CUTTING ACTION

APPRECIATING HONG KONG’S WUXIA FILMS
THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTIVE EDITING

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

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SUMMARY

Because the *wuxia* film is partly defined by its presentation of action I have used an analysis of how action has been constructed in a number of *wuxia* films to provide a way of appreciating their spectacular narratives. In this thesis I conduct an analysis of key editing techniques that have been used in action sequences of Hong Kong’s *wuxia* films since the 1960s. In doing so I shed light on idiosyncrasies of the Hong Kong film style and I also broaden the dialogue on the under-researched film-craft of editing.

In my introduction I establish the Hong Kong film style as the product of a production system that facilitates constructive editing. I compare the production methods of this ‘constructive system’ to those of the continuity system, as championed by Hollywood, to establish how Hong Kong filmmakers have developed a distinctive approach to the spatial and temporal construction of movement.

Three core chapters are then dedicated to the detailed analysis of constructive editing techniques that have been utilized by Hong Kong filmmakers. I demonstrate how these techniques have developed in relation to particular influential forces that I have identified, which are: the pursuit of novelty, editing concepts (pertaining to the spatio-temporal presentation of rapid series of shots) and the oscillation between the realistic and fantastic stylisation of pre-requisite generic feats. I find that editing techniques are readily manipulated to accommodate these concerns and that some techniques have been regularly reprised to become idiomatic as certain types of spectacle return to fashion.

The final chapter consolidates a number of my findings with a case study of the first fight sequences from two seminal films: King Hu’s *Come Drink With Me* (1966) and Tsui Hark’s *Seven Swords* (2005). The case study reveals that Tsui has modeled structural elements of his film (in particular the plotting of combat events) upon Hu’s landmark *wuxia* film. In this way I demonstrate that spectacle conveys both narrative meaning and directorial intent.
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