CHAPTER ONE

of

CUTTING ACTION

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

PhD Thesis
by
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1. CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While working as an editor for a television quiz show I became aware of the limitations of Western filmmaking techniques being used in the presentation of action. The quiz show required me to re-edit archival footage from the 1950s to the 1990s, cutting newsreels and commercials down to short and dynamic fifteen-second clips. The most dynamic footage I had access to came from old car races, car commercials and music videos, but in general, routine camera-work and monotone performances, coupled with my own inexperience and a compulsion to adhere to the rules of the continuity system lead to the assembly of clips that were unfortunately quite bland. Although I had become interested in the filmic presentation of movement – of the movement of humans and vehicles – I found that I could not easily manipulate the footage at my disposal into anything particularly thrilling, or both thrilling *and* sensible (much to the chagrin of my producer). The original creators of the footage had done their best to generate as much visual interest as possible but I eventually acknowledged that I was not going to be able to practice cutting in the manner I desired because the production methods utilised by Australian crews had been dedicated to the maintenance of the continuity system. So the footage I needed – the angles, the performances, the numerous details of action – would not be forthcoming.

At about this time I had seen three films that alerted me to the influence of the dynamic and enigmatic film style of Hong Kong's action films. Those films were Tsui Hark's *The Blade* (1995), the Wachowski Brother's *The Matrix* (1999) and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).[1] I came to realise that the optimum presentation of action which I was beginning to see in the Hong Kong film style was due to those film crews' united commitment to the expression of action and their intention to provide the editor with a predetermined selection of shots. To assuage my desire to edit dynamic action sequences, I embarked upon this research thesis, which serves to elucidate the theoretical explanations of editing that underlie those practices. I approach this thesis both as an editor and as an admirer of the Hong Kong film style. My intention has been to combine these two interests to enrich my understanding of both fields.

What is 'Hong Kong film style?' In an interview that I conducted in 2006, I discovered that director Tsui Hark had also asked this question when Chinese censors told him that one of his films exhibited 'too much Hong Kong style' (Gravestock and Walsh 2006: 127). It is an ambiguous criticism and one that prepared Tsui for the occasional necessity to alter his films in order to get them screened. To grasp the idiosyncrasy of a Hong Kong style, this thesis attempts an answer through an examination that centres on the stylistic application of constructive editing in fight sequences of *wuxia* films. The term '*wuxia pian*' is commonly used to refer to a 'swordplay film' (Rayns 1996: 155). However, the word '*wuxia*' does have a more explicit derivation, which will be discussed later in this introduction as it essentially demarcates the pre-requisite features of the genre.

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[1] Although the latter two films are not exclusively Hong Kong productions, an eminent Hong Kong filmmaker, Yuen Woo-ping, choreographed them.

Constructive editing, as it will be referred to in this thesis, has been defined by film researcher David Bordwell as: '[a]n action – usually a difficult or dangerous one – [that] is broken up into bits, each one rendered in a separate shot, and the viewer constructs a unified action out of the details' (1998: 33).

My central assertion is that constructive editing has been used to stylise dynamic action sequences, especially in the *wuxia* film genre's representation of fantastic feats, and it is an integral part of any Hong Kong group film style. Hong Kong's system of production has been built around the facilitation of constructive editing. Therefore I examine the ways in which constructive editing is shaped by significant forces, which will be outlined as this chapter progresses but, in summary, they are: the pursuit of novelty, the evolution of peculiar editing techniques, the stylisation of heroic feats and a formulaic design principle that organises combinations of combatants. The four subsequent chapters of this thesis will address each of these different aspects of the Hong Kong film style in turn. In each chapter I analyse the application of editing techniques to unpack that chapter's central premise. The delimitations I have placed upon the scope of this research are set out in the following section.

The Scope of My Research

While I reflect upon pre-1960s *wuxia* films to inform our understanding of the development of film style, it is the period between King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* and Tsui Hark's *Seven Swords* that grounds this thesis. However this is not an historical account of stylistic evolution. Over the years, the mass-production of

martial arts films in Hong Kong has resulted in the release of far too many films to address within one thesis. Given that numerous films have been destroyed and lost it would be difficult for a researcher to formulate a comprehensive and accurate genre study along historical lines. What's more I neither speak nor read Cantonese and Mandarin, so there is also a wealth of cultural content that I have only come to understand over time and through research, while other areas still remain obscure. Mindful of these issues, the purpose of this research has been to reveal the way that editing techniques are used to present action by close investigative analysis of some films to which I have had access.

In order to narrow the scope of my research I primarily focus upon the analysis of fight sequences because these events regularly exhibit constructive editing techniques.[2] I also focus upon fight sequences drawn from the *wuxia* film genre. *Wuxia* narratives recount folkloric tales of righteous swordsmen (*xia*) and swordswomen (*xia nü*), and *wuxia* is the oldest of Hong Kong's action film genres, pre-dating both the kung fu film and the police-action thriller. Many of the filmmaking techniques developed by kung fu and police-action filmmakers evolved from, and in reaction to, the *wuxia* genre which, in turn, re-absorbed those refined techniques as it evolved. So, despite the delineations of my focus, I have occasionally found it useful to provide evidence of common stylistic traits from other Hong Kong action genres as well as from non-combat scenarios. By occasionally expanding my research with such complementary tangents an understanding of key elements of the Hong Kong film style can be outlined. Within this framework I

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[2] The term 'fight sequence' specifically refers to physical conflict between combatants. The term 'action sequence', as used here, refers to an event with a spectacular aspect that presents bodies (or objects) in propulsive motion. So, explosion, chase and fight sequences all fit under the umbrella-term of 'action sequence'.

investigate the ways in which the forces I have identified can influence the sequential construction and combination of shots.

Wuxia films are exciting and dynamic and as an editor I pose questions about how *wuxia* films are cut to produce exciting and dynamic action. As my review of the relevant literature will indicate, there have only been a handful of writers who have specifically researched Hong Kong film style, and even fewer who have undertaken a detailed analysis of the actual stylistic means by which this action cinema works. Fewer still have analysed editing techniques. The literature on editing has predominantly been written by (non-Hong Kong) editors themselves. Consequently, my analysis will proceed through a comparison with the theories and practices of Hollywood continuity system editors to highlight the differences between editing techniques (this decision will be fully explained later in this introduction). While my research into the Hong Kong film style draws upon pre-existing research, it is predominantly based upon comparative evidence from the films themselves. There is a wealth of information in the simplest of cuts – treasure troves in the harder ones – and more than enough material to conduct a substantial detailed analysis of the Hong Kong film style.

To set up the following research chapters this introductory chapter will address the twofold areas of my argument's concern – the Hong Kong film style (as it relates to the *wuxia* film) and editing techniques. Firstly I contend with a definition of the Hong Kong film style to reconcile otherwise problematic misconceptions of the Hong Kong action film as one that simply delivers spectacle at the expense of narrative. In the second half of this chapter I explain how the Hong Kong film style

has evolved as a result of peculiar and effective production methods that facilitate and prize the excitement that can be generated by constructive editing.

The structure of the remaining chapters of this thesis will be explained shortly, but those chapters also respond to a central element on my critical agenda – misconceived ideas about Hong Kong action film style. One of the reasons that this research needs to be conducted is to refute a peculiar Western bias against Hong Kong action films and, by default, Hong Kong filmmaking in general. There remains a resistance to the idea that spectacle can contain and advance narrative.

Hong Kong Film Style: Narrative Versus Spectacle?

One view of the action film style is that it foregrounds action and that it does so at the expense of narrative concerns. James Monaco has noted that:

> when the main aim of filmmakers is action, it's so much easier to be able to leave the character to the star, to be able to plug in readymade personas after the script has been written. Character development always takes away valuable time that could more profitably be devoted to action, anyway. So much more efficient if the character has been established in half a dozen earlier movies. (1979: 72)

Certainly the action film genre does demand spectacular events. Such events are the focus for my analysis of editing and, within the *wuxia* genre, spectacular events are frequently expressed through combat. There is a conception, however, that the spectacular event exists as an attraction that is independent of narrative. In this vein Michele Pierson has suggested that some types of computer generated imagery (CGI) event, for example, purposefully suspend both the temporal and narrative propulsion of an action sequence so as to display the glory of the attraction. At these moments

she suggests that the film-crafts operate to foreground the primary novelty of a CG image; Pierson writes that:

> In films such as *The Abyss*, *Terminator 2*, *Lawnmower Man*, … *Jurassic Park*, *Stargate*, … *Johnny Mnemonic*, and *Virtuosity* the presentation of key computer-generated images produces a distinct break in the action. These temporal and narrative breaks might be thought of as helping to establish the conditions under which spectators' willed immersion in the action - their preparedness to being carried along by the ride - is suspended long enough to direct their attention to the display of a new kind of effects artifact. In these films, effects sequences featuring CGI commonly exhibit a mode of spectatorial address that - with its tableau-style framing, longer takes, and strategic intercutting between shots of the computer generated object and reaction shots of characters - solicits an attentive and even contemplative viewing of the computer generated image. (2002: 123-4)

In this way Pierson indicates that film-crafts can be used to specifically address and impress the audience with unashamedly spectacular display. I agree with this point and in my second chapter (The Pursuit of Novelty) I show that there is a compulsion to draw the viewers' attention to the spectacular event. In that chapter I argue that within the competitive Hong Kong film-industry there is a drive to excel stylistically and this drive to achieve novel spectacular events can dominate the design of the edit. At the same time Pierson evokes Tom Gunning's 'Cinema of Attractions' (Gunning 1990: 58) and argues for a suspension of temporal and narrative progression in favour of the solicitation of spectator attention through the provision of an exciting spectacle – which is a concept that I find problematic in this context. That spectacular events halt narrative progression is also one of the thorny criticisms of the martial arts film and it is not altogether accurate.

