

JOHN WOO'S The Killer

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香港大學出版社

HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
www.hkupress.org

© Kenneth E. Hall 2009

ISBN 978-962-209-956-2 (*Paperback*)

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Condor Production Ltd. in Hong Kong, China



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"At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed."

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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Introduction

The Killer (John Woo, 1989) is one of the key films of the Hong Kong New Wave period. It has achieved a secure cult status in the West and has exercised great influence on Western and Asian filmmakers.¹ Additionally, the film served as the springboard for the fame of its director and contributed materially to the early attention given to Hong Kong cinema during the 1990s by Western film critics and audiences. Its connection to the chivalric tradition in Chinese and Hong Kong cinema is readily apparent and important, most particularly its indebtedness to the work of masters such as the late Chang Cheh (Zhang Che).² The chivalric and traditional Chinese and religious elements so important to *The Killer* can appropriately be placed into a context which includes *The Killer* as a precedent: the works of some younger directors from Hong Kong and of the South Korean New Wave are significant inheritors and editors of Woo in this respect. *The Killer* has also been discussed in terms of its treatment of masculinity and as an example of performance or “style” cinema;³ and it has been

criticized (or celebrated) as camp and lauded as a new departure in “action” filmmaking. Despite the relatively close attention paid to the film in these areas, however, its infrequently heralded continuity with the film noir tradition is striking. This is not only the case with regard to classic noir works such as *This Gun for Hire* (Frank Tuttle, 1942) and to later examples such as *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), but also in terms of its great importance to later phenomena such as the works of Johnnie To,⁴ the more recent American neo-noir and the Korean renaissance (and, for that matter, as a counter-influence on independent filmmakers such as contemporary Japanese auteur Kitano Takeshi).⁵ In this connection, the influence of John Woo, whose signatures began to be developed in *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) but which were polished and crystallized in *The Killer*; is to be seen especially in Korean Renaissance products such as *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999) and *Joint Security Area* (Park Chan-wook, 2000), both technically and in terms of the moral and political positioning of the characters (expressing Korean fears of unification and the perceived erosion of traditional Confucian roles in light of modernity).⁶

Aside from generic, stylistic, and reception concerns, *The Killer* is a central work within the political and historical context of 1980s Hong Kong and Asia, where its depiction of incompleteness and lack may betray an anxiety about the insecure colonial status of Hong Kong. The concerns expressed in the film about the disappearance of older values and of a vanishing way of life are continuous with the anxiety to be found in films such as *A Better Tomorrow* about the pending 1997 handover to China.⁷ These preoccupations also help to account for the general sense of anxiety and “apocalypse” which suffuses *The Killer* and which are expressed in a fashion characteristic of noir filmmaking.

This seminal Hong Kong film can trace its ancestry to the noir subset of hitman and lone gunman films like *This Gun for Hire*, *Born to Kill* (Robert Wise, 1947), *Dillinger* (Max Nosseck, 1945),

and *Underworld USA* (Sam Fuller, 1961). The noir inheritance of *The Killer* is channeled most especially through the films of French master Jean-Pierre Melville (1914–73). John Woo has repeatedly expressed his indebtedness to Melville's *Le Samourai* (1967) and to *Le Cercle rouge* (1970), but the Melville influence on Woo extends to other canonical films such as *Le Doulos* (1964) and *Le Deuxième Souffle* (1966).

The often mentioned but seldom specified influence of *The Killer* on subsequent neo-noir films, including “hitman” and gangster films, becomes clearer when the influence of the noir canon on Woo is more fully understood. The contribution of *The Killer* to the neo-noir catalogue is first situated within the Hong Kong context in which Woo was such a seminal figure during the late 1980s, with the important examples of films by Johnnie To such as *Fulltime Killer* and *A Hero Never Dies* (1998). Due to the cult interest in Woo and *The Killer* in the 1990s, Western directors who have been claimed as neo-noir practitioners released works with clear indebtedness to *The Killer*. These films include *The Professional* (Luc Besson, 1994), *El Mariachi* (1993) and its sequel-remake *Desperado* (1995) (both by Robert Rodriguez),⁸ *Ghost Dog* (Jim Jarmusch, 1999), and of course the Quentin Tarantino films. This influence has not always been well-digested, as see the recent British attempt *Gangster No. 1* (Paul McGuigan, 2000), or has chiefly extended to stylistic homages, as with Rodriguez, but *Ghost Dog* is a superior example of such influence.

Finally, the film should be understood not as a solitary ‘peak’ for director Woo or as a serendipitous artistic success by an otherwise commercial director but as a masterwork whose concerns yet surface in Woo’s admittedly more diffuse Hollywood production. Both the chivalric motifs of *The Killer* and its noir sensibility, including its foregrounding of incompleteness and lack, are to be seen in key Woo works such as the underrated *Windtalkers* and *Face/Off* and even in lesser products such as the recent *Paycheck*.

Conclusion

John Woo's *The Killer* was central to the innovative quality of the new Hong Kong cinema. This film helped to filter Hollywood and European action and noir influences through the web of Chinese traditional motifs found in the chivalric tradition. *The Killer* brought Woo to the attention of critics in the West and helped thereby to foster the careers of younger Hong Kong, and Korean, filmmakers who in turn have drawn upon Woo's innovations to create their own original commentaries on the Woo corpus. Woo has also influenced Western filmmakers and has continued to refine his own vision in his work in the West.

