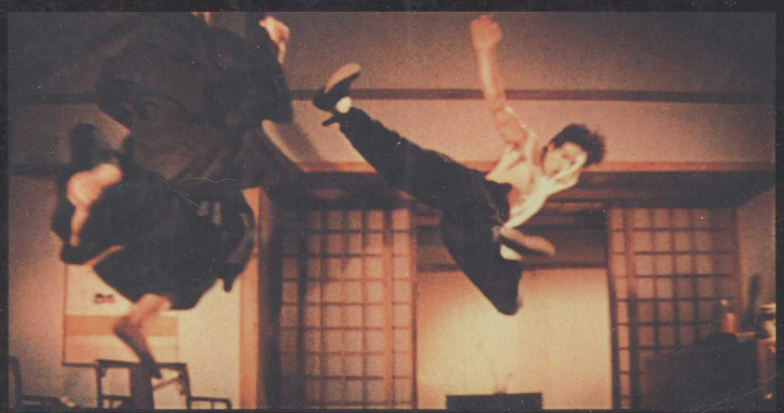
DAVID BORDWELL

PLANET HONG KONG

POPULAR CINEMA AND THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT



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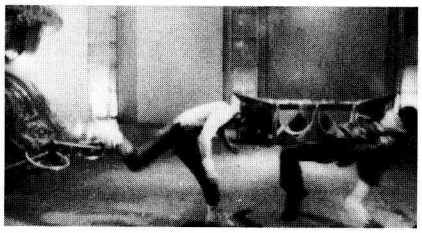

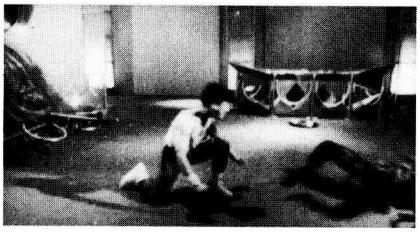

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POPULAR CINEMA AND THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT

DAVID BORDWELL

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藏书

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PREFACE

Some of the best books on Hong Kong start with the author flying in to the old Kai Tak airport, the jumbo jet nearly scraping the rooftops of Kowloon City before wheeling around sharply to land. (An Australian pilot is supposed to have described the trip as eight hours of sheer boredom followed by eight minutes of sheer terror.) This magnificent arrival is impressed in my memory too, but the real thrill came later, when on a sultry March night I wandered along Nathan Road, staring up at a forest of towering neon. Columns of Chinese characters several stories high, blazing crimson or gold, stretched alongside more familiar names: Toshiba in silver and red, an aqua OK signaling karaoke.

Drifting with the crowd, I sauntered among old men walking gravely with hands clasped behind their back, executive men and women hollering into cell phones, matrons strolling four and five abreast, children trotting along in shorts and suspenders, slender boys in white shirts and blue trousers, auburn-haired girls with knapsack purses strapped to their backs. There were plenty of tourists: big German and Australian couples appraised cameras and Discmen in shop windows while American students rummaged through a cart of bootleg CDs. The noise was overwhelming: buses screeched to discharge their passengers, people shouted amiably at one another. Occasionally a man would try to pull me out of the commotion. "Copy watch?" "Sir! Where are you from, sir? Are you thinking of a suit?"

To cross from Nathan Road to Salisbury Road, the street that runs along the harbor, is to leave most of the turmoil behind. Among the cool columns of the Cultural Centre, at the tip of the peninsula, people shift gears. The Centre is less popular for its museums and theaters, I suspect, than for its tranquillity; later I would discover that every day families fresh from the Marriage Registry gathered in front of a fountain there for photographs, the bride dazzling in a white gown and perhaps clutching a Snoopy handbag. That first night, though, I was behind the Centre staring at the skyline of Hong Kong Island across the harbor.