Perhaps the fantastic content of the Hong Kong martial arts film has impelled amazed Western reviewers to overlook the narrative intricacies of these films? In

1972, Cheng Kang's *The Twelve Gold Medallions* (1970) made quite an impact on

one reviewer, prompting him to write:

> It is a shock to occidental viewers unschooled in Zen and mysticism
> suddenly to have actors levitate, fly or catapult through the ceiling without
> apparent plot foundation. Characters can also split trees with their bare
> hands, stop waterfalls with a powerful stare, and cause instant death with a
> tap on the chest. (One such tap in "Medallions" left a bloody handprint on
> the wall behind where the character was standing). Nevertheless one adjusts
> quickly.[3]

Unfortunately the West's adjustment to the *wuxia* genre has not been so quick.

Although the success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000) has

introduced and familiarised the *wuxia* genre to a new generation of Western

audiences there are still instances where the genre is misunderstood. Internet forum

threads frequently exhibit sceptical posts – such as "Dracin's" critique of *Crouching

Tiger, Hidden Dragon*:

> This movie started out alright, and serious... Then suddenly, not many
> minutes into the movie (i think), they started defying gravity and such, and
> the whole thing went down into the toilet... I stuck through it though, but it
> turned out to be complete crap... Sorry all you fanboys, but so much of it
> just didn't make sense... When were you able to do that [fly] without
> explaining it? (And don't compare this to superman, he's an alien damnit,
> kid's character made for mindless entertainment, I thought this was
> supposed to be more serious?)[4]

Certainly Hong Kong action film directors want to have an impact upon the viewer

with various sensory assaults but these types of fantastic spectacle, such as the

weightless leap, which caused Dracin's consternation, are central to the *wuxia* film

genre. In fact they are essential and do not need explanation within the context of the

genre.

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[3] Costner, Tom (15 April 1971) 'One Wonton, Two Eggdrop', *The Village Voice* quoted in Leyda 1972: 469.
[4] Dracin (Tue Mar 25 2008 01:38:13) 'Does gravity not exist in this film?', imdb.com:
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0190332/board/thread/83285722?d=101299748&p=6#101299748http://www.imdb.com/ti
tle/tt0190332/board/thread/83285722?d=101299748&p=6#101299748

Partly because of the cultural shock that they can evoke, a Western viewer's prejudices against the *wuxia* film can often revolve around the misconception that spectacular feats have no apparent foundation in the narrative. Bordwell has warned against dichotomizing narrative and spectacle in this way, writing that:

> Sensuous appeals are surely part of popular cinema, but the narrative/spectacle dichotomy is probably not the best way to understand them. For one thing, the split presupposes a fairly austere conception of narrative. In fact, storytelling is constantly going on in popular film, and moments of spectacle are usually integral parts of the plot. (2000: 178-9)

The Hong Kong action film style is dedicated to excellence in the realm of spectacle, but this is not to say that spectacle precludes narrative. The *wuxia* film audience expects to see the heroic adventures of the *xia* expressed in combat and so the plot is manipulated to give rise to as many combat situations as possible. Thus vendetta narratives are highly popular as are those in which the hero strives to be the ultimate fighter. During these fight sequences we are privy to the hero unleashing his super-heroic martial arts power and typically the *xia*'s most challenging fight will be withheld until the end of the film because then they must summon all their power to vanquish the enemy in spectacular fashion. Although facilitated by conventional, linear plotting, fight sequences provide an arena in which novelty can spring forth but at the same time they also determine the trajectory of the plot. Mary Farquhar reinforces Bordwell's warning against dichotomizing spectacle and narrative and has pointed out that fight sequences are 'enmeshed' with the plot:

> While combat is the core attraction of the martial arts genre, the plot usually triggers action sequences. Otherwise, action would be pure display. Furthermore, action does not suspend so-called realist storytelling. Even the most extraordinary martial arts combat scenes contain drama as counterpoint and continuation of the story-line. Hence action is enmeshed in the narrative as both spectacle and storytelling device. (2003: 167)

I am in agreement with Bordwell and Farquhar that spectacular moments are integral to the plot. Indeed, I subscribe to the point of view that action sequences invariably motivate further plot-lines and that, furthermore, there is always a distinct narrative within the fight itself. I find it fairly obvious that a fight sequence will have some impact upon the plot regardless of the kind of spectacles that it contains because a fight must have one of three outcomes: a win, a loss or a draw – any of which will have an impact on the progression of the plot thereafter. Yet narrative progression does not stop for spectacular combat to unfold and narrative impact is not delayed until the end of the fight. *Wuxia* directors use fight sequences to develop narrative and the result of a fight will be determined by the narrative content of the fight. Moreover, the narrative content of a fight can have an influence on any number of non-combat themes too.

Familiar spectacles, such as fight sequences, are treated with new stylisation in order to generate novelty. Coincident with this activity is the intention to have an affect on the viewer, which might seem to confirm Pierson's viewpoint that affecting material is opposed to narrative progression. However, as I have begun to show in this chapter, spectacles and narrative operate in synthesis – not opposition. Although spectacular events may incorporate a stylistic design that deviates from the rest of a film they nonetheless maintain narrative propulsion and their form as spectacle is intrinsically affected by their place in a larger narrative schema. My interest is in how the sensuous appeals of the *wuxia* fight sequence are shaped in relation to larger narrative patterns rather than being constructed in opposition to them. Toward this end the word 'spectacle' can be replaced by the term 'action event'.

Hong Kong's action films do not belong to the Cinema of Attractions, a category that Gunning rightly restricts to early cinema, but within the Hong Kong film industry there are other forces that shape action events and also have an influence on film style. The organisation of this thesis is based upon the analysis of the four particular influences: the pursuit of novelty, the evolution of editing techniques, the stylisation of fantastic heroic feats and a formulaic design principle that organises combinations of combatants. The next section explains these forces more thoroughly and how they provide foundation for the central arguments of each chapter.

Thesis Outline

The oscillation and evolution of techniques as they pass back-and-forth between genres is one of the indicators of a certain competitive spirit that pervades Hong Kong filmmaking. It is what I have called the 'pursuit of novelty'. The constant competition between directors and between production companies to enhance and exceed each other's stunts and spectacles has meant that the *wuxia* film is constantly being reinvigorated by innovation. Success in this endeavour is based on finding increasingly ingenious ways to present otherwise familiar feats. This creative, competitive compulsion pervades the evolution of the genre and so it is directly addressed in my lead chapter, Chapter 2: The Pursuit of Novelty.

Because Hong Kong action filmmakers are persistently looking for new ways to present action, their pursuit of novelty has had an impact upon the evolution of editing techniques. The evolution of such techniques will be seen in Chapter 4, but in the interim there needs to be an introduction to some of the techniques that have been

developed – this is provided by Chapter 3: Editing Concepts. Hong Kong directors produced novelty by adapting ideas from Japanese samurai (*chambara*) films. Constructive editing was a core technique of these films and Stephen Teo has suggested that the 'martial arts parlour tricks of the sort popularised by the Japanese blind swordsman Zatoichi' influenced the Hong Kong action film style (2003a: 24). In Chapter 3 I provide an example of one of Zatoichi's parlour tricks to initiate an examination of the way in which Hong Kong filmmakers have employed constructive editing to convey the skilfulness of their heroes and to provide persuasive displays of impossible action. Also in that chapter, and later in this introduction, I will argue that the Hong Kong film style facilitates the use of constructive editing and, subsequently, that its production method should be understood as a *constructive system*. Additionally, I employ the *continuity* editing system's theoretical basis and terminology to dissect the effectiveness of editing techniques comprising the Hong Kong film style. During this endeavour some idiosyncratic techniques are identified, such as: the capacity to construct cogent but rapid successions of shots, the application of the swift prompting reaction shot, the control of the movement of the viewer's eye, the use of eye-line matches and multifarious types of match-on-action cut.

Constructive editing is used to convey rapid successions of shots that are linked to create impossible, super-heroic feats. But, as well as the competitive drive between directors to achieve stylistic novelty, there are also studio and audience demands to consider. Here the difficulty faced by the filmmaker derives from the tension between the presentation of fantastic feats (that are integral to *wuxia* narratives) and the demand for realistic action that emerged in Hong Kong in the mid 1960s. I

address this problem in Chapter 4: Stylistic Priorities, and investigate its effect upon the stylisation of both realistic and fantastic action by analysing key generic feats; specifically: the weightless leap, palm power and the casting of flying swords.

Both the pursuit of novelty and the stylisation of heroic feats are, in turn, influenced by an over-arching, hierarchical plot design which determines that there will be a presentation of increasingly powerful combatants within fight sequences and throughout the film. Cheuk Pak-tong has called this the 'staircase formula' (Cheuk Pak-tong 1998: 58-59). So the final chapter, Chapter 5: Design Principles, analyses the way that this narrative framework affects style and provides a case study of two films. More explicitly, I analyse the construction of the first fight sequences from two films: King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1966) and Tsui Hark's *Seven Swords* (2005). It will be noted that similar forces influence the contemporary Hong Kong action film style as the film style of the mid-1960s. Both of these films represent a directorial compulsion to render realistic fight sequences in a genre that demands the fantastic and, as will be shown in chapter 5, there are remarkable similarities between the plot structure and presentation of action in either film. These parallels will be made more apparent in the following section and will be thoroughly expounded within the final chapter.

