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Aberrant Pedagogies

JR, QT and Bruce Lee

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This article proposes that central to queer studies (and 'radical,' 'politicized' scholarship more widely) is a critique focused on the cultural power of institutions – pedagogical institutions in particular. It relates Jacques Rancière's critique of such institutions to this wider 'radical political' impulse, and relates this impulse itself to 1960s counterculture. It asks why Rancière's critique stops before his own historical moment, a moment that can be tied to the 1960s; and it attempts to establish the discursive status of Rancièrian and radical approaches such as queer theory by picking up where Rancière leaves off: the countercultural critique of pedagogical institutions, which spread through many realms of society, including martial arts. The key figure here is the anti-institutional and countercultural Bruce Lee. So, the article explores Bruce Lee's iconoclastic, inter- and antidisciplinary approach to 'learning' in relation to Rancière's queer pedagogy in order to deepen our thinking about an 'emancipatory relation.'

[W]hat if the field of Cultural Studies, far from actually threatening today's global relations of domination, fit their framework perfectly[?]

~ Slavoj Žižek (2001: 225-6)

Queer Lee

Bruce Lee is hard. Bruce Lee is sexy. Bruce Lee is cool. Bruce Lee is not white. Bruce Lee is Asian. Bruce Lee kicks white, American, Russian, Japanese, Italian, imperialist, colonialist, capitalist, gangster and indeed anyone and everyone's ass. There is something patriarchal here, in this phallic hero. There is also something

homoerotic. There is something heteronormative. There is also something postcolonial. This much we know. But is that it? Is that all there is? Within film studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and various ethnic identity studies, this appears to be about the long and short of it. These are the main sorts of lessons that are regularly learned from and about Bruce Lee: lessons about identification, lack and desire, about cultural identity, the role of fantasy, about the body as bearer of ideology, the ambivalence and polysemy of Bruce Lee's texts, the homo at the heart of the hetero, and so on (Abbas, 1997; Brown, 1997; Chan, 2000; Eperjesi, 2004; Hunt, 2003; Marchetti, 2001; Morris, 2001; Teo, 2008). These are important lessons. But there is more. There are other lessons to be learned from Bruce Lee, no less queer than those readings which try to queer Bruce Lee, or those that fantasize through him, with him, in him, of him. These lessons are not necessarily or literally sexual, but they are wedded or welded to patriarchal, arboreal and phallogocentric structures.

The ones I would like to draw attention to here relate to learning, to lessons that have been learned, and to the significance of the ways in which the lessons that are to be learned from Bruce Lee intersect unexpectedly with lessons in and about the 'project' of cultural studies and its critics. In saying this, I am using the term 'cultural studies' as short-hand, as an umbrella term to evoke the genealogically and ethico-politically entangled discursive formation of work in postcolonialism, history from below, gender studies, post-structuralism, queer theory and – as is so easy to say – so on. My decision to elevate 'cultural studies' as the umbrella term to cover such a wide, complex and contradictory field will, I hope, neither be received as particularly controversial nor as especially unusual, as each of these overlapping fields always also folds into the others and has them folded into 'itself' in more than one way.[1]

However, what is less straightforward is the fact that, when I evoke this formation's 'critics,' I will not be referring to those whose work is clearly and decidedly (or decidably) 'outside' the fields of queer-, postcolonial-, etc. cultural studies. Rather, I will be lining up the rather unexpected and unlikely (non)couple of Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Rancière. This is not because I see their work as being even remotely similar, in its own right. It is rather in order to show that, despite the immense differences between Rancière and a character like Žižek, they both occupy (*equivalently but differently*) a fraught border on the shores of this (or these) cultural studies that they both so clearly take their distances from. To experience both the beaches and the ports of these shores – the points of convergence and play as well as of articulation, communication and control – my primary contention is that we might do no better than taking seriously the question of the lessons to be learned from Bruce Lee. Reciprocally, to learn something more from Bruce Lee, and to pose a rather more tantalising challenge to cultural studies in all its forms than the ones we are familiar with, we might do no better than taking seriously the question of the lessons to be learned from Jacques Rancière.

In the face of studying Bruce Lee, and despite the apparently trivial status of this long-departed Hong Kong American celebrity martial artist, it is of more than 'academic' interest to note, right at the start, the extent to which 'China' or 'Chineseness' is inscribed (indeed, *hegemonic*) within the current theoretical and political discourses of cultural studies, post-structuralism, ethnicity and feminism. As Rey Chow makes plain, this is so in at least three ways. First, the Chinese 'other' played a constitutive (haunting) role in the deconstructive critique of logocentrism and phonocentrism, in ways that far exceed the general 'turn East' (in the search for alternatives) characteristic of 'French' theory and much more besides of the 1960s and 1970s. Second, the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s actively admired and championed the Chinese encouragement of women to 'speak bitterness' against patriarchy. And third, the enduring interest in the 'subaltern' among politicized projects in the West has always found an exemplary example in the case of the Chinese peasantry. Indeed, says Chow, in these ways and more, "'modern China" is, whether we know it or not, the foundation of contemporary cultural studies' (Chow, 1993: 18).