As with all legendary views, the postcard version is too cramped. Here were skyscrapers spread out carefully, as if designed to lead your eye from the spiky profile of the Bank of China to the Neo-Deco Central Plaza and soon enough to the gigantic glowing signs for Citizen and San Miguel. Behind these, misty green hills rose to the Peak. Everything was reflected in the bay, not in perfect outline but in thousands of red, blue, and gold highlights broken by the ferries and barges that crisscrossed your line of sight. This view may be Hong Kong's greatest work of art. I picked up smells too—the pungent "fragrant harbor" that gave the colony its name, the odor of floor wax from the lobby of the Centre. On the esplanade, couples loitered and tourists snapped photos of the great contrivance shining across the water.

What had brought me here? In the fall of 1973, soon after I had started teaching at the University of Wisconsin, I went to see *Five Fingers of Death* paired with *The Chinese Connection* in the dilapidated Majestic Theatre. Not long afterward I saw *Enter the Dragon.* These movies shook me up. A few years later in Richmond, Virginia, I saw *Bruce Lee's Game of Death,* a film of such surpassing oddness that I screened it for my film theory class. At the same time, during trips to Europe, I caught up with King Hu's exhilarating masterworks.

During the 1980s, while writing about Hollywood cinema and film theory and the films of Yasujiro Ozu, I occasionally checked in on Hong Kong cinema. I caught a Jackie Chan here, a Tsui Hark there, and cable TV yielded up oddities like *Shaolin Kung-Fu Mystagogue.* The films appealed to me as "pure cinema," popular fare that, like American Westerns and gangster movies of the 1930s, seemed to have an intuitive understanding of the kinetics of movies. Over these years, my old friend Tony Rayns saw to it that I was sent the annual catalogues of the Hong Kong International Film Festival, and so I came to learn something of this cinema's history.

In the early 1990s I dived in, not least because these movies aroused my students' passion in a way that I had not seen for a long time. I began booking Hong Kong films for my courses, subscribing to the fanzines, picking up videotapes and laserdiscs. Soon I was convinced that this was a popular cinema of great vigor. When I gained a semester's leave in the spring of 1995, I decided that it was time to visit the Festival.

Through the Festival I met Li Cheuk-to, Athena Tsui, Stephen Teo, Shu Kei, Michael Campi, and many others who have become firm friends. I also saw a selection of recent films, a retrospective of postwar movies, and a sample of what was playing at the moment. At the first Hong Kong Critics Society award ceremony I met Ann Hui, Wong Kar-wai, and other filmmakers. I managed to slip into the Hong Kong Film Awards, where I snapped photos and got autographs of stars and directors I admired. During my three weeks' stay I lived in a fan's paradise. I even ate at Chungking Mansions.

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I became addicted to visiting Hong Kong. Sometime after the third trip, at the urgings of my wife, Kristin Thompson, and my friend Noël Carroll, I decided to write a book. It was a difficult decision, not only because I don't speak or read Chinese. For one thing, there is already a lot written about this cinema, and there is going to be a lot more. Web pages are sprouting at this moment. Further, I have seen only about three hundred seventy Hong Kong movies. (If you think that's a lot, you are not yet a hardcore fan.) Still, perhaps out of stubborn naïveté, I thought that I had something original to say about the movies produced in this tiny corner of Asia. I thought that I could explore this cinema not as an expression of local society, nor as part of the history of Chinese culture, but as an example of how popular cinema can produce movies that are beautiful.

What follows, then, is an essayistic attempt to understand the interplay of art and entertainment in one popular cinema. Because I have felt free to choose what interests me, I have left to one side, for example, the Cantonese Opera films, the social realist tradition of the 1950s, the musicals and comedies and melodramas of the 1960s, and the films of Sadean violence. I have also not touched upon the work of certain directors whose work is unavailable in good film prints. Selective though it is, I hope that *Planet Hong Kong* will serve as both an introduction to Hong Kong film and an exploration of matters not addressed elsewhere—industry background, production practices, and above all filmic structure and style.