The staircase formula will be regularly invoked during the thesis and requires more explanation. Beyond the similarities between *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* many *wuxia* films share a common design principle of staging increasingly spectacular action events. One of the ways that these spectacles can be organised is to ensure that fight sequences proceed through combinations of increasingly skilled

combatants. Liu Damu has attributed this design feature to the influence of the narrative structure of the novel, 'Legend of the Strange Hero', in which one episode requires a husband and wife 'to fight their way through four gates guarded by various members of the [wife's evil] family' (1996: 55). The final battle is with the powerful Grandmother Gan, who is defeated by a giant golden eagle that rescues the husband and wife. Liu asserts that:

> This episode has exerted great influence on the narrative structure of the *wuxia* film. The protagonist of the film was put through a series of confrontations (in effect, the various gates) each of which required greater skill and effort to overcome. (1996: 56)

Cheuk Pak-tong noticed the same design principle in the films of King Hu. Cheuk describes the staircase formula as a regimented and consecutive plotting pattern that begins with the portrayal of 'characters of the lowest status and with the least competence in the martial arts, proceeding to characters of higher status and prowess in the martial arts' (1998: 58). This delaying tactic has an effect upon stylistic construction because the assembly postpones and doles out action events according to a pattern. Like the levels and "boss" encounters in a computer-game, the staircase formula operates according to a cumulative reward system that provides increasing excitement as a result of overcoming increasing difficulty. As the hero progresses through the story the staircase formula requires him or her to exhibit ever-increasing martial arts skills to defeat each increasingly powerful enemy until he must start to unleash his fantastic, *qi*-based powers to become victorious. Cheuk's conception of the staircase formula also acknowledges that there will be consecutive bouts between increasingly formidable opponents *within* a fight sequence itself (1998: 58-59). Consequently the combat between more powerful characters tends to be delayed until the end of a fight sequence as well as the end of the film. It follows that the

techniques used to present increasingly fantastic feats ought to exceed the novelty of previous fight sequences within the film *and* previous action events within the fight itself. This can mean that the final fight sequence will see the deployment of extreme spectacles that are presented through extreme stylistic choices toward a particularly thrilling crescendo. But this is only a potential by-product of the staircase formula's pattern of construction – the escalation of spectacle is not assured by this strategy so much as it is facilitated. The staircase formula is simply an organised hierarchy of combatants that provides a platform for escalating spectacle. Maverick directors can subvert this formula and in Chapter 5 we will see how Hu and Tsui do this.

All of the influences on the Hong Kong film style that I have identified are thoroughly intertwined and they affect the presentation of spectacular action events as well as the editing techniques that are used to display them. So far I have explained the scope of my research, discussed the importance of understanding that spectacle can have narrative content while at the same time indicating that there are other influential forces that shape the Hong Kong film style and I have outlined how my chapters will address these issues; yet I have only provided glimpses of the genre that this thesis examines. In the next section I outline the background of the *wuxia* genre, with particular emphasis on the challenge of presenting action realistically, and how this concern came to dominate the style of the genre since the 1960s.

An Overview of the Wuxia Film Genre

> There is not one realism, but several realisms. Each period looks for its own, the technique and the aesthetics that will capture, retain, and render best what one wants from reality. (Bazin 1997: 6)

André Bazin declares that the filmic construction of realism is changeable. There is no singular realism. The stylistic changes undergone by the *wuxia* genre support this observation. It is an old and fantastically based genre that has endured redefinitions of realism across a number of periods. David Chute has translated the term *wuxia* as 'martial chivalry', stating that the 'umbrella term *wuxia* simply attributes force or power, *wu*, to a person of righteous principles, the *xia*.' (2003: 5). The word, '*wuxia*', therefore incorporates both the central character as well as his power and the plotting of *wuxia* films revolve around the *xia*'s application of super-heroic power as he upholds his righteous principles (see also Ho 2003a: 13). Hence *wuxia* filmmakers are faced with the task of presenting the essential qualities of *wuxia* lore – central to which are the fantastic martial arts skills of the hero (Chute 2003: 5-6). So a *wuxia* narrative is characterised by pre-requisite super-heroic feats. These feats are persistently challenged by advances in cinematic technology and popular trends, which force the stylistic evolution of the depiction of those feats.

Sam Ho tells us that the *xia* is a folkloric character who, since approximately 90 BC, has been 'increasingly romanticised, in poetry, fiction and on the Chinese opera stage before reaching the mythic position he occupies today, as an embodiment of China's ideals of courage and personal honour' (2003a: 13). At the dawn of *wuxia* filmmaking, in the silent era of the 1920s, the *xia* came to the cinema as a well established super-heroic archetype. He had the capacity to harness and channel *qigong* ('light art' or energy) which he used to enact a multitude of uncanny powers, which include casting flying swords, shooting bolts of energy from his hands and leaping weightlessly across long distances.[5] In the 1920s, when filmmakers began to

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[5] Weightless leaping is known as 'qing gong' – 'light body skill'.

adapt the *xia* character from the Beijing Opera and from popular literature, they were able to use film technology to show such fantastic feats as could only be described in literature and implied at the Beijing Opera. For example, at the Opera the weightless leap was performed acrobatically within the confines of the stage whilst at the cinema a superimposed or animated image, such as in *The Swordswoman of Huangjiang* (Chen Kengran, Zheng Yisheng, Shang Guanwu 1930), could represent the xia leaping far across the landscape.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the genre from the mid-1960s onwards. By this time immensely modern action genres such as James Bond films and Japanese *chambara* films had become somewhat of a sensation in Hong Kong and the mythical feats that defined the *wuxia* genre had become old fashioned by comparison. The imports displayed a modern cool, a sense of humour and a stylistic aplomb that made the film style of *wuxia* films appear theatrical, and the stylisation of *wuxia* feats became synonymous with cinematic artificiality (Teo 2003a). So in October 1965 Hong Kong's premier film-production company, Shaw Brothers, publicly declared its intention to launch a 'New Era' of *wuxia* action. An article appeared in their promotional paper, *Southern Screen*, reading: '[t]he fake, fantastical and theatrical fighting and the so-called special effects of the past will be replaced by realistic action and fighting that immediately decides life or death' (cited in Ho 2003b: 115).[6] The distinction between the stylisation of action is an important one because by this definition realistic action does not convey magical content nor does it employ outmoded choreography and outmoded filmmaking techniques. It also suggests that realistic action is quick and deadly too. This particular differentiation on technical

and narrative grounds is what is meant when I use the term 'realism' within this thesis. Yet Shaw Brothers' agenda ultimately left the methods of the construction of the New Era style to its filmmakers.

The Shaw's declaration for an aesthetic shift caused a peculiar conundrum for *wuxia* filmmakers because their genre's conventions demanded super-heroic feats and now they had to re-invent those feats to suit a modern taste for realistic action. Subsequently fantastic elements were re-designed to look more realistic by being rendered in a more contemporary film style. Key to this goal would be the utilization of constructive editing.

Of the films that were supposed to launch the New Era into the mainstream, King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1966) has been identified as one film that definitively achieved Shaw Brothers' aim of revolutionising the *wuxia* genre's film style (Ooi 2000: 17; Teo 2003a: 24). However Hu was still restricted by generic conventions as Stephen Teo points out:

> Not even the new school could forsake fantasy altogether, not without fundamentally changing the shape of the genre. The movie that propelled the new school into mainstream box-office popularity, King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1966), was in fact an amalgam of new school concepts and old school magic. (2003a: 24)

In this thesis I elaborate upon Teo's insight by exploring how films such as *Come Drink With Me* grapple stylistically with the difficulty of presenting fantastic feats within a New Era style designed to present realistic action.

Hu maintained the primacy of old school magic by postponing its unfettered use until the final sequences of the film. The majority of Hu's fight sequences in *Come Drink*

With Me (5 of 7 fight sequences) represent non-magical combat between highly skilled but non-magical opponents, yet the last two fight sequences do exhibit overt displays of magical power. So Hu opted to implement combat which was mostly devoid of magical powers *per se*, but which displayed uncanny strength and dexterity by capitalising upon the impression of speed and kinetic force that constructive editing can lend to a sequence of shots (Teo 2003a: 24). These feats of strength and dexterity are not necessarily more realistic so much as they are less fantastic. Sek Kei identifies the impetus for the cinematic redesign as being motivated by directorial dissatisfaction with existing production methods and he has called such impressive feats (that conform to neither unbridled fantasy nor the limitations of real fighting) a form of 'credible exaggeration' (1994: 31).

Thirty-nine years after *Come Drink With Me* ushered in the New Era the maverick director Tsui Hark was still grappling with the problem of presenting realistic action in the wake of the widespread use of CGI that had brought fantastic elements back to the foreground. During an interview with Tsui Hark in 2006, I asked him what he had learned from making *Seven Swords* and he replied:

> I think quite a lot, especially about the realism in fighting. With *The Blade* I tried to create a different world with that kind of action. In *Seven Swords* I found out that action can be done in a certain way, a way that I have got to apply in *Seven Swords* Part Two to fully realise what it's going to look like. We are trying to create a world where people believe that the action is not choreography. (Gravestock and Walsh 2006: 126)

Like *Come Drink With Me*, *Seven Swords* displays a film style that aspires towards a renewal of realistic action. This puts Tsui at the forefront of the post-CGI revision of the *wuxia* film – if not a global revision of the action film style. Because of its idiosyncratic innovation the Hong Kong film style has become extraordinarily

influential in foreign film industries. The following section briefly explores the exportation to the global film market of the innovations in editing that find their genesis in the *wuxia* genre.

