



**Enter the 2-Disc Platinum Edition:
Bruce Lee and Post-DVD Textuality**

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Keywords

Bruce Lee

DVD textuality

DVD extras

The Big Boss

Game of Death

Abstract

Bruce Lee's films have moved across not only cultural boundaries, but also different media platforms – film, television, video and an assortment of digital media. DVD and Blu-ray don't just facilitate ownership of optimum and definitive versions of texts, but also re-define textuality through their secondary materials. As Barbara Klinger argues, 'DVD acts as an ambassador of context, entering the home complete with its own armada of discourses meant to influence reception, including behind-the-scenes industry information and commentary tracks'. In the case of a culturally contested figure like Bruce Lee, such an armada of discourses might be particularly worthy of study. Moreover, DVD introduces new criteria for determining what makes a 'perfect DVD movie', by making use of the audio-visual 'perfection' facilitated by the medium or presenting particularly impressive arrays of extras. Bruce Lee is perhaps not an obvious candidate for post-DVD study, compared to such formats as the TV boxed set or multi-disc extended cut of a Hollywood blockbuster. These comparatively low budget films don't lend themselves to the audio-visual perfection expected of a high-end blockbuster movie. Moreover, most DVD versions of his films (including releases in HK and the US) have been light on extra features. Nevertheless certain releases of Lee films do raise interesting questions in the light of post-DVD debates. How are Lee's defiantly pre-digital movies positioned and re-mediated on DVD? This paper will consider some of the different versions available, and the role of intratextual materials. It examines competing discourses used to frame Lee's legacy and cultural significance, particularly between his Hong Kong films and the Hollywood co-production *Enter the Dragon*. The essay focuses in particular on two Bruce Lee films characterised by degrees of incompleteness – *The Big Boss* (cut after its original Mandarin release) and the incomplete *Game of Death*. Considering *Game of Death* in the context of the 'perfect DVD movie' debate, this essay revisits the question of whether a 'bad' film (at least in its theatrical version) can become a 'great' DVD.

Contributor Note

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In an issue of the British fanzine *BLR* (*Bruce Lee Review*) published in 2012, one of the articles imagines what the 'definitive' DVD/blu-ray release of *The Big Boss* (Lo Wei, Hong Kong 1972) might look like – a version that has not only never been made available but may never become available, given the 'missing in action' status of some of its footage (Bentley 2012: 19).¹ Across three discs, the author 'fantasizes' about the different versions of the film (the 'lost' Mandarin cut, two different English dubs, and the later Cantonese language version) along with extra features chronicling the film's multiple versions, including its different musical scores, as well as the standard galleries of interviews, trailers and stills that have accompanied previous releases of a film that is rarely seen as Bruce Lee's best work. DVD and blu-ray, with their capacity for extra features that might include alternative versions, deleted scenes, features that cover and attempt to compensate for missing scenes, facilitate such cinephile fantasies. And Bruce Lee, of course, is a figure who for many years has been at the centre of discourses of completeness, the archiving of rare footage and other materials, the desire for every existing record of his life (particularly on film) to be *seen*.

Bruce Lee's films have moved across not only cultural boundaries, but also different media platforms – film, television, video and an assortment of digital media – from theatrical exhibition (sometimes in very different versions) to the 'home film cultures' (Klinger 2006, 2008) that are now his cinematic domain. DVD and blu-ray don't just facilitate ownership of optimum and

either definitive or alternative versions of texts, but also potentially re-define textuality (for certain viewers, at least) through their secondary materials – extra features, deleted scenes, commentaries. There has been some debate about the extent to which consumers actually watch and/or listen to these supplementary materials (Brookey and Westerhaus 2002; Parker and Parker 2005; Ruh 2008), although we might speculate that Bruce Lee is the kind of figure who attracts the sort of hypothetical 'invested viewers' that Brookey and Westerhaus are talking about, 'who have an incentive to allow their viewing experience to be directed – at least in part – by DVD extra text' (2002: 25). Furthermore, as Barbara Klinger argues, DVD not only comes armed with an array of supplementary material, but introduces new criteria for determining what makes a 'perfect DVD movie' (2008: 29). What this paper examines then is how Lee's movies are positioned and re-mediated on DVD (and, by extension, blu-ray).