The book also delineates Hong Kong's significance for international popular filmmaking. How did cheap movies made in a distant outpost of the British Empire achieve broad international appeal, while European filmmakers bemoan their inability to reach even their own national audiences? How did Hong Kong filmmakers manage to create artful movies within the framework of modern entertainment? What can these films tell us about storytelling in a mass medium—its history and craft, its design features and emotional effects? Such questions inevitably lead us back to the unique achievements of Hong Kong cinema and to an assessment of the delights and the shortcomings of the films themselves.

Some might say that the book risks imposing an outsider's values on a cinema that exists in and through unique cultural circumstances. But despite many claims to the contrary in our multicultural milieu, there are more commonalities than differences in human cultures: universal physical, social, and psychological predispositions and the facial expressions of many emotions will be quickly understood in a film, whatever its country of origin. Many practices—such as acquiring shelter and caring for children—are similar in different societies. Cultures also converge historically, because when they come into contact, borrowing is inevitable. The traditions of Hollywood and Japanese cinema have powerfully influenced Hong Kong film.

Popular cinema, moreover, is deliberately designed to cross cultural

boundaries. Reliance on pictures and music rather than on words, appeal to cross-cultural emotions, easily learned conventions of style and story, and redundancy at many levels all help films travel outside their immediate context. That audiences all over the world enjoy Hong Kong movies dramatically illustrates the transcultural power of popular cinema.

Today the Asian financial crisis has driven the crowds from Nathan Road, and the Hong Kong film industry is struggling to survive. This book portrays a vibrant moment in the history of popular film and shows how it participates in a vigorous tradition of mass entertainment. That tradition is nearly as old as the century that is now ending, and it is becoming, day by day, more powerful in every land. It is time we understood it better. These films can help us to do so, and along the way they can show us a splendid time.

Madison, Wisconsin
December 1999

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1

ALL TOO EXTRAVAGANT, TOO GRATUITOUSLY WILD

Hong Kong cinema is one of the success stories of film history. For about twenty years, this city-state of around six million people had one of the most robust cinema industries in the world. In number of films released, it regularly surpassed nearly all Western countries. In export it was second only to the United States. It ruled the East Asian market, eventually obliterating one neighboring country's film industry. Distributed in the West, Hong Kong films became a cult phenomenon on an unprecedented scale. Although a typical production cost about as much as a German or French one, the industry enjoyed no subsidies of the sort that keep European cinema alive. Hong Kong movies were made simply because millions of people wanted to watch them.

Over the last two decades American film has devoured the world market. In some countries Hollywood claims 90 percent of box office receipts. Yet over the same years Hollywood movies held a minority position in Hong Kong, with U.S. market share sometimes falling to less than 30 percent. Global blockbusters often failed in Hong Kong. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) ranked only sixteenth in local admissions, beaten by *The Dead and the Deadly, Legendary Weapons of China,* and *Boat People. Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1989) earned just one-third the grosses of *God of Gamblers.* Not until the fateful year 1997 did Hollywood edge out the local product, claiming slightly over half the admission receipts—and some would blame that outcome on local underproduction and elevated ticket prices for Western fare.

How did this tiny cinema come to be so successful? Some answers lie in history and culture, but many others are to be found in the films themselves. Hong Kong's film industry offered something audiences desired. Year in and year out it produced dozens of fresh, lively, and thrilling movies. Since the 1970s it has been arguably the world's most energetic, imaginative popular cinema.

Every fan has favorite examples; here are two of mine. At the climax of the first part of King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1971), a swordsman and swords-

1.1 Swordfighters clash in midair in *A Touch of Zen.*

woman confront enemy warriors in a bamboo grove. It is no ordinary combat. The fighters leap twenty feet in the air, pivoting and somersaulting, sometimes clashing with one another (Fig. 1.1). The woman strategically vaults up, caroms off one tree trunk, and alights on another, clinging there like a spider before swiveling and dive-bombing her prey. Apart from the aerobatics, the swordfight is filmed and cut in a daringly opaque way. Although each image is carefully composed, the editing makes the shots so brief that we merely glimpse the fighters' extraordinary feats. Eisenstein and Kurosawa might admire the precise force of this sequence.