A Rationale for Research: Globalisation of the Hong Kong Film Style

The trans-national, co-production of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) prompted commentators to ponder the development of the *wuxia* film beyond Hong Kong and in 2003 Teo mused that:

> the *wuxia* picture is increasingly moving away from its center in the Hong Kong film industry … The economic malaise still plaguing Hong Kong cinema, a result of the Asian financial crisis, means that the industry must increasingly turn to multinational financing and co-productions … What is not apparent is how the martial arts genre will develop when cut off from the nourishing culture of this center. (2003a: 26)

The *wuxia* epic has become a multinational production and whilst the development of the Hong Kong film style has been stunted within its homeland it has been absorbed by foreign film industries. Techniques that have been developed within, and are characteristic of, the Hong Kong film style have been adapted to the film styles of other regions.[7] I am interested in finding common editing techniques that can be said to be indicative of Hong Kong filmmakers' contribution to action film style. In my view, these techniques have substantially contributed to the appeal of Hong Kong film and the increasing exportation of its stylistic features to the rest of the world. It is important to further define the Hong Kong film style and to recognise that style's exemplary use of constructive editing because it is still undergoing a

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[7] The idea of a Hong Kong film style raises difficult questions about the 'nationality' of films, of their country of origin, and of the ways in which the development of a genre responds to social conditions internal or external to a particular country. These important questions are beyond the scope of this thesis.

transitional period, which sees it being incorporated into filmmaking techniques at a global level.

Hong Kong-derived action techniques (such as wire-work, peculiar constructive editing techniques and martial arts choreography) have been merged with CGI effects and have proven to be a successful attraction for such Hollywood blockbusters as the *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999), *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000), *Kill Bill Volumes 1 & 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003/2004), *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008), *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) and *The Last Airbender* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2010). Similarly this merger is visible in the film styles of films from other countries such as the France/Canada co-production of *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (Christophe Gans, 2001), the Russian *Night Watch: Nochnoi Dozor* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2004), the French *B13: Banlieue 13* (Pierre Morel, 2004) and Bollywood's *Krrish* (Rakesh Roshan, 2006). Thus the Hong Kong film style has undergone a global renaissance.

At this moment in time, when it is apparent that Hong Kong action techniques have been incorporated into the international lexicon of filmmaking and as mainland Chinese industry becomes the primary producer of *wuxia* film, it is important to reflect upon the enormous contribution of Hong Kong filmmakers to the action film style and to recognize and document that contribution. One aim of this thesis is to foster such an appreciation of the Hong Kong film style through the analysis of editing within the *wuxia* genre.

Literature on the Hong Kong Film Style

Authoritative commentary on the film style of Hong Kong has often come from interviews with the filmmakers themselves. The annual publications of the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) have provided an invaluable source of interviews with Hong Kong cast and crew that have formed the basis of many articles on the subject. In particular the HKIFF's compilations, 'A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film' (Lau 1994a) and 'A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Swordplay Film (1945-1980)' (Lau 1996a) both feature regularly cited essays. Additionally the Hong Kong Film Archive has published director-focussed texts that collate some of those interviews as well as providing more comprehensive biographical information and previously unpublished interviews, such as *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang* (Law Kar 1998) *The Swordsman and his Jiang Hu: Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film* (Ho and Ho 2002) and *Chang Cheh: A Memoir* (Chang 2004).

Although some Hong Kong directors have been recognised for their stylistic influence on the Hong Kong film style, there has been scarce comprehensive analysis of an individual film until Stephen Teo's leading monograph, *King Hu's A Touch Of Zen* (2007). This book provides an authoritative detailed analysis of a tremendously influential film that is necessarily addressed at certain stages within this thesis. Meanwhile, a weighty tome, *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study* (Wong 2003), which features five strong essays dedicated to commentary of their *wuxia* films,

appraises the Shaw Brothers' eminent production house. Action choreographers have also been appropriately recognised for their contribution to the development of the film style with the 2006 HKIFF in association with the Hong Kong Film Archive making an important contribution to this subject with *A Tribute to Action Choreographers* – a compilation of interviews with significant action choreographers such as Yuen Woo-ping, Tony Ching Siu-tung and Han Yingjie (Li 2006). This thesis' research is partly dedicated to elucidating how the Hong Kong style of constructive editing has developed the capacity to present shots in rapid succession with a maximum amount of cogency but, with the exception of a few essays, these texts provide relatively inexplicit information about editing techniques. However, as we shall see in the next section, this is not an unusual situation. Editing, in general, has rarely been the subject of academic debate and is often overlooked in favour of more star-studded topics.

David Bordwell has provided vital analysis of the Hong Kong film style by identifying key filmmaking practices that enable the salient transmission of information in counterpoint to the speed of the edit. I confirm Bordwell's reasoning through analysis of the sequential construction of shots and the relationships between the content within the frame. Therefore, at this early stage, it is pertinent to give a summary of Bordwell's key findings. In particular Bordwell recognizes that the in-camera method of collecting footage helps to construct clear and dynamic action and he explains that:

> Hong Kong filmmakers realize that sharp, easily read fighting gestures are necessary for a forceful effect. The director then enhances this legibility by well-chosen camera positions … Before filming the instructor would decide on each character's school and combat style, but the fights would not be prepared in advance. Each fight was worked out on set, with the shooting proceeding in continuity. Thus each camera position was adjusted to the

exact bit of business that the shot would highlight. (2000: 220-221)

Tony Rayns has also pointed out that in-camera editing is a key method used by Hu and Hong Kong directors in general, saying that '[a]lthough he works much more slowly and painstakingly than his contemporaries in the Hong Kong film industry, Hu shares with many of them a preference for editing his films in camera, in so far as he uses a new camera set-up for almost every shot' (1975/6: 12). Because each action is framed according to the best camera position for that action, the in-camera method of production means that an edit seldom takes the viewer back to a previously established framing. Although some framings may occasionally seem similar they are frequently adjusted to best capture the action being constructed and slight reframing is often facilitated by hand-held camerawork. This makes for an interesting sequence of shots in which the camera framings from shot-to-shot are far more unpredictable than those of the continuity system. Frequent reframing has a significant influence upon Hong Kong film style, which will be more explicitly examined in comparison to the continuity method of production in the next preparatory section on editing.

The in-camera method denotes the precision with which Hong Kong filmmakers construct action. In this vein Bordwell has described a 'precisionist' style that became dominant in the early 1980s, whereby only the essential details of an action are framed and shown in rapid succession (2003: 12). This type of constructive editing in which 'the action is built out of many more detail shots – a face, a body part, a weapon lashing out – and the rhythm comes not only from the figures' action but also from a barrage of hyper-composed details, which we assemble into an integrated action' (Bordwell 2003: 12). Paradoxically, both the success and difficulty

of this method comes from the rapid succession of shots in a precise arrangement which gives the viewer the details of an action but which denies them enough time for full comprehension of the total action until all of the necessary details have been shown. This kind of "growing" comprehension regularly relies upon the audience applying what I call *cumulative reasoning* to a succession of fresh shots – each detail adds an increasing awareness of the total action being constructed. The presentation of isolated details that are united by constructive editing has the effect of guiding the viewer through a specific thought process. Each shot is, metaphorically, a link in a chain of logic intended to persuade the viewer of a lucid action sequence. Constructively edited performances can employ a high degree of discontinuity whilst maintaining a thorough sense of *continuousness*. I conceive of continuousness as a method of maintaining a sense of a continuity of action across the cut despite possible temporal and spatial irregularities from shot to shot.

The precisionist technique can simultaneously command attention and suspend the capacity for cognition, though sometimes waywardly when experimental ideas don't find their optimum execution. Bordwell has identified certain methodologies within the Hong Kong production system that are used to ensure that the construction of the action is precise and to keep the barrage of details easily comprehended by the viewer. In particular, during rapidly edited sequences, the swift procession of shots is better understood by the viewer when there are pauses which provide moments of respite that allow the mind to resolve what the eyes have seen. Bordwell has identified and called this a 'pause-burst-pause' pattern (1997: 80). Secondly, the shots regularly convey their subject content with optimum readability and a gestural vitality that Borwell initially called 'expressive amplification' (1997: 86).

Bordwell initially describes the pause-burst-pause pattern in relation to the rhythmically choreographed movement of the performer (1997: 80). In his book, *Planet Hong Kong*, Bordwell more explicitly expands his definition of the pause-burst-pause pattern to find that, compared to Hollywood's approach to action, the Hong Kong method of constructive editing also provides paused moments for the viewer to be made aware of changes in the combat narrative (2000: 199-247). Pauses can compensate for bursts of action so that shots may appear in swift succession without confusing the viewer and, indeed, providing her with the best perspective of the action.

Pauses do not simply occur as longer shots and this thesis will show that sometimes they come in the form of a quick cutaway from the action being constructed, such as the swift prompting reaction shot discussed in chapter 3. The shots need to be kept visually clear for the action within them to be instantly cognised when presented at speed. This is achieved, in part, through the 'strategy of expressive amplification', which Bordwell describes as a method of 'arousing and channelling emotion' (2000: 231-232; see also 1997: 86).

