



**Dialogue:
Conquest of Reality:
Response to Paul Bowman's
'Instituting Reality in Martial Arts Practice'**

Kyle Barrowman

The University of Chicago
Email: kbarrowman@uchicago.edu

*A discussion in response to Paul Bowman's article
'Instituting Reality in Martial Arts Practice'*

Abstract

In this Dialogue, Kyle Barrowman responds to Paul Bowman's article 'Instituting Reality in Martial Arts Practice' and poses questions pertinent to future development of martial arts studies.

Contributor Note

Kyle Barrowman is a postgraduate student at The University of Chicago. He has previously published essays in *Offscreen*, *The International Journal of Žižek Studies*, and *Senses of Cinema*, on subjects ranging from Michael Mann and Alfred Hitchcock to Bruce Lee and Steven Seagal.



Introduction

As excited and honored as I was to be able to contribute an essay to this Martial Arts Studies issue of the *JOMEC Journal*, the greatest thrill for me regarding the whole experience was being able to establish a line of communication with Paul Bowman. From when I initially submitted my essay for this issue in December of 2012 to when the issue was published this past June, my e-mail correspondence with Dr. Bowman produced a number of interesting conversations wherein we batted around different ideas about the martial arts, the movies, and the academy, many of which helped to enrich my contribution and all of which helped to enrich my thinking on Martial Arts Studies.

Considering how generous and helpful Dr. Bowman was with his criticisms, insights, and encouragement regarding my own essay, I felt only too fortunate to have the opportunity to try to repay in some small measure his generosity by offering a few observations regarding his essay 'Instituting Reality in Martial Arts Practice'. I originally sent Dr. Bowman a rough numbered list featuring some questions and concerns in response to what I felt were key moments in his argument. Some of what I mentioned has already been dealt with by him in the essay featured in this issue and has therefore not been included in the present response essay. However, it was Dr. Bowman's opinion that the issues I brought up that were not taken up directly in his essay were worth placing in the wider conversation within the growing field of Martial Arts Studies,

not least so that he would be able to facilitate the conversation and elaborate, clarify, and/or counter some of my comments in ways that will hopefully enrich the work currently being done in this exciting new endeavor.

1. The Problem of Institutionalization

Given the title of Paul Bowman's essay, it seems only natural to begin by broaching what he frames as the 'problem' of institutionalization in martial arts practice. In his essay, Bowman outlines this problem in the following manner:

If one really is concerned with questions of violence and reality, then the *decision* to commit to one style of martial arts as opposed to any other involves a leap of faith ... [T]he hope is that the training will prove adequate in reality, if and when required [while] the fear is that one is deluding oneself, or being satisfied with simulations. The problem is that, in any eventuality, all roads are leading to institutionalization. This is because *ways of training become styles* (institutions) – *disciplines* that produce the [requisite] bodily propensities, reflexes and dispositions.... [I]f we understand bodily training like this, the other side of 'emancipation' is always going to be 'stultification' (Rancière 1991). This means that ... liberation or emancipation *from* style, on the one hand, and stultification *by* style, on the other, seem to emerge





reciprocally and to be opposite sides of the same coin. Put differently: even if it may be the case that at some level the desire to 'master reality' is what prompts such activities as martial arts training in the first place, the end result is always a kind of *disciplining* and hence *institutionalization*. (Bowman 2014: 5)

This passage is characteristic of Bowman's scholarship in that there are myriad provocative formulations here that could easily support entire essays – from the notion of the 'decision' (significantly italicized in his text) to 'commit' (curiously not italicized in his text despite being an equally if not even more interesting word choice) to a single martial arts style to the idea that ways of training *become* styles – however the point on which I found myself focusing was whether or not institutionalization should even be framed as a problem in the first place. If martial arts practice helps a person to be better prepared for a physical confrontation, and if martial arts practice necessarily leads to institutionalization, then institutionalization helped that person to be better prepared for that physical confrontation. Can institutionalization really be (that big of) a problem if it helps martial arts practice achieve (one of) its function(s)?

At some points in his argument, I feel like this is exactly the point that Bowman is making. The fact that there is a residue of uncertainty leads me to wonder if it is his language throughout his essay which is confusing for me; or his indulgence at times in the language of those martial arts theorist-practitioners who are unaware of these contradictions or paradoxes (and

who view the failure of Bruce Lee's 'evangelical' ideas of emancipation and liberation as something like the 'fall' into institutionalization) as his way of registering this unavoidable process of disciplining/institutionalizing (I hesitate to say the *right* way, even though I do believe Bowman is correct).