Woo himself evaluates *The Killer* as one of his creative peaks. He sees it as a serendipitous mix of successes: "*The Killer* is a nearly complete movie to me. I am never 100% satisfied. However, the technical experiments worked pretty well and helped me to establish my style. The overlapping editing, the freeze frame, the slow motion, it all fit well together. The shooting, the editing, the music, the pigeons, the two guns, it was all just me feeling free to do what I

wanted. It was one movie where I had total creative freedom” (Woo, “E-Mail Response” 2). He does not, however, perceive or admit to much influence from the film on his later work (although critics are certainly free to tease out such threads): “In all of my movies I try to do new experiments. After I did one like *The Killer*, I am not going to try to recreate it. Like a painter who uses different colors to create new paintings in the same style, I use basic filmmaking theory to make the movies I want to create” (Woo, “E-Mail Response” 2). Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that *The Killer* served as a template for Woo’s mature style and approach. The hyperbolic romanticism and unabashed spirituality and sentiment often identified as essential to the Woo style, as well as the bravura visual approach, with its well-known elements of circling camera movement, quick editing, and focus on facial expressions, are all found in fully developed form in this film.¹ One might adapt Woo’s frequently used analogy between his work and that of a painter to note that Woo designed his basic palette with his work on *The Killer* and has developed and blended his color scheme and texture with his later films. Despite having adapted to the Hollywood system, Woo continues to blend his distinctive style, matured and codified in *The Killer*, into studio productions and to attempt important innovations within generic contexts.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 For a discussion of the cult status of *The Killer* in the United States and in South Korea, see An.
- 2 Chang Cheh (1923–2002) made highly significant contributions to the body of Hong Kong chivalry films, including swordplay and martial arts cinema. Beginning in the 1960s, he directed a series of masterpieces including *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) and *Golden Swallow* (1968). His mentorship of directors including John Woo has cemented his legacy. See Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* 45–46.
- 3 See Cynthia Baron, “Suiting up for Postmodern Performance in John Woo’s *The Killer*,” *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, ed. Cynthia Baron et al. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2004), 297–329.
- 4 To is the innovative director of films such as *Running Out of Time* (1999) and *Fulltime Killer* (2001).
- 5 Among Kitano’s films are *The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi* (2003) and *Fireworks* (1997).

- 6 For tradition and present-day Korea, see Kim Haboush.
- 7 For well-reasoned commentary on Woo's concerns about Hong Kong's status preceding 1997, see Chow 366, 370. (I am indebted to Tony Williams for suggesting this source.)
- 8 For the two Rodriguez films, see Torres. Torres also notes the Woo influence (168).

Chapter 1 Apprenticeship for *The Killer*

- 1 See my *John Woo: The Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999), 5, for a brief summary of some of these biographical points. I rely there on John Woo, "Woo in Interview," *Sight and Sound* 3.5 (May 1993): 25.
- 2 In his preface to *Chang Cheh: A Memoir* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003), Sek Kei defines *yanggang* and summarizes Chang's influence: "... his *yanggang* (staunch masculinity) style was so overwhelmingly powerful that it simply uprooted the foundation of local cinema and established the supremacy of the male action star for years to come. His influence on local cinema, in this aspect, was beyond that of ... any other directors" (Chang, C., *Chang Cheh: A Memoir* 1).
- 3 Chang once remarked that "art is extravagant excess" (Chang, C., "Chang Cheh Talking" 20).
- 4 Chang Cheh spoke rather ambivalently of the impact of his work on Woo's, although he did emphasize the complexity of the conflictual pairs in Woo's films: "I doubt I had any direct influence on John Woo. Maybe we have similar tastes. Maybe that's why people compare our films. He's obsessed with love/hate relationships and inner turmoil. That's why his *A Better Tomorrow* resembles my *Blood Brothers* [...]. The parallels are obvious" (Feldman 4). Woo himself recently commented that "My favorite movies of Chang Cheh are *One-Armed Swordsman*, *Golden Swallow* and *Blood Brothers*. I love most of his films but *One Armed Swordsman* has the most spirit and is the most cinematic to me" (Woo, "E-Mail Response" 1).
- 5 See his comments on the film to Karen Fang (Fang, *John Woo's* 115–16).

- 6 For Peckinpah's style, see the article by David A. Cook, "Ballistic Balletics: Styles of Violent Representation in *The Wild Bunch* and After," *Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch*, ed. Stephen Prince (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 130–54.
- 7 Woo detailed his interest in Melville in a recent communication: "I have seen almost all of Melville's movies and my favorite[s] of all time [are] *Le Samourai* and *Le Cercle rouge*. *Le Samourai* is very stylish and cool. I was attracted by Alain Delon's performance. His loneliness is cold but his heart was warm. He was a killer but he had a code of honor. I can relate to this man who is loyal with a code of honor. That character influenced *A Better Tomorrow*. *The Killer* was a tribute to the film *Le Samourai*. Especially the opening sequence when he blinds the singer then falls in love with her and redeems himself by taking care of her" (Woo, "E-Mail Response" 1).
- 8 Claude Chabrol (1930–), sometimes identified with Hitchcock-style suspense films, is a French New Wave director whose films include *Les Cousins* (*The Cousins*, 1959) and *Violette Nozière* (*Violette*, 1978) (Katz 234–35). Robert Bresson (1907–99) "occupies a unique place in French cinema. He cannot be classified with either the old guard or the New Wave but is highly respected by both for pursuing his own individual style, unperturbed by the cinema around him." His films include *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest*, 1951) and *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* (*A Man Escaped*, 1956) (Katz 171–72).
- 9 *Flic* is French argot for "cop."
- 10 My use of the term "cyborg" is to be understood in the sense employed by Rushing and Frentz in their *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film*.
- 11 This type of "knight" was exemplified outstandingly in Fred Zinnemann's *The Day of the Jackal*, whose assassin ("the Jackal"), despite his ruthlessness, operates according to a professional sense of right and wrong, treating those who assist him honorably with merited respect, and those who attempt to misuse his trust with ruthless dispatch. For specific commentary, see Brookes.
- 12 Melville stated that "From the outset, the black woman in white [in *Le Samourai*] is the incarnation of Death, with all the charm that death can have" (Nogueira and Truchaud 121).