The strategy of expressive amplification relies upon the viewer being 'able to read the performer at a glance' and Bordwell posits that the regular use of a relatively tight shot scale is key to providing the viewer with an exacting, clear perspective of the action (2000: 232). He argues that, unlike the Hollywood preference for giving 'more of the locale than we really need to see … Hong Kong directors judge their scale more exactly' (2000: 232). Their 'commitment to closer views', Bordwell

writes, 'opens several creative doors':

> First, all the resources of constructive editing are available to link these fragments of action. Second, the viewer's attention is always riveted on the key elements: the moving bodies … Third, a medium shot of the hero keeps some figures in the scene offscreen, so enemies can pop into the frame unexpectedly (2000: 233).

The second point that Bordwell makes is especially pertinent to this study: riveting the viewer to the subject enables the editor to cut with great speed whilst not losing cogency. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, Hong Kong's constructive editors often use incredibly fast shots – so fast that they are only barely registered by the viewer. So how do these editors rapidly cut between shots with small shot scales whilst maintaining cogency?

The aims and effects of the rapid assembly of shots will be investigated within the following chapters.

Because this thesis provides analysis of the assembly of numerous detailed, swift and uniquely framed shots, the reader must have an appreciation that each shot has special significance within an action sequence. The decision of *where* to cut and *what* to cut to is not made lightly but there are certain industry protocols that hold sway over these decisions. Whilst style can be an individual imprint that directors make upon their work, films also exhibit common design features that bear the stamp of an industry's peculiar production methods. In the following section on editing I will further argue that the Hong Kong film style is primarily a result of the in-camera method, which encourages the Hong Kong filmmaker to use varying shot scales to prioritise action while the location is often incidentally constructed. A preliminary comparison of the way that continuity and constructive production systems affect

editing techniques will continue this process of clarifying what is meant by the Hong Kong film style.

So far I have primarily discussed issues relating to the Hong Kong film style and the *wuxia* genre without much explication of constructive editing. Before this thesis gets fully underway there are significant editing theories, practices and concerns that must be explained.

A Rationale for Research: Recent Changes in Editing Methods

Just as the Hong Kong film style must be analysed and documented so that the contribution of Hong Kong filmmakers to the global film style can be recognised and admired, the craft of editing needs to be studied as it has also recently endured a profound transitional period. Patrick Gregston, a senior film editor, has called for more widespread 'academic criticism and comment on the craft', declaring that '[i]ntellectual exploration of editorial concepts seem to have ebbed with the onset of Stalinism in Russia' (2002: 143).

Gregston's motivation for such a rallying call is due to the fact that the editing craft has recently undergone a transitional adjustment - from analogue to digital production methods. The new age of digital media has significantly altered the processes by which editors develop their skills. This has prompted Gregston to ponder the effect of the recent imposition of digital culture and he has found that the passage of skills by mentorship has all but disappeared due to the pressure of fast-paced digital production schedules. Gregston's lament is that 'a number of editorial

techniques, and concepts have probably been lost because no one has been able to document them. They have retired with their authors' (2002: 135).

The authors of editing techniques may have retired but their films remain. It is therefore incumbent upon academics to analyse the techniques of film editors and to make their findings available, not only to fellow academics and the discerning public, but also to filmmaking professionals who have increasingly limited time to master old techniques or practice new techniques inspired by the digital age. This thesis responds to Gregston's call for more academic research on the craft of editing because, although film editing is an intuitive craft, we need to study it in order that disappearing concepts and techniques are documented for posterity and so that practitioners can access theories and practices that provide a foundation for their craft.

For the purpose of identifying the commonalities (and mutations) of a production system's film style it is necessary to understand its inherent editing concepts and techniques. However, the craft wisdom of film editing is customarily passed from mentor to apprentice and a number of the ideas that I reference have rarely been analysed outside of the editing suite, let alone committed to paper. Editor Craig McKay declares that 'there is no other way' to teach editing and he says:

> I always have somebody next to me and I'm saying virtually on every cut, "What do you think?" How else are you going to train them? (LoBrutto 1991: 203)

McKay's attitude reflects a commonly held belief that experienced editors decide exactly where to cut based on gut instinct and not intellectual analysis. Michael Kahn, another editor, confirms McKay's opinion:

> There's not an editor in town that edits with his mouth. They may talk good but they edit with their heart. You can go to school to learn how to splice, but not to learn when it plays (LoBrutto 1991: 176).

Having spent some time at the editing desk and watching others edit, I agree with these notions, though editing is not simply an intuitive craft. There are analysable filmmaking practices that determine the form of the edit. Production systems provide a framework for the assembly of shots.

The principal production methods used in Hong Kong action films have been those that both facilitate and demand constructive editing. I posit that it is the use of in-camera editing which has come to exemplify the editing of the Hong Kong film style and so I refer to this edit-oriented method of production as a constructive system. The comparative difference between continuity and constructive production system methods has resulted in distinct presentations of action. In particular, filmic space and time are dealt with in markedly different ways. We will also begin to see how the Hong Kong constructive system has developed highly effective ways to present action sequences, while the Hollywood continuity system has not enabled its editors to achieve the same kind of expertise.

Constructive editing is best understood by distinguishing it from continuity editing. The two techniques are not mutually exclusive as both seek to uphold narrative development but they do so in very different ways. This is primarily because they require significantly different production methods for the collection of footage. In either system, material must be staged and shot in such a way that facilitates the dominant editing practices. James Monaco's definition of the difference between editing and montage is useful here as he has pointed out that editing 'suggests a

trimming process in which unwanted material is eliminated', while montage 'suggests a building action, working up from the raw material' (2000: 216).[8] Continuity editing requires the collection of coverage from which the editor selects action to trim down the final edit. Conversely, constructive editing requires the collection of specific shots from which action will be built. These different methods of production create appreciably different conditions for their editors.

The continuity system of production provides the editor with coverage from which she can trim the content of the edit. This allows for a wide-ranging amount of decision-making on behalf of the editor because there are fewer constraints upon where to cut. In contrast, in the constructive system the editor is provided with a series of details for assembly. Because a martial arts film's action is typically conceived on-set and shot in-camera, it is the action director, rather than the editor, who predetermines the order in which the shots will most likely be assembled. Constructive system editors may be restricted by the collection details from which they will build a pre-determined narrative. As a result, the range of coverage for construction of the action provided is predominantly determined by the duration of a specific detail within the camera frame. Therefore this method can provide little allowance for coverage or even the overlap of a particular movement from shot to shot and cutting can be limited to trimming footage from either end of a necessarily fast shot. Compared to the continuity system, this results in a comparative decrease in the amount of creative, narrative input for the constructive editor. However this also results in the development of a peculiar eye for detail; the Hong Kong constructive editor has honed her skill to know exactly which frames to keep whilst

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[8] Constructive editing is the principal editing technique of montage.

constructing and ensuring that the total action is both comprehensible and dynamic as well as finding the precise point at which to cut to achieve optimum affect.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is dedicated to addressing a number of discrete preliminary issues that will serve as a précis to the detailed discussions in the chapters to follow. I provide a review of relevant literature, which will define film editing concepts and encompasses editors' theories of spectatorial activity. In particular, I make a distinction between the ways that continuity editors seek to immerse the viewer in the story by hiding their work while Soviet constructive editors use their work to create unique perspectives and will more readily agitate the audience. I will also provide reasoning for my decision to base this thesis' research upon a comparison between continuity practices and the Hong Kong film style, yet Soviet theories do occasionally provide the tools to make deductions about Hong Kong editing choices. The last part of the section then addresses the broad question of defining Hong Kong film style as a product of its production methods and how those ideas have been put into practice in the presentation of action.

Literature on Editing: Theories of Perception and Cognition

Editors have developed rule-of-thumb craft practices based on assumptions regarding the viewer's cognitive responses to filmic information. The viewer's potential response to the new shot, and its delivery by a cut, is a vitally important consideration because it guides the editor's decision-making process and, hence, the construction of the film. However there has been relatively little research into how these decisions are made.

Editors' concepts provide a fundamental starting point for researchers of editing. The ideal candidates to best explain the effect of constructive editing upon the viewer might appear to be the Soviet theorist filmmakers of the 1920s, such as Lev Kuleshov, Vsevold I. Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein, but while they provide ample theoretical discourse about how to use constructive editing to agitate an intellectual and emotional response from the viewer (which will be discussed shortly), I have found that theoretical information about how the viewer responds to constructively edited sequences can be made more readily apparent by comparison with the ideas of continuity system editors. Continuity system editing methods and concepts are grounded in decades of practical development. As a result, the continuity system editors' culture of mentorship has enabled the development of ideas and techniques that exhibit a thorough appreciation of spectatorial activity. By applying the findings and teachings of continuity editing practitioners to the evidence of *wuxia* films, a comprehensive analysis of Hong Kong constructive editing practices can be made, even though it does so by contrast.

The Technique of Film Editing by Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar was first written in 1953 to 'fill the gaps' in the knowledge of filmmaking that had not been addressed in text-books to that date, namely the 'pivotal contribution of the film editor [which] has never been analysed objectively' (1977). Their book provides a comprehensive analysis of broad ranging editing techniques and concepts regarding the ways in which narrative information can be transferred to the viewer. Since then the majority of writing on film editing has taken the form of instructional teaching aides or practitioner's handbooks. Written in this vein is (writer, director and editor) Edward

Dmytryk's *On Film Editing*, published in 1984, which provides a stern guide to becoming a better 'cutter'.[9] Subsequently a New Jersey lecturer, Richard D. Pepperman, discovered Dmytryk's contribution when informed that his own teachings mirrored Dmytryk's concepts and as a result Pepperman set about writing his own publication, *The Eye is Quicker*, released in 2004 (xiii). In Dmytryk and Pepperman we have two theorists (publishing twenty years apart) taking different routes but reaching similar conclusions about the effects of editing upon viewers. In their convergent ideas from independent research we have compelling evidence about the likely cognitive processes of the viewer at the point of the cut. Of particular note is the common idea that a good editor's work remains invisible - unseen by the viewer because it is devoid of discontinuities.