In Tsui Hark's *Peking Opera Blues* (1986), a young woman has allowed several friends to sleep overnight in her room, but in the morning her father bustles in unexpectedly. The friends must hide anywhere they can—crouching under the blanket, scampering around behind the father's back, even clambering up to the rafters (Fig. 1.2). Each shot's dodges are choreographed in layers for maximal comic effect (Figs. 1.3–1.5). As in *A Touch of Zen,* an outlandish premise is subjected to a rousing exactitude of execution.

Hong Kong films can be sentimental, joyous, rip-roaring, silly, bloody, and bizarre. Their audacity, their slickness, and their unabashed appeal to emotion have won them audiences throughout the world. "It is all too extravagant, too gratuitously wild," a *New York Times* reviewer complained of an early kung-fu import; now the charge looks like a badge of honor.[1] These outrageous entertainments harbor remarkable inventiveness and careful craftsmanship. They are Hong Kong's most important contribution to global culture. The best of them are not only crowd-pleasing but also richly and delightfully artful.

How can mass-produced movies be artful? To answer this question, we must be willing to grant that the compromises of business do not prevent mass entertainment from achieving genuine artistry. We must also grant that there is a distinct aesthetic of popular film–a set of principles that shape its forms and effects. Finally, we must be willing to look closely at

1.2 *Peking Opera Blues:* Bedroom farce becomes silent slapstick.

1.3 *Peking Opera Blues:* A hanging basket is knocked away . . .

1.4 . . . and accidentally swings out at the viewer . . .

1.5 . . . but is caught on the return by a boy who pops into view.

popular movies, to study how they tell their stories and deploy film technique; we must be ready to analyze.

Hong Kong cinema has been an industry for more than sixty years. During the war-torn 1930s and 1940s Shanghai film companies fled to the relative tranquillity of the British colony. Soon after the triumph of Mao's 1949 revolution, Hong Kong began turning out scores of movies in well-tried genres: comedies, crime movies, family dramas, swordfight films, and Chinese operas. Films were made in both Mandarin and Cantonese. The highest output came from large companies, most notably that of the Shaw brothers, who ran their "Movietown" like an old-fashioned Hollywood studio (Fig. 1.6).

Until the 1970s, Hong Kong movies found distribution only in Asia and in émigré communities. Most westerners learned of this cinema through the kung-fu film, with its revenge-driven plots and flamboyant martial arts. The worldwide success of Bruce Lee's films guaranteed that Hong Kong would be forever identified with this genre. But the world market became glutted with kung-fu films, and locally other trends emerged, such as the Cantonese dialect comedy identified with Michael Hui, a former TV star. Soon afterward Jackie Chan cultivated comic kung-fu and became the biggest star in Asia.

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1.6 Run Run Shaw with some of his 1960s stars.

By the early 1980s virtually all Hong Kong films were in Cantonese, and a new generation of directors came to the fore. Often trained in the West and in television, less tied to Mainland traditions than older hands, these young filmmakers turned away from the martial arts and toward gangster films, sword-and-sorcery fantasy, and dramas of contemporary life. Many of the films garnered acclaim in festivals and foreign exhibition, the most notable success being Ann Hui's *Boat People* (1982). Although this "new wave" did not overturn the mass-production ethos of the industry (most of the young directors wound up in the mainstream), its energy reshaped Hong Kong cinema into a modern and distinctive part of the territory's mass culture.