- 13 Melville also expressed his interest in *Bonnie and Clyde*, although perhaps for reasons differing from Woo's (Nogueira and Truchaud 123). For Woo and Penn, see Woo's comments to Karen Fang (Fang, *John Woo's* 115–16).
- 14 Woo's appropriation of other directors' styles is often rather difficult to specify, and his direct borrowings are sometimes rather private in meaning and interpretation. For example, he points to Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) as the source for his inclusion of the "love birds" in *Paycheck* (2003) (Woo, "Interview: John Woo" 2–3). After Woo has elucidated the reference, the borrowing is easy to see; but its source is not immediately apparent upon viewing the film. This tendency in Woo differs radically from the allusiveness so often found in filmmakers like Brian De Palma, whose *The Untouchables* (1987) features clear allusions to directors like Eisenstein, as in the "Odessa Steps" reference at the end of De Palma's film.
- 15 Woo commented regarding Kurosawa, "Whenever I start a new movie, I usually like to watch his films — especially for the action sequences. Like when I made *The Killer*, I just keep repeating watching [*sic*] the *Seven Samurai*—the last action sequence [that is, the rain battle]" (Cox).
- 16 Liu uses the term *yu-hsia* ("wandering knight") to refer to the type often called *wuxia* ("martial knight"). For our purposes, the distinction is unimportant, since the knightly or chivalric figure and the characteristics attributed to him have generically influenced fiction and film, such as the modern works of novelists Jin Yong and Louis Cha, and the films of directors such as Chang Cheh, King Hu, Chu Yuan, and John Woo. For commentary on Liu's work and on the "knight-errant" tradition, see Ma.
- 17 Woo was assistant director on Chang Cheh's version of the romance (*Shui hu zhuan* [*Water Margin*], 1972).
- 18 "World of the vagrants" is Ng Ho's rendering of *jiang hu*. He explains: The literal meaning of *jiang hu* is rivers (*jiang*) and lakes (*hu*); by extension, it implies all corners of the world. The term used to mean the dwellings of hermits, but later came to designate the world of the vagrants, and "*jiang hu* dwellers" are commonly understood to be those in disreputable or shady professions. Hence, the term has also been translated as "perilous waters." (Ng 85n1)

- 19 Important for the ethos of chivalry and triad films is the fact that the *jiang hu*, at least in legend, mirrored accepted Chinese social protocols, despite its outlawry: “The *jiang hu* is an anarchistic world, yet abiding to the Confucian [*sic*] respect of the master, father and traditional authority” (Reynaud 4).
- 20 As we shall see, this characteristic is shared by Woo with Jean-Pierre Melville.
- 21 Kit was played by Leslie Cheung, Ho by Ti Lung, and Mark by Chow Yun-fat.
- 22 Thompson says that such pairs “are usually strikingly different in their traits, and their lives initially have little or no connection. Yet early on in the action, one develops a fascination with the other and often even spies on him or her. Hidden similarities between the two are gradually revealed, and one character may change to become more like the other” (Thompson 46).

Li and John are “different” mainly in their professions, although in their early confrontations Li also expresses the standard police view of killers and criminals. Li slowly becomes intrigued with John’s personality and methods and gradually draws closer to him, until finally the two become spiritual brethren.
- 23 See also Yang and Duara. For the treatment of heroes in fiction, see Ruhlmann.

Chapter 2 Production History and Background

- 1 The 1967 film and Woo’s free remake have the same title in Cantonese (*Ying hung boon sik*, or “True Colors of a Hero”). For information on this film, including illustrations, see Fonoroff 104–5.
- 2 Woo’s business partner Terence Chang observed that *A Better Tomorrow* “earned \$34 million HK, a very large sum at the time” (Hall, K. E. 212n17). Terence Chang Jia-tsun (1949–) is an important producer long associated with John Woo. He has played a central role in introducing Hong Kong film to Western audiences (Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* 50–51). See also my entry

- on Chang in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, ed. Zhang Yingjin (London: Routledge, 1999), 112 (Hall, K., “Chang, Terence”).
- 3 In her recent *Dying to Belong: Gangster Movies in Hollywood and Hong Kong* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), Martha P. Nochimson relies heavily on Karen Fang’s *John Woo’s A Better Tomorrow* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2005) for her discussion of Woo’s two *A Better Tomorrow* films (76–84) but makes the odd assertion that previous books “that discuss John Woo have little to say about his or any gangster films” (77n8). Despite including my *John Woo: The Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999) in her reference list, Nochimson apparently considered my entire chapter (5) on these two Woo films to “have little to say,” although I cover there and elsewhere points such as the importance of the Triad ethos and the “reincarnation” of Mark (Chow Yun-fat’s character) as Ken in the second film.
 - 4 Woo says that “I had over ninety shooting days on *The Killer*. It was nearly double the common amount of days for Hong Kong films at that time” (Woo, “E-Mail Response” 1).
 - 5 For a summary of Lee’s career, see Williams, “Danny Lee.”
 - 6 According to Terence Chang, the film was “financed 90 percent by Golden Princess, and 10 percent by Magnum. Magnum is owned 51 percent by Golden Princess and 49 percent by Danny Lee” (Chang, T.). (The other preproduction details mentioned here are also taken from the same interview with Terence Chang.)
 - 7 The film was first released in Taiwan in March 1989, with a running time of approximately 124 minutes. It was then cut to its normally shown length, about 110 minutes, and released in Hong Kong in July 1989. Its Hong Kong box office suffered because of the timing of its release, not long after the Tiananmen massacre in Beijing on June 4 (Chang, T. 10).

Chapter 3 Style and Structure in *The Killer*

- 1 Steve Neale provides a well-researched and closely argued presentation of the difficulties with noir as a genre in his chapter “Film Noir” in his *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2005 [2000]), 151–77.