Discontinuities are anathema to the continuity system in which the invisibility of film-crafts and seamless continuity is championed. Dmytryk has asserted that it is the job of the editor to ensure that '[n]o non-professional viewer will remember the cutting' because:

> most cuts are specifically contrived to pass unnoticed. If the film is well shot and well cut, the viewer will perceive it as a motion picture which seems to flow in continuous, *unbroken* movement on a single strip of film. At times, even if a film is *not* well shot, an extremely clever cutter can still shape it into a smooth, continuous narrative. (1984: 11-12 original emphasis)

The optimum result for the continuity system editor is that the viewer maintains an active engagement with the fiction and a passive acceptance of the machinations of the editing because the editing remains invisible.

There are a number of ways that continuity editors have sought to maintain

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[9] 'Cutter' being Dmytryk's preferred term to 'editor' (1984: 1-2).

invisibility. Towards this goal, editor Walter Murch developed a unique and important concept regarding the transmission of visual, filmic information. In his book *In the Blink of an Eye*, Murch reflects upon his own editing practices and theories, central to which is the notion that the blink response is an indication of the generation of a new idea within the mind. Murch maintains that 'the blink is either *something that helps an internal separation of thought to take place* or it is *an involuntary reflex accompanying the mental separation that is taking place anyway*' (1992: 60 original emphasis). Consequently Murch proposes that a cut should occur at '*potential* blink-point' (1992: 67 original emphasis). To achieve the invisibility of a cut, Murch considers and anticipates the viewer's mental response, saying:

> At the moment you decide to cut, what you are saying is – in effect – "I am going to bring this idea to an end and start something new." It is important to emphasise that the cut itself does not create the 'blink moment' – the tail does not wag the dog. (1992: 61)

Because editors have had to develop rule-of-thumb techniques and theories about the viewer's perception they have also prefigured scientific research into the brain/eye function. In his PhD thesis, *An Attentional Theory of Continuity Editing*, Tim J. Smith conducted scientific analysis of continuity editing by testing subject viewers' eye-movement across the cut (2005). Smith's work establishes that continuity editors have managed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the way that viewers respond to visual stimuli. Although Smith points out that, as yet, there is no empirical, scientific research to support the notion that 'blinks coincide with cuts' he does confirm that '[b]links are believed to be an index of cognitive activity', which supports Murch's concept (Smith 2005: 104).

Key to Smith's research is Albert Michotte's psychological concept of "*existence*

constancy" which is described by George Butterworth as '*"the experience that objects persist through space and time despite the fact that their presence in the visual field may be discontinuous"*' (2005: 3 original emphasis). Smith finds that continuity editing 'ensures *existence constancy* by creating conditions under which a) the visual disruption created by the cut does not capture attention, b) *existence constancy* is assumed, and c) expectations associated with *existence constancy* are accommodated after the cut' (2005: 3 original emphasis). Continuity editors maintain existence constancy by cutting according to the understood responses of the viewer and not necessarily to the exact physics of the action being presented. Strict continuity of action does not necessarily translate to a smooth reception of the filmic material by the viewer and, in some instances, strict continuity can even cause mental disruption. For example, when making a match-on-action cut, both Dmytryk and Pepperman advocate an overlap of frames rather than an exact physical match so that the action appears smooth and (although they don't use the scientific term) existence constancy is ensured (1984: 32-33; 2004: 18-19). Chapter 3 of this thesis will more closely examine the uses of the match-on-action cut and its multifarious applications in the Hong Kong style of constructive editing; for now the significant point is that the appearance of continuity relies upon slight discontinuity. The invisibility that continuity editors seek to maintain is enabled by their post-production practices, which ensure existence constancy across the cut *via* slight discontinuity to accommodate the viewer's physiological functioning.

Murch advocates anticipating the viewer's behaviour to make cuts invisible. Dmytryk and Pepperman suggest that slight discontinuity can provide a seamless appearance. So continuity editors engage in a high degree of post-production

subterfuge to keep the viewer immersed in the narrative. In contrast, the passive

guidance of the viewer championed by the continuity system is at odds with the

Soviet Era teachings of Pudovkin who reckoned that editing should eliminate general

observations of the world that are available to the 'first, casual, merely general and

superficial glance' of the spectator so that a far more remarkable apprehension of the

scrutinized subject can be achieved through the filmic presentation of details (1958:

91-92). To that end he derided the methodology of the continuity system declaring

that:

> Terms such as "interpolation" and "cut-in" are absurd expressions, the
> remnants of an old misunderstanding of the technical methods of the film.
> The details organically belonging to scenes … must not be interpolated into
> the scene but the latter must be built out of them. (1958: 51)

The idealised end result of Soviet constructive system practice is that the viewer is

engaged in an active response to the film because she must actively cognize the

relationships between each successive shot in order to complete the film. Similarly,

Kuleshov maintains that 'correct montage, even if one takes the performance of an

actor directed at something quite different, will still reach the viewer in the way

intended by the editor, because the viewer himself will complete the sequence and

see that which is suggested to him by montage' (1974: 54).

The Soviet constructive editor has a different goal to the continuity editor: the

continuity editor seeks to create a seamless narrative in which the viewer can become

immersed while the Soviet editor seeks to *involve* the viewer in the generation of the

narrative. Eisenstein believed that montage was able to engage the viewer in a way

that the passive and un-confrontational continuity method could not, saying:

> A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging
> images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. It is this that constitutes the
> peculiarity of a truly vital work of art and distinguishes it from a lifeless one,

in which the spectator receives the represented result of a given consummated process of creation, instead of being drawn into the process as it occurs. (1970: 17)

In this case continuity is not entirely necessary, even redundant. Dynamism is the priority and montage is the means by which dynamism can be generated.

Eisenstein confirms that montage encourages viewer excitement, writing: 'it is precisely the *montage* principle, as distinguished from that of *representation*, which obliges spectators themselves to *create* and the montage principle, by this means, achieves that great power of inner creative excitement in the *spectator* which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further than giving information or recording events' (1970: 35 original emphasis). However Eisenstein also proposes that the viewer should be agitated. He sees Kuleshov's notion that montage is a method of 'adding individual shots to one another like building blocks' as 'outmoded' (Taylor 1988: 163). Conversely Eisenstein also derides Dziga Vertov's Cine-Eye as too impressionistic, lacking in '*formal effectiveness*' and somewhat too individualistic to have an impact upon the masses (1970: 62 original emphasis). Eisenstein asserts that the masses require a comprehensible yet dynamic film style that encourages action and declares:

> *It is not a "Cine-Eye" that we need but a "Cine-Fist".*
> Soviet cinema must cut through to the skull! (1970: 62 original emphasis)

Toward this end, Eisenstein proposes that '*montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that* DERIVES *from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another*' (Taylor 1988: 163 original emphasis). The impact generated between montage shots (or cells) is necessary to make impact upon the viewer's psyche. Rather than '*unrolling* an idea with the help of single

shots' Eisenstein says that, 'montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots – shots even opposite to one another' (1957: 49). For Eisenstein dynamism does more to evoke dialectical ideas than the continuity of sequential shots and collision is necessary to induce emotional excitement.

However, Kuleshov has also noted that montage must be measured and the cut calculated because early Soviet film experiments did not relay their intended objectives. Kuleshov paraphrased the criticism of their work:

> "Have pity you crazy futurists! You show films comprised of the tiniest segments. In the eyes of the viewer the result is utter chaos. Segments jump after each other so quickly that it is thoroughly impossible to understand the action!" (1974: 55)

Noting that fast cutting can generate a 'nervous irritation' when the position of a prominent subject is relocated across the cut to a different position within the frame, Kuleshov proposes that 'the direction and motion of the last frame of the preceding shot and the first frame of the successive shot must coincide; if they do not, an abrupt jump necessarily takes place' (1974: 55). In this case Kuleshov and Hollywood editors are in agreement: the cut must not disturb the viewer with subtle discomfort. By the same token, both constructive and continuity system editors have a common goal: they seek to stir the emotions of the viewer – but they use different means to achieve this end.

The editing aesthetic of Hong Kong's martial arts films falls somewhere between the aggressive, agitational intent of Eisenstein and the covert, passive style of the Hollywood continuity system editors. Like the Soviets there is a determination to make an impact upon the audience but like the Hollywood editors there is a

requirement to keep the cutting unobtrusive while keeping questions of film technique absent from the mind of the viewer so as not to invoke concerns about cinematic artificiality. Martial arts film editors tread a fine line: trying to astound the audience with stylistically enhanced performances whilst at the same time keeping their craft relatively unobservable.

Because Hong Kong action films often feature a number of rapidly presented shots from a series of different camera positions there are regularly employed editing techniques that ensure dynamic action can be presented with cogency. In this thesis I will conduct close detailed analyses of the relationships between shots and the placement of the cut to determine how continuity is manipulated for dynamic effect and how cogency is achieved, delayed or withheld in order to have an impact upon the viewer.

