

## **Reorienting Violence: Self-Defence Training, Orientalism and the Sublime**

Paul Bowman  
*Cardiff University*

This talk engages with this seminar series themes of violence and non-violence by focusing on the ambivalent and ambiguous subject of self-defence. Self-defence training certainly arises and exists in relation to violence: training typically involves the sustained study of physical violence – with more sophisticated approaches also studying avoidance and de-escalation, along with behavioural, psychological, emotional and environmental factors too. This talk mainly considers the physical aspect of self-defence training. It argues that although self-defence training might on first glance look like violence, it always involves its reorientation. Training itself – even if it is ostensibly ‘for’ violence – is not violence. Rather, it is a practice that fosters a deep, identity-changing investment in that training. I argue that this is led by a range of intense affective experiences that can be characterised as ‘sublime’, and that an investment in sublime experiences can be seen as integral to all manner of martial arts and self-defence practices. Finally, it argues that, although in Western ‘Asian’ martial arts, sublime affects have often been orientalised (not least because, in the West, at least since the birth of Romanticism, the sublime has often been orientalised), and although modern self-defence practices tend to be resolutely anti-orientalist, the sublime can still be seen to structure their discourses in profound ways.