- 2 For clarification on the name variance of the killer character, see Hall, K. E. 213n5.
- 3 John Woo has emphasized changes in the original treatment, presumably resulting in some shifting of the “love triangle” to the background: “The original idea for this film was a love triangle where a cop and a killer are in love with the same girl. The triangle would bring the cop and the killer together to understand each other better. Unfortunately, we didn’t have enough time with the actress to make that work well enough. So we had to change the story. *The Killer* would have been a different story” (Woo, “E-Mail Response” 2).
- 4 For an instructive contrast to this scene, see the recent film *Assault on Precinct 13* (a 2005 remake of the 1976 John Carpenter film, directed by the interesting young French director Jean-François Richet), in which the gangster anti-hero played by Lawrence Fishburne meets in the opening scene with an informant in a church, only to kill him for betrayal and leave to be arrested.
- 5 Robert Hanke applies the term “hyperkinetic violence” to Woo’s style. My own terminology here is a reference to his formulation, found in an essay which agrees with several of my points about Woo, in particular the positive evaluation of *Face/Off* relative to the director’s Hollywood work up to that point (1997) (Hanke).
- 6 The importance of the opening hit scene as a template for the film’s stylistic and thematic emphases is not restricted to its existential qualities but extends to the buttressing of the film’s qualities as a noir work. In his discussion of violence in film noir, Paul Arthur comments on the importance of violent set-pieces within the structure of these films and ascribes a particular significance to such scenes at the beginning of films (like our example from *The Killer*): “Thus the mayhem erupting in opening scenes may turn out to be less a central enigma [for detection] than a signpost or avatar of a more generalized atmospheric dread. [...] Trajectories of violence in film noir are subtended not by the revelation of criminal identity but by its ramifications, how immersion in an underworld adventure disrupts and ultimately voids a character’s psychosocial traces of identity.” Within the same context, Arthur also notes that “the noir series indulges in a unique and oddly displaced mode of auto-annihilation”

- which is adumbrated by destructive (and self-destructive) scenes like John's opening hit, an action which leads eventually to John's "auto-annihilation" (Arthur 161). Arthur's comments on the presence of death in noir narratives help to contextualize my observations on constriction (see Arthur 160).
- 7 For an informative sketch of the sadly short-lived career of this interesting actor, see Mank.
 - 8 For more on the elegiac Western, see my essay, Ken Hall, "*Gringo viejo* and the Elegiac Western," *University of Dayton Review* 23.2 (Spring 1995): 137–47.
 - 9 Woo noted that at the shooting of John's death scene some difference of opinion existed on how much physical contact the two lovers should be granted: "So, while we are shooting the scene, and Chow Yun-Fat suggest[s] crawling toward each other and they touch[] and then they [are] holding hands, but I said, no, I didn't like it, I would like them crawling and missing each other, makes it more tragic, ..." (Woo, "Interview" 21).
 - 10 Alton published a reference manual including his technical perspective and expertise in 1949. See John Alton, *Painting with Light* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995). See also Naremore 172–75.
 - 11 For an informed discussion of the relevance of low-key lighting and of cinematographers like Alton and Musuraca to film noir, see Neale 170–73. For a detailed study of Musuraca's work in *Out of the Past*, see Naremore 172–85. See also John Alton, *Painting with Light*.
 - 12 Perhaps, too, Woo was inspired by the famous opening shot from the Bond films (very popular in Hong Kong as elsewhere), in which Bond fires into a gun-barrel trained on him, killing the assassin and filling the view of the barrel with blood. As in the Bond films, where Bond fires at the camera's perspective, John appears to fire at Jenny's (here, the camera's) perspective. For commentary on the Bond openings and their relevance to camera narration, see Krug 79.
 - 13 Barthes 26–27. I am indebted to the excellent article by Christian Krug, "On Jimmy Stewart's Hand: Violent Acts in Western Films, 1946–73," *Studies in the Western* 12 (2004): 46–90, for informing me on this concept in Barthes. See Krug 50.

- 14 David Bordwell comments on Woo's employment of varied shot lengths to create an effect of highlighting shots as if in "relief" with regard to *Hard-Boiled* (Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong* 226–28). See the discussion of this scene in my *John Woo: The Films* (Hall, K. E. 122). The reflection motif may have been suggested to Woo by a similar moment at the opening of *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964), when Bond (Sean Connery) is saved from an attack from behind when he sees the killer reflected in the eye of the woman whom he is embracing.
- 15 Cinematographer Peter Pau, who worked on *The Killer*, notes that Woo used multiple cameras more sparingly at this point in his career than in his later films: "Not much during my shooting period with him. For drama sequence, John was still using one camera by then (now he uses up to 8 cameras to do so, I heard). For gun fighting scene, sometimes two, rarely three. For the documentation of the dragon boat race, we certainly need 3 cameras to do so" (Pau).
- 16 King Hu (Hu Jinquan, 1931–97) "was one of the first Chinese directors to gain international recognition for his filmmaking." His films include *Come Drink with Me* (1966) and *A Touch of Zen* (1971). Hu was an important influence on younger directors like John Woo. Hu "reestablished the female warrior on-screen, paced his movies like spaghetti Westerns, and created classic mise-en-scène and masterful, rhythmical editing" (Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* 178–79).
- 17 An example of Woo's use of rack focus in *The Killer* was cited by cinematographer Peter Pau, who worked part of the time on the film. This is the shot "From the face of Tsang to Lee at the police station while we were doing a slow dolly" (Pau), clearly motivated to highlight the doubling of the two cops.
- 18 The term is Bordwell's: see his article on King Hu (Bordwell, "Richness"). For Hu's style, see also Cheuk and Farquhar.
- 19 For the French New Wave, see Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2002).
- 20 Ringo Lam Ling-tung (1955–) is an influential and innovative Hong Kong director whose films include *City on Fire* (1987) and *Full Contact* (1992) (Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* 221–23). Kirk Wong Che-keung (1949–) has directed films including *Crime*

- Story* (1993) and *Organized Crime and Triad Bureau* (1994). Stokes notes that Wong's "signature tracking shots and unusual camera angles navigate a dark underworld and provide a parallel dark vision in which action emerges from characters' conflicts" (Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* 490–91). See also my entry on Wong in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, ed. Zhang Yingjin (London: Routledge, 1999), 366–67.
- 21 Woo perceives his technical influences in terms somewhat different from those discussed above, but he readily acknowledges the influence of several directors: "*The Killer* was a tribute to Jean Pierre Melville. Also, the technique I used was a homage to Martin Scorsese. I used the slow motion close ups and camera movement that I loved from *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*. The gun battle moments were inspired by *Bonnie and Clyde* and Sam Peckinpah's *Wild Bunch*. The choreography was more [an] homage to Chang Cheh." (Woo, "E-Mail Response" 2).
 - 22 A companion scene was originally shot which featured Li rescuing Jenny from a similar attack, thus establishing further parallelism between Li and John, but this was cut from the final Hong Kong release. It can be viewed on the British DVD release of *The Killer*, from Medusa Communications.
 - 23 Originally, the film's cut contained a brief scene which showed John driving away from the scene at the moment Li and his colleagues arrive.
 - 24 This uneasiness extended to the police force: "In the period from the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, negotiating the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese communist sovereignty, to the 1997 handover, anxieties about police power centered on the possible abuse by China of the paramilitary police powers in Hong Kong and the potential replacement of the Hong Kong Police by communist China's secret police" (Fang, "Britain's Finest" 298).
 - 25 Interestingly, though, as the film's director points out, Walker never actually kills anyone — Reese falls to his death while Walker is questioning him, and the other bosses and henchmen are killed by a mob sniper (James B. Sikking). Walker is used by Fairfax (Keenan Wynn) to eliminate the other bosses, and at film's end, Walker disappears without the money.