Just as Margaret Thatcher's government prepared to cede the colony back to China, the Hong Kong film industry was launched upon what many regard as its golden decade. A flood of lively films raised production standards while expanding the possibilities of established genres. The hugely successful *Aces Go Places* series, launched in 1982, streamlined Cantonese comedy in farcical pastiches of James Bond intrigue. Jackie Chan modernized the kung-fu film by recasting it as adventure saga (*Pro-*

ject A, 1983) and urban police thriller (*Police Story,* 1985). In films like *Shanghai Blues* (1984), Tsui Hark updated older formulas through bold style and tongue-in-cheek humor. He also revived the historical kung-fu movie with his nationalistic epic *Once upon a Time in China* (1991). The gangster film returned with a hyperbolic romanticism in the "heroes" films of John Woo (*A Better Tomorrow,* 1986; *The Killer,* 1989), as well as in movies by Kirk Wong (*Gun Men,* 1988) and Ringo Lam (*Full Contact,* 1992). In the early 1990s the resurgent Hong Kong cinema finally came to public notice in the West. Jackie Chan and John Woo became American celebrities, and Tsui, Lam, Wong, and others finished films in Hollywood. Ironically, as local films gained respect, the industry went into a tailspin, losing its regional markets and falling prey to video piracy and the Asian financial crisis. Yet even as journalists were writing *finis* to this cinema, remarkable films continued to be made, and a new generation maintained Hong Kong's lively traditions.

How did such a frankly commercial filmmaking tradition manage to create the conditions for something we might recognize as artistry? Posing the question this way presumes that art suffers when it is bound up by commerce, yet many of the fine-art traditions we honor sprang from the market. Italian Renaissance painting was an intensely economic enterprise, responding to demands for portraits, frescoes, altarpieces, and decorated furniture. Artists were artisans, like the shoemaker, organizing their shops for efficiency and maximum profitability. Today, sculpture, painting, and orchestral music, along with virtually all architectural projects, result from commissions, in which market forces reveal themselves nakedly.

But in high art, some might argue, economic demand doesn't shape the specific outcome: whereas the elite artist expresses a singular vision, the popular artist must compromise in order to satisfy the audience. Yet this claim is an exaggeration. The Renaissance painter often had to fulfill a program laid down in the commission, which often specified subject, composition, materials, coloring, and iconography. In the nineteenth century the collapse of academic painting led to the rise of genre painting and the impressionist style, both shaped to the tastes of new customers, while composers were urged to court a comparatively untutored public by writing program music and overtly nationalistic pieces.

We need not go quite so far as Virgil Thomson, who once suggested that a composer's musical style changes in accord with the funding source.[2] It is just that in any art, form tends to follow format, and format is often shaped by business pressures. After Beethoven, composers increased the size and varied the instrumentation of the orchestra, partly in order to mount a massive sound that would fill the new, bigger auditoria built for general audiences. In eighteenth-century England, as writers lost their patrons, they came to depend upon booksellers, who demanded long pieces of prose fic-

tion. Commercial demands mold styles and forms, in both elite art and popular art. That a work of art is financed and marketed does not make it any less a work of art.

In popular cinema, highly personal films may be produced for an entertainment industry—witness those of Buster Keaton, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Howard Hawks, and other distinctive filmmakers. But "art films" are a business as well. Granted, many are not the products of profit-driven local industries or entrepreneurs; they receive public funding. (In the late 1990s, the average European film was 70 percent state-financed.) Few of these subsidized films attract a local audience or overseas distribution, so as purely economic investments they are disastrous.[3] Instead payback shifts to another level. The subsidized film competes to win places in the world's four hundred annual film festivals, which are hungry for non-mainstream fare of all kinds.[4] If a festival entry wins acclaim, perhaps an award, the sponsoring agency is confirmed in its decision to back the project, with honor flowing to national culture. For such reasons, the festival network has become a circuit of production, distribution, and exhibition parallel to that of mass-market cinema. Art cinema is not always profit-driven, but it remains market-oriented, and this pressure has affected its traditions, genres, and conventions.[5]

Hong Kong has a few "art films" that feed into festivals. Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (1994) became a cult hit, and his *Happy Together* (1997) won the Best Director prize at Cannes. Until very recently, though, local moviemaking has been unsubsidized, so internationally prestigious directors like Clara Law, Ann Hui, and Stanley Kwan depend upon mainstream styles, stars, and genres. In comparison to their contemporaries—say, the austere Taiwanese directors Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang—Hong Kong's "festival" filmmakers look decidedly pop.