Paradoxically, while DVD seems to be sufficiently in commercial decline to already qualify as 'old media' (or at least 'past-its-sell-by-date media'), its theorisation is still comparatively new (Barlow 2005; Klinger 2006; McDonald 2007; Bennett and Brown 2008; Gray 2010) and its impact on our relationship to film and television has been substantial. And given that blu-ray largely retains the textuality of DVD (distinguished thus far primarily by its enhanced audio-visual capabilities), these debates are probably best referred to as 'post-DVD theory'. Central to this body of theory are those paratexts – 'texts that prepare us for other texts' (Gray 2010: location 548) – that are positioned alongside the film or programme as 'inter-related texts in an integrated package' (Brookey and

¹ No format is specified but the reference to HD transfers suggests that the author has blu-ray in mind.

Westerhaus (2002: 23). 'The DVD edition', suggest Deborah and Matt Parker, 'is essentially a re-orientation of the film, often carried out by a variety of agents, and subject to a wide variety of choices made by the eventual viewers' (2005: 125). Bruce Lee is perhaps not an obvious candidate for post-DVD study. These are not particularly rare films like some of the cult movies that DVD has given fresh life and new prestige to, and nor do these comparatively low budget films lend themselves to the audio-visual perfection expected of a high-end blockbuster movie released in High Definition formats. Moreover, most DVD versions of his films (including releases in Hong Kong and the US) have been comparatively light on extra features. Nevertheless certain releases of Lee films do raise interesting questions in the light of post-DVD debates.

This paper examines Lee's films on DVD/blu-ray from three angles. Firstly, I shall draw on what Roz Kaveney refers to as the 'thick text' – 'we accept that all texts are not only a product of the creative process but contain all the stages of that process within them like scars or vestigial organs' (2005: 5). Such scars and vestigial organs are often the province of the DVD extra; the deleted scene, the trailer gallery, the commentary all contributing to this textual thickening. Some of these 'scars' and 'vestigial' parts are discarded ephemera now given new textual significance. One such piece of seeming ephemera is included on Hong Kong Legends' UK release of *The Way of the Dragon* (Bruce Lee, Hong Kong 1972) - the UK trailer campaign commissioned by distributors Cathay for the Odeon cinema chain and executed by Rebel Films of Carshalton, Surrey. It's a trailer that stands in stark contrast to the slick campaign Warner Brothers designed for

Enter the Dragon – 'Action! Thrills! Excitement – kung fu style!' promises the very English narrator, or simply 'Bruce Lee, *The Way of the Dragon* – all over London from Sunday!' on the TV teaser. This paratext – once an 'entryway' to the film (Gray 2010: location 514), now a quaint curio – is presented through a discourse of rareness, a piece of Bruce Lee memorabilia thought lost, but it has two other functions. Firstly, given that this is a UK DVD release, it functions nostalgically, situating the film as part of the 1970s 'kung fu craze' that would largely fizzle out in the West when there were no more Lee films available (and *Way of the Dragon*, as these trailers underline, was the completed Lee film released last in Western countries).² Secondly, it tells the tale of a local text going global and then being mediated for reception in another local context (a context in which the words 'kung fu' are exciting, exotic, the 'latest thing'). Other textual 'thickeners' are commissioned specially for DVD releases, such as commentaries, and can re-orient the text for those who choose to listen. A further characteristic of this thick textuality is Kaveney's suggestion that 'all works of art are to some extent provisional – in that they are abandoned rather than ever completed, and in that they are always one particular stage in a notional process which may be picked up again two decades later' (ibid.). The *vestigial* and the *provisional* have some bearing on two Lee films in particular – *The Big Boss*, a film marked by changes in Hong Kong censorship subsequent to its initial release and some evident uncertainty about how to export it, and *Game of Death* (Bruce Lee, Hong Kong 1972/Robert Clouse Hong Kong 1978) a

² The trailer lists the films in the order in which they were released in the UK prior to *Way – Fist of Fury*, *The Big Boss* and then *Enter the Dragon*.

literally abandoned film, incomplete at the time of Lee's death, while *Fist of Fury* (Lo Wei, Hong Kong 1972), *Way of the Dragon* and to a certain extent *Enter the Dragon* (Robert Clouse, Hong Kong/USA 1973) exist in more or less 'definitive' versions.

Secondly, according to Barbara Klinger, 'DVD acts as an ambassador of context, entering the home complete with its own armada of discourses meant to influence reception, including behind-the-scenes industry information and commentary tracks' (2008: 21). In the case of a culturally contested figure like Bruce Lee (Chinese patriot, transnational star, Chinese American icon), such an armada of discourses might prove to be particularly illuminating. Where is Lee situated as a transnational star? Who speaks for him? Hong Kong Legends' DVD releases are at greater pains to position Lee as part of Hong Kong cinema than Warner Brothers' *Enter the Dragon* extras, which present him as someone destined for Hollywood, while also speaking to a specifically British experience of Lee's films (as we have seen with the *Way of the Dragon* trailer campaign).