This 'problem' also seems related to the 'problem' of repetition in martial arts practice being both enabling and limiting – something which, once registered as a paradox, no longer seems like an actual problem inasmuch as it is at once inevitable and necessary. My response to this portion of Dr. Bowman's essay ultimately boils down to wondering what he wants his readers to take away from his reorientations of institutionalization and repetition: A) Are they problems that we need to solve or B) Are they inevitabilities that should not be viewed as problems?

2. Pedagogical Aesthetics in Martial Arts Cinema

Moving on from the practice of martial arts to the mediatization of martial arts, Bowman anchors his essay with a consideration of the Keysi Fighting Method (KFM), which was put on the martial arts map thanks to Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight Trilogy (*Batman Begins* [2005], *The Dark Knight* [2008], *The Dark Knight Rises* [2012]). Given that I come from a film studies background, it should come as no surprise that I find Bowman's thoughts on the mediatization of martial arts exceedingly interesting. Not only that, I think the way he frames many of his arguments on this front (both for the sake





of his discussion of the Dark Knight Trilogy and the place therein of KFM from the essay presently under consideration as well as for the sake of an earlier discussion of the Bourne Trilogy [*The Bourne Identity* (2002), *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007)] and the place therein of Kali [Bowman 2013a] are very astute and can be of great use to scholars interested in analyzing martial arts cinema. Having said this, my response to his discussion of KFM in the Dark Knight Trilogy is not so much a critique as it is a desire to historically contextualize and extend his comments beyond these three films.

After setting the stage for KFM's onscreen arrival, Bowman mentions how it 'was employed as a way to help make the film[s] look excitingly "different"', and he posits as the key feature of the 'visual difference' of KFM as opposed to other familiar modes of cinematic fight choreography 'the fact that KFM looked rough, raw, and brutal, in ways that Hollywood had not really explored or exhausted before' (Bowman 2014: 6). While I have no desire to combat his characterization of KFM, I do feel the need – especially within the context of what Bowman frames as the 'reality drive' – to bring up in connection with this brief consideration of the history of martial arts cinema the important place in that history occupied by Steven Seagal. In his seminal analysis of Seagal's Aikido aesthetics, Aaron Anderson places Seagal on the most extreme realistic end of what he calls the martial arts cinema 'reality spectrum', and I think Seagal would make for a useful point of (specifically cinematic) comparison with KFM in addition to Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do initiative insofar as he

was the first martial arts star to create a new, post-Bruce Lee standard for combative realism onscreen by uncompromisingly showcasing the brutal efficiency of his martial arts skills (Anderson 1998).

Additionally, in looking at the relationship between martial arts pedagogy and the cinema, Bowman acknowledges the fact that nearly all martial arts have become known (particularly in the West) through cinematic representations. In the case of KFM in particular, though, Bowman argues that its mode of 'Post-DVD Pedagogy' marks a break from previous modes. As he asserts:

'Knowledge' of KFM was not circulated in the same way that 'knowledge' about other martial arts had been circulated, prior to DVD and the Internet. With KFM, fans were not merely trying to mimic the martial moves they'd seen in the movie. Rather, the DVD extras offered ... a specific pedagogical interpellative mode, which is a species or relative of – whilst remaining different from – either fiction film or documentary. (Bowman 2014: 12-13)

I do not wish to dispute this assessment of post-DVD pedagogy, as I believe these observations regarding KFM and its particular pedagogical mode are accurate and worth pursuing. However, I do think it is necessary to elaborate the pedagogical timeline of martial arts cinema beyond a simple 'Before KFM' and 'After KFM' division. Bowman frames this division as one between films that feature martial arts and films that feature, as 'special features',





actual 'lessons' in how to perform the martial arts techniques featured in the films. What gets lost in this schematic division is the uniqueness of the pedagogical modes of previous films such as those featuring James Cagney's early experiments with martial arts (e.g. *'G' Men* [1935] and *Blood on the Sun* [1945]) as well as the paradigmatic films of Seagal.