The next preparatory section provides a preliminary comparison of the way that continuity and constructive system filmmakers edit action. It explains how the two different production methods have an influence upon the editor's assembly of footage and how the style of editing differs because of this influence. It will be noted that neither system precludes continuity nor constructive editing techniques, meaning that Hong Kong constructive system filmmakers employ continuity editing techniques and the Hollywood continuity system has also used constructive editing. We will see that continuity editors acknowledge certain editing concepts that can be used to have an impact upon the viewer during combat sequences, but we will also begin to see how these notions have been more thoroughly explored, refined and crafted into specific techniques by Hong Kong constructive system editors (which

will be more explicitly outlined in Chapter 3). These refined editing techniques primarily arise from the in-camera method of constructive system production because it prompts an edit in which shots are presented at speed and in which the camera framing is rarely the same from shot to shot. The speed and unique framing of each shot means that continuity concepts can be challenged but these same traits also mean that an action can convey a sense of continuousness.

The Effect of Production Methods Upon Action Style

The contrasting ways that these production systems attend to the presentation of action within location indicates a fundamental distinction between their presentations of dynamic action. Because Hong Kong's constructive system editors are beholden to the action choreographer's vision (due to the in-camera edit approach) they regularly have to disregard continuity as their editing choices are limited by a predetermined shot selection. This key difference affects the way in which the constructive system organises filmic space and time.

Within the continuity system there are familiar and regularly used modes of presentation that facilitate an easy reception of visual information. The continuity editing style commonly relies upon a hierarchy of shots that are beholden to the establishment of space and the maintenance of correct screen direction for the action within that space. The edit often presents an establishing master shot, which gets broken down into smaller framings or inserts, such as a two-shot, then mid shots and close-ups. In this way the space essentially contains the action within it. The action within that space is organised according to the 180 degree axis of action so that

actors' positions, screen direction and eye-lines remain constant in relation to each

other and in relation to the location itself. Additionally the range of coverage from

these various angles enables the editor to cut with temporal consistency. Whereas the

Hong Kong constructive editor (and especially the precisionist editor) may have to

elide considerable sections of action from shot-to-shot, the continuity editor does not

necessarily have to do this because coverage (ideally) enables the overlap of

movement from one shot to the next. One of the reasons for this method is that it is

supposed to maintain continuity – hence the "continuity" system. Continuity is

primarily determined by spatial correctness and coverage enables visual temporal

continuity.

Although the continuity system method of capturing more footage and providing

more coverage offers the editor more scope for autonomy over the assembly of the

content, the constructive system still provides a more assured strategy for expressing

action. The classical Hollywood production method does not predetermine the final

cut in the same way as the constructive system, and so it becomes the continuity

editor's responsibility to assemble the action from the footage provided. At the end

point of production, continuity system editors have rarely been in the position to be

able to cut constructively. As a result their methods for cutting action sequences have

frequently been inexplicit. As editor Richard Marks reveals:

> The axiom of action cutting is, never complete an action. Always leave it
> incomplete so it keeps the forward momentum of the sequence. (LoBrutto,
> 1991: 181)

Expanding upon Marks' comment, Bordwell asserts that Hollywood action styles

that emerged in the 1980s prioritise 'constant and continual activity' at the expense

of audience engagement with the characters involved in the action (1997: 76). The

obfuscation of the audience's vision of the spectacle (particularly the filming of the actor's stunts in long shots to accommodate a stuntman) only serves to further alienate the audience from the emotional thrust of the action. Bordwell says that:

> The actor's performance is minimized and other cinematic techniques compensate for it. The rapid cutting, constant camera movement, and dramatic music and sound effects must labor to generate an excitement that is not primed by the concrete event taking place before the lens. (2001: 75)

For Bordwell this results in the viewer feeling a 'relatively undifferentiated visceral arousal' and 'a diffuse feeling of general excitement' rather than a strong emotional response to the action (2001: 75). This is not to say that there has been no intention by continuity system filmmakers to generate action sequences that have a greater impact upon the viewer but that the system of production has not provided a distinctly organized method of achieving this aim.

Continuity editors have attempted to replicate the real-world sensation of being involved in combat but the goal of invisible cutting to create a seamless narrative also prevails over the dynamic expression of action. Continuity system adherents, Dmytryk and Murch, have both explained their approach to editing fight sequences in terms of concealing the cut from the viewer. Their concepts (outlined below) represent two different methods of blinding the viewer to smuggle their cuts during a fight sequence. While they evoke key aspects of the Hong Kong film style – the temporal elision of actions and the rapid editing of shots – their production system has not enabled them to explore these ideas in great detail.

In the continuity system, because film fighting is manufactured and blows do not actually land upon their targets, Dmytryk asserts that 'a few cutting tricks can help to

manufacture "reality"' (1984: 75). One such cutter's trick employs sound to conceal

the temporal elision of action from one shot to another. In this instance Dmytryk's

technique prompts a "wince" response, which is a form of blinding the viewer during

which the cut can be smuggled; he posits that:

> Not all actors can "time" or "take" a punch properly. Let us say that in a full
> shot the puncher misses the intended target, his opponent's chin, by an
> unacceptable margin. On top of that, the receiver's reaction is a shade too
> late. If just as the fist, in the full shot, should meet the chin we cut to a close
> up of the "punchee" and see his head snap back as we hear a loud, dubbed in,
> smack of the fist, the illusion of a solid hit can be made to seem very real
> indeed. In cutting such a sequence, I have often found myself wincing at
> such a blow, even though I knew that no actual physical contact had been
> made. (1984: 75)

Importantly, Dmytryk also suggests that a truncation of the action can conceal the

falsity of the event. Although he recommends this method as a safety measure to

maintain continuity despite poorly choreographed timing, Hong Kong filmmakers

have frequently applied the method of truncating a movement so as to increase its

dynamic impact. Methodologically, in the Hong Kong constructive system, the

truncation of movement is partly due to the collection of isolated detailed shots that

may not include a replicated movement with which to overlap footage; so, in part,

truncation is a necessity. However, an elision of part of the total action can also make

the action appear quicker and more powerful than it actually was. To show this effect

I have provided an example from Yuen Woo-Ping's *Iron Monkey* (1993), which is a

kung-fu film in a period setting. The hero, Iron Monkey, deals a blow to an assailant,

Black Widow. Here the actor is substituted with a stuntman trained to take a punch

and the impact is shown.

As the assailant reels backwards the cut is made and the following shot shows her flying across screen to slam into a wall.

The impact of the hand with the face is shown and the cut is made on the reeling action so that the flight and impact with the wall is prioritised. Thus an action can be imbued with uncanny force – a particularly useful tool for the *wuxia* filmmaker who must imbue action with fantastic, super-heroic qualities.

The dynamism that fast cutting can bring to fight sequences has not gone unnoticed by continuity editors. Fast cutting is demanded by the in-camera method of production in Hong Kong but for Murch fast cutting is useful because of the rapid cognitive functioning that it can generate. Murch argues that a fight sequence should feature rapid editing for the purpose of having an impact upon the viewer's thought processes to prompt a cognitive involvement in the fight because he believes that:

> the sequence of thoughts - that is to say the rhythm and rate of cutting –
> should be appropriate to whatever the audience is watching at the
> moment … If you are in an actual fight you will be blinking dozens of times
> a minute because you are thinking dozens of conflicting thoughts a minute –
> and so when you are watching a fight in a film there should be dozens of
> cuts per minute. (1992: 66)

Murch footnotes his observation with recognition of the difference in observational behaviour between longer and shorter takes. As well as a cognitive response, he argues that the replication of real world physiological processes would also prompt an emotional response. He states that short takes:

> would make the audience participate emotionally in the fight itself. If, on the other hand, you wanted to create an objective distance – to have the audience observe the fight as a phenomenon in itself – then you would reduce the number of cuts considerably. (1992: 66)

Murch's notion corresponds with Pierson's idea that longer takes can help to solicit 'an attentive and even contemplative viewing' of the event (2002: 124). Longer takes do provide the viewer with objective distance, which also allows the viewer to appreciate the display of skill as an uncensored feat. Thus longer takes can also allow an appreciation of the authenticity of the martial arts skills of the *actor* (rather that a stuntman), which is a significant reason for using longer takes during martial arts action.

The mind is not allowed the freedom to contemplate the spectacle nor appraise authenticity when assaulted by a series of short takes. Contrary to Murch's view, rapid editing does not necessarily assure an emotional participation by the viewer. Effective rapid editing requires more than just placing more cuts per minute. Within the Hong Kong system the prioritisation of action has resulted in the development of a number of techniques that are used to make a dynamic emotional impact upon the viewer – and shot speed is one of the significant concerns. Because the speed of shots is a primary concern within this thesis I have indicated, where pertinent, the measurement of shots in frames – for example: [8f] means, eight frames.

Furthermore I have indicated when a shot is the first frame of a shot, the incoming frame, or the last frame of a shot, the outgoing frame (Pepperman 2004: 9). With the help of such data I have identified and analysed a number of techniques that enable cogent rapid constructive editing within the body of this thesis, while a few are outlined below to further explain a common delineation of space within the Hong Kong constructive system.

The continuity system is predominantly reliant upon the location to provide a foundation for the action but the Hong Kong constructive system style is based upon the prioritisation of action, and spatial context is determined by the action within it. The in-camera method has enabled and encouraged Hong Kong action filmmakers to principally concentrate upon the action that is being constructed and the location is incidentally defined as a result.