Popular cinema begins in business—the impulse to turn out pictures regularly to satisfy a mass audience's appetite. What, then, would an aesthetic of popular film look like? Unsurprisingly, it is founded on mass tastes, and these often favor force over finesse. A mass-market movie from any culture tends to highlight pratfalls, spills, bodily functions, ladder accidents, and other base constants of human life. Since the 1930s Hollywood has been constrained by some lower-middle-class canons of taste, so we often forget how the silent clowns (even Chaplin's romanticized Little Tramp) dwell on the ugly tactility of motor oil on spats, pie dripping from eyelashes, thumbtacks fished out of the soup. Abbott and Costello, Jerry Lewis, Rodney Dangerfield, John Belushi, and Jim Carrey have maintained this tradition.

The vulgarity of popular cinema reaches paroxysmic extremes in Hong Kong. Here a typical movie will feature spitting, vomiting, nose-picking, and vistas of toilets and people's mouths. In *Fight Back to School* (1991) Stephen Chiau pretends a condom is chewing gum and blows a bubble with it. In the farce *All's Well End's Well* (1992), offscreen a masseuse

whacks a man's feet with a baseball bat while a school official squats on a toilet; as the bat cracks, the official groans with bowel strain. Later in a hospital the film's amnesiac protagonist begins his day by gargling with the urine from his bedpan. Gags like these indicate that the spectacle of kung-fu is only one side of a cinema thoroughly fascinated with bodies *in extremis*. Hong Kong film celebrates voluptuousness and grotesquerie; it savors cleavage and penises, comic warts and farts, mold-blotched vampires, greedy eaters smeared with sauce and fat, and creatures with gigantic tongues. Nothing gorgeous or hideous is alien to this cinema.

Vulgarity offers one kind of forcefulness; striking images yield another. Hong Kong director Ringo Lam speaks for many of his peers: "I like visuals and simple stories. I would prefer my movies to have very little dialogue."[6] When Robert Parrish asked how he could learn to direct actors, John Ford suggested he watch *Stagecoach*. Parrish returned from the screening protesting that John Wayne had scarcely a dozen lines. "That's the way to direct actors," Ford replied. "Don't let 'em talk." Intellectuals often quote lame dialogue to show the callowness of popular cinema, but they thereby miss what lies in the images. It's hard to find weighty significance in the bedroom feints of *Peking Opera Blues* and the aerobatics of *A Touch of Zen*. In many movies, the chief pleasures are pictorial.

Which is to say that popular filmmakers have refined techniques of vivid visual storytelling. The foundations of "film language" were laid by the entertainment cinema of the 1900s and 1910s, when directors had to get stories across fast and vividly. D. W. Griffith, Victor Sjöström, and Louis Feuillade, the three finest directors of the period before 1918, were all churning out films for mass audiences. Today's popular cinema preserves many devices from the medium's earliest years—the chase, the hairbreadth escape, the cliff-hanging hero, the struggle with storms or gravity or locomotives. Hong Kong cinema, in its drive for clarity and impact, has revitalized silent-film techniques. Slow- and fast-motion, dynamic editing, striking camera angles, and other devices that the avant-garde of the 1920s declared to be "purely cinematic" are stock in trade in this popular cinema. Its makers have intuitively rediscovered the short, sharp flashback that serves to remind the audience of an earlier scene, as well as the "symbolic insert" beloved of early filmic storytelling (Fig. 1.7).

But doesn't all cinema exploit the power of moving images? Again we come to the trade-off between fastidiousness and force. Since the late 1950s, much Western art cinema has dwelt on static compositions and ambivalent moods (Fig. 1.8). Antonioni, Tarkovsky, Fassbinder, Wenders, and other outstanding directors have created a cinema of suggestive atmosphere.[7] The mass-entertainment filmmaker, committed to storytelling, anxious to rivet the audience's attention, strives for clear and dynamic images rather than contemplative ones. Style will tend toward functional economy. It favors the graceful behavior of performers, such as John

1.7 *The Killer:* Jenny's memory of John, treated as an emblematic image of his trade.