Unlike the familiar cases of *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978) or *Kickboxer* (1989), which show *what* martial artists do, Cagney's and especially Seagal's films call attention to *how* martial artists do what they do. Seagal more than any other martial arts star offers a form of cinematic pedagogy that is not implicit in the films – that is to say, it is not something solely up to obsessed fans with DVD players or YouTube streams willing to endlessly rewind and replay Jackie Chan and Jean-Claude Van Damme fight scenes to teach themselves the various moves nor is it something non-narrative/extra-diegetic and thus not strictly cinematic – but rather, something that is explicit and an inextricable part of the films' actual aesthetic construction. In the language of Stanley Cavell, this can be thought of as 'what the text knows of itself', or, another way he has phrased it, what the text knows of the viewer (Cavell 2005 [1985]: 117).

Before he was a movie star, Seagal was an Aikido instructor, both in Japan where he spent years training in his late teens and in the U.S. after he had returned as an adult (he has also continued for the past two decades to offer demonstrations at as well as host various seminars around the world), and his role as a pedagogue informs the construction of his films just

as much as Bruce Lee's similarly pedagogical role informed the construction of his films. In *Beyond Bruce Lee*, Bowman makes the crucial observation that 'many academics who have sought to study Bruce Lee ... have overwhelmingly overlooked the fact that Bruce Lee – *himself* – actually *sought* to teach at all ... have overlooked *that* he sought to teach and *what* he sought to teach' (Bowman 2013b: 67). Likewise, the nature of Seagal's cinematic pedagogy has also been overlooked, and I think following Bowman's lead down this path of the mediatization of martial arts has the potential to better illuminate the history and the vicissitudes of martial arts cinema.

3. The MMA Connection

Situated in a strange middle-ground between the martial arts and the media, the sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) has begun to feature more and more prominently in the academic discourse on martial arts (evident in some of the contributions to this very journal issue). Bowman himself has not offered any extended considerations of MMA, but he has provided a few challenging comments on the sport across his various essays and books. In the particular essay under discussion here, MMA figures into his argument in a way that allows him to pick up and extend past commentaries, here more firmly placing the sport within the realm of media theory. One part that I found especially interesting was the discussion of KFM and its online/DVD 'courses' (Bowman 2014: 8). Even though they are not strictly identical to the KFM courses (for example, there is no belt





progression or anything of the kind), inasmuch as they predate the emergence of KFM and highlight the connection between the martial arts and the mediascape, I feel it is worthwhile to mention Bas Rutten's role as the most notable and prolific MMA fighter to release these types of 'how-to' instructionals in the form of his *Superior Free Fight Techniques* videos from Nikko Toshogu Press in 1996 (which also released a series on kickboxing with Rob Kaman), his *Big Books of Combat* from 2002, and his hilarious (and undeniably effective) *Lethal Street Fighting Self-Defense System* from 2003.

Another interesting and more recent case of MMA pedagogy is the 'Gracie Breakdown' YouTube series where Ryron and Renner Gracie (sons of Rorion Gracie, the main brain behind the creation of the Ultimate Fighting Championship [UFC]) take recent or classic fights and go through the techniques used step-by-step.¹ These examples are also, as Bowman said of the special features for the Bourne Trilogy and the Dark Knight Trilogy, related to but curiously different from fiction films or documentaries.

I was also struck in Bowman's discussion of KFM and its debt to film by the puzzling case of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). Bowman follows the trajectory of KFM from when it showed up onscreen to when it took off in both the film and the martial arts communities, and he compares this trajectory to that of BJJ from when it

showed up in the UFC as the style represented by multiple-time UFC tournament champion Royce Gracie and subsequently changed the combat sports landscape. On the basis of this comparison, I could not help but wonder if there is anything significant in the fact that, when BJJ showed up onscreen in 1987 in the classic buddy-cop actioner, *Lethal Weapon*, on which Rorion Gracie served as the fight choreographer and in which Mel Gibson wins the climactic fight with Gary Busey courtesy of a triangle choke, there was no comparable explosion in the popular consciousness (which is to say, *there was no explosion*). In his contribution to this issue, Daniele Bolelli talks about the reciprocity between BJJ/MMA and the movies (Bolelli 2014), but I have always found it interesting how the relationship has never been all that smooth, how there have been strange time lags – as if BJJ needed 'reality' (in the form of the UFC) before it could be 'fictionalized' and thus embraced by the cinema (as evidenced by the abundance of movies nowadays that feature BJJ moves such as *Flash Point* [2007], *Haywire* [2011], and *The Last Stand* [2013]) while the more 'traditional' and 'flashy' martial arts needed to dazzle the eyes of movie audiences before they could be taken seriously enough to be considered for their efficiency (as evidenced by the abundance of MMA fighters nowadays who are incorporating flashier techniques into their arsenals).