This sort of (unhomely) historicization of the interplay of forces constitutive of the contours, investments and impulses of contemporary cultural studies (and its critics) can 'hurt.' This is especially so when we want to believe that our own position is unique, superior, untainted or uncompromised by the messy and often ugly intertwined forces that have produced the present conjuncture. But acknowledging the fraught genealogy of the present is surely an essential stage of any work – a harrowing ordeal that may nevertheless provide an enlivening jolt.

There are many ways to do this. If Chow recasts the investments and orientations of cultural studies, post-structuralism, and the politicised 'studies-suffix' subjects in terms of what she calls an unacknowledged but constitutive 'Chinese prejudice,' theorists such as Žižek, Bourdieu and others have often cast cultural studies as being at the forefront of the ideology of 'political correctness' which itself is recast as the cutting edge ideology of neoliberalism. There are many versions of such challenges to cultural studies' putative ethical and political values and virtues, of course, just as there are many different forms of response to and engagement with such questions within the various fields and forms of cultural studies. In fact, no footnote could suffice to indicate the breadth and depth of these debates. But we could look quickly at one provocative and pertinent contribution to it.

Meaghan Morris' essay, 'Learning from Bruce Lee: Pedagogy and Political Correctness in Martial Arts Cinema' (2001), is particularly apposite here because in it Morris examines the relationship between film and cultural criticism and the forces, discourses and impulses of 'PC' or 'political correctness.' Crucially, Morris concedes the

disappointing links between contemporary film and cultural criticism and the much vilified and stereotyped PC (a link which boils down to moralism), but she seeks nevertheless to find a way to redeem both. She tries to do this by focusing on the theme of pedagogy. Before we get to pedagogy, it is helpful to note Morris' primary argument:

PC is not primarily a code regulating expression but a spectators' revolt. Aesthetically focused but social in resonance, PC is an act or a movement of criticism initiated by groups of people who develop shared responses to particular cultural conventions, and begin to form 'an' audience in the marketing sense: by articulating a collective 'commentary on cinema', they announce themselves as an audience. And they vocally object to the quality of something which cinema provides. Understood this way, PC as a critical formation has less in common with the grim radicals of media bad dreams (real as dreams may be) than with those highly respectable 'consumer movements' which have, through the very same media, powerfully influenced business and advertising practices in recent decades. (Morris, 2001: 181)

Of course, in affiliating 'aesthetic dissensus' with 'consumer movements' that are 'highly respectable,' Morris opens the door for the Žižekian retort that such 'movements' are therefore *not political*, precisely because they are both *respectable* and *consumer*. The Žižekian insistence on the internal dynamics of capitalism as the Real (and) backdrop or horizon against which any claim of 'the political' is to be judged (Žižek, 2000) is a challenge that – no matter how hyperbolic, (performatively) self-contradictory, and no matter how 'logically' refutable it may be (Laclau, 2000, 2005) – nevertheless *haunts* my own thinking here and elsewhere. For, whatever else may be said about Žižek, he nevertheless *has a point*. And it won't just go away. So, without attempting to exorcise the Žižekian spectre, but whilst refusing to be dominated by it, I will attempt to use it, along with the coordinates provided by Chow and Morris, to triangulate a point from which to craft a manoeuvre informed by, equivalent to but different from, those executed by the likes of Chow, Morris, Žižek and, ultimately, Rancière. This manoeuvre relates to rethinking pedagogy.

The lesson of Bruce Lee

Meaghan Morris tries to look at Bruce Lee 'otherwise' by focusing on the peculiar importance of pedagogy when it comes to grasping his significance. She points out the enduring centrality of pedagogy in martial arts films and the often overlooked importance of Bruce Lee as a teacher. It is crucial to approach Bruce Lee in terms of pedagogy, argues Morris, because 'the overwhelming concern with "the body" in recent cultural criticism can obscure this aspect of (Western) Bruce Lee worship and narrow unduly our approach to action cinema in general.' So, Morris draws attention to the significant 'persistence of the training film in Hollywood cinema,' and to the ways that 'training films give us lessons in using aesthetics understood as a practical discipline – "the study of the mind and emotions in relation to the

sense of beauty” – to overcome personal and social adversity’ (Morris, 2001: 175-6).[2]

Of course, we should note, straight away, that the kind of *looking otherwise* (or *reading differently*) that Morris undertakes is not deliberately provocative or controversial. Morris does not seek to offer the kind of reading which would boil the blood of conservatives or anti-PC militants of ‘common sense.’ In fact, although Morris does suggest that ‘the technique of “queering” is [the] liveliest recent manifestation’ of a key interpretative drive in film studies, one that ‘can be creative,’ she actually suggests that queering can also be ‘blinkerered and narrow in its relentlessness’ (2001: 184). So, although Morris wants to read Bruce Lee ‘otherwise,’ she does not want to rush headlong into acts of ‘queering’ or ‘othering.’ At least not directly. Rather, Morris operates in terms of the insight that there can only be so many times that looking at Bruce Lee ‘otherwise,’ by for instance revealing the *homo* at the disavowed heart of the *hetero*, can be regarded as news.[3] Which is why *what* Morris seeks to ‘learn’ from Bruce Lee does not relate to the erotic and does not simply relate to issues of patriarchy, phallogentricity, heteronormativity, masculinity, or suchlike. Instead, she chooses to learn something *else* from Bruce Lee. This is a lesson about learning from cinematic images – or rather about *realising*, becoming aware, being transformed by *experiencing* through cinematic images, and the overall complexity of the experience of films.