- 26 Instructive examples of the public-private loyalty conflict in Japanese film are the several versions of the *Chushingura* or 47 Ronin tale and the 1967 film *Samurai Rebellion* (Kobayashi Masaki), with Mifune Toshiro as a retainer who finally rebels against his clan because of their cruel treatment of his family.
- 27 This scene was originally followed by a brief scene which showed one of Wong's men examining traces of the two men's presence, as if tracking them by intuition. Woo was to reprise this cut scene in *Hard Target*, in a scene only present in that film's rough cut, in which Pik (Arnold Vosloo) examines traces left by Chance (Jean-Claude Van Damme) and Natasha (Yancy Butler). See Hall, K. E. 183–84.
- 28 For a presentation of this and other examples of Woo's employment of visual technique to express doubling, see Hall, K. E. 122–23. Bordwell also notes and explicates Woo's violation of the 180-degree rule (*Planet* 108–09).
- 29 Woo elaborates on his employment of various filming techniques: "I learned film theory from books, especially editing, but I never followed them. I use overlapping editing, rack focus, close ups and tracking shots based on my emotions. Since I have been influenced so strongly by musicals, I like tracking shots that lend movement to the scenes so they have a musical rhythm. I often want the scene to look elegant that way. I use overlapping for the emotional impact. I use close ups and sometimes extreme close ups because I want to see the real emotion in the actors['] eyes. I want to see the detail in the building of the performance" (Woo, "E-Mail Response" 1). As one might expect, Woo classifies his technical artistry as anything but academic.
- 30 My treatment of the beach as a liminal space is informed by Aaron Gerow, "A Scene at the Threshold: Liminality in the Films of Kitano Takeshi," *Asian Cinema* 10.2 (Spring–Summer 1999): 107–15.
- 31 The films of influential director Wong Kar-wai (1958–), a native of Shanghai, include *Days of Being Wild* (1990) and *Fallen Angels* (1995). Wong's work is characterized by "[a] distinctive look, varied film speeds, edgy and unusual camera angles, handheld and steadicam camerawork, nonlinear plots" and other qualities lending it a certain level of indeterminacy (Stokes, *Historical Dictionary of Hong Kong Cinema* 487–89).

- 32 Jean-Luc Godard (1930–) is the innovative and controversial director of numerous films including *Breathless (A bout de souffle, 1960)* and *Weekend (Week-End, 1968)*. In the 1960s, he experimented particularly with self-reflexive cinema. Jacques Rivette (1928–) is a “[c]ontroversial filmmaker of the French New Wave whose few, unorthodox films have baffled or bored some critics and fascinated others.” His films include *Céline and Julie Go Boating (Céline et Julie vont en bateau, 1974)* (Katz 533–35, 1155).
- 33 Truffaut (1932–84) was the most influential member of the French New Wave, as director, critic, and occasional actor. His landmark films include *The 400 Blows (Les quatre cents coups, 1959)*, *Shoot the Piano Player (Tirez sur le pianiste, 1960)*, and *Jules and Jim (Jules et Jim, 1961)* (Katz 1364–65).
- 34 I am indebted to Andrew Spicer, *Film Noir*; for alerting me to the term “edited zoom” and to the Monaco source (Spicer 132).
- 35 In addition, the striking Dragon Boat chase scene, in which Woo intercut documentary footage with shots of John being pursued by the police boat, is an important authorial piece because of its complex editing, which includes rapid changes in pace from slow to fast motion. According to cinematographer Peter Pau, who worked on the film, this technical aspect of the film was “a very different look in Hong Kong cinema” of the time (Pau 1).

Chapter 4 Jean-Pierre Melville and Woo

- 1 Their relationship is reminiscent as well of the friendship between the two swordsmen played by David Chiang and Ti Lung in *The New One-Armed Swordsman* (Chang Cheh, 1971). Although a local girl is clearly enamored of the Chiang character, and is quite attractive, she is not an issue in their friendship. Their only mutual interest in her is to protect her from the evil of the renegade sword clan.
- 2 John Huston (1906–87) became an important American director after his *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), which led directly to Humphrey Bogart’s stardom and set the style for “tough-guy” detective films. Although uneven, his career enjoyed peaks such as *The Treasure of*

the Sierra Madre (1948) and *The Asphalt Jungle*. He was also an effective actor, especially in *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) (Katz 664–66).

- 3 Manouche may be Gu's sister, or she may be his girlfriend. This is unclear from the narrative, intentionally so, as Melville stated (Nogueira and Truchaud 121).
- 4 Thompson and Bordwell's assertion that "Woo invoked Jean-Pierre Melville's films in celebrating an underworld code of trust and honour, but his characters are far more boyish and narcissistic than their French counterparts" (Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 220) may apply to some extent to *A Better Tomorrow* (to Mark and Kit especially), but certainly not to *The Killer*, which is additionally the Woo film most heavily influenced by Melville. John and Li struggle in a very manly, adult manner with their own crises of conscience, and they are heavily invested in the emotional life of those around them: assuredly not a picture of boyish narcissism.
- 5 The terms are Vincendeau's. See, for example "Autistic" 148–50.
- 6 With respect to Melville's conflicted romanticism, see the remarks in "Melville" 2: 674.
- 7 Emmanuel Burdeau likens this aspect of Melville's work to a similar impetus towards uniformity or lack of "intelligibility" in the work of Bresson and notes that Melville "va vers l'indifférenciation (en quinze ans, un flic remplace *Bob* le flambeur) [tends towards indifferenciation (after fifteen years, a cop replaces *Bob* the thief)]." For Burdeau, this tendency concerns the intention of Melville to "level out" his stars, that is, to deprive them of star quality (66). Woo does reveal that he consciously imitated Delon's attire in *Le Samouraï* in his own dress style as a young man, noting that the film had a generational influence (Woo, "Le Style Melville" 80). For Delon's style, see Hayes.
- 8 The 92f is a 16-shot 9mm Luger or Long, semiautomatic, favored by police departments and, perhaps in another influence on Woo, by Riggs (Mel Gibson) in the *Lethal Weapon* films. Incidentally, after the nightclub shootout near the beginning of *Le Deuxième Souffle*, a *flic* notes that one of the guns used, a 9mm, is not a ladies' gun — probably a reference to Manouche, but indicative of the masculine ethos pervading Melville's work as well as Woo's.

