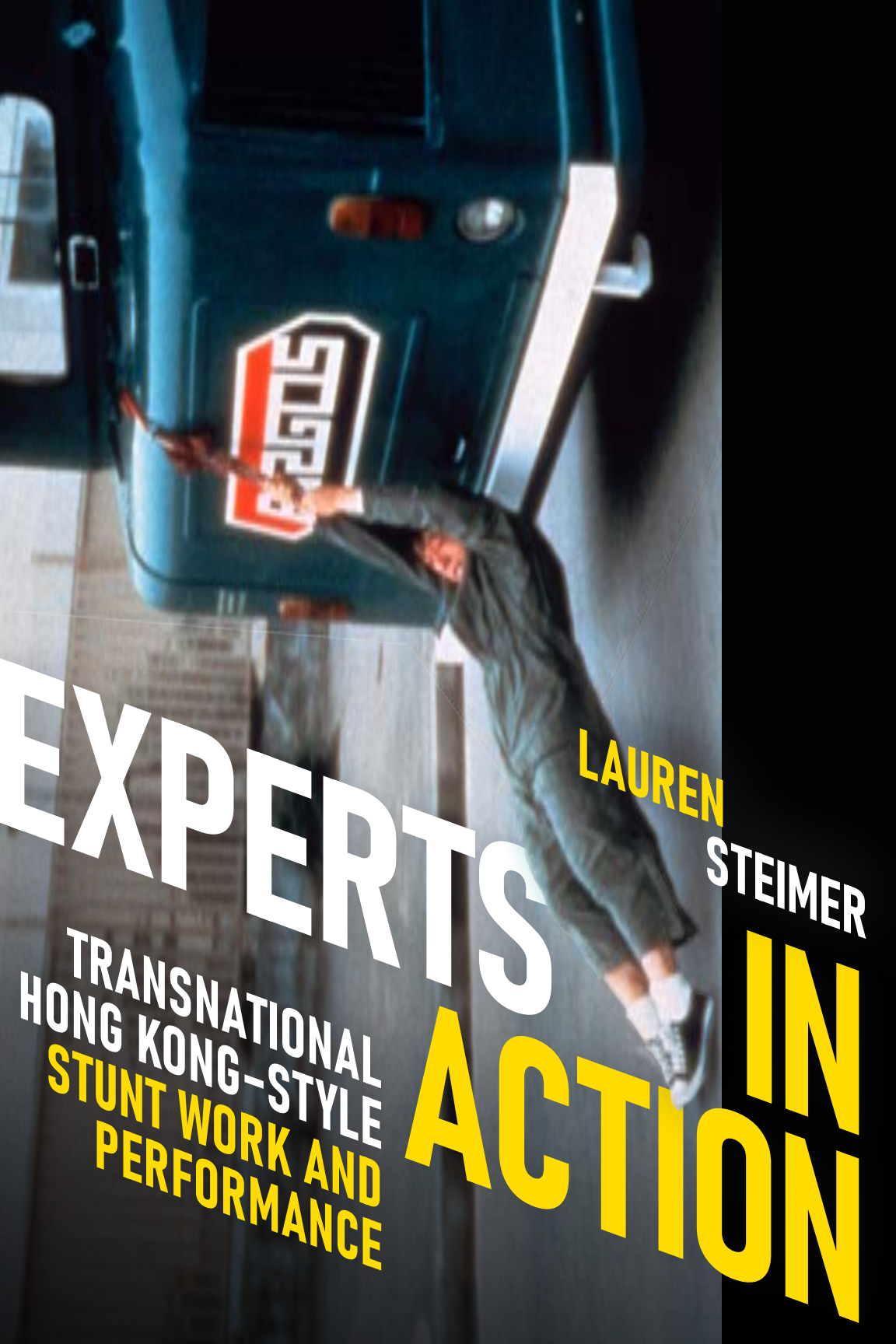

EXPERTS IN ACTION

TRANSNATIONAL HONG KONG–STYLE STUNT WORK AND PERFORMANCE

LAUREN STEIMER

EXPERTS IN ACTION

EXPERTS IN ACTION

TRANSNATIONAL HONG KONG–STYLE STUNT WORK AND PERFORMANCE

LAUREN STEIMER

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS · DURHAM AND LONDON · 2021

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Matthew Tauch
Typeset in Arno Pro and Bahnschrift by
Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Steimer, Lauren, [date] author.
Title: Experts in action : transnational Hong Kong-style stunt work and performance / Lauren Steimer.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020027523 (print) | LCCN 2020027524 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478010579 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478011705 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478021261 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Stunt performers—China—Hong Kong. | Martial arts films—China—Hong Kong. | Motion picture actors and actresses—China—Hong Kong.
Classification: LCC PN1995.9.S7S745 2021 (print) | LCC PN1995.9.S7 (ebook) | DDC 791.4302/8095125—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020027523
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020027524

Cover art: Jackie Chan. Still from *Police Story* (1985, Hong Kong). Cinema Group / Photofest. © Cinema Group.

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges College of Arts and Sciences Book Manuscript Finalization Support at University of South Carolina, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

For the sixth floor of 721 Broadway.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If writing this book has taught me anything, it is that I have no right to call myself the author of this manuscript. While writing often seems like a solitary task, it is not. Work, in all its forms, requires the labor of others—others who all too often go uncredited for their contributions. I am bound to fail in this enterprise of acknowledgment. The task at hand is impossible, that of thanking all of the others who helped to make this book a reality through their own work—scholarly, emotional, physical, or otherwise. I'm going to try anyway. First, let me make something clear—my name may be on the front of this book, but my editor at Duke University Press, Elizabeth Ault, was my stunt double. She covered for me when my timing was off, she taught me the moves, and she made me look like a professional. She's the spectacular performer. I'm just the face that gets superimposed on all of her expert labor. Elizabeth, it was an honor and a privilege to work with you. I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to the entire team at Duke University Press. Thank you and I'm sorry, Kimberly Miller. You have, through your craft and artistry, tricked people into thinking I can write clear and grammatically correct sentences. Kimberly Miller is the fire-retardant gel that kept this stunt of a book from being a fiery mess. Thank you, Annie Lubinsky. Duke University Press may list you as a Project Editor, but I think of you as my Stunt Coordinator. You kept me on target and showed me the ropes. Karen Tongson read an early version of this manuscript, and if not for her support, this book would not be in print today. The international ethnographic research for this book project would have been impossible if not for the funding provided by the University of South Carolina Provost's Humanities Grant.

Kelly Wolf, you have survived with me through my dissertation, seven surgeries, a car accident, my hearing loss, countless pleas for puppies and kittens, and now this book. I admire you for your strength, your bravery, and your patience. It's been clear from the beginning who the strong one is in this relationship—in every possible way. I love you more than I could ever love anything, even Fiona. Thank you for driving me all over Ireland and New Zealand and remembering to ask the questions that I forgot. This book

would not exist without your labor. I am grateful to Rosenberg and Garbo for getting me through the early stages of this manuscript and to River and Scully for keeping me company while I finished it.

The anonymous referees provided me with invaluable feedback. Their constructive advice helped me to deliver a much stronger version of this book than I had imagined possible. I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of the fans who answered my questions and helped me to better understand which concerns to prioritize in the writing of each chapter. I also required the assistance of the Thai Film Archive, and they graciously assisted me with some translation work on Chinese-Thai names. The stunties and industry experts whom I interviewed for this project gave me insight into areas few academics are privileged to know. I thank the following exceptional individuals for their time, their kindness, and their insight: Eimear O'Grady, Dayna Grant, Lucy Lawless, Zoë Bell, and Peter A. Marshall. I also want to thank Dane Grant and Michele "Mishi" Fairbank for facilitating my interviews and visit to the *Ash vs Evil Dead* set in Auckland and to the *Ash* stunt team for letting me hang with them and for sharing their stories. I also want to thank Giedrius "Gee" Nagys and the Stunt School Ireland for letting me participate in their training day and for setting me on fire, literally.

This book could not have been written without the support of the Steimer and Wolf families. I thank Patricia Steimer, James Steimer, Pamela Wolf, and Joe Wolf for their endless support and the pet care they provided during my research trips. I also want to thank my sisters and brother, who have been my support network through this process: Susan Francis, Christine Steimer, Annie Wolf, and Pat Wolf.

My coworkers (and their pets) have been like a second family to me here at the University of South Carolina. Mark Cooper read an early version of my manuscript and provided me with key lines of thought for its revision. He and Heidi Rae Cooley also supported me through countless trips to the hospital and helped to keep my aging pets alive. Laura Kissel has been an absolute mensch throughout this long process. I could not have done this without her help. I thank her and Julie Hubbert for the time they spent with me in the hospital and Julie for just generally being my partner in crime. Teaching with her helped me to be a better writer. Sue Felleman brought me food and told me when I was taking on too much. I want to be like Sue when I grow up. She taught me how to be a mentor. Mark Minett and Heather Heckman have been a refuge for me as I wrote this book. I thank them for their friendship, their advice, and the unfettered access they give me to their cat, Monster. My production colleagues have taught me how to be a more

responsible film and media scholar and how to properly account for media production labor and laborers. I thank Simon Tarr, Jen Tarr, Evan Meaney, Northrop Davis, and Carleen Maur for teaching me to be more responsive and responsible.

My dissertation group was there for me when this project was in its infancy and helped me to stay sane in those early days of its writing. Thank you, Ragan Rhyne, Leshu Torchin, Rahul Hamid, Doug Dibbern, and Sky Sitney. I am grateful to Miranda Banks, Toby Miller, Chris Straayer, and Anna McCarthy for the time and effort they put into helping me with this project. I am forever in the debt of Zhang Zhen for looking at countless revisions and examining my manuscript with intense attention to detail. The first chapter ever written for this book was edited by Bliss Cua Lim. It was Bliss who helped me to realize the potential of this research. Joel David supported me in every way imaginable. I aspire to someday know one-tenth as much as he does about Asian cinemas. Liza Greenfield has been my sage and my muse for over twenty years. She's always my stuntwoman. Lucas Hilderbrand taught me what was worth caring about and how to write with my own priorities and drown out negative chatter. Though this book lacks the eloquence of Elena Gorfinkel's writing, it is imbued with her revolutionary spirit. Alisa Lebow doesn't like it when I thank her for teaching me to be a better thinker, so I'll just have to thank her for her enthusiastic support of my creative writing. Her engagement with that writing made me more confident that I could write this book and that it might find a willing audience.

I want to thank all of my students at the University of South Carolina; the University of California, Irvine; and New York University. You inspire me to be a better teacher, researcher, and writer every day. I would also like to thank Jennie Jackson, in particular, for reminding me to stay hydrated.

I had the good fortune to meet both Chris Holmlund and Meaghan Morris at conferences, and those meetings changed my life forever. I had admired their work for so long, and getting to know each of them in person has been transformative for me and my work. Meaghan and Chris are the inspirations behind this project, and I am forever in their debt.

If I have forgotten anyone, please remember that I told you that my attempt at acknowledgments would be a failed venture from the start and know that you have my gratitude. This book is dedicated to the sixth floor of 721 Broadway because it was born there—born in conversations had, lessons learned, friendships made, and a life transformed by that space shared by the cinema studies and performance studies departments.

INTRODUCTION

EXPERTS IN ACTION

> Most Westerners, in their initial encounter with Asian masters of in-body disciplines are so overwhelmed by the sheer virtuosity of technique, the fluidity of practice, and the powerful presence of the performer that both "what" that virtuosity is and "how" the performer achieves that state is left unexplored.
> —PHILLIP B. ZARRILLI, "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'BECOME THE CHARACTER'"

> I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who had practiced one kick 10,000 times.
> —BRUCE LEE, *TAO OF JEET KUNE DO*

In the summer of 2015, I visited the *Bruce Lee: Kung Fu, Art, Life* exhibit at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and stood transfixed in front of a few old pieces of paper on the wall as other museum visitors swiftly moved past me to get to presumably more enticing items like Lee's yellow *Game of Death* jumpsuit and video clips from his films.[1] I must have looked highly suspicious to the guards because I stood there staring at the pieces of paper for at least fifteen minutes, and I kept looking over my shoulder to check that I was not obstructing anyone's view. To my shock, as I stood there rooted to the floor in awe with butterflies in my stomach, losing any sense of composure, I obstructed no one's vision. The two people who accompanied me had already finished much of the exhibit and came back for me, inquiring as to why I looked so flushed. In front of us was a handwritten description of Lee's training regimen, and I needed to write it all down. Shortly afterward, I repeated this process when I found Lee's choreographic notes for the *Way*

of the Dragon Coliseum fight in another room.[2] I was not overwhelmed to be in the presence of an object that Lee had written/touched, though I do understand that inclination and expect that may have been why there were small crowds around the nunchaku and the jumpsuit. I am a scholar of action technique and performance with an investment in production cultures, and access to this type of work product is exceedingly rare. I was starstruck by the data, by access to the "how" (practice/training) and "what" (choreography) of Lee's virtuosic technique.[3]

For decades, the field of film and media studies has tackled the how and why of stardom with tenacity, but we have always had difficulty speaking to the specifics of performance in relation to Hong Kong–style action stardom. We tend to narrativize the action, identify thematic conflicts, or rely on adjectives rarely drawn from lexicons of bodily practice to differentiate between the styles of distinct performers. To paraphrase Bruce Lee, we have been concentrating on the finger and missing all the heavenly glory.[4] There is a more direct and specific way to speak to the creation and reception of virtuosic action spectacles. This project originated as a means to answer two seemingly simple questions: how can the field of film and media studies more clearly describe action genre performance, and what is meant by "transnational" action media? This deceptively simple point of origin spawned an intricate network of related queries concerning the production of action film and television spectacles and the degree of training required for their creation, the transnational ascendancy of Hong Kong–style action aesthetics in contemporary media, the relationship of fandom and reception to the performing body of the stunting star, and the relevance of research on expert performance to the mediated body of the martial arts adept.

Throughout this book I use the term *stunting star* and not *stunt star* or *stuntie* (a trade term for any stunt person). I use this term both to reinforce the progressive nature of stunt work and training (as acts in progress) and to distinguish the stunt *double*, who consistently performs the same role and is sometimes credited but relatively unknown to most audiences, from the performer who is marketed to audiences in a manner actively referencing their history as a stunt performer. The stunting star is a key component of Hong Kong–style action, if only because stunt performance distinguishes certain Hong Kong action stars from most other stars in the action genre. Stunting stars are not common in contemporary Hollywood action films and television programs, which dominate foreign screens. Because the division of labor for large-budget films and television programs actively disperses risk to stunt workers, outside of Hong Kong–style productions stunt

performers are experts in action, and action stars are (possibly) experts in acting. The stunting star is possible only in production contexts lacking union and regulatory oversight: a figure precariously positioned in a perfect nexus of calculated risk, flexible labor, and corporeal spectacle. As this book addresses the production and reception of the expert performance of Hong Kong–style action spectacles in film and television, it regularly returns to the work of stunting stars and expert stunt coordinators and in doing so prescribes a means of discussion and analysis of their labor.

Hong Kong–Style Action

Esther Ching-mei Yau notes that Hong Kong movies made an indelible mark on cosmopolitan style cultures by the turn of the millennium. She links the stylistic contributions of Hong Kong cinema to transnational transactional economies of distribution and consumption, which pushed Hong Kong stars, films, and aesthetic repertoires far beyond the confines of the territory. Yau refers to the distinctive "imprints" of Hong Kong stars as "unusual" in this globalized landscape overpopulated by Hollywood films and Americanized products.[5] As Poshek Fu and David Desser note in their own anthology on the subject, "Hong Kong cinema had arrived" by the early 1990s through transnational distribution, strong video markets, positive critical response, and active fan reception practices.[6] In so many ways, *Experts in Action* revisits the subject of Yau's anthology—Hong Kong cinematic style and its unusual types of stardom—after the fall of Hong Kong cinema. After the decline in film production in Hong Kong in the mid- to late 1990s, films and television programs approximating Hong Kong aesthetics and structures of stardom proliferated in the places where Hong Kong had previously "arrived." This project does not approach Hong Kong cinema's stylistic contributions to visual culture as broadly as Yau's collection or Fu and Desser's. *Experts in Action*, as the title suggests, follows more in the footsteps of Meaghan Morris, Siu Leung Li, and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu's *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*. Morris, Li, and Chan expound in much greater detail on Yau's contention that Hong Kong cinematic style permeated the visual culture of "world cities" in the 1990s in such a way that the style transgressed national boundaries. The editors of this anthology frame Hong Kong action cinema as a "convergence point" or "contact zone" for scholarly discussion of the many elsewheres operating in and through Hong Kong cinematic traditions.[7] Borrowing Morris's astute ob-

servation in her introduction to that volume, *Experts in Action* is also "not a book *about* Hong Kong action cinema."[8] There is a great deal of scholarly writing about Hong Kong action cinema and about Hong Kong films and stars of the 1970s through the 1990s. This book is more interested in the aftereffects of the success and global circulation and reception of those films and stars. As Yau argued, Hong Kong cinema left an imprint on the world, and this project is keen to unpack that imprint's material effects on aesthetics, legal restrictions, craft practices, and audience expectations in the world beyond Hong Kong.

This book regularly uses the phrase *Hong Kong–style action* to indicate an assemblage of elements most commonly associated with action design work from Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s and 1990s: stunting stars, Asian martial arts, complex fight sequences with multiple points of physical contact between cuts, and dynamic and fluid wirework. Some of these elements are also common to earlier periods of Hong Kong cinema history and to cinematic traditions beyond Hong Kong. For example, a small number of stars did their own stunt work in Hong Kong, Hollywood, and Thailand (as well as many other localities) during even the earliest period of film history, but the specific attributes associated with the stunting star (as a marketable commodity who in actuality does most of their own stunts) are exceedingly rare and genealogically linked to the rise and transnational circulation of Jackie Chan as a star. Many stars have claimed to do their own stunts, but very few actually do, and none has demonstrated Chan's longevity. Additionally, martial arts combat as action spectacle (in the form of boxing, kung fu, fencing, etc.) has been a standard element of a number of action subgenres in Hong Kong, the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other national media contexts the world over since "early cinema," but the manner in which staged screen combat is organized, blocked, movement-serialized, filmed, and edited (a process increasingly referred to as *action design*) differs by period and locale. The preference for martial arts fight scenes choreographed so that one protagonist can take on multiple combatants simultaneously or in very quick succession, and shot in longer takes with a high number of points of physical contact in each shot, is linked to the rise and transnational circulation of 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong action films. The wirework design for Hong Kong action films of this period was also much more elaborate than Hollywood wire rig designs of the same period, was constructed via a trial-and-error process on set, and was created with fewer resources and minimal labor restrictions compared to the Hollywood context.

These action design and wirework techniques from Hong Kong were shared and emulated within transnational stunt *communities of practice*. Following Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, I consider communities of practice as collective learning environments in which the knowledge and resources of a group of participants in an individual domain or intersecting domains are shared.[9] Stunt communities of practice are transnational and local, as many expert stunt workers participate in a flexible labor economy, and the production of action spectacles is an increasingly translocal enterprise. In the United States, from the height of the studio era to the 1990s, it was most common to shoot shorter fight beat (choreographed movements and points of contact) sequences with only one to three points of contact because stars were tied under contract and had to be paired with expert stunt performers to execute the choreographed movements without injury. Hollywood stars rarely have expert status in either on-screen fight choreography or other stunts. Shorter beat sequences did not strain their learning capacities and limited the likelihood of an accident that might delay the production. Over time, members of stunt communities of practice operating (most commonly) in the United States became well versed in this system of action design via shifts in training habits within their networks of practice, which they also spread to other localities when members or teams worked abroad. However, the influx of Hong Kong action films into the United States from the 1980s and 1990s changed the reservoir of technique for stunt laborers working on US-produced film and television (which were sometimes shot offshore), and the influx of talent from Hong Kong like Yuen Woo-ping (袁和平) contributed to a major stylistic shift in action design. Action design has always required expert stunt performers, and as action aesthetics from Hong Kong infiltrate various production contexts, those localities draw on expert local stunt workers, stunt teams, and stunting stars, whose trained bodies become action spectacle.

Hong Kong–style action by definition is both rooted in the globalized circulation of Hong Kong films, stars, choreographers, and stunt workers and also rootless, in that it is *of* Hong Kong without necessarily being made *by* or *in* Hong Kong. Hong Kong–style action was born of the transnational transactional economies of distribution and consumption identified by Yau and realized via the points of convergence explored by Morris, Li, and Chan. The moniker *Hong Kong–style* is inherently transnational because it is a relational category that calls out cultures of influence. Each chapter in this manuscript situates the production of Hong Kong–style action within those cul-

tures of influence (e.g., production cultures, reception contexts, aesthetic repertoires). Simultaneously, each chapter addresses the specific localized manifestations of Hong Kong–style action in the Thai, US, and New Zealand film and television industries. Hong Kong–style action develops differently in each context in relation to legal restrictions, local production structures and hierarchies, funding and available resources, training contexts, and glocally networked stunt communities of practice. Hong Kong–style action, like the stunt labor forces that subtend its production, is inherently flexible. It is always expanding its archive of technique, always on the move, and inherently adaptable to local conditions of production and consumption. Individual expressions of this style of action in films, television programs, and live performance are culturally specific to the site of production, while the concept more broadly considered is in a near-constant state of metamorphosis. Hong Kong–style action can be found in Hollywood, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, mainland China, and an increasing variety of national media industries and global production hubs. This book is based on research that I conducted in California, New Zealand, and the Republic of Ireland. Hong Kong–style action is an adapted and adaptive form in that it changes in accordance with local resources. Each chapter offers the reader a new avenue for transnational analysis of Hong Kong–style action based on defining attributes of this style: differential risk economies, modes of stardom linked to exhibition and distribution cultures, practices of communicative translation, and technical and educational exchange within transnational stunt craft networks. As a paradigm, Hong Kong–style action points both to the past and to the future of globalized action design and in the same movement points both to and away from Hong Kong. This paradigm is indebted to the aesthetic traditions as well as the production structures, rituals, and techniques common to Hong Kong action films of the 1980s and 1990s and simultaneously operates in transit and through translation beyond the confines of Hong Kong.

Film and media studies regularly approaches performance as a text decipherable through detailed discursive analyses of technique, genre constraints, and star texts. Film and media performance analysis is indebted to work in star studies that examines the meaning-making functions of stardom as an apparatus as well as more specific discursive formations that adhere to individual stars. This project has an affinity with contemporary film and media performance studies and theories of stardom in that it enables the reader to attend to action performance with greater specificity and with attention to both genre constraints and the reception and performance his-

tories of individual stars and expert stunt workers. However, this project departs from the current trend in cinema and media performance analysis in four ways: it prioritizes action performance over acting; it employs industrial analyses and production studies methodologies to more directly assess what transnational labor flows add to performance, and how they do so; it adapts the analytic criteria of the scientific field of expert studies to humanistic inquiry into media labor; and it looks to fans to aid in the evaluation of expert performance in action. In the past decade, as film and media studies has taken a performative turn, many scholars in star studies have focused in greater detail on acting as a newfound object of analysis. Scholarly work in this area might anatomize the training process; examine recurring patterns of gesture, cadence, and expression; or deconstruct the affective register of a particular performer. To a certain extent, *Experts in Action* participates in these same practices. However, this book is reticent to engage with acting, both because other scholars have addressed it in great detail and because acting has often been prioritized to the exclusion of other types of screen performance. This is not to say that action performance has little to do with the craft of acting; I simply want to draw attention to a system of performance for which most scholars do not currently have a detailed operating vocabulary. This project contends that a *traceur*'s parkour-style *kong vault* (a headfirst dive in which the hands are used for propulsion against a stationary object) in a James Bond film or a stuntwoman's tae kwon do *yeop chagi* (옆 차기; side kick) in an episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess* is most productively addressed in the context of (1) the material and mediatized histories of the action's production (transnational training histories and production/exhibition contexts) and (2) the degree to which such actions command the attention of spectators.[10]

The application of production studies methodologies—in particular, onset observation and interviews with expert action performers—provides the reader with a new operational vocabulary for discussing transnational action aesthetics and histories. The expert studies approach allows us to examine the entire performance process, from training, to production, to onscreen event. The combined use of industry studies and production studies approaches and the adoption of the metrics for performance analysis identified by expert studies accomplish something that has heretofore exceeded the grasp of film and media studies work on performance and action: this project makes action design, stunt work, and fight choreography legible to analysis. For too long, film and television analyses have avoided detailed discussion of action design, effectively rendering it ineffable. Deconstruc-

tion of action star images often provides illuminating and highly descriptive discussions of the star's body, but assessments of movement are rarely as illustrative. This book carves a new path for studies of action stars and performance, making plain an expressive register for future discussions of the work of action. It introduces a new emphasis on the labor involved in the production of action spectacles, as well as the specialized language necessary to bring this work into view. Additionally, the book considers the transnational movement of style and technique and in doing so comes to terms with the effects of cultural policies, production structures, and financing arrangements on the creation of action spectacles and the laboring bodies of producers. All of the stars and stunt workers discussed in this book demonstrate modes of expert performance in the domain of Hong Kong–style action media and, as such, share the mediating mechanisms most commonly associated with experts: decade-long training and early childhood exposure to deliberate practice, retraining, and adaptation.

Expert Performance

Scientists have been trying to map the unique mechanisms for the production of expert performance for over a century and have since identified a style of training (deliberate practice) and a duration of training (ten years) as necessary factors in the creation of exceptional and reproducible performance. While researchers have studied expert performance in fields as varied as typing, chess, combat aviation, and dance, certain defining attributes held true regardless of the domain: an *expert* commonly has on average ten years, or ten thousand hours, of training in their *domain* of expertise. As early as 1899, William Lowe Bryan and Noble Harter established the "ten-year rule" for expert performance in their study on telegraphers, and this rule has remarkably held fast in the face of countless studies on experts of all varieties.[11] The domain is a field of knowledge that may be narrowly or broadly conceived depending on the study. Experts most often begin their training in early childhood with a daily regimen supervised by an esteemed instructor and then supplement or refine their skill set later in life by further training and/or on-the-job practice. The style of training in any discipline takes the form of *deliberate practice*. As defined by K. Anders Ericsson, a premier scholar in expert studies, deliberate practice is a form of knowledge acquisition in which the tasks needed to achieve mastery of a domain are broken down into smaller segments (identified by George Miller in 1956 as

"chunks") and repeated with supervision and correction by an instructor.[12] As each chunk is perfected, another is added, and the level of difficulty increases as the memorized chunks conglomerate into the whole performance sequence. The student learns the skills necessary for expert performance in the domain through a graduated cycle of instruction, practice, failure, and achievement. William Chase and Herbert Simon isolated the mediating mechanisms of memory that distinguished expert performance from novice performance, theorizing that experts use the chunks from training stored in long-term memory to make decisions during a performance, a process called *chunking*.[13] The chunking processes of expert performers are analogous to Richard Schechner's "restored behavior," or twice-behaved behavior.[14] Much of the research in expert studies demonstrates that expert performances are not the result of natural talent but of a history of deliberate practice evoked by restored behavior. Experts are not born; they are cultivated.

In the sciences, scholars define expertise as a collection of skills that contribute to *measurably superior* and *reproducible* performance. Studies on expert performance emphasize *measurability* and *reproducibility* on demand as defining attributes of the phenomenon, as laboratory study under controlled conditions has been the ideal method for identifying expertise in the cognitive sciences because it allows for observation of approximated conditional effects on cognitive and perceptual-motor skills. Researchers observe experts completing tasks common to their domain and systematically evaluate and identify the mediating mechanisms that affect the measurable quality of their performance. For example, a study of expert typists, in which the subjects' actions were recorded on video and played back in extreme slow motion, identified visual access to upcoming words (the "look-ahead strategy") as a mediating mechanism for measurably superior typing rates.[15] Not all expert performance is reproducible under laboratory conditions. Some researchers employ ethnographic observational methods similar to those used in performance studies, while others look to retrospective interviews, concept maps that illuminate the ontological structures of expert knowledge, or biographies for data that scholars cannot acquire in the lab. Historiometric approaches to expert performance trace career trajectories to determine maximum and minimum degrees of output and critical reception. This method can turn qualitative evaluations (conducted by other experts) of an expert's performances into more compliant quantitative data.

Though film and media studies and expert studies approach performance through distinct methods, utilize seemingly antithetical qualitative and quantitative evaluative criteria, and assess performance for unique pur-

poses, there is still great value in a dialogic approach to expert performance that incorporates the concerns of both disciplines. This project harmonizes these disparate approaches to performance. Each discipline is uniquely suited to supplement the shortcomings of the other. While stardom and performance analyses in film and media studies struggle with the ineffability of action design and stunt work, expert studies lacks the tools to grapple with the intangibility of screen performance as an inherently complex object. The material body of the expert performer becomes intangible to expert studies because it is not easily mappable, measurable, or quantifiable during the act of mediated performance. Though the body of any expert in screen performance is material at some stage of the production process, the mediated performance itself is always somehow intangible—a collection of processes congealed into a representation. Unlike the labor of experts whom researchers can study under laboratory conditions, the work of screen performance cannot simply be measured in terms of speed, dexterity, or the reproducibility of learned practices and behaviors. Fortunately, film and media studies has spent decades developing a fairly standardized linguistic toolbox designed to identify the contributions of cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scène to screened performance. Additionally, this same discipline situates any performance in relation to genre standards within a national media context. Last, it also provides a more detailed cultural context for the study of mediated expert performance through the examination of cultural policies, industrial practices, and production cultures. In short, this book demonstrates that any approach to expert screen performance must simultaneously contend with the ineffability of the practiced body in motion and the intangibility of mediated corporality by using a convergent methodology drawn from both disciplines.

Expertise

In expert studies, the two primary criteria for expertise, performance that is both measurably superior and reproducible, are problematic markers for expertise in screen performance because editors most commonly select that type of performance for reproduction precisely because it is measurably superior to other recorded footage. It is necessary to reduce the expert studies model of expertise to its two core attributes when applying it to screen performance—recognition and reproducibility. Recognition and reproducibility are key markers of expertise in screen performance via both

analytic reception and production practices. Film and television scholars and fans *recognize* expertise when some part of an individual's performance exceeds viewers' horizon of expectations based on that performer's past work and the work of the performer's contemporaries. Fans and scholars of genre and star performance can identify this type of expertise because of their extensive frames of reference. This skill is honed through years of attentive viewing and research practices. Additionally, these same scholars and fans are drawn to individual sequences, scenes, or brief instances of screen performance not because these examples are reproducible, as all screen performances are, but because of their *reproducibility*. The recognition of expertise results in a desire to rewind and replay the event and to relive the experience of viewership. These individual sequences, scenes, and instances, more than the whole films or programs from which they originate, drive the engaged spectator toward repeated viewings. Expertise becomes identifiable via acts of communication between expert performers and expert observers. It requires not simply a skilled performer but also a perceiving subject knowledgeable in the intersecting domains of that performer. In regard to the subject matter of this book, those domains are the production of action spectacle and the reception of action spectacle, both requiring extensive training. To trained eyes, expertise in screen action performance is instantly distinguishable and inherently rewatchable.

Much as the disciplinary preoccupations of film and media studies require us to adjust the parameters for expert studies approaches to screen performance, expert studies methodologies call for a shift in focus in film and media studies discourse from action stars to action performance. Work on action cinema is commonly preoccupied with both individual stars and the distinctive markers of action stardom. Even as film and media studies have recently taken a performative turn, discussions of action performance often fall prey to the very industry discourses on action stardom they are trying to unpack. Studio publicity machines manufacture action stars, and scholars analyze the various ways in which action performance originates from and is sutured to the action star's body without ever addressing the fact that most on-screen and prescreen action labor is not performed by stars. The expert studies criteria used to identify experts make it possible to differentiate between individuals who exhibit different levels of training in a given field based on the degree of reproducibility and superiority as correlated with the type and duration of training in that field. Film and media studies has a great deal to gain from adapting expert studies approaches as they provide us with guidelines for analyzing expert, intermediate, and novice per-

formance. These methods help us to see more of the mythmaking functions of behind-the-scenes featurettes and interviews on the weeks to months of training some action stars undergo for a role, whereas expertise requires a regime of daily practice for around a decade. Adopting expert studies criteria has the potential to change not simply how we talk about action performance but also whose labor we analyze in the most detail. This approach facilitates a necessary shift in perspective on both above- and below-the-line action labor.

Though this shift in perspective allows for a more detailed understanding of the division of labor between acting stars and stunt performers, the goal of this project is not to create a new hierarchy. It should be possible to identify what distinguishes experts from novices without investing in the previous drives toward coverage of "great masters." In that respect, *Experts in Action* shares Julietta Singh's contention in her book *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* that "pitting mastery against mastery" only serves to reinscribe power into structures of domination.[16] This project does not proclaim action performers or choreographers as the "new action auteurs" but does call into question our very investment in the auteur concept, which for too long has clouded our vision and blinded us to the conditions of action labor production. As Singh argues, "By continuing to abide by the formulation of 'mastering mastery,' we remain bound to relations founded on and through domination. In so doing, we concede to the inescapability of mastery as a way of life."[17] At first glance, the skilling processes of performers working in Hong Kong–style action have seemingly little in common with the drives toward and functions of mastery in the twentieth-century decolonization movements that Singh investigates, but both use mastery as a form of protection and a means of legitimation. For both groups, Foucauldian practices of self-mastery abound and, arguably, produce distinctions between masterful selves and less masterful others. The drive toward mastery produces difference and inscribes value. Like Singh, I have no interest in reproducing these valuation structures, but I see great value in her project of "staying with the trouble" of "where, how, between whom, and to what futures mastery is engaged."[18] In that regard, this project is not designed to help us identify expert performance so that we can valorize it above all other forms of performance but to understand why, where, and by what means expert performers in action become necessary. In this manner, this book, much like *Unthinking Mastery*, strives to "reorient" the field with a "new vitality," encouraging action scholars to turn toward labor.[19]

Expert Performance in Action

This project requires a mode of performance analysis specific to the skills of expert performers working in Hong Kong–style action. Traditional star studies is useful but inadequate to the task of expert analysis. The method employed in this book integrates analysis of the defining attributes of expert performance with the concerns more typically addressed by star studies, to name the labor of stunting stars and expert stunt workers. This method examines histories of training on- and off-screen as well as the circulation of information about training and craft. This formulation takes the laboring body of the expert action performer as a site for analysis. This book examines action performance in a manner that captures the determining influence exerted on the expert action performer by the moments in which the performer becomes a *body spectacle*, a unique form of visual display common to a set of film and television genres (e.g., the musical, the martial arts film, the pornographic film, slapstick comedy) that is generated by and consists of the laboring body of a virtuoso performer expertly skilled in deftly choreographed corporeal manipulation. The representative tasks/body spectacles associated with Hong Kong–style action as a domain linked to training in Asian in-body disciplines include, but are not limited to, martial arts techniques, gymnastics and acrobatic maneuvers, wire-bound harness work, and device-aided jumps and flips. The method employed in this book draws lexicons of practice from the craft traditions linked to the training histories and workaday lives of the stars/subjects (e.g., stunting, martial arts, Peking opera, gymnastics) to bring into view the work of expert performance through acts of naming.

Pierre Bourdieu's idea of the *laborer's labored-over body* as physical capital is particularly germane to this work.[20] Both Bourdieu and Chris Shilling call attention to the ways in which individuals commute physical capital into economic and cultural capital.[21] In harnessing the physical capital of the expert action performer as an embodied form of spectacle, Hong Kong filmmakers (and those working in Hong Kong–style action) have attempted, with great success, to convert physical capital into economic and cultural capital in the form of film profits and a generic signature (the body of the martial arts virtuoso) unique to these films.

The Virtuoso Reception Context

Experts in Action adapts the identificatory criteria for expert performance to a method of star analysis focused on the laboring performer's body and discourses on the virtuoso in performance studies. The virtuoso is not an individual performer but rather a relationship between the performer and the spectator generated by the body spectacle and the dissemination of training discourse. The expert stunt performer or stunting star is not synonymous with the virtuoso because the virtuoso is not a performing body in itself but a reception context. Two texts inform this particular formulation of the virtuoso: Paul Metzner's book *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris during the Age of Revolution* and Judith Hamera's essay "The Romance of Monsters: Theorizing the Virtuoso Body." Metzner's redefinition of the virtuoso, with its focus on spectacle, reception, and the circulation of information about the technician/performer, is invaluable to my formulation of the status of the virtuoso as formed both in moments of cinematic spectacle and in the dissemination of information on the performer's training regimes. Metzner's virtuosi are not cinema stars; their performances and devices predate even the earliest modes of cinematic production. Those magicians, musicians, automaton builders, and chefs of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France emerged as great artists because of Napoleonic policies aimed at modernization, the practices of revolutionaries that opened public space to the populace, the technological euphoria that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, and of course the circulation of text and images concerning the performers, made possible by advancements in print technology.[22] The performers discussed in this book are seemingly quite disparate from those analyzed by Metzner in terms of time period, nation, and areas of specialization. What the Peking opera performers, martial artists, and stunt performers of this study share with Metzner's virtuosi is a tendency toward the spectacular effected by deliberate practice, a corporeal formation explored in detail in each of this book's case studies.

Judith Hamera echoes Metzner's interest in the spectacular body. Hamera's piece alters the commonly held definition of the virtuoso and ponders the manner in which virtuoso performance effects the clarity and precision of body writing. The act of performance and the process of spectatorship define Hamera's virtuoso. For Hamera, the virtuoso is simultaneously a performing body and a mode of reception; she "explore[s] a model of extraordinary physicality as a tactic for inventing a particular kind of relationship between the dancer and the critic—an interspecies relation, if you like, and

a spectacular one in the etymological sense of *specere*, to look or behold."[23] I use Hamera's model of the virtuoso as a performer-spectator relationship, extending the reception context beyond the critic to media consumers with prior knowledge of the expert action performer's spectacular dispositions (fans). Taking this reception context as a starting point, I am interested in exploring the project that Hamera discards, that of "developing specifics of a new technique for writing about the virtuoso body."[24] Hamera argues that virtuoso performances defy contemporary forms of body writing because of the precision with which virtuosi execute movements, the innovative manner in which they combine forms, and the modes of overly engaged spectator response that such performers provoke.[25] This book borrows from Hamera's reconceptualization of the virtuoso as created in the act of informed spectatorship and responds to her move to address the adept performer-in-motion as a process confounding language. The methodological contribution that this study makes to Hamera's theory of the virtuoso is the identification and analysis of the specific bodily dispositions that contribute to the shifting performance styles of individual virtuosi.

To explore resonances between this project and Bourdieu's account of the body, I borrow the term *bodily disposition* to characterize the disciplined and technologized body of the stunting star. For Bourdieu, disposition is key to an understanding of the habitus (a system of dispositions that is the generative principle of a person's practices, products, and judgments).[26] Disposition is a complex notion in Bourdieu's thought, a "semantic cluster" that ranges from aesthetic cultivation to bodily attitudes. Bourdieu defines disposition as "a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination."[27] Bourdieu's emphasis is on how class is embodied, as he argues that "the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste."[28] This volume deploys the idea of bodily disposition not so much to address the classed body of the stunting star but to trace the debts of this body to a historically and culturally specific web of bodily disciplines deliberately practiced in such a manner as to produce a body with a predisposition, proclivity, or propensity to, for example, fly through the air in a martial arts film. The idea of a culturally and historically situated bodily disposition sheds light on the conspicuous differences between the bodies of many Hollywood stars and those of Hong Kong action stars.[29] The body spectacle is formed in the simultaneous visual articulation of the actual performing body, the cinematographic manipulation of that body, and the virtuoso relationship between performer and knowing spectator.

This book's approach to experts problematizes the essentialism underpinning structures of power common to academic writing in film and media studies and linked disciplines. We often make the mistake of assuming that *expert* and *academic* are synonymous. There are fans and industry professionals who have long histories of training that run parallel to and intersect with our domains. This book looks to them as expert interlocutors. Fans have been treated as subjects worthy of rigorous academic study for years; however, this book's contribution to fan studies is unconventional. Convention organizers, documentary filmmakers, and media producers have positioned fans as experts before. Fan knowledge has been utilized as a valuable industrial resource and as an object of scholarly investigation, but what is new in this volume is the incorporation of the knowledge of expert fans of Hong Kong–style action to guide analysis. When I call on fans as experts, I am not explicitly referencing the knowledge base of acafans (academic fans with a scholarly interest), nor am I excluding it. I wish to make very clear that this book does not hierarchize expert scholarly knowledge over expert fan knowledge. I turn to fans as colleagues, as experts in an adjacent and at times intersecting domain. Fans may approach Hong Kong–style action differently from Hong Kong action scholars, and we can benefit greatly from exploring the points of intersection of our adjacent domains. To that end, I do not psychoanalyze the responses I have collected from fans, just as I would reject the impulse to do that to the scholarly work of colleagues in the field of film and media studies. Fans are interlocutors in this project, not objects of analysis.

Transnational Media Studies: Polymorphic Analysis of an Object in Flux

This book traces distinct, embodied histories of transnational exchange by isolating and defining unique forms of expert performance common to contemporary globalized action film and television genres. While Hong Kong may be an obvious starting point for a book on action media, the selection of Hong Kong poses problems for trans*national* analysis. Hong Kong cinema is commonly referred to as a national cinema or at the very least as a body or work comparable to other national cinemas (e.g., those of Korea, India, the United States), when in point of fact Hong Kong is a "special administrative region" (SAR) and not a sovereign nation and has been slowly transitioning from British to Chinese rule, a program called "one country, two systems"

that will be complete in 2046. Other authors have addressed the particular predicament of speaking of Hong Kong cinematic productions as a "national" media context. Strictly speaking, Hong Kong cinema does not fit the auteur-defined models of national cinemas, oppositional to Hollywood in both aesthetics and ideology. Bliss Lim refers to Hong Kong cinema as a "national cinema effect," articulating the paradox of Hong Kong cinema, a cinema that is not national but that scholars have historically addressed as if it were. Lim proffers an analytic category that is simultaneously indebted to the manner in which the scholarship on Hong Kong cinema has historically tended toward national models and also highly cognizant of the cinematographic, economic, and thematic affinity between Hong Kong films and those produced elsewhere.[30] This book posits an account of Hong Kong cinema as, in Lim's terms, a "national cinema effect" and also considers the operation of Hong Kong action cinema aesthetics, production structures, and techniques abroad as manifestations of Hong Kong–style action operating in transnational cultural economies that are not singular or linear.[31] The polymorphous manifestations of Hong Kong–style action beyond the SAR require not one singular approach to transnationality but diverse approaches to the shifting logics of transnational media production and consumption at a key point of convergence: action design requires the labor of expert stunt performers.

The expert performers discussed in this book are transnational not simply because of the global marketing, distribution, and reception of their films and television programs but because the act of production adapts techniques and corporeal practices common to Hong Kong action films to localized media contexts (e.g., the United States, New Zealand, Thailand). These technical histories of corporeal practices congeal in the body of the expert action performer. In addition, the transformation of training regimes and bodily maintenance into the visibly laboring body of the expert action performer is augmented by distinctly filmic elements (e.g., cinematographic decisions, structures of editing) that amplify the effect on the spectator of the specialized labor (e.g., dance, martial arts, stunts) performed in individual sequences. The body spectacles of the prominent performers selected for this study are distinct in that the remarkable physical accomplishments captured by the camera and transformed by cinematography and editing illuminate a transnational history of embodied practices ranging from martial arts training to film production and marketing.

Many books already address pre-1997 and post-1997 Hong Kong cinema, and while no scholar would likely deny the emergence of a "crisis cinema"

in Hong Kong around this key date, *Experts in Action* speaks to a different moment of departure and convergence in the history of transnational Hong Kong cinema, 1994. In 1994 the Hong Kong government instituted the Organized Crime and Triad Ordinance, and the triad funding for local film production started to dry up, with production going from 234 films in 1993 to 153 films in 1995, with numbers declining sharply each year thereafter.[32] Additionally, the Thai film tax was lowered in 1993, and within the year US and Hong Kong films began to flood the market. The following year, Hong Kong studios increased their investment in the exhibition market in Thailand.[33] Also in 1994, New Zealand revised its film and television tax incentive plan, and production increased dramatically. *Xena: Warrior Princess* began production in New Zealand the following year. Finally, in 1994 China agreed to the importation of ten first-run Hollywood films in order to increase profits through revenue sharing, which would lead to an increase in the production (and coproduction) of Hollywood films designed to appeal to Chinese audiences.[34] This mid-1990s tipping point in cultural policy design may not have simply prompted the shift to Hong Kong–style action design abroad, but it more than facilitated transitions in transnational physical and aesthetic stunt craft traditions.

This book traces a variegated trajectory by which the Hong Kong film industry's reliance on experts in Peking opera and martial arts contributed to action aesthetics (created in an accelerated production environment and lacking corporate or governmental oversight) that would be circulated outside of the Hong Kong SAR and re-created by experts working in stunt communities of practice in the United States, Thailand, and New Zealand. This book approaches the transnational circulation of aesthetics and technique in the action genre in relation to the industrial need for and creation of experts. All of the primary experts in action discussed in this book have followed somewhat similar career paths from stuntie to action choreographer or stunt coordinator, though most stunt performers will never ascend to a managerial position as a choreographer or coordinator. In an era when computer-assisted action spectacles predominate, an extremely limited number of stunting stars and expert stunt performers will rise from obscurity. Though stunting stars are generally expert stunt performers, the inverse is not always true. Some expert stunt performers have effected the transition to Hong Kong–style action abroad and risen from obscurity to revered status within their peer group but lack public attention. This book seeks to make their labor more apparent, and, as such, the book transitions from a discussion of

stunting stars like Jackie Chan, Tony Jaa (จา พนม), Jeeja Yanin (ญาณิน "จีจ้า" วิสมิตะนันทน์), and Zoë Bell to an analysis of expert stunt coordinators Chad Stahelski and Dayna Grant. The adoption of Hong Kong–style action spectacles in transnational action media after 1994 aided in the ascent of these stunt experts, trained in somewhat different bodily disciplines and working in polylocal and translocal media production industries. In their simplest form, the chapters of this book examine the means by which the circulation of Hong Kong action films outside the borders of the SAR both effected a new breed of stunting star and also relied on as well as transformed the domains of expert stunt performers in Hong Kong, Thailand, the United States, New Zealand, and beyond.

Elsewheres and Imprints: Transnational Hong Kong–Style Action in Context

This book is organized such that the chapters following this introduction enact a double movement by addressing production contexts increasingly less spatially proximate to Hong Kong and also shifting the focus from analyses of stunting stars to other expert stunt performers. The specific articulation of Hong Kong–style action in any given context (e.g., film, television program, sequence, or scene) is heavily determined by four characteristics: mechanisms for the mediation of risk, Hong Kong cinematic exhibition and reception cultures, local translation tactics, and the flow of craft practices. Each of these elements makes expertise a requirement and results in distinctive forms of expert performance. The relationship between the financial risk of the production and the physical risk of the performers informs Hong Kong–style action design in all contexts, just as all Hong Kong–style action requires the previous circulation of Hong Kong films to establish a horizon of expectations among audiences and standard criteria for producers. The transnational expressions of Hong Kong–style action always necessitate translation practices owing to differences in production environments, labor structures, and regulatory contexts. Additionally, innovative stunt work in Hong Kong action (and other) traditions requires the training opportunities provided by transnational craft networks. In an effort to track down the elsewheres and imprints of Hong Kong action cinema, to find the many places where Hong Kong action cinema left discernible marks on production cultures and aesthetic traditions, each of the chapters that

follows focuses on one of these four attributes of Hong Kong–style action design.

While risk aversion may be common to all Hong Kong–style action production contexts, the first chapter highlights the most glaring example of differential relationships to risk in the Hong Kong and Hollywood media industries. Prompted by fans' astute observations that Jackie Chan's Hollywood films and his Hong Kong films feature remarkably distinct action aesthetics though they showcase the same expert performer, this chapter explores the use value of the same expert in action in two different contexts. This chapter examines the mutually informing economies of corporeal and financial risk that distinguish Hong Kong–style action in US production contexts from the body spectacles produced in Hong Kong. In Hollywood the expertise of stunt performers (as recognizable based on performance histories and as reproducible on command) ensures safety on the set. In Hollywood, not only is safety ensured on set, but it is also key to the authorization of insurance on set. Owing to labor and insurance regulations in Hollywood, action stars are not recognized as experts in action performance and are restricted in their corporeal contributions to fights, falls, and other stunts. This chapter identifies the legal, industrial, and financial mediating mechanisms that alter Chan's expert performance in Hollywood productions in comparison to his earlier work in Hong Kong.

There is a consistent relationship between financial risk and the imperiled body of the stunting star in many East Asian and Southeast Asian media contexts. The star who not only is *known* for doing their own stunts but actually *does* most of their own stunts is a rare commodity that is much more common in Asian production contexts. This is likely due to more flexible labor structures than those in Hollywood, as demonstrated by Sylvia J. Martin's ethnographic research on stunt work in the United States and Hong Kong, along with less formal and rigid relationships between financing and insurance.[35]

The second chapter discusses the divergent effects of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 on the Hong Kong and Thai film industries. Thailand bounced back more quickly than did Hong Kong, whose film industry had already experienced a huge drop in production. Hong Kong action films had long dominated the Thai box office. The decrease in the number of Hong Kong action films on-screen created a gap filled by Thai stunting star Tony Jaa. Jaa's films and stunts, and the star text of the stuntman-turned-star, mimicked so closely those of Jackie Chan, with the great exceptions that Jaa's body spectacles were drawn from native Thai martial arts traditions and that he demonstrated his expertise on command by reproducing the stunts in

live performances without the assistance of wirework rigs. This chapter explores the imprint left on Thai action cinema by the history of Hong Kong action cinema exhibition in Thailand. In particular, this imprint caused Hong Kong action production structures, techniques, and star formations to operate as a mode in new Thai action cinema. While action scholars have defined the parameters of action as a mode (e.g., spectacular bodies, speed of movement, and sound effects and music as accentuating pulses), Hong Kong–style action operates as a mode in the Thai context via production contexts that mimic those of 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong action design and simultaneously surpass those spectacular designs in both dexterity and danger. The domestic and transnational financial success of this mode resulted in a new model for Thai action stars.

The distribution of Hong Kong films abroad left lasting imprints on the action design aesthetics and the training requirements for expert stunt performers far beyond Asia. The transnational flow of Hong Kong movies to video rental stores in the United States introduced new forms of action design to cult audiences. Some of the fans drawn to the distinctive character of Hong Kong action techniques and aesthetics were also US film and television producers. Chapter 3 explores the repurposing of Hong Kong action aesthetics by the US fanboy media producers of the New Zealand–produced, globally syndicated television series *Xena: Warrior Princess*. As there was little crossover between the New Zealand and Hong Kong stunt communities in the early 1990s, Kiwi stunt workers had to improvise in terms of both technology and technique. This chapter considers their attempts to reproduce the overall effects of Hong Kong action set pieces as a form of communicative translation. This translation required an expert with training in both gymnastics and martial arts—stuntwoman Zoë Bell. She worked as a stunt double for Lucy Lawless on *Xena: Warrior Princess* as Bell had a bodily disposition that was ideal for the uncommon action design techniques used for the show. Bell's on-set work for the program further contributed to her domain-specific training in Hong Kong–style action techniques, transforming her into not simply an expert stunt performer but, more specifically, an expert in Hong Kong–style action. These forms of training made her the ideal candidate to double for Uma Thurman in the *Kill Bill* series and led to her star turn in Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof*.[36] This process led to Bell's transformation from an expert stunt performer to a stunting star with a virtuoso reception context.

In the fourth chapter, we move from the local translation practices addressed in the previous chapter to the transnational flow of technique in the

years following the release of *The Matrix*.[37] We return to Hollywood and New Zealand to trace the imprints of Hong Kong action techniques and labor structures in stunting communities of practice. This chapter investigates the importance of expert stunt performers operating in transnationally linked craft communities of practice. The chapter considers the transnational flow and adaptation of stunt craftwork from Hong Kong in relation to the training regimes and work product of expert stunt workers. This chapter reorients the analysis of Hong Kong–style action in two key ways: it shifts perspective from stunting stars to expert stunt performers, and it redirects our attention from the individual stars of the previous chapters to the team dynamic of stunt craft practice as overseen by action designers and coordinators. This chapter looks at the work of New Zealand stuntwoman and stunt coordinator Dayna Grant on *Ash vs Evil Dead* as well as that of Hollywood stuntman and coordinator Chad Stahelski (as well as his partner David Leitch) and the 87eleven Action Design team.[38] These experts facilitate the flow of technique as they add to their domains of expertise through the skills they learn in transit in the new international division of cultural labor.

The conclusion of this book is a call to action that provokes the engaged reader to consider how expert labor enables the production of spectacle far beyond the action genre as well as in and beyond film and media. The conclusion argues that while the formula for the analysis of expert performance laid out by this book may be easy to apply to well-known performers, actors, or stars, it is just as viable for analyzing the on- and off-screen craft practices of experts as a whole. The method employed in this book has much broader applicability and is best used as a political weapon to make visible the labor of lesser-known experts working behind the screen and in the shadows.

Experts in Action does not propose an overarching grand theory of transnational media analysis but rather suggests that we start from the shared and intersecting skill sets of certain laborers working in media production in different localities. From those points of convergence, we can consider the effects of policy, industry, and production strategy on these workers and the work they do. There is no one way to approach transnational media because the effects and histories of transnational media are always also local and never singular. This book sheds light on the laboring bodies of experts that leave us transfixed by the action, and it names their work.

NOTES

Introduction

1. *Game of Death*, directed by Robert Clouse and Bruce Lee, action choreography by Bruce Lee and Sammo Hung Kam-bo (Hong Kong: Golden Harvest; Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1978).

2. *The Way of the Dragon* (*Meng Long Guo Jiang*; 猛龍過江), martial arts direction by Bruce Lee (Hong Kong: Golden Harvest and Concord Production, 1972).

3. Note on personal names: The use of non-European names in this volume follows the standard practice in East Asian studies. Chinese and Korean names are listed with the family name first and the given name second. The only exceptions to this practice are for individuals who are known internationally by their stage names.

4. *Enter the Dragon* (*Long Zheng Hu Dou*; 龍爭虎鬥), action choreography by Sammo Kam-bo Hung (Hong Kong: Golden Harvest and Concord Production; Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1973).

5. Esther Ching-mei Yau, ed., "Introduction: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World," in *Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 1–3.

6. Poshek Fu and David Desser, introduction to in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts Identity*, ed. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

7. Meaghan Morris, "Introduction: Hong Kong Connections," in *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, ed. Meaghan Morris, Siu Leung Li, and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 12–13.

8. Morris, "Introduction," 13.

9. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

10. *Xena: Warrior Princess*, created by Rob Tapert and John Schulian, action choreography by Peter Bell and Shane Dawson (United States and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures and Universal Television), aired September 15, 1995–June 18, 2001 (syndicated).

11. William Lowe Bryan and Noble Harter, "Studies on the Telegraphic Language: The Acquisition of a Hierarchy of Habits," *Psychological Review* 6 (1899): 345–75.

12. K. Anders Ericsson, "The Acquisition of Expert Performance: An Introduction to Some of the Issues," in *The Road to Excellence: The Acquisition of Expert Performance in the Arts and Sciences, Sports, and Games*, ed. K. Anders Ericsson (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996), 1–50; and George Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information," *Psychological Review* 63 (1956): 81–97.

13. William G. Chase and Herbert A. Simon, "Perception in Chess," *Cognitive Psychology* 4 (1973): 55–81.

14. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35–116.

15. Timothy A. Salthouse, "Effects of Age and Skill in Typing," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 113, no. 3 (1984): 345–71.

16. Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 2.

17. Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 6–7.

18. Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 2.

19. Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 7.

20. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 97–256.

21. Chris Shilling, "Physical Capital and Situated Action: A New Direction for Corporeal Sociology," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 25, no. 4 (2004): 473–87.

22. Paul Metzner, *Crescendo of the Virtuoso: Spectacle, Skill, and Self-Promotion in Paris during the Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2–11.

23. Judith Hamera, "The Romance of Monsters: Theorizing the Virtuoso Body," *Theatre Topics* 10, no. 2 (September 2000): 147.

24. Hamera, "Romance of Monsters," 147.

25. Hamera, "Romance of Monsters," 147–51.

26. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.

27. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 562n2.

28. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 190.

29. This difference was noted, in a different context, by Steve Fore in the contrast he draws between Jackie Chan and Arnold Schwarzenegger, the difference between adroit versus beefcake bodies. See Steve Fore, "Jackie Chan and the Cultural Dynamics of Global Entertainment," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, ed. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 239–62.

30. Bliss Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 188.

31. Michele Hilmes conducts a similar project, investigating the relationships and points of convergence between US and UK radio and television histories. See Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

32. Meng-yang Cui, "Hong Kong Cinema and the 1997 Return of the Colony to Mainland China: The Tensions and the Consequences" (master's thesis, University of Bedfordshire, 2007), 30.

33. Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, "The Ambiguity of the 'Emerging' Public Sphere and the Thai Media Industry," in *The New Communications Landscape: Demystifying Media Globalization*, ed. Georgette Wang, Jan Servaes, and Anura Goonasekera (New York: Routledge, 2000), 105–6.

34. Yue-zhi Zhao, "Whose *Hero*? The 'Spirit' and 'Structure' of a Made-in-China Global Blockbuster," in *Reorienting Global Communication: Indian and Chinese Media beyond Borders*, ed. Michael Curtin and Hemant Shaw (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 172.

35. Sylvia J. Martin, *Haunted: An Ethnography of the Hollywood and Hong Kong Media Industries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

36. *Kill Bill: Vol. 1*, directed by Quentin Tarantino, action choreography by Yuen Woo-ping, Sonny Chiba, Keith Adams, and Ku Huen-chiu (Los Angeles: A Band Apart, Super Cool ManChu; New York: Miramax Films, 2003); *Kill Bill: Vol. 2*, directed by Quentin Tarantino, action choreography by Yuen Woo-ping, Sonny Chiba, Keith Adams, and Ku Huen-chiu (Los Angeles: A Band Apart, Super Cool ManChu; New York: Miramax Films, 2004); and *Death Proof*, action choreography by Jeff Dashnaw (New York City: Dimension Films, Weinstein Company; Austin: Troublemaker Studios, Rodriguez International Pictures, 2007).

37. *The Matrix*, directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, action choreography by Yuen Woo-ping (Los Angeles: Silver Pictures, Village Roadshow Pictures, Groucho II Film Partnership, and Warner Bros., 1999).

38. *Ash vs Evil Dead*, produced by Robert Tapert, stunt coordination by Stuart Thorpe, Dayna Grant, and Tim Wong (United States and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures and Starz!), aired October 31, 2015–April 29, 2018, on Starz.

Chapter 1: Risky Business

1. Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 47.

2. Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 99–100.

3. Yung Sai-shing, "Moving Body: The Interactions between Chinese Opera and Action Cinema," in *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, ed. Meaghan