Amid a discussion of the aesthetics (including, of course, the camp and kitsch dimensions) of many American martial arts films, Morris turns her attention to a scene within the film, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (1993). This film is, in Morris’s words, ‘a sanitized as well as hagiographic interpretation of Bruce Lee’s life as authorized by his widow,’ Linda Lee-Cadwell (Morris, 2001: 180). In it, Bruce (played by Jason Scott Lee) and Linda (Lauren Holly), on one of their first dates, end up in a cinema watching *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. It is significant – indeed foregrounded and emphasized by the film – that they have ended up in the cinema because they have been refused entry to a restaurant for obviously racist reasons. So, they find themselves in a ‘laff fest revival.’ In the cinema, we watch them watching the spectacle of Mickey Rooney bumbling around as the slapstick Japanese character, Mr Yunioshi. Morris deftly points out the way that the camera shows us Bruce and Linda watching the same scene *differently*: Linda initially laughs along with the rest of the audience, until she notices Bruce’s distinct lack of enjoyment. Then the camera shows us a very significant moment of realisation. According to Morris, this scene actually shows a viewing subject ‘enter into another subjectivity’ (181) through the act of viewing – and, specifically, through viewing an other(s) way of viewing and being viewed. As she sees it:

when Linda suddenly connects the Chinese man beside her, the ‘Oriental’ on screen, and her pleasure in both, she makes an imaginative leap outside the logic of her own familiar dreams which

allows her to experience something new. Putting 'herself' in another's position, she finds that her companion lives a connection between his body and the grotesque parody on screen – one fictionally modeled on a fleeting moment of cinema but relayed and sustained in its everyday life by the gazes (and the voices) of other people. (Morris, 2001: 181)

In the terms of Jacques Rancière, we could conceptualise this scene as a moment of 'aesthetic dissensus,' in which the experience by Linda and (perhaps) Bruce amounts to a moment of 'subjectivization,' or, in Rancière's words, 'the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other' through 'a process of disidentification or declassification' (Rancière, 1992: 60, 61). Thus, at this point, Linda could be regarded as becoming 'an outsider or, more, an *in-between*' (61) by way of what Rancière calls an 'impossible identification' (61). It is 'impossible' because Linda is not that which she has just *realized*; or, in Rancière's terms, Linda's is an identification that cannot be *embodied* by her, herself. As Rancière theorizes it, political subjectivization 'always involves an impossible identification, an identification that cannot be embodied by he or she who utters it.' It is rather, according to Rancière, 'a heterology, a logic of the other'; 'it is never the simple assertion of an identity; it is always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by an other, given by the ruling order of policy' (62).

Learning from pedagogy

However, there is more to a Rancièrian reading than providing slick lessons in identity formation or the production of new subjectivities that occupy new subject-positions. That is, there *is* a difference between Rancière and Morris here. This devolves on different notions of pedagogy, but it has a far wider significance. This can be seen if we use Rancière to focus on the way pedagogy itself organises Morris' vision when she is 'learning from Bruce Lee.' For, although what Morris would rightly have us learn is a lesson about the dubious ethics and orientations of much film criticism itself, it is nevertheless the case that Morris still ultimately identifies with and prioritizes a certain 'classical' pedagogical position. For, Morris will go on to propose that 'Linda returns to *Breakfast at Tiffany's* with the eyes and ears of a critic, or so I like to think; as a student, she is certainly able to "enter into" another subjectivity...' (181).

But let us hesitate before making such a step ourselves; for, as Rancière (1991) has urged us to notice, an interpretive decision such as this also carries the connotation that becoming 'a critic' amounts to *maturing* into a critic, or, in the case of Linda's moment of revelation, being re-born (satori-like) as an 'enlightened one.' To identify such a moment of transformation, realisation or 'subjectivization' (Rancière, 1992) with an already-instituted institutional category (The Critic) is, in Rancière (as in Barthes [1977]), to rob it of its *emancipatory* potential. Indeed, as Rancière sees it, this would be to participate in 'a logic whereby the social critic gains by showing democracy losing' (Ross,

1987: xi) – by claiming that the insight, the knowledge, or the wisdom is always and already the property of ‘the critic.’ As Kristin Ross puts this:

if science belongs to the intellectuals – the masters – and the critique of bourgeois content is reserved for those who already know, then there is only one way for students to criticize their masters’ knowledge ... and that is to become their peers. (Ross, 1987: xvii)

Thus, even though Morris figures spec(tac)ular cultural relations as potentially politicizing, her own fundamental identification remains with the position of the pedagogue. In this, Morris exemplifies the post-Gramscian tendency in cultural studies to regard ‘culture as pedagogy’ (Giroux, 2002) and, accordingly, to seek to find and to teach (about) the best that has been thought, said and broadcast. This is the ‘improving,’ ‘educating’ rationale that Jacques Rancière identifies in so many philosophers, critics, theorists and pedagogues, including, most famously, Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu. To Rancière’s list of ‘philosophers and their poor,’ we might add perhaps *all* of the key figures of cultural studies and cultural theory.