- 9 Vincendeau points out that with Melville “the supreme professionalism of the gangsters gestures towards the new super-skilled *cadre*-engineer, the lynchpin of the French post-war technocratic establishment. Thus, Melville’s configuration of masculinity both celebrates and critiques the shift towards a cool, hard, technocratic new society that mid-century France so markedly underwent” (Vincendeau, “Autistic” 151).
- 10 Also, Woo traces the character of Mark to the Melville film: “*Le Samourai* is very stylish and cool. I was attracted by Alain Delon’s performance. His loneliness is cold but his heart was warm. He was a killer but he had a code of honor. I can relate to this man who is loyal with a code of honor. That character influenced *A Better Tomorrow*” (Woo, “E-Mail Response” 1).
- 11 For a standard statement of the globalist perspective on Woo, see Fang, *John Woo’s A Better Tomorrow*.
- 12 Sidney’s crippled hand is perhaps a visual allusion to the similarly deformed wrist of Raven (Alan Ladd), the hitman in *This Gun for Hire*, although without the specific context of the injury in the Ladd film. (Raven tells Ellen [Veronica Lake] that his foster mother used to beat him and finally used a hot iron on his wrist, at which point he killed her.) Perhaps, too, Sidney’s lack of two gun hands refers to the *One-Armed Swordsman* series. At the end of the first film in that series, Kang (Wang Yu) tells his teacher (Tin Fung) that he is of no use as a swordsman, being crippled with only one arm. In both cases, the warriors protest too much: Kang is in fact fearsomely capable, and Sidney proves himself more than able to defend himself with only one hand, and in fact to do considerable damage offensively, in his attack on Wong and his men at the end of the film.
- 13 Later in the film, after Sidney has tried to reach accommodation with the “new class” represented by Wong and his henchmen, he will again find, in his last great moment, that a gun fits quite well even in his crippled grip, as he has rediscovered his old values. Here Woo appears again to honor Melville, in whose *Le Cercle rouge* (1970) disgraced ex-cop and marksman Jansen (Yves Montand) makes a spectacular comeback and, also like Sidney, sacrifices himself in an attempt to allow his colleagues to escape.

- 14 With regard to the *wuxia* tradition and “homoeroticism,” the following exchange from an interview with Chang Cheh is instructive:
- PEGGY CHIAO, CRITIC:** Those Chang Cheh films are all about male bonding. He worships the male body. All those muscles, all that nudity. It’s all very sexual. I think it’s his vision of male paradise! Very interesting.
- CHANG CHEH:** It’s my reading of a Chinese tradition, nothing else. No Chinese reader thinks of homosexuals when he reads a book like *The Three Kingdoms*. Nobody thinks the heroes of *Water Margin* are gay. (Feldman 3)
- 15 In this way the protagonists depart from one of the acknowledged models for Woo’s male heroes (especially those played by Chow Yun-fat), Alain Delon, who was identified with a nearly robotic expression of maleness; as Hayes summarizes: “From the mid-1960s onwards, and particularly after *Le Samouraï*, the Delon persona demonstrates an increasing internalisation of conflict, allied to an increasingly impassive acting style based on restraint, suppression and the exaggeration of physical characteristics, ‘a glacial perfection in which the merest twitch of eyebrow or mouth is significant’ [...]” (Hayes 52). (The quotation cited is from Forbes 56). For the role of sentiment, especially “grief,” in Chinese heroic poetry which featured accounts of historical or legendary knights-errant, see Chan. Liu (4–7) provides a listing of the “ideals” by which the Chinese knights-errant of history were said to live.
- 16 Li’s most notable display of anger at his superiors occurs after his heroic pursuit of one of the gunrunners whom he and Tsang were trying to arrest in a sting operation early in the film. After the criminal kills a policeman and flees onto a tram, Li chases the tram on foot and draws his gun on the man, who takes a woman hostage. Li shoots him but the woman dies of cardiac arrest. His superiors upbraid him for the death of the hostage despite the fact that he had exhibited great courage and dedication in the confrontation. As Sondergard and Collins observe, Li’s heroic efforts are accentuated by Woo’s editing decision at the close of the chase: “[...] in an example of Guan Yunchang’s [Kwan Yü’s] defeat of any number of wicked opponents in Luo’s novel [*Sanguo yanyi* or *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*],

when Inspector Li ... in John Woo's *The Killer* ... finally captures Eddie (Tommy Wong Kwong-leung), a vicious criminal willing to kill innocent bystanders in order to make his escape, a close-up of Li's face dissolves into the image of Guangong [Kwan Yü]. The superimposition of the Guan effigy on his features externally signifies his inner spirit and acknowledges the formidable skill he exhibited in the arrest" (Sondergard and Collins 54).