The most contentious claim that Bowman makes with reference to MMA is when he argues that 'BJJ, MMA, KFM, and arguably now many other martial arts ... are constituted by and cannot but operate and exist within and according to the

¹ For example, here is the Gracie Breakdown of the classic first encounter at UFC 1 between MMA legends Royce Gracie and Ken Shamrock: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSS9CuuPvQg.





terms of the mediascape' (Bowman 2014: 9). I definitely agree with his later observation that the mediascape is a 'disavowed but constitutive supplement' (Bowman 2014: 9) to martial arts, but I think it overstates the case to claim that BJJ or MMA literally cannot exist without the media. If by 'exist' he means exist in the specific form in which they exist at the present moment, in which they are as popular and well-known as they are today courtesy of TV, home video, and online streaming, then maybe not (although I hasten to add that the famous 'Gracie Challenge' was already well-known in the martial arts community prior to the creation of the UFC, thanks especially to the April 1992 issue of *Black Belt Magazine* where a Kenpo Karate instructor wrote an article detailing his experience accepting the Gracie Challenge and losing to Royler Gracie), but I think anything beyond that is a reach, although I would be very interested to hear Bowman argue the point more thoroughly.

I also think it is important to note that a strict correlation between MMA on TV and KFM on film is not a valid comparison, for while the very notion of mediatization puts pressure on MMA's claims to being 'real', it is still definitively more real than a Batman movie and therefore does not belong on the same ontological level. In Cavell's language, MMA events are *recordings*, not films, and therefore must be considered in separate ontological registers. As he explains:

In calling something a recording [Cavell's example is a piece of music] two criteria are in play: (1) there is an original, separate event of which this is a recording and to

which one can be present directly, so to speak; anyway, present apart from the recording; (2) the recording is in principle aurally indistinguishable from that event, where 'in principle' signifies that the essential virtue of a recording is fidelity. (Cavell 1979 [1971]: 183)

Lastly, although Bowman never brings this 'ontology of MMA' argument into the foreground of his essay, I would like to push on it a little more with reference to a previous commentary he offered and on which he elaborates in the present essay under consideration. As he maintained in an earlier argument:

[The] declared drive [of MMA and the UFC] to get to the real and the ultimate reality – or indeed, the universals – of unarmed combat was tragically flawed by its being necessarily shackled and subordinated to the injunctions and imperatives of mediatization. The society of the spectacle wants its spectacles spectacular and hyper-real, and advertisers want their ad-breaks every ten minutes (Debord 1994; Baudrillard 1994). So, MMA and the UFC – perhaps the most brutal and supposedly therefore 'real' of televised sport combat – were mediatized and hyper-realized *from the start*. (Bowman 2013a: 8)

Once again, I would like to reiterate that I am not opposed to the argument that mediatization necessitates a more complex understanding of the 'reality of combat'. However, at the risk of being pedantic, I would like to clarify that the





UFC was not mediatized and hyper-realized 'from the start' (which Bowman emphasizes with italics), at least it not in the specific way he suggests. The early UFC was inarguably pushing the spectacle angle as a means of attracting attention, but insofar as it was a Pay-Per-View product, the considerations of 'ad-breaks every ten minutes' were of no concern – not to the original SEG-owned UFC product of the 'human cockfighting' era nor even the later Zuffa-owned product of the 'Unified Rules' era.² And even since the UFC has started broadcasting original programming (e.g., *The Ultimate Fighter*) and live fight cards (e.g., *Ultimate Fight Night* and *UFC on Fox*), there have been no additional changes made solely for the sake of television. In short, television has had to accommodate the UFC, not the other way around, as in the necessity of fitting commercials in between the 60-second rest periods between rounds and in modifying a given night's programming in the event a fight or fights go over the allotted broadcast time.

As to the charge of accommodating the bloodthirsty spectators who want their spectacles spectacular and hyperreal, this again was not manifest in the actual structure of the UFC in particular or MMA at large. One could point to the fact that referees today have the power to separate fighters in the clinch or stand fighters up from the ground as a result of inactivity as

² 'Human cockfighting' is a reference to John McCain's infamous characterization of early MMA (an ignorant position first exposed by Ken Shamrock in an important 1995 debate on *Larry King Live*) while 'Unified Rules' is a reference to the set of MMA regulations drafted in 2000 that have since become the foundational guidelines for sanctioned MMA events in North America.

indicative of rules that facilitate more spectacular and hyperreal fights, but in addition to this being a comparatively recent development (and thus not a factor 'from the start') it is also important to note that being a *by-product* of a rule or set of rules is not the same as being its/their *source*.