It is not their motives but their *orientations* that Rancière challenges. This is because, as is well known, the lesson of Rancière is the lesson of *equality*. Here, the lesson to be learned from Rancière is that pedagogy premised on imparting knowledge to the ignorant *stultifies*. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), Rancière devotes himself to a consideration of the fact that everyone – demonstrably, verifiably – can and very often does learn without being taught in the mode of what Rancière calls ‘explication’ (the intellectual intervention of an explicator). Classical pedagogy Rancière calls ‘the explicative order,’ and his deconstructive contention is that it is ‘the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such’ (Rancière, 1991: 6); and hence his contention is that:

Explication is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world.... To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid. (1991: 6)

This, Rancière calls the ‘double inaugural gesture’ (6) of the ‘explicative order’ – the thinking which ‘divides the world into two,’ or ‘divides intelligence into two,’ by proceeding as if ‘there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one’:

The former registers perceptions by chance, retains them, interprets and repeats them empirically, within the closed circle of habit and need. This is the intelligence of the young child and the

common man. The superior intelligence knows things by reason, proceeds by method, from the simple to the complex, from the part to the whole. It is this intelligence that allows the master to transmit his knowledge by adapting it to the intellectual capacities of the student and allows him to verify that the student has satisfactorily understood what he learned. Such is the principle of explication. (1991: 7)

Following Joseph Jacotot, the Eighteenth Century educator that Rancière reads in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he concludes that this – the dominant – conception of education is to be regarded as ‘the principle of *enforced stultification*’ (Rancière, 1991: 7). The logic of self-legitimation of the explicator runs: ‘Until [the teacher] came along, the child has been groping blindly, figuring out riddles. Now he will learn’ (7). Proceeding by ‘figuring out riddles,’ says Rancière, is overwhelmingly regarded by explicators as proceeding *incorrectly, outrageously*: moving ‘along in a manner one shouldn’t move along – the way children move, blindly, figuring out riddles’ (10) is disparaged.

Rather than enforcing – as a matter of routine or principle – this disciplined hierarchy as if it were the necessary character of all learning, Rancière advocates Jacotot’s postulate that the universal process of learning is something shared alike by ‘the child, the learned man, and the revolutionary’ (12). Its key coordinates are called *chance, experiment, equality* and *will*. ‘The method of equality was above all a method of the will,’ writes Rancière: ‘One could learn by oneself and without a master explicator when one wanted to, propelled by one’s own desire or by the constraint of the situation’ (12). Without a *master explicator*, concludes Jacotot; but *not without a master per se* (12-13). In other words, the role of the master is not that of a subject supposed to know, to be followed, listened to, obeyed, as ignorant to learned. Rather, the master is the one who issues a command. Solve this. Work out that. The master’s *intelligence* is by the by. The notion of the ‘master,’ and specifically the ‘will’ of the master, is separated from that of ‘intelligence.’ Realising this, says Rancière, allows ‘the jumbled categories of the pedagogical act to be sorted out, and explicative stultification to be precisely defined.’ Thus, concludes Rancière/Jacotot: ‘there is stultification whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another.’ For although ‘a person – and a child in particular – may need a master when his own will is not strong enough to set him on track and keep him there ... that subjection is purely one of will over will.’ And this – it deserves to be said – is no bad thing. However:

It becomes stultification when it links an intelligence to another intelligence. In the act of teaching and learning there are two wills and two intelligences. We will call their coincidence *stultification*.... We will call the known and maintained difference of the two relations – the act of an intelligence obeying only itself even while the will obeys another will – *emancipation*. (13)

Rancière is unequivocal about the significance of this: 'This pedagogical experiment created a rupture with the logic of all pedagogies.' For, Jacotot's experiment – simply *telling* students to learn both the French and the Flemish pages of the bilingual book *Télémaque*, an experiment which led the students to learn excellent French very quickly – did not involve 'the transmission of the master's knowledge to the students.' In fact, 'Jacotot had transmitted nothing':

He had not used any method. The method was purely the student's. And whether one learns French more quickly or less quickly is in itself a matter of little consequence. The comparison was no longer between methods but rather between two uses of intelligence and two conceptions of the intellectual order. The rapid route was not that of a better pedagogy. It was another route, that of liberty. (14)

The rest of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* charts the ensuing misappropriations and misadventures of Jacotot's 'realisation' once it was picked up, turned over, assessed, implemented or instituted by others, all over the world. However, it seems noteworthy that Rancière's book stops before the moment of the post-1968 institutional reformation which in some sense inspired Rancière's critique in the first place. So, the question is: what became of Jacotot's universal learning? And what is Rancière's own relation to, investment in, or status vis-à-vis the post-1968 field that he critiques and intervenes into by insinuating the subversive lesson of Jacotot?