- 17 For a study of Confucianism and family in China, see Ebrey.
- 18 *Yi* was one of the virtues typically attributed to knights-errant. Liu provides several translations but for the purposes of his discussion of knights-errant, he settles on "altruism" (Liu 209n2). For a discussion of the English rendering of this and other terms from Chinese philosophy, see Bodde. Liu also distinguishes between the Confucian and the knightly application of ethics: "The Confucians and the knights-errant had different conceptions of *yí*: to the former it meant 'doing the right thing,' to the latter ... it meant 'doing more than required by common standards of morality'" (Liu 7).
- 19 Woo characters often qualify as men "out of their time," misfits within contemporary society or bureaucracies: thus, John from *The Killer*, Tequila from *Hard-Boiled*, and Ho from *A Better Tomorrow* among his Hong Kong films. The characteristic Woo outsider figure has continued in his Hollywood work: Boudreau in *Hard Target* (1993) is a drifter, a nonconformist; the Travolta villain in *Broken Arrow* (1996) is a stronger outsider figure than the Slater hero; both male leads in *Face/Off* (1997) are rebels and misfits, their differences being largely a matter of degree; both Ethan Hunt and Sean Ambrose in *Mission Impossible 2* (2000) are individualists, again differing chiefly in degree; Enders in *Windtalkers* (2002) is not only a nonconformist but also, nearly psychotic in his alienation; finally, in *Paycheck* (2003), as in *Broken Arrow*, the villain qualifies somewhat more as a Woo character than does the rather colorless Ben Affleck lead.

Chapter 5 Woo's Inheritors: *The Killer* as Influence

- 1 The work of Luc Besson is a case in point. Lucy Mazdon observes the importance of Asian-European cross-fertilization in her discussion of *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and its remakes, and she points directly to Woo, noting that “Besson’s film recalls the work of directors such as John Woo. Like *Nikita*, Woo’s films show alienated and often brutal central characters and graphic violence. Films such as *The Killer* (1989) and *Bullet in the Head* (1990) have also achieved a cult following in the United States [as have Besson’s films] suggesting a close, circular (and inter-cultural) relationship between these films, Besson’s work and its various remakes” (Mazdon 108).
- 2 Cinematographer Peter Pau in fact pointed to the employment of mixed camera speeds as one of Woo’s great contributions to Hong Kong film: “I loved John’s idea on the Dragon Boat scene (using the race as a cover, with [a] floating Chow [who] tries to aim the shot). I thought that was the best scene to [form a] portrait [of] Chow as a Killer. John did use slow-motion in conjunction with fast motion to set up a very different look in visual[s] in Hong Kong cinema by then. That had been a signature filmmaking of John” (Pau).
- 3 To is the subject of a recent study by noted scholar of Hong Kong film Stephen Teo (see Works Cited).
- 4 The term “reverential parody” is taken from Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 60.
- 5 In terms of the basic narrative line, the film is reminiscent of *Assassins* (Richard Donner, 1995), in which the top killer (Sylvester Stallone), who wants to retire after one more job, is threatened and pursued by the unhinged challenger (Antonio Banderas). This film is itself a remake, or at least a recycling, of the Charles Bronson vehicle *The Mechanic* (Michael Winner, 1972), in which a brash young killer, played by Jan-Michael Vincent, challenges the ascendancy of the hitman played by Bronson. (Lo Kwai-cheung also notes the similarity to *Assassins* as well as to some other films, although not to *The Killer* [Lo 150]).
- 6 In a film full of movie references, yet another interesting parallel appears in the scene when Tok reveals casually to Chin that he is a

- killer. She does not quite believe him but soon learns the truth. This scene recalls an odd moment in a generally odd film, *Gangster Story* (1961), the only film directed by Walter Matthau, in which he stars as a bank robber who becomes a corporate employee, a robber for hire in a mob. Before he goes to work for the gang, he tries to hide out from them (he has robbed one of their banks), and he slips into a public library where he engages in casual, flirting conversation with the librarian Carol (played by his real-life wife Carole). When she asks him what he does for a living, he replies that he robs banks. Like Chin, she does not believe him at first, but after she learns the truth, she not only stays with him but also dismisses the idea that his work, and their life together, is police business.
- 7 Max (Jamie Foxx), the taxi driver character, berates him for his lack of understanding of others and calls him a “sociopath.”
 - 8 Stephen Teo highlights the importance of To’s *The Mission* (1999) as commentary on Woo: “To’s films supplement Woo’s notion of gangster chivalry and mateship — *The Mission*, arguably To’s most distinctive work, echoes *The Killer* ... or *A Better Tomorrow* ... albeit with its own beat and style, and in a very real sense, the movie responds to and counteracts Woo’s masterpieces” (Teo 25; my ellipsis).
 - 9 I am indebted here to Andrew Grossman, who observes that To ironizes Woo’s chivalry codes, although I do not agree with Grossman that To engages in a thoroughgoing deconstruction of these codes: To’s killers still maintain varying degrees of their ancestors’ *wuxia* standards. See Grossman 2, 8.
 - 10 *Nikita* was remade in Hong Kong as *Black Cat* (*Hei mao*, Stephen Shin, 1991) and in the United States as *Point of No Return* (John Badham, 1993). It also spawned a successful TV series in the United States (*La Femme Nikita*, 1997–2001).
 - 11 The training and reshaping of Nikita also echo the plot of *My Fair Lady*, particularly with its emphasis on making an “ugly duckling” into a stunningly beautiful and sophisticated woman. A recent and fascinating example of such reworking of the Pygmalion-Galatea myth is the cult favorite television series *Alias* (2001–06), featuring Jennifer Garner as an ingenuous college student who is retrained as a spectacularly capable secret agent, and who discovers that in fact she