4. Fighting for (the) Real

This discussion of MMA leads me to explicitly take up the extraordinarily difficult question that has been implicit in much of what I have discussed up to this point – namely the place of 'reality' in the discourses on the martial arts and the media. Assessing Bowman's essay from the broadest standpoint, I find it shares an unmistakable connection with the canonical realist film theory of André Bazin – in particular what Bazin conceptualized in one of his most famous writings as the 'myth of total cinema' (Bazin 2005a [1946]: 117-122), which shares an affinity with Bowman's argument vis-à-vis his interrogation of what can be similarly conceptualized as the 'myth of total martial arts'.

The problem that I feel attends this similarity (and something that is a far more significant problem for martial arts practice than it is for film theory) is a lack of clarity/explicitness as to how (or if) Bowman is evaluating the main points of his argument (which could potentially lead – as it did in my case – to a lack of clarity as to how we are supposed to be evaluating these points ourselves). For example, in a discussion of martial arts'





asymptotic relation to reality,³ I was left wondering where Bowman stood on this necessary division.

Highlighting the experientiality of training and of combat is crucial and Bowman's discussion of the necessarily contingent nature of the 'reality of combat' builds on the idea that every style is merely one point on the martial arts reality asymptote, but the lingering question for me while reading these types of comments is, 'Okay, so what do we do about it?' Even if neither Judo nor Krav Maga (for convenient examples) can claim to have 'achieved reality' in any 'objective' or 'total' sense, the notion of the asymptote still presupposes, if not a simplistic 'real versus not real' split, at the very least a 'more real versus less real' split.

After all, if one were to pick two points on an asymptote, even if the line will never actually cross the axis – which is to say, even if no martial art will ever totally achieve reality – does it not follow that one point/martial art must be closer than another? When Bowman says (with reference to KFM and Krav Maga) that 'some styles ... specialize in training for evermore different combat environments and scenarios' (Bowman 2014: 3), he seems to be inviting the inference that preparing one for more situations than less is a valid reason to prefer training in one martial art over another, or considering one martial art more realistic/applicable than another. Is such

³ Bowman's invocation of the asymptote also places him in connection with Bazin, who famously invoked the concept of the asymptote in his landmark work on Italian Neorealism (Bazin 2005b [1952]).

an inference in line with or opposed to the argument being put forth?

In my own research on cinematic realism, the problem I repeatedly come across is how to usefully compare the realisms of different films (indeed, I frequently find myself wondering if films can/should even be compared in this fashion in the first place). Even if I concede the Bazinian asymptotic understanding of cinematic realism, questions such as 'Which film is more realistic, Film X or Film Y?' nevertheless persist. As I stated earlier, this would seem to be an even more pressing concern for martial arts practice than for film theory, as the question of which film is more realistic does not have the potential to either save someone's life or get someone killed in a fight. It would be unfair to demand that Bowman actually answer this question in a way that satisfies every martial artist on the planet, but all the same, I think some comments to the effect of what martial artists could/should do in the face of this dilemma would go a long way in quelling what Cavell cannily described as feeling 'ontologically restless' (Cavell 1979 [1971]: 17). Discussing our inability to understand what Bazin famously framed as 'the ontology of the photographic image' (Bazin 2005a [1945]), Cavell elucidates the ways we are made to feel ontologically restless by the difficulties, contradictions, and paradoxes inherent in all attempts to understand what exactly photographs do and, indeed, what exactly photographs *are*.⁴

⁴ To read more from Cavell on issues in film theory, see Cavell (1979 [1971]; 1981; 1996). For insightful commentaries on/extensions of Cavell's ideas, see the work of the two most prominent Cavell exegetes in film studies, William Rothman (2000;





I myself feel similarly ontologically restless when it comes to the question of what martial arts do/are. Bowman maintains that 'neither traditionalist martial arts like taijiquan nor anti-traditional martial arts like KFM are necessarily any closer to the "truth" or "reality" of combat' (Bowman 2014: 18), and while that statement is sound insofar as 'truth' and 'reality' are shifting terms, I cannot help but want to ask questions like, 'Which martial arts work better in Situations A, B, and C?', which is the same as asking, 'Which is better?', or, in fact, 'Which is more realistic?'