Forget Jacotot

In September 1971, *Black Belt Magazine* published an article called 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate.' It was written by Bruce Lee. This article is arguably epochal, in many ways. It is important to note that 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' is one of the few definitive written statements given by Bruce Lee on the subject of what he wanted to teach – namely a revolutionary approach to martial arts that he called 'Jeet Kune Do.' [4] In Bruce Lee's words: 'Literally, "jeet" means to intercept or to stop; "kune" is the fist; and "do" is the way, the ultimate reality'; so, Jeet Kune Do means 'the way of the intercepting fist' (1971: 24). Yet, Lee insists: 'Do remember, however, that "Jeet Kune Do" is merely a convenient name. I am not interested with [sic] the term itself; I am interested in its effect of liberation when JKD is used as a mirror for self-examination' (24). Thus, rather than a style, a method or a syllabus, Bruce Lee's 'Jeet Kune Do' was originally an experimental ethos organised in terms of liberation.

Given this, it seems pertinent to reflect on the fact that many academics who have sought to study Bruce Lee, to 'read' Bruce Lee, and to learn 'from' Bruce Lee – in film studies, gender studies, postcolonialism, and so on – have overwhelmingly overlooked the fact that Bruce Lee *himself* actually *sought* to teach at all. Many have overlooked *that* he sought to teach and *what* he sought to teach. Yet, when we enquire into the nature of the 'lesson' that Bruce Lee sought

to teach – the final signified that he intended to impress upon the world – we encounter a lesson that is uncannily similar to the lesson of Rancière's Jacotot: you can learn without being taught and you can teach what you do not know.

The term 'Jeet Kune Do' had been coined by Lee to evoke the guiding principles ('Do') or ultimate aim in fighting – quick and decisive victory. Lee believed these to be encapsulated in anything that could simultaneously intercept/interrupt an attack ('Jeet') and deliver a simultaneous hit of one's own ('Kune'). According to his senior student, Dan Inosanto, Lee was particularly enamoured of Western fencing's 'stop-hit' technique – the act of blocking and striking simultaneously in one movement – hence, the name (and indeed, the look and feel of) Jeet Kune Do. But Lee was at pains to emphasize that in itself JKD was not a 'style': 'Unlike a "classical" martial art, there is no series of rules or classification of technique that constitutes a distinct "Jeet Kune Do" method of fighting' (24), he insisted.[5] The point, instead, writes Lee, is that 'through instinctive body feeling, each of us 'knows' our own most efficient and dynamic manner of achieving effective leverage, balance in motion, economical use of energy, etc' (24). Thus, *we all already know* how to move, how to fight. At the same time, learning formal 'patterns, techniques or forms touch[es] only the fringe of genuine understanding.' Formal training in martial arts actually *stultifies* the learner. According to Lee, the 'core of understanding lies in the individual mind, and until that is touched, everything is uncertain and superficial.' He claims: 'Truth cannot be perceived until we come to fully understand ourselves and our potentials. After all, knowledge in the martial arts ultimately means self-knowledge':

At this point you may ask, "How do I gain this knowledge?" That you will have to find out all by yourself. You must accept the fact that there is no help but self-help. For the same reason I cannot tell you how to 'gain' freedom, since freedom exists within you. I cannot tell you what 'not' to do, I cannot tell you what you 'should' do, since that would be confining you to a particular approach. Formulas can only inhibit freedom, externally dictated prescriptions only squelch creativity and assure mediocrity. Bear in mind that the freedom that accrues from self-knowledge cannot be acquired through strict adherence to a formula; we do not suddenly 'become' free, we simply 'are' free.

Learning is definitely not mere imitation, nor is it the ability to accumulate and regurgitate fixed knowledge. Learning is a constant process of discovery, a process without end. In JKD we begin not by accumulation but by discovering the cause of our ignorance, a discovery that involves a shedding process.

Unfortunately, most students in the martial arts are conformists. Instead of learning to depend on themselves for expression, 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 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. (Lee, 1971: 24)

In place of formal pedagogical structures, Bruce Lee – who had no formal qualification in any martial art but who could demonstrate ‘mastery’ in many – advocated autodidacticism, self-help, constant innovation, testing, exploration, experiment and dynamic verification. In other words, Bruce Lee was quite radical or revolutionary. Indeed, suggests Daniele Bolelli: ‘At a time when no forms of established authority went unchallenged, it seems only natural that even the field of martial arts was destined to experience some drastic change’ (Bolelli, 2003: 182-3). After characterising Bruce Lee’s ‘time’ – the late 1960s – as an era of all things anti-authoritarian, Bolelli concludes that:

The philosophy of JKD can therefore be seen as the gift (or the curse, depending on your point of view) of the alchemical mixing of Taoism, Zen Buddhism, the antiauthoritarian culture of the 1960s, and Bruce Lee’s own personality. Regardless of whether we agree with Lee’s approach or not, his example remains as an open invitation to do one of the healthiest things that anyone, martial artist or not, can do; questioning one’s own beliefs. (183)

The only help is self-help. Push yourself. Know thyself. You already know yourself, in yourself. Subject all institutions to a deconstructive questioning. Don’t follow leaders. Question all beliefs. Experiment with interdisciplinarity in the name of antidisciplinarity. This is the lesson of Bruce Lee. Of course, it is often said that a vague (but violent) ethnic Chinese ‘cultural nationalism’ comes out in Lee’s films, whilst this radical egalitarian/universalist individualism comes out in his martial arts ‘philosophy’ and written texts. However, even in Lee’s early films (largely written and directed by others and following stock formulas) Lee’s nationalism always comes in response to nationalistically-inflected aggression against ‘innocent’ Chinese underdogs. Moreover, Lee’s later and increasingly self-controlled works (such as the incomplete *Game of Death*) all seek to emphasize themes of universalistic equality and individualistic emancipation. So it is clear that what subtends all of Lee’s texts is the *egalitarian* impulse that can be seen in ‘Liberate Yourself.’ This article ends:

There is no standard in total combat, and expression must be free. This liberating truth is a reality only in so far as it is ‘experienced and lived’ by the individual himself; it is a truth that transcends styles or disciplines. Remember, too, that Jeet Kune Do is merely a term, a label to be used as a boat to get one across; once across, it is to be discarded and not carried on one’s back.

These few paragraphs are, at best, a ‘finger pointing to the moon’. Please do not take the finger to be the moon or fix your gaze so intently on the finger as to miss all the beautiful sights of heaven.

After all, the usefulness of the finger is in pointing away from itself to the light which illumines finger and all. (24)

Lee was to use this 'finger pointing' analogy again. It reoccurs at the start of *Enter the Dragon* (1973), during one of the establishing scenes. The opening scenes of the film are of course all about establishing an interpretive context, and what these opening scenes chiefly provide will undoubtedly have been many viewers' first 'experience' or inkling of the discipline and mysticism of the legendary Shaolin Temple and its mythical warrior monks. This 'mysticism' is condensed in one of the very first scenes, in which Lee tutors a young monk, Lau. This scene runs like this:

Lee: It's Lau's time.

Braithwaite [surprised and somewhat puzzled]: Yes, of course...

Lee: Kick me. [*Lau seems puzzled*] Kick me. [*Lau throws a side-kick*] What was that? An exhibition? We need [*pointing to his head*] emotional content. Try again! [*Lau kicks again*] I said emotional content. Not anger! Now try again! With *me!* [*Lau throws two more kicks, causing Lee to respond*] That's it! How did it feel to you?

Lau: Let me think.

Lee: [*Slaps Lau's head*] Don't think! *Feel!* It is like a finger pointing away to the moon. [*Slaps Lau's head*] *Don't* concentrate on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory. Do you understand?

Lau: [*smiles, nods, bows*]

Lee: [*Slaps the back of Lau's head*] *Never* take your eyes off your opponent, even when you bow.... That's it.

The behaviour of Lee's character in this 'teacherly' mode is not without precedent. According to Avital Ronell, Zen teachers often liberally strike students who give the wrong answers to Zen koans (*riddles*, essentially); an act which arguably has various pedagogical functions. The main function of the strike is to jolt the student into 'realization,' 'awakening,' or 'satori' (Ronell, 2004: 62). In Ronell's words:

The hit seals a sort of 'compliment' conferred by the attentive master, who prods the physical body for the purpose of uninhibiting a scene of contemplation, new and unanticipated. The shock is crucial to the experience of the koan: it stages the opening of thought exceeding itself in the jolt. (Ronell, 2004: 62)

The riddler

But, in 'Liberate Yourself' and in *Enter the Dragon*, what is the thought? In an essay on the pedagogy of Buddhism, a piece which

involves an analysis of some of the occurrences of the finger pointing to the moon riddle in Zen Buddhist writings, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes that whilst on the one hand Western education largely proceeds by 'assuming that every lesson can be divided into ever more bite-sized, ever more assimilable bits,' on the other hand, the 'wisdom traditions' of Buddhism principally 'assume that students have already surmounted a fairly high threshold of recognition' (2003: 171-2). This is coupled with what she calls a 'radical doubt that a basic realization can be communicated at all' (172). It is in this, she suggests, that the difference between Western and Buddhist pedagogy consists: Buddhist pedagogy does not 'teach'; rather it attempts to establish – to verify, to test – 'recognition,' or 'realisation.' As Ronell formulates this, 'the koan, offered by the teacher – the 'master' – is meant to 'open' the pupil to the possibility of Saying. The master is responsible for initiating the call of such an opening.' This 'call of such an opening,' she continues, is often 'attained by the administration of a shock.' This is why the master 'is frequently figured as beating, hitting, or slugging the pupil' (Ronell, 2004: 62).