1.8 A moment in the odyssey of two children in Theo Angelopoulos' *Landscape in the Mist* (1988).

Wayne's strides and pauses at the rocky stream at the close of *The Quiet Man* (1952) or Bruce Lee's soaring kicks in *Fist of Fury* (1971). Filmmakers will take pride in the subtle precision of certain camera movements, or in editing tactics that convey stupendous agility.

A few filmmakers will prolong certain grace notes, spinning stylistic cadenzas around the narrative core. King Hu, doyen of the Hong Kong swordplay film, realized early in his career that "if the plots are simple, the stylistic delivery will be even richer."[8] What Western fans consider "over the top" in Hong Kong movies is partly a richness of stylistic delivery—an effort to see how delightful or thrilling one can make the mix of dialogue, music, sound effects, light, color, and movement. Realism is less important than a bold expressiveness in every dimension. In particular, physical activity can achieve a real magnificence when it is sustained and embellished. This delight in expressive technique is a local elaboration of the sensuous abundance sought by popular filmmakers everywhere.

In the art of popular cinema, vivid visuals are shot through with emotion. In order to attract a mass audience, popular art deals in emotions like anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and indignation.[9] Since these feelings evidently operate in all cultures, a film that appeals to them travels well. Entertainment mobilizes playground passions, direct responses to blatant aggression, kindness, or selfishness. Cinema is particularly good at arousing emotions kinesthetically, through action and music. Bruce Lee asked his students to give their fighting techniques "emotional content," such as purposefully directed anger.[10] When this quality is captured in vigorous, strictly patterned movement, in nicely judged framings and crackling cutting, with overwhelming music and sound effects, you can feel yourself tensing and twitching to the rhythms of the fight. This is filmic emotion at its most sheerly physical.

1.9 The *Chinese Feast:* Ka-fai checks Sun's sincerity by seeing if her picture has the privileged place in his wallet.

We are told that mass entertainment favors simple, pure states of feeling, but plainly it works with mixed emotions too. One aim of mass art is to make you laugh through your tears, to give you a smile and a lump in your throat. In *The Chinese Feast* (1995), Ka-fai (Anita Yuen) has taken off her chef's hat, but her hair stays erect in a Woody Woodpecker topknot. This adds an exuberant zaniness to the romantic climax, when Sun (Leslie Cheung) confesses his love (Fig. 1.9). Still, popular plotting does exploit manichean opposites: self-sacrifice is sharpened by contrast with cruelty, generosity by contrast with greed. In *Task Force* (1997), the policewoman Shirley (Karen Mok) returns to the apartment she shares with her boyfriend, Kelvin. He has ignored her, dodged appointments, and skipped her father's funeral. Everything has aroused our indignation at Kelvin's callousness. Now Shirley has decided to leave him. She comes to claim her things while her partner, Rod, waits outside in the car. The scene dwells on Shirley drifting wistfully around the apartment. Suddenly, cut outside to show her returning to Rod, telling him she's decided to take away none of her things after all. The abruptness of the transition seems to mark her sharp decision to accept the breakup with Kelvin. The two drive off, and a tear trickles down from behind Shirley's sunglasses. But then we realize that the sudden cut to her entering the car omitted a piece of action. We now get a miniflashback showing her angrily pulling down bookshelves, knocking over the stereo, and generally laying waste to Kelvin's life. Shirley's surge of righteous anger stands out more strongly against the suggestion that she took his indifference passively, and we get to feel both pity for her and satisfaction at her retribution.

The opponent of mass culture objects that this tactic indulges the audience, letting it "have things both ways." But popular film strives for a wide-open emotional range, and having things both ways perfectly suits that purpose. Entertainment aims to chart the highest highs and the lowest lows. The tactic is seen most strikingly in the "double ending," which al-

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