

CUTTING ACTION

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

by
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2011

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:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Peter J. Gravestock', written in a cursive style.

Peter J. Gravestock

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been undertaken, written, revised or completed without the first-class supervision of Dr Mike Walsh. I am indebted to Mike for his direction, criticism and encouragement of my work. Despite his busy schedule, and the inconvenience of living in different states, Mike was always ready to look at my work and his constant request for “pages” helped me to believe that my work was important. Interesting discussions with Mike stimulated many new ideas and vastly improved the construction of my arguments and my writing-style. He also broadened my horizons by introducing me to many luminary scholars and by encouraging me to participate in the dialogue of film criticism. Lastly, without Mike’s help I may never have travelled to wondrous Hong Kong, and for all of this I am infinitely grateful.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Flinders University Scholarships Committee for the financial assistance provided by a Flinders University Research Scholarship. Without such aid this research would not have been possible. I also greatly appreciate Dr Ruth Vasey’s latterly examination of my writing and for her invaluable suggestions.

I’d like to offer a special thank you to Research Coordinator, Karen Jacobs, who made me feel part of a community, which lightened the otherwise lonely experience of being an external postgraduate student.

I am grateful to Sam Ho who provided words of encouragement and advice, and to the kind staff at the Hong Kong Film Archive who introduced me to their wonderful collection of films and memorabilia.

Thank you to the organisers of the Hong Kong International Film Festival who readily permitted me access to their spectacular celebration of cinema. Thank you also to the organisers of the Melbourne International Film Festival who granted me access to speak with Cheng Pei Pei and Tsui Hark.

I’d also like to thank Peter Tapp and Zoe Tovey of Metro Magazine for their interest in my work and for their publication of a number of articles that I wrote whilst this thesis percolated in my mind.

I am lucky to have had Paul Finlay as a mentor editor, and the work we undertook has provided a valuable font of “real world” experience, which has put the craft aspect of this thesis in good stead.

Lyell Mensforth, my old friend, is unaware that his enthusiasm for Tsui Hark’s film, *The Blade*, so many years ago now, sparked my interest in Hong Kong’s *wuxia* films and was the catalyst for this hefty collection of words.

I am grateful for the love and support of my extended and immediate family. A big hug to Grandmother Elizabeth for inspiring me with the drive to finish this work. Boundless thanks go to Valery, Wendy, Kerry, Penelope, Vicki and Corinna. Also: “mad propz” to my brother, Ringo.

Lastly, I’d like to express my love and thanks to Jo for her patience, support, encouragement and *joie de vivre*.



*Dedicated to my father, David Ian Gravestock,
who instilled in me a love of extraordinary stories.*

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