Given how long the 'reality of combat' issue has been on the table in the martial arts community and given how remarkably complex the issue of combative ontology is, as Bowman cogently lays out over the course of his essay, I am not, as I have already mentioned, demanding that he answer everything, that he 'solve' this issue once and for all. I am curious, though, as to where we should go from here. In another one of his most famous writings, Bazin discusses the 'fundamental contradiction' in cinematic realism in a way that seems to me to get to the core of the fundamental contradiction of martial arts practice:

Every form of aesthetic must necessarily choose between what is worth preserving and what should be discarded ... but when this aesthetic aims in essence at

2010; 2014) and D.N. Rodowick (2007; 2010; 2013). Daniel Morgan (2006) has also provided an intriguing reading of Cavell, particularly in relation to Bazin's realist arguments.

creating the illusion of reality, as does the cinema, this choice sets up a fundamental contradiction which is at once unacceptable and necessary: necessary because art can only exist when such a choice is made. Without it, supposing total cinema was here and now technically possible, we would go back purely to reality. Unacceptable because it would be done definitely at the expense of that reality which the cinema proposes to restore integrally (Bazin 2005b [1948]: 26).

Returning to this fundamental contradiction, Bazin concludes:

At the conclusion of this inevitable and necessary 'chemical' action, for the initial reality there has been substituted an illusion of reality composed of a complex of abstraction ... of convention ... and of authentic reality. It is a necessary illusion but it quickly induces a loss of awareness of the reality itself, which becomes identified in the mind of the spectator with its cinematographic representation. As for the filmmaker, the moment he has secured this unwitting complicity of the public, he is increasingly tempted to ignore reality. From habit and laziness he reaches the point when he himself is no longer able to tell where the lies begin or end. There could never be any question of calling him a liar because his art consists in lying. He is just no longer in control of his art. He is its dupe, and hence he is held back from any further conquest of reality. (Bazin 2005b [1948]: 27)





Even though I am not, *pace* Bazin, demanding the achievement of 'total martial arts', that does not mean I believe there is no further conquest of reality to be achieved. In relation to Bowman's discussion of martial arts practice, I want to be able to come away with the sense that we are at least on the right track, that the 'paradigm shifts and revolutions in martial arts' (Bowman 2014: 2) were not lateral movements but positive steps forward, that we have actually made progress in martial arts practice and theory.

Returning again to MMA, I feel that this is evidenced by Bowman's intriguing discussion of 'frills' (Bowman 2014: 10). In relation to his discussion of paradigm shifts and revolutions in martial arts practice, it is interesting to note the (for lack of a better term) 'frill revolution' that started (at least started in the sense that it became a point of focus for fighters, commentators, and fans) in MMA with the arrival in the UFC in 2007 of Lyoto Machida; that became the talk of the town once Seagal became involved in the training of Machida and Anderson Silva, each of whom won (shortly after publicized work with Seagal and with Seagal in attendance and even often in their corners, only strengthening the connection with the 'fake' styles of martial arts allegedly suitable only to cinematic illusion) with 'frilly' knockouts, Silva knocking out Vitor Belfort with a front kick in February of 2011 (the very kick Seagal

is on video working on with Silva) and Machida knocking out Randy Couture with a crane kick two months later; and that is now (thanks to the 'Showtime Kick' from Anthony Pettis and the abundance of recent spin-kick knockouts from the likes of Edson Barboza, Uriah Hall, Renan Barao, Vitor Belfort, Junior Dos Santos, and many others) just an accepted part of contemporary MMA. The question Bowman asks, 'Does reality have frills?' (Bowman 2014: 10), could also be posed, 'Are frills fake?', and the answer, even within the context of MMA (which, if not *really* 'real', is at least, as Greg Downey sagaciously examines in his contribution to this Martial Arts Studies issue, 'as real as it gets' [Downey 2014]) which has for so long been hostile to traditional martial arts, is no longer a resounding 'Yes'.

At the very least, if it is Bowman's belief that we have *not* made progress with martial arts practice, that we have not achieved any further conquest of reality, I would like to know how such a conquest is possible, how we can continue following the curve of the asymptote to get closer to (if never actually *get*) 'reality'. And if it is Bowman's contention that even such a minimal attachment to reality/universality is fated to fail and ill-advised, if he contends that there is no further conquest of reality to be achieved, then I would be interested to know the point from which he believes we would be best equipped to 'tarry with the negative', as it were.



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Dr Paul Bowman: BowmanP@cf.ac.uk

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