Ronell jolts her consideration of Buddhist pedagogy back to questions of Western philosophy. Sedgwick, too, quickly returns the discussion back to 'Philosophy proper,' so to speak.[6] However, Sedgwick is guided by a fascination with the Buddha's claim: 'I have not taught a single word during the forty-nine years of my Dharma preaching'; and that, rather than teaching *as such*, 'the Buddha spoke many sutras, which should only be taken as "the finger that points to the moon", not the moon itself' (Sedgwick, 2003: 170).

If such pedagogies can be taken seriously by both queer and other radical emancipatory theorists in the realms of philosophy, 'wisdom traditions' and pedagogy 'proper,' this still raises the question of the pedagogical status of Bruce Lee's cinematic and journalistic non-teaching of exactly the same things (if it still makes sense to put it like this)? And what of the fact that the moment of Lee's emergence was also the moment of high-hippy countercultural utopianism (the late 1960s and early 1970s)? What is to be made of the fact that this period is also the period that spurred so many critiques of institutions – and particularly pedagogical institutions – including those coming from deconstruction, cultural studies, feminism, postcolonialism, gender and sexuality studies, Bourdieu and (*hence*) Rancière?

The finger

It would be fair to say that Bruce Lee's finger is pointing not just to the moon, but to problems of referentiality, indexicality and ontology, all of which at a certain time coalesced into one hell of a discursive convergence. As already noted, the dialectical synthesis of the apparently diametrically opposing 'lessons' of Bruce Lee (the Chinese nationalism of the 'lesson of the early celluloid Lee' versus the pragmatic, egalitarian inter- and antidisiplinary 'lesson of JKD') can be found in what might be called a certain 'spirit.' This spirit subtends,

infuses and suffuses 'both' lessons of Bruce Lee. This spirit is often too quickly represented as the spirit of Zen – a putatively timeless, 'transcultural' spirit. However, such a spirit surely can and should be historicized. According to Sedgwick:

In the United States it seems to have fallen to the twentieth-century popularizers of Zen, after World War II, to begin to articulate the centrality in many forms of Buddhism of [a] radical doubt that a basic realization can be communicated at all. After all, if Zen practice cannot promise to bring one methodically over the high learning threshold of satori ['awakening', 'realization'], it at least offers distinct practices, such as wrestling with koans, for dramatizing and perhaps exhausting the impossibility of methodical learning. Furthermore, the anti-scholasticism of Zen and the often anti-intellectualism of the counterculture merged in a durable consciousness of the limits of verbal articulation. The 1960s heyday of these explorations [...] was one when a critique of school institutions became the vehicle of almost every form of utopian investment; if Buddhist explorations were peripheral to the student movement, they nonetheless both enabled and were enabled by it. (172)

Quite how one ultimately judges the value and lasting effects of such a movement remains to be decided. What is clear is the central place of Bruce Lee within this movement, as expression and agency, bringing many elements of the cultural and political margins right to the centre of global popular culture. Indeed, Bruce Lee can be regarded as providing what Rancière calls 'the aesthetic dimension of the reconfiguration of the relationships between doing, seeing and saying that circumscribe the being-in-common [which] is inherent to every political or social movement' (2000: 17). Of course, Rancière adds quickly, 'this aesthetic component of politics does not lead me to seek the political everywhere that there is a reconfiguration of perceptible attributes in general. I am far from believing that "everything is political".' Yet, he quickly adds: 'On the other hand, I believe it's important to note that the political dimension of the arts can be seen first of all in the way that their forms materially propose the paradigms of the community' (17). This is not to suggest that Bruce Lee was a herald and trailblazer of a PC utopia. However, it is, at least, to locate Bruce Lee firmly at the shifting centre of enduring intercultural and cross-ethnic representation. As Rey Chow sees it, this is:

a process in which the acceleration and intensification of contacts brought by technology and commerce entail an acceleration and intensification of stereotypes, stereotypes that, rather than simply being false or incorrect (and thus dismissable), have the potential of effecting changes in entire intellectual climates... (Chow 2002: 63)

What is the 'mechanism' and the 'political' status of such changes? We have already seen one example of the way in which a viewer might 'learn' from Bruce Lee, in Morris' reading of Linda's experience

in the face of Bruce's experience of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. There are others.

On the shores of aesthetic dissensus

In his afterword to Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Slavoj Žižek claims:

when, three decades ago, Kung Fu films were popular (Bruce Lee, etc.), was it not obvious that we were dealing with a genuine working class ideology of youngsters whose only means of success was the disciplinary training of their only possession, their bodies? Spontaneity and the 'let it go' attitude of indulging in excessive freedoms belong to those who have the means to afford it – those who have nothing have only their discipline. The 'bad' bodily discipline, if there is one, is not collective training, but, rather, jogging and body-building as part of the New Age myth of the realization of the Self's inner potentials – no wonder that the obsession with one's body is an almost obligatory part of the passage of ex-Leftist radicals into the 'maturity' of pragmatic politics: from Jane Fonda to Joschka Fischer, the 'period of latency' between the two phases was marked by the focus on one's own body. (Žižek, 2004: 78-9)

