in writing this essay was to ensure that it would be of interest/value to more people than just the two principals involved in the discussion. Bowman and I are obviously invested in Bruce Lee, but is anything that I have had to say in the preceding of interest/value to someone doing fieldwork on capoeira, or analyzing the psychology of martial artists who compete in combat sports, or investigating the history of catch wrestling, etc.? To answer this question in any kind of detail would require making this already inordinately long essay even longer, so, in conclusion, I want merely to sketch some possible opportunities for future scholarship in light of what I have had to say here in this essay.

In recent years, we have heard talk of how the field of martial arts studies is 'pre-paradigmatic' [Bowman 2017, 2019; Judkins 2017]. This is an idea taken from Thomas Kuhn and his famous investigation of 'the structure of scientific revolutions' [Kuhn 1962/1996]. The idea is that, given the relative newness of martial arts studies, the same 'data' – whether a specific martial arts style, like aikido, or a specific sociopolitical event, like the Boxer Rebellion, or a specific historical figure, like Bruce Lee – is being analyzed through myriad lenses using myriad analytical tools. It seems to me that, by and large, as far as most martial arts studies scholars are concerned – the more the merrier. From a certain scholarly perspective, the pre-paradigm stage is the freest, most exciting, and most productive period precisely because there is so much, and so much diverse, activity. I completely understand this. I even experienced the same rush myself while attending the first few martial arts studies conferences, reading the first few issues of the *Martial Arts Studies* journal, etc. However, I think that it is time for martial arts studies to begin to look ahead to what comes after the pre-paradigm stage, namely discussion and debate as to which paradigms are useful for which sort of inquiries and which are not. If pluralism is the catchword here, there remains the question of what sort of pluralism is most conducive to the continued evolution of our field.

In the course of initiating a paradigm shift in the discipline of film studies, Noël Carroll contrasted two conceptions of pluralism and made a case for one over the other:

Here it pays to distinguish between two versions of theoretical pluralism ... One kind of theoretical pluralism might be called

peaceful coexistence pluralism. Coexistence pluralism is very laid back. Everyone has his own theory; if you want to conjoin theories, well, that's a matter of personal taste. You can accept some cognitivist hypotheses, but if you also like some aspects of psychoanalysis (at this point, it is usually said, 'I find it useful'), you can have that too. On the other hand, there is also methodologically robust pluralism. On this view, it is good to have lots of theories around as well. But it is good to have these theories around so that they can be put in competition with each other. From the point of view of the robust methodological pluralist, it is good to have a number of theories in the field at the beginning of the day, but by the end of the day, one hopes that some will be eliminated through processes of criticism and comparison in light of certain questions and the relevant evidence. Some ostensibly competing theories may, upon examination and debate, turn out to be complementary or supplementary. But many are also likely to fall by the wayside.
[Carroll 1996: 62-63]

Where does martial arts studies stand here? To this point, we have for the most part been content to peacefully coexist. But how much longer can – should – that last? Surely not every chapter from every book published in the Martial Arts Studies book series, or every essay downloaded from every issue of *Martial Arts Studies*, elicits from every martial arts studies scholar joy, assent, and the inspiration to follow suit. Surely there are countless discussions and debates that have not yet been initiated. When will that happen? Should that happen? If it should happen, how should it happen? For an example beyond the confines of Bruce Lee, in the previous issue of this journal, in the course of reviewing *The Martial Arts Studies Reader*, Qays Stetkevych decried the fondness in academia generally and martial arts studies specifically for 'elitist post-structuralist terminolog[y]' [Stetkevych 2019: 79] and denigrated 'opaque ... postmodern-esque word play' [Stetkevych 2019: 81]. Are Stetkevych and I merely crying wolf (or, worse, tilting at windmills) or are there in fact pressing issues that we need to address as a field with respect to valid and invalid scholarship? If the latter, what mode of address is called for in broaching these issues?

At this year's annual martial arts studies conference, Janet O'Shea argued for the probative value of what she called 'oppositional civility' [O'Shea 2019a; see also O'Shea 2019b] while Alexander Antonopoulos examined via the Dog Brothers the philosophy of 'Higher Consciousness through Harder Contact' [Antonopoulos 2019] and Brigid Burke discussed the need in training to manage one's combative 'intensity' and to 'calibrate' oneself to one's sparring partners [Burke 2019]. Returning to the present example of my exercise in

alterdisciplinarity, on Antonopoulos' terms, I think that I have hewed very closely (and I hope effectively) to the Dog Brothers' mantra of higher consciousness through harder contact while, on Burke's terms, I think that I have managed my intensity very well and calibrated myself appropriately to my sparring partner. However, on O'Shea's terms, I can imagine someone (perhaps even my sparring partner himself) objecting that I have not been civil in my opposition, or, on Burke's terms, that I have failed to manage my intensity and have inappropriately calibrated myself. These are familiar problems on the 'martial arts' side of the equation, but how are we to address these problems on the 'martial arts studies' side? How are we to adjudicate such debates over what constitutes a 'proper' debate, or over how to get the most out of a debate (for both those directly and indirectly involved in the debate)?

These are all open questions that are not addressed to any one person. Rather, they are addressed to everyone to whom martial arts studies matters. Returning to Kuhn, he believed that, upon initiating such debates as I have been encouraging here, there are three possible outcomes:

Sometimes normal science ultimately proves able to handle the [debate] despite the despair of those who have seen it as the end of an existing paradigm. On other occasions the [topic of debate] resists even apparently radical new approaches ... Or, finally, the case that will most concern us here, a [debate] may end with the emergence of a new candidate for paradigm and with the ensuing battle over its acceptance.
[Kuhn 1962/1996: 84]

In this essay, I have offered new candidates to replace an existing paradigm. Will there be ensuing debate? Will other, similar, debates emerge in other areas, with other topics of debate? As Stephen Prince once averred, the 'spirited opposition' of 'paradigm conflicts' not only comes with the potential to 'illuminate [a] field's basic and often unexamined assumptions and methods, its very history and traditions', it also provides a 'measure of the vitality of an academic field' [Prince 1992: 49]. I, for one, think that it is time that we started to showcase the vitality of martial arts studies.

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