Thirdly, Klinger and others have observed a set of popular discourses surrounding the 'perfect DVD movie' (which might not necessarily have been a 'perfect movie'). According to Klinger, 'What critics hail as "the perfect DVD movie" embodies aesthetic standards more directly beholden to the technical features that seem to set DVD apart from previous ancillary formats' (29). Aaron Barlow seems to have something similar in mind when he suggests that the best DVDs create 'new objects that utilize the possibilities of the new medium' (2005: 78). He contrasts this with the prestigious Region 1 DVDs produced by Criterion

(usually arthouse classics), which present 'scholarly, authoritative editions of classic works' but do not promote the 'new kind of viewing experience' that he feels should be part of the DVD experience (77). This is a demand that particularly favours the contemporary, high-end movie – the much celebrated *Lord of the Rings* sets, for example, with their extended cuts and exhaustive (or perhaps merely exhausting) documentaries. For the cult classic, on the other hand, there is a potential tension between textual authenticity and DVD-ness. Bruce Lee's fans are unlikely to want his films to become 'new objects', yet UK label Hong Kong Legends' Special Collector's Edition and Platinum Edition DVDs took on the reputation of being the best available editions of the films. On the US Amazon site, several of the reviews for the US box set *Bruce Lee: The Master Collection* released by 20th Century Fox in 2002 advise other consumers to buy multi-region DVD players and purchase the Hong Kong Legends discs.³ The dictionary definition of platinum identifies it as a metal that 'does not tarnish'; these 'Platinum' editions are bidding (in admittedly hyperbolic terms) for definitive status. 'Platinum' was also the name given to the prestigious DVD releases of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which were regarded by many as presenting the definitive versions of the films (rather than the shorter theatrical cuts) as well as bestowing an 'artistic aura' of

³ The US box set includes the American (dubbed) prints of *The Big Boss* (under its US title *Fists of Fury*), *Fist of Fury* (under the title *The Chinese Connection*), *Way of the Dragon* (US title: *Return of the Dragon*) and *Game of Death* with no extras or alternative language tracks, along with the documentary *Bruce Lee; The Legend*. For the Amazon customer reviews, see http://www.amazon.com/Bruce-Lee-Collection-Chinese-Connection/dp/6305519471/ref=cm_cr_pr_product_top [accessed September 6, 2013]

'uniqueness, value, and authenticity' (Gray 2010: location 1669). While Lee's films never aspire to the markers of 'quality' that Peter Jackson's blockbusters do, they are frequently invested with their own kind of value and particularly 'authenticity' – moreover, they find their author figure (often reaffirmed in DVD's paratexts) in Lee himself. As Gray argues, 'paratextual frames can ... prove remarkably important for how they assign *value* to a text' (2010: location 1647). Significantly, subsequent UK DVD releases of Lee's Hong Kong films (by which I'm excluding the Hollywood co-production *Enter the Dragon*) reproduce the extras from the Hong Kong Legends versions with some additional interviews with assorted co-workers of Lee. But not all of Lee's films lend themselves to such textual closure, as the article in *BLR* suggests. And one of them in particular, *Game of Death*, is an interesting example of what might be judged a 'bad' film becoming a 'great' DVD in the form of Hong Kong Legends' Platinum Edition.

Textual Thickness

'What does it mean when we say we have watched a film?' asks Brian Ruh (2008: 138). My first experience of seeing a Bruce Lee film was a theatrical one – *Enter the Dragon* in the mid-1970s. This was a very specific version of the film – the original UK cut to carry a British Board of Film Censors (later, Classification) certificate. Lee's signature weapon the nunchaku (such a bone of contention for the BBFC later) was still intact, but O'Hara (Bob Wall) lunging at Lee with broken bottles was missing. The pre-titles 'monk scene' placed between Lee's opening fight and his meeting with the British operative Braithwaite was not yet part of the 'international' cut of the

film (whereas its inclusion now seems to be a default on DVD and blu-ray versions). I recall the thrill of seeing these 'missing' scenes for the first time years later. In the 'old' (pre-video) cinephilia identified by David Desser (2005: 208), such 'moments in cinema' were central to the cinematic experience, 'a fleeting moment of experience and epiphany'. But perhaps we have become more accustomed to seeing 'lost' scenes and restored versions at home. Interestingly, the uncut versions of Bruce Lee's films were finally approved by the BBFC for their DVD release, as though technology and cultural climate had somehow converged in one particular cultural context. I have seen Lee's films theatrically – both cut and dubbed on original release and uncut/subtitled at more specialist screenings (such as the BFI's National Film Theatre) – in Super 8mm cutdown versions (an early 'home cinema' culture), on television and VHS, on DVD and its 'superior' counterpart, blu-ray. This multiplicity of platforms and contexts is central to my understanding of these films – I'm part of a generation that still remembers not being able to 'own' one's favourite films, for example.⁴ They have been marked by varying degrees of completeness, authenticity (the often elusive 'definitive version') and audio-visual quality (the right ratio, a good transfer). But incompleteness and inauthenticity don't necessarily consign a particular version of a film to history – rather, they become part of its history by speaking of its travels over time and across different cultural and technological contexts. As Paul Bowman puts it, with any individual Lee film, we are less

⁴ Moreover, edited Super 8mm versions were in some cases how I first saw censored sequences from the theatrical versions, such as Lee's nunchaku duel with Dan Inosanto in *Game of Death*.

likely to be talking about 'this film' than 'these films' (2013: 111).

Kaveney's reference to textual scars, then, is one that I find hard to resist here. And like the wounds that Bruce Lee often displays on his body, the scars on his films become sources of fascination in themselves – they help tell the tales of their transnational travels, of battles both won and lost with censors and distributors. *The Big Boss* and (inevitably) *Game of Death* are the two most scarred of Lee's films, manifesting different degrees of incompleteness and provisionality. *The Big Boss* is distinguished by not even having been shown with the same musical score over the years – rather, it has been exhibited with at least four different ones. The 'original' score by Wang Fu-ling was recorded for both the Mandarin version and the original English dub that was rejected for its American release. When the film was bought by the German distributor Cinerama, they chose to westernise the film by commissioning a new score by composer Peter Thomas (Naumann 2010), which was also used on subsequent international releases of the film, including the USA (where the film was known as *Fists of Fury*) and the UK. When *The Big Boss* was reissued in Cantonese in the early 80s, that version combined a score by Joseph Koo originally written for the film's Japanese release with incongruous slices of English progressive rock such as Pink Floyd's 'Time' from *Dark Side of the Moon*. Hong Kong Legend's DVD includes the Cantonese version, with the Peter Thomas score on the English dubbed version. Neither of these can quite claim to be the 'original', if such a thing exists. The bilinguality of Lee's films, Bowman suggests, throws certain binaries into disarray – 'fidelity/infidelity, primary/secondary, original/copy, authentic/construction and so on'

(2013: 111). As an English-speaking Bruce Lee fan (the 'invested' fan who has bought this 'superior' edition), I am being invited by the menu to select the most authentic soundtrack. Surely it's the Cantonese version – the DVDs make great capital out of offering 'original' language versions (and Cantonese is the default version – you have to actively choose the English dub). However, given that the 'original' (Mandarin) version isn't currently available, should the existing versions be judged on the basis of which came first – in which case, the English version is more of an 'original' than the Cantonese one (which, after all, is also a dubbed version – if those distinctions still mean anything at this point). Or should we always defer to cultural origin (even if the version isn't the 'original')? Pink Floyd didn't record *Dark Side of the Moon* until after Lee's death, and Bruce's signature war cries on the Cantonese version are recognisably lifted from *Enter the Dragon* – Lee hadn't developed this trademark until *Fist of Fury*. To play the English dub is to flirt with consigning the film to camp purgatory, but the music score might authenticate it for viewers who first saw the film on its English language release. The Peter Thomas score is one of the 'scars' that the film carries – and one might say the same of the English dubbing. I would speculate that the English dubs are not there for Anglophone Bruce Lee fans who don't like subtitles – they're there because they are part of the film's history. However, the dubbed version is not presented 'raw', as it were. The original English dub included some unintentionally comic out-of-sync sound effects that have been corrected – thus the version presented on DVD negotiates between nostalgia for the historical moment of 'Bruce Lee fever' and the dangers of camp silliness.

If there was to be such a thing as a 'Director's Cut' of *The Big Boss*, it would undoubtedly be the elusive Mandarin version that *BLR's* writer (like many Bruce Lee aficionados) longs to see surface. Rumours abound that it might be in the hands of a private collector or lost altogether; its last reported sighting was at a Bruce Lee Fan Club screening in London in 1979. The Mandarin version includes not only the alternative music score by Wang Fu-ling, but additional footage that was cut after its original release. Two of these cuts have exerted particular fascination for Lee fans. The first is well known as a still – Lee's character Cheng Chao-an puts a large saw through someone's head (stories vary about whether this sequence was actually in any release version – it was apparently not included in the print shown in London in 1979). The second partly survives in the film's original trailer – Cheng returns to the Thai brothel he has visited earlier in the film (with a different prostitute) for what might be a final sexual encounter before he faces death at the Boss' mansion. It's a 'missing' scene with some ramifications both for Lee's otherwise chaste screen persona and for the film's treatment of its Thai setting.⁵ One might speculate that the scene was later removed to bring Lee's character in line with the similarly naive figure he plays in *Way of the Dragon*, who flees from a topless prostitute in Rome. Only Hong Kong Legends' two DVD releases – the 2000 Special Collector's Edition and the 2006 Platinum Edition – attempt to address the missing footage. The Collector's Edition does this via the original Hong

Kong trailer, prefaced by an explanatory introduction that draws our attention to footage not in the film – Cheng pushing the second prostitute roughly onto the bed (again, clearly not the chivalrous Lee of later films) or standing naked behind a chair.

The Big Boss has a trashy 'grindhouse' dimension largely absent from Lee's later films – spurting blood, severed limbs packed in ice, naked flesh – and there was evidently more of this in the original cut. The Platinum Edition tries to make more of a feature of the missing footage, even though it still has no more than the trailer to draw on – it has two discs to fill up and the missing scenes are obvious (if problematic) candidates for textual thickening. 'Deleted Scenes Examined' uses text narration to take us through the missing scenes, sometimes illustrated by blurry photographs. In the case of the saw-through-the-head, they edit the still into the sequence, while the brothel scene uses the trailer footage, which is also included in the trailer gallery. The trailer and the deleted scene are arguably the quintessential vestigial organs that Kaveney speaks of. The role of the trailer always changes over time – it is less likely to be an 'entryway paratext' (Gray 2010) in the case of a 'classic' or 'cult' re-release, more likely to provide context and archival colour. Here, it takes on something like a documentary function – closer to Gray's '*in media res paratext*' that serves to 'inflect or redirect the text following initial interaction' (2010: location 755) – filling in some of gaps in the main text that we might not have known existed.

⁵ Rather problematically (but not uncharacteristic of Hong Kong's representation of Thailand as 'Third World Other' in the early 70s), the film's Chinese women are the objects of chivalry and protection, while its Thai women are disposable sex workers.

Competing ambassadors of context

The Bruce Lee DVDs with the most generous array of extras are Warner Brothers' Region 1 and 2 DVDs of *Enter the Dragon* and Hong Kong Legends' Platinum editions of the other films, but it is across these releases that we see some of the biggest differences in how supplementary materials orient us towards Lee and his films. There are some points of convergence – both include supplementary materials that position Lee as 'more than' an action star; a legitimate martial artist, innovator and philosopher, a man with a 'legacy'. But there are some significant differences, too. *Enter the Dragon*, the first Lee film to make it to blu-ray, is packaged as a prestigious Hollywood studio film (sometimes partially erasing its Hong Kong-ness) – boxed set editions, a 30th Anniversary edition with a new 'Making Of' Documentary *Blood and Steel*, the involvement of Lee's (American) family members.⁶ Warners' *Enter the Dragon* DVDs and blu-rays have the aura of 'authorised' editions. The film is introduced by Linda Lee, Bruce's wife, while his daughter Shannon features heavily on a more recent blu-ray edition. The DVDs/blu-rays include material from John Little, the Linda-approved authority on Lee and publisher of his papers and letters. Above all, it's the Lee disc with the most substantial input from people involved in the film's production – producers Paul Heller and Fred Weintraub and writer Michael Allin. As we might expect, it's a very particular Lee who emerges from these 'ambassadors

⁶ The 'Lee family' is a somewhat divided one, with widow Linda and daughter Shannon having the power to 'authorise' official versions of Lee, whereas Chinese family members (such as his brother Robert) occupy a less powerful position that nevertheless makes them more accessible to a DVD label such as Hong Kong Legends.

of context' – Lee as Hollywood star in the making, his Hong Kong films relegated to stepping stones towards his real destiny. This 'authority' is bolstered by the array of surviving material available as extra material – extensive trailer campaigns (both theatrical and TV), a promotional film from 1973, actress Ahna Capri's home movie footage of the film's production. Hong Kong Legends don't have the same kind of studio-approved material – their approach to Lee's Hong Kong films is closer to a kind of fan scholarship. Their default DVD extra is the interview with someone who knew Bruce Lee – *Fist of Fury* and *Way of the Dragon* are particularly dependent on such extras because there are no deleted scenes to excavate, and limited trailers available.

I want to focus here particularly on the DVD commentary, perhaps the DVD extra that has attracted most attention – it both carries the 'aura of quality' (McDonald 2007: 59) and can be seen as privileging certain readings of the text. Tellingly, the DVD commentaries on Lee's films have been almost exclusively Anglophone – Mega Star's Hong Kong DVD of *Fist of Fury* provides a Cantonese commentary by Donnie Yen but also includes an English language one by Bey Logan, the most prolific commentator for DVD labels such as Hong Kong Legends, Premier Asia and Dragon Dynasty. Warners' *Enter the Dragon* DVD (and subsequent releases) has a commentary by Paul Heller, which also incorporates a separately recorded telephone conversation between Heller and writer Michael Allin. Heller's approach is largely anecdotal, punctuated by long silences and prone to metaphorically scraping his fingers down a blackboard; he describes the film as a 'karate action picture', refers to Lee as 'the first Third World Superstar' and likens the (Orientalist) look of the

film to the comic strip *Terry and the Pirates* – ‘China lends itself to that. It’s a colourful place’, he tells us. Admittedly, some of this is congruent with aspects of the film itself, but Heller’s tale is of western filmmakers encountering the unsophisticated filmmaking techniques of the ‘far east’. In his commentaries for Hong Kong Legends, Bey Logan speaks from a rather different position. Logan is of English birth but has been based in Hong Kong for a number of years, initially as a journalist but with an increasing involvement in the film industry as writer, producer and even performer. Logan’s commentaries are thus able to draw on inside knowledge of the Hong Kong film industry while also speaking as cultural outsider. More importantly, while he is as much a filmmaker as Heller – albeit not of the Lee films – he doesn’t speak as one. Rather, he positions himself as a knowledgeable fan – the tone of address is of one Bruce Lee fan to another. DVD commentaries often deploy a ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger 2006: 89), the sense of being chatted to and forming an ‘imaginary friendship’ (Doherty 2001: 78) or overhearing a conversation – Matt Hills has called it ‘a new type of fantasised co-presence’, a ‘mediatised watching-with’ (2007: 52). But this is easier for the filmmaker than the expert commentator. A filmmaker’s commentary is more likely to be improvised, while at the same time carrying the authority of authorship – a ‘digital-authorial “paratext”’ (Grant 2008: 103). Even if the filmmaker can’t generate this imaginary intimacy – and, indeed, comes over as distracted, slightly boring, company – then s/he will still carry the aura of authorial authority. The ‘expert commentary’ (whether by critic, fan or academic) is, as Ginette Vincendeau has observed, more like a piece of research – she describes the academic commentary as an ‘in-between space’

between ‘academic research proper and cinephilia’ (Bennett and Brown 2008b: 122). It requires preparation, and possibly even a script – Vincendeau apparently wrote a 17,000 word script for the commentary that accompanied Jean Pierre Melville’s *Le Cercle Rouge*. It thus risks dryness, making us feel that we’re being lectured at (or worse, read to), although in the case of the academic commentary (a sub-category of the expert commentary) that is probably to be expected – labels such as the BFI and Criterion are offering prestigious editions of canonical films. Bey Logan occupies a rather different position as expert – knowledgeable but not academic. On his *Big Boss* commentary, we can hear him shuffling his notes, but he never sounds as though he’s reading from them – his tone is always conversational, combining context, analysis, opinion and fan trivia. Vincendeau lists the pitfalls of the prepared expert commentary as ‘breathlessness, rambling, redundancy and irrelevance’ (Bennett and Brown 2008b: 124) and above all, ‘too many silences’ (125) – Logan avoids them all, while managing to sound entirely spontaneous. He actually recorded two different commentaries for *Fist of Fury*, the first for the Mega Star DVD (where there are a few more silences than on his later commentaries)⁷ and a second one for Hong Kong Legend’s Platinum Edition. While he inevitably reiterates some information, Logan manages to incorporate further research, for example revising his opinion of director Lo Wei. Having earlier taken the familiar line of dismissing Lo as an uninspired hack (and thus crediting all of the film’s strengths to Lee); he had seen some of the director’s Shaw Brothers films on DVD in the interim, now presenting him as a journeyman director capable of

⁷ I suspect that it was his first.

rising to the challenge on selected films.⁸ At one point, he manages to name every single stuntman (some of them now quite well known) as Lee kicks them in the famous dojo scene, at another he refers to the interviews with Japanese actors Hashimoto Riki and Katsumura Jun elsewhere on the disc, a particularly conspicuous intratextual strategy.

The 'Perfect DVD movie'

After single disc releases of *The Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury* and *Way of the Dragon*, Hong Kong Legends released *Game of Death* in 2000 as the first and best of their Platinum Editions – subsequent editions have largely reproduced that edition. It may not be the best Bruce Lee film, at least not in its feature length version, but I want to suggest that it would paradoxically become his 'best' DVD (if we follow Aaron Barlow's criteria of making the film a 'new object'). There's something about the film, in its different versions, that seemed to inadvertently anticipate new media platforms. The plot of Lee's original film – abandoned in the 1978 feature version cobbled together with doubles and footage from his earlier films – is the basis of every single 'beat-em-up' videogame; a film about bosses and levels. An agent of some sort sent to retrieve a stolen treasure from a pagoda, Lee must fight his way to the top of the building against masters of different martial arts styles, culminating with his most formidable opponent (played by the celebrated basketball player Kareem Abdul Jabbar) who practices no known

⁸ The director's commentary probably holds the highest position of prestige amongst DVD commentaries. However, not only are all of the directors of Lee's films dead – Lo Wei, Robert Clouse, Lee himself – but Lee is widely taken as the auteur figure even of those films he didn't direct or officially choreograph.

style. It remains hard to imagine what Lee's final version might have looked like when the only surviving footage is of three of its planned fights. Little wonder that with some editing to remove Lee's comrades on the mission, the footage could be incorporated into an entirely different narrative (one that traded on the rumours surrounding Lee's death).

The film's hypothetical original structure (designed to illustrate Lee's hybridised Jeet Kune Do fighting style) is remediated on the second disc of the Platinum Edition. Bolter and Grusin use the word 'remediation' to describe the way new media 'appropriates the techniques, forms and social significance of other media and attempts to refashion them in the name of the real' (2000: 65) – here, Lee's 'lost' narrative is remediated in the form of interactive DVD menus that allow us to ascend the floors of the pagoda (while also giving the film an aura of profundity entirely lacking from the feature length version). The extras are organised into five 'floors', from which one can click to ascend or descend – The Gate to Enlightenment, the Temple of the Praying Mantis, the Temple of the Tiger (effectively, the Dan Inosanto floor), the Temple of Gold, and at the top the Temple of the Unknown, whose main prize is 'Game of Death Revisited', a reconstruction of Lee's surviving footage (found by Bey Logan while he was working for Media Asia). *Game of Death* suits the textuality of DVD because it works best as a series of intratexts – competing versions of the film juxtaposed, the visible scars of an abandoned film completed some years after its star's death, by which time Hong Kong action cinema was stylistically very different. These two different versions of *Game of Death* – the theatrical version and the attempt to reconstruct Lee's original footage as fully as possible – are

framed to provide clear signposts to the 'authentic' and 'original' version (which we 'ascend' to), although that too is only one version of the original footage.⁹ However, this requires the DVD to complicate the relationship between the feature attraction and one of its 'supplements' (which has greater claim to being the 'original', or one version of the original). A further 'scar' included in the package is footage (not featuring Lee, but his double) only included in the Hong Kong release of the film. In a further illustration of the different investments in and formulations of Lee, this footage replaces one of Lee's original fight scenes (with the Hapkido expert Ji Han-jae) with an action sequence closer in style to the Hong Kong cinema of the late '70s, in which choreographer Sammo Hung and stunt double Yuen Biao were particularly prominent. In other words, this paratextual 'scar' illustrates how Lee's 'authentic' approach to martial arts action had lost some of its appeal for local audiences.

At the start of his commentary for the international version of the feature length *Game of Death*, Logan comments: 'This film is like a guilty pleasure for me. It was actually the first Bruce Lee movie that I ever saw, so it has a special place in my heart. And I look at it now and it's a really good "bad" movie'. What this might suggest on the surface is a paracinematic mode of viewing (to use Jeffrey Sconce's term) whereby cinematic incompetence is celebrated by the cult film viewer as an oppositional aesthetic (Sconce 1995). But that isn't

quite what emerges from Logan's commentary, even though he derives some inevitable amusement from outrageous continuity errors and cardboard Bruce Lee masks stuck on mirrors or asks justifiably 'What were they thinking?' as Lee's actual funeral footage is used to depict his character's faking of his own death. According to Catherine Grant, 'The act of selecting the director's commentary turns the "original" (theatrical) experience of watching the film *as fiction* into one of watching it "re-directed", or literally re-performed *as a documentary*' (2008: 111). Grant is talking specifically about discourses of intentionality on directors' commentaries, but the notion of the commentary transforming the film into a documentary has a broader application. In the case of *Game of Death*, it transforms a film that fails *as fiction* into a documentary about an impossible and yet endlessly fascinating film – the commentary not only compensates for and explains the film's diegetic incoherence but also serves to provide its own textual completeness. Grant describes commentaries as 'auteur machines', but watching *Game of Death* with the commentary on is to see it as a film with competing auteur figures pulling the film in different directions at different times – Bruce Lee, the 'auteur' of the incomplete original, Robert Clouse the *Enter the Dragon* director brought in to bring the film to feature length, and Sammo Hung overseeing the newer action footage. Where other Lee commentaries (Logan's included) position Lee as auteur over his directors and credited fight choreographers, Logan if anything here prioritises Sammo Hung, given the unenviable task of shooting new fight sequences that needed to pass for Bruce Lee fights while meeting the heightened demands of audiences in the late 1970s. When Billy Lo fights Bob Wall

⁹ An alternative reconstruction of the 'original' *Game of Death* – cut a little tighter – appears in the documentary *Bruce Lee: A Warrior's Journey* (John Little, US 2001) which ironically appears as a DVD extra on some releases of *Enter the Dragon*.

in a locker room, Logan doesn't paper over the shifts between close-ups of Lee from *Way of the Dragon*, moves by Korean super-kicker Kim Tai-jung and acrobatic Yuen Biao, but also celebrates it as 'a unique little fight' and 'an object lesson in ... the real Sammo Hung style'. He captures the paradox of the fight – a copy and a cheat, a Bruce Lee fight that isn't a Bruce Lee fight, but also an ingenious triumph in impossible circumstances.

Klinger argues that DVD elicits two forms of cinephilia, an 'old' one and a 'new' one. In terms of 'old' cinephilia, it replaces and supersedes the arthouse and rep cinema as a means of access to a vast range of cinematic forms from art to cult and esoterica (2008: 23). The second type – that which produces the 'perfect DVD movie' – is beholden to a digital aesthetic, making visible and audible use of DVD and blu-ray's capacity for technical perfection as well as their storage capabilities (29). Lee's films sit more readily in the first category – best-possible and sometimes definitive versions of films that in their theatrical

life suffered the ravages of breaks, burns and censor cuts. It's *Game of Death* that sits somewhere between these two kinds of DVD cinephilia – a best-possible version precisely *because* of the way it is able to use the intratextuality of DVD. It has its own theatrical tribulations, seen by some as a curiosity, loved for all its flaws by other fans. But it seemed to find its most perfect incarnation on DVD – the most incomplete of Lee's films paradoxically became the 'thickest' of texts. These discs are, bar some minor updates, already more than ten years old – short of the Mandarin *Big Boss* turning up, Lee's films may seem to have exhausted this old/'new' platform. But earlier this year, Lee had a more controversial encounter with new technology – a CGI Lee (performing a famous speech from the TV series *Longstreet*) was used to advertise whisky in Mainland China. Whatever issues were raised by the health-conscious Lee advertising alcohol, he was convincing enough to suggest that we might not have seen the last 'definitive' version of *Game of Death*.

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This article was first published in *JOMECE Journal*

JOMECE Journal is an online, open-access and peer reviewed journal dedicated to publishing the highest quality innovative academic work in Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. It is run by an editorial collective based in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University, committed both to open-access publication and to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and academic integrity. *JOMECE Journal* is peer reviewed with an international, multi-disciplinary Editorial Board and Advisory Panel. It welcomes work that is located in any one of these disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary work that approaches Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies as overlapping and interlocking fields. It is particularly interested in work that addresses the political and ethical dimensions, stakes, problematics and possibilities of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies.

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ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340

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