In other words, for Žižek, if the emergence of the image was a pole of *subjectivating identification*, the future of the image was ideological phantasy. So, as many thinkers have noted,^[7] Žižek's point is that images, moments, events, become (to use an overburdened and deeply problematic word) 'co-opted' – ideologically recuperated: domesticated, channelled, moved into a place. However, for Rancière, as we have seen, subjectivization (in contradistinction to 'interpellation') involves 'an identification that cannot be embodied' – not 'the simple assertion of an identity' but 'always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by an other, given by the ruling order of policy.' Thus, we might say that where Žižek (in a way that is not all that different from Althusser) would see imaginary and symbolic identification as *placing* us in a *pre-given ideological* 'place,' Rancière prompts us to see *identification as a disidentification that displaces us into a political 'place.'* This is a place of dissensus. In our example, the relation of Linda to Bruce and to 'her' community that is constituted by the dissonance of her viewing 'awakening' (or 'satori') arguably amounts to what Rancière calls 'the aesthetic dimension of the reconfiguration of the relationships between doing, seeing and saying that circumscribe the being-in-common [which] is inherent to every political or social movement' (Rancière, 2000: 17) – and now we might add, every 'emancipatory' pedagogical relation, whether that be in relation to the book, the magazine or the screen.

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Truth of Žižek (2007), as well as editor of *Interrogating Cultural Studies* (2003) and *The Rey Chow Reader* (2010).

Notes

1. For an extended discussion of all of these points and others, see my book *Theorizing Bruce Lee* (Bowman, 2009).

2. Bruce Lee has long been recognised as a muse for postmodern self-construction: Morris clarifies this by discussing his role in the camp US martial arts film, *No Retreat, No Surrender*, in which the ghost of Lee comes back to enable the teen hero to reconstruct himself to vanquish his foes.

3. In fact, the crux of Morris's entire article in this regard is that although she sees the grain of truth in Robert Hughes' caricatural comment that 'the world changes more widely, deeply, thrillingly than at any moment since 1917, and the American academic left keeps fretting about how phallogentricity is inscribed in Dickens's portrayal of Little Nell' (184); on the other hand, Morris believes that there has in fact been 'a wide, deep, thrilling change in the world which Robert Hughes has missed' – namely, that 'fretting over phallogentricity is now a popular occupation' (184). We may or may not accept Morris' contention that 'fretting over phallogentricity is now a popular occupation.' (Personally, I do not, although I think that in the mid to late 1990s perhaps it looked like it was *about to become* more of 'a popular occupation'; and maybe it did briefly become slightly more common than it had been, at least journalistically.)

4. For, since his death, Lee's name has been attached to the wholesale and indiscriminate posthumous publication of selections from his notebooks, college essays, journals and jotters, and these include many unattributed but readily traceable quotations from other thinkers – all of which ultimately makes Bruce Lee seem to be a barefaced plagiarist – as if he himself made the decision to publish 'his' words in that form, after he died. But 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate' was signed and signed off by Bruce Lee. It is his manifesto for 'Jeet Kune Do.'

5. He continues: 'JKD is not a form of special conditioning with its own rigid philosophy. It looks at combat not from a single angle, but from all possible angles.' Thus, 'There are no prearranged sets or "kata" in the teaching of JKD, nor are they necessary' (1971: 24).

6. Sedgwick chases the interpretation of the finger-moon riddle through the archives of Zen Buddhist writings; for the 'implication of the finger/moon image is that pointing may invite less misunderstanding than speech, but that even its non-linguistic concreteness cannot shield it from the slippery problems that surround reference' (2003: 170). As she concludes: 'Perhaps the most distinctive way Mahayana Buddhism has tried to negotiate the "finger

pointing at the moon” issue is through the ostentive language of thusness or suchness’ (170). However, ostention, indexicality, acts of reference, and suchlike, produce a ‘resonant double movement’ (171), which Sedgwick prefers to approach through the terms and poetics of Buddhism itself. This preference allows her to propose that ‘finally, in the view of thusness, even the distinction between finger and moon dissolves, and with it perhaps the immemorial injunction against confusing them’: ‘As a contemporary Zen abbot notes, ‘The finger pointing to the moon is the moon, and the moon is the finger. . . they realize each other’ (...). A koan commentary elaborates: ‘When the monk asked about the meaning of “the moon”, the master [Fa Yen] answered “to point at”; when someone else asked about the meaning of “to point at” the master replied “the moon”: Why was it so? The deepest reasoning, probably, was in the Enlightened mind of the Ch’an master, where there was no distinction between what the ordinary mind called “to point at” and “the moon”: To him, the relation between the two was similar to the relation of an ocean to its waves’ (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003: 171).

7. See, for example, the discussion of this in Brown (1997). I refer the reader to Brown in particular for two reasons: the first is because Brown’s discussion of Stuart Hall’s trailblazing analysis of co-optation or ideological rearticulation refers and relates directly to martial arts culture; the second is because Brown’s analysis of ‘co-optation’ is considerably more nuanced and sophisticated than most others.

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