- was programmed by her father from an early age to become such an agent. For *Nikita* and *Pygmalion*, see Grindstaff.
- 12 This malfunctioning is seen most clearly when Raymond is asked to go beyond the limits of his emotional endurance. His controller (his own mother, played by Angela Lansbury) orders him to kill a liberal senator (John McGiver) who opposes her husband's national candidacy. Since Raymond has standing orders, imprinted in his conditioning, to kill anyone also present at the site of a hit, he also kills his beloved Jocie (Leslie Parrish). The signs of his internal turmoil are made quite visible by Laurence Harvey's expressive facial tics. For a good discussion of the machine-human dichotomy in this film, see Rushing and Frentz Ch. 6. Rushing and Frentz observe that "Although Jocie is not able to save Raymond, her sacrifice rehumanizes him, for immediately after his mechanized self kills her, he begins having nightmares that weaken his conditioned persona enough for Ben [one of his company in Korea, and the psychic detective of the film, played by Frank Sinatra] to deprogram him" (137–38).
 - 13 Raymond is termed a "mechanism" by his Chinese brainwasher (played with malicious and sinister zest by Khigh Dhiagh, familiar to many viewers as nemesis Wo Fat on the *Hawaii Five-O* TV series).
 - 14 Mazdon observes that "Léon is both hit man (the hat, the coat, the boots) and innocent child (the too-short trousers and simple vests)" (112).
 - 15 For a summary of his childlike characteristics, see Hayward 61–62.
 - 16 In using the term "pastiche," I follow Otome, esp. 3, although her conclusion that the *bushido* stance is "just an arbitrary style ... chosen for an alienated man who has no place in the fast-moving, excessively affluent capitalist society [of New York]" (3) is overstated. The "alienation" of the Ghost Dog leads him to choose a "style" which is anything but "arbitrary": to the contrary, his adoption of *bushido* values is an attempt to instill value into his life by seeking out a code which similarly sustained, or was intended to sustain, the members of a class who began to lose its moorings beginning with the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1611.
 - 17 Leung was the assistant director on *The Killer*, and is a good example of the positive impact Woo has had as a mentor on aspiring talents.

- 18 The setting for the plot clearly echoes John Frankenheimer's excellent *Black Sunday* (1976).
- 19 The film ends with a scene reminiscent, although perhaps not consciously so, of Chang Cheh's *Invincible Fist* (1969). Ryu visits the sanitarium patient Hyun, whom he had previously met when trying to get information about Hyun/Hee, and the film fades out with Ryu and Hyun quietly visiting on a bench. At the end of the Chang Cheh film, Tie (Lo Lieh) promises to stay with the blind daughter of Ma, whom he has just killed; of course he conceals Ma's true nature and fate from her.
- 17 Leung offered wry homage to Woo in his 1997 *Task Force*, in which the young cops banter about "a John Woo film," and a female character tells a story about her rescue by a killer whose actions are clearly modeled visually on those of John. Additionally, Woo appears in a cameo role as a cop at the end of the film, questioning the work of a fellow officer and saying "Good work" to Rod Lin, the young cop hero of the film.
- 21 In *Léon*, the friendship is with Mathilde (Natalie Portman); in *Assassins*, the Stallone character forms an alliance with his target, played by Julianne Moore; in *Ghost Dog*, the hitman forms contacts with two people, the ice-cream man and a little girl; and, in *The Killer*, John becomes close to Jenny.

Chapter 6 Woo after *The Killer*

- 1 For a discussion of this period in Woo's career, see Hall, K. E., *John Woo* Ch. 9.
- 2 Here Woo reprises the death-duel situation found in several of his films, notably *Hard-Boiled*, *Broken Arrow*, and *Face/Off*. In his second and third Hollywood efforts, *Broken Arrow* and *Face/Off*, Woo not only reprised the duel motif but also brought back John Travolta to serve as one of the opponents. As in his Hong Kong films, which featured recurring characters and situations as well as recurring actors like Chow Yun-fat, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, and Ti Lung, Woo has worked repeatedly with certain actors — John Travolta, Nicolas Cage,

and Christian Slater. Cage appeared in *Face/Off* as Travolta's enemy (replacing Slater in the position he had occupied in *Broken Arrow*). Cage then appeared in *Windtalkers* as an oppositional figure, of uncertain morality and sanity, with newcomer Adam Beach playing an "enemy" in the sense of a comrade-in-arms disgusted at first with the Cage character's cynicism and violence. Woo's technique of sequential casting allows him to develop intertextual contrasts and parallels between his own films and incidentally permits the critic to set his Hollywood work against his Hong Kong work in terms of this variable.

- 3 As Woo responded to my query about the influence of *The Killer* on his later work, "In all of my movies I try to do new experiments. After I did one like *The Killer*, I am not going to try to recreate it. Like a painter who uses different colors to create new paintings in the same style, I use basic filmmaking theory to make the movies I want to create" (Woo, "E-Mail Response" 2).
- 4 For an incisive summary and critique of the unusually vitriolic attacks leveled at this film, see Stokes, "John Woo's War."
- 5 Beach, a native of Manitoba, plays the tragic Pvt. Ira Hayes in Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). Beach is a Saulteaux Indian (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0063440/bio>).
- 6 Richard Slotkin places "ethnic platoons" in American war films into a context of American nationalistic consciousness. See his "Unit Pride; Ethnic Platoons and the Myths of American Nationality," *American Literary History* 13.3 (2001): 469–98.
- 7 The friendship echoes the relationship between the two heroes in Woo's *Last Hurrah for Chivalry* (1979), itself a recasting of chivalry elements from films including *The New One-Armed Swordsman* (Chang Cheh, 1971) and Chu Yuan films such as *The Magic Blade* (1976) and *The Sentimental Swordsman* (1977), all featuring sensitive and emotive encounters between swordsmen.
- 8 Woo confirms that in *The Killer*, "The choreography was more homage to Chang Cheh [than to other directors]" (Woo, "E-Mail Response" 2).
- 9 The soldier thereby becomes a warrior, completing the portrait of him as an embodiment of Navajo tradition which began with his flute-playing and dispensing of ancient wisdom. The Ti Lung sword scene

- is, of course, an homage to the actor's great career as swordsman hero, most notably in films directed by Chang Cheh and Chu Yuan. For a summary of Ti Lung's career, see Williams, "Honor and Endurance: A Tribute to Ti Lung."
- 10 Or, as Terence Chang related, to attack the filmmakers for intruding on an American issue: "... a lot of the white film critics I met objected to ... two Chinese guys making a movie about a piece of American history [...]" (Stokes, "John Woo's War" 197).
- 11 Both are caper films (the caper here being the destruction of the time viewer), and both feature a *Jules et Jim*-influenced trio of protagonists, in this case, Affleck, Thurman, and Paul Giamatti.

Conclusion

- 1 Bordwell subsumes such devices under the general rubric of "intensified continuity," which he characterizes as "traditional