The movement (and stasis) of bodies and objects is the primary concern for Hong Kong action filmmakers, rather than the location in which those bodies and objects are situated. For example in *Iron Monkey* there is a twenty-four shot scene with an average shot length of 2.19 seconds (67 frames) that takes place in Pa Cho Hall in which the action is constructively edited to prioritise the action. In this scene a gust of wind sends paper documents flying around the room and so Doctor (Yu Rong-Kwong) and Orchid (Jean Wang) use their martial arts skills to gather up the papers. Within this scene none of the framings are repeated exactly and there is no wide establishing shot. Instead, wide shots are used when a wide shot scale is best suited to capture the specific action. The scene begins with a medium close-up two-shot.

The pair notice papers swirling about the room and (literally) leap into action to solve the problem. In a canted low-angle medium two-shot, Orchid watches as the Doctor kicks off a bench and leaps to the right of screen.


The Doctor's kick-off action is the central focus of the shot and the low-angle emphasises his upward trajectory; additionally the canted angle enables his body to begin to exit the frame much faster because he is closer to the edge of frame. This shot also demonstrates that within this thesis it is important to consider more than just how the cuts work but how cutting works with camera placement and staging.

Two shots then show the Doctor somersaulting through the air in a maintained left-to-right screen direction. The first shot is scaled to best capture a rightward diving somersault and the low angle gives the impression that some height is gained with this action.

The next shot is smaller in scale to show the Doctor gathering up the papers during his flight.
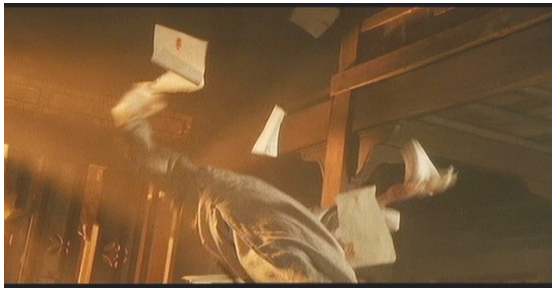
The total action – leap, somersault and grabbing the papers – would be impossible to perform in a single take but constructive editing makes it possible.

The edit returns to a shot of Orchid, still looking rightward but in a new framing. In the previous medium two-shot (that included both the Doctor and Orchid) the framing allowed space for both bodies and the angle of that shot prioritised the primary action – the leap of the Doctor as he kicked off from the bench. The new framing of the same area now prioritises the new action – Orchid's tossing of the bench. She changes her eye-line to a leftward direction and tosses the bench off-screen, in the same leftward direction.

Because of Orchid's new eye-line, which indicates a potential new area, a new screen direction (right-to-left) is initiated. The bench toss and the following shot confirms that Orchid will be travelling in this new direction - a different direction to the Doctor. After the toss a cut is made to the bench landing followed by Orchid's feet using the bench as a launching pad and beginning to exit through the top of the frame.

With this shot the 180 degree axis of action that has been established is now crossed. Concentration upon the actions being performed, through judicious shot scale and cut-point selection, provides a sense of continuousness despite contravention of the continuity system rule.

Orchid's change in eye-line and the opposing screen direction for her launch, prompts us to believe that she is gathering papers in a different part of the same room as the Doctor. Close analysis of the *mise en scene* in the next shot confirms this – but in real time, the shot, just over a second long, is too fast to allow much appraisal of the space by the viewer. The filmmakers maintain spatial continuity but it is incidental to the prioritisation of the action. Orchid leaps into the air collecting papers, independent of the Doctor but on the other side of the same room [26f].

Although the shot frames some of the location's key details from the Doctor's initial somersault shot – the lamp and sign – these are not framed to establish space or confirm spatial continuity. The priority is the body in flight and the swirling papers in the centre of the shot. Like the first shot of the Doctor's somersault, the scale is larger to allow for the swirling papers and the movement of the body across the shot – in this case: from the bottom to the centre of frame.

During this scene the movement of combatants' bodies across the screen commands the viewer's attention. When they land, they do so on the opposite side of the room from where they began.

In this way the action has, literally, come full circle. The in-camera method has been used to trace the passage of two independently travelling bodies around the edges of a room to end up in a position within the location that is opposite the position where they began. So, in addition to the potential confusion that the rapid and regular displacement of the camera might cause, in this example there is also the potential confusion caused by two separate trajectories of action. There is also the speed at which the information is presented to add to the confusion. All this works for discontinuity rather than against it but it is the centrality of the performance that provides continuity.

The Hong Kong film style has a number of techniques that help to maintain the viewer's comprehension of the action. These will be more fully explained in the body of this thesis but some have been mentioned here. In particular the deft manipulation of screen direction helps to keep the viewer abreast of the trajectory of what is happening even though they may not be able to establish exactly where it is happening within the location. The shot scale prioritises the trajectory of the bodies and the shots are too fast to allow much analysis of the *mise en scene* or to locate the action within the space.

Given the restrictions and rules of the continuity production method it is unlikely that a continuity system filmmaker would be able to construct the action in the *Iron*

Monkey example unless they vigorously challenged the system in which they work. Also, the *Iron Monkey* example is not a combat scene – it is a mundane situation that has been dynamically enhanced – which means it is not necessarily within the continuity system filmmaker's scope for the application of dynamic techniques anyway. Nor is the example pure spectacle either; there is narrative importance here because constructive editing is utilised to establish the acrobatic skill of both characters, which confirms the Doctor as the mysterious, eponymous hero and highlights the tender synchronicity between the Doctor and his apprentice. Rapid editing can elicit an emotional response from the viewer but it must be expertly handled.

Within this study we will see that Hong Kong filmmakers have considered and developed abundant ways to present rapid processions of shots that do not just stimulate the sensation of multiple thoughts per minute but guide (or force) the viewer to cognise otherwise unfeasible action events. The cognitive impact that the juxtaposition of a series of rapid shots has upon the viewer is undeniable and the Soviet theorists were aware of this, but Hong Kong action filmmakers have subjected it to decades of development, which has meant that constructive editing remains an integral, defining feature of the Hong Kong film style.

CONCLUSION

Whilst Hong Kong film style is not simply a procession of spectacles that are devoid of narrative, it is often spectacular. With the presentation of spectacular events the Hong Kong action filmmaker seeks to have a dynamic impact upon the viewer.

Dynamic impact is achieved in a number of stylistically different ways, such as the rapid presentation of shots, direct attacks into the camera and crossing the 180 degree axis of action to name a few (and which will be examined in the body of this thesis). But just how do Hong Kong filmmakers utilize these impact-generating techniques? Despite the efforts of researchers, there is still only a scant supply of Hong Kong action filmmakers' reasoning behind the use of certain filmmaking techniques and mere phrases indicating the reasoning behind using editing techniques, so I rely upon the more comprehensively documented experience of continuity system editors to outline what presumptions about audience engagement guide their own cutting. By examining the various craft based hypotheses of these continuity system editors in comparison with the (relatively) primary evidence of *wuxia* films, the principles of rapid constructive editing techniques can begin to be explained.[10] A detailed study of editing techniques is not only a useful way to explain the Hong Kong film style, it also delineates some of the key forces that shape action in the *wuxia* genre, which are: the pursuit of novelty, the evolution of peculiar editing techniques, the realistic or fantastic stylisation of heroic feats and a formulaic design principle that organises combinations of combatants.

Broadly, the scope of this thesis spans thirty-nine years of *wuxia* filmmaking from the implementation of New Era realism in *Come Drink With Me* to *Seven Swords'* probing new style. There is a wealth of stylistic information in these films for those who care to look and Hong Kong's filmmakers have long been aware of these filmmaking concepts and techniques but, surprisingly, there is a deficiency of

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[10] I use the word relatively because many DVD's present a restoration of the original film - and to what extent the restoration has needed to be conducted is unknown. It might require the removal of overly damaged frames. Whilst many officially released DVDs are of a fine quality there is no way of knowing - save for a frame by frame analysis with an original print - where in its duration a film might have been restored in regard to frame deletion.

research into the specifics of editing, let alone, editing within the *wuxia* genre. There are some researchers who have been inspired to analyse the Hong Kong action-film style and this thesis not only depends upon, but confirms their original hypotheses. This thesis uses Bordwell's comprehensive analysis of the Hong Kong film style as a basis from which to further elucidate the forces that influence editing techniques and concepts. Although notions about the nature of the Hong Kong film style are primarily discernable from the comments of filmmakers themselves, these comments have been added to by the important work of Bordwell and Teo, among others, who have closely examined seminal films and explicated stylistic practices common to Hong Kong filmmaking. Yet, due to the relatively oblique veil cast over the editing craft I find that I must necessarily invent and apply English language definitions to certain types of shots (eg: the "kick-off shot") and types of cut (eg: the "ultra elided match-on-action") that may well have original, but as yet untranslated, Chinese terminology. Nevertheless, I provide a detailed analysis of constructive editing techniques with rough-and-ready terms in the hope that they will be of some use until the original terms are revealed. Lastly, because of its formalist bent and necessary attention to craft wisdom, I submit that this study may also serve as a practitioner's hand-book. It is aimed at alerting filmmakers to the possibilities of presenting action, and for those who are already versed in the techniques that are compiled herein I hope that this study prompts them to further mutate the style to continue its evolution.

The next chapter addresses the pursuit of novelty as a significant impetus for change and technical development within the Hong Kong film style. Novelties evolve rapidly, but become familiar just as rapidly, which means that they then have to be reinvented. There are some constant factors, however, which are determined by pre-

requisite generic content and familiar scenarios. Yet, despite these restrictions, the

pursuit of novelty is one of the driving forces for change within the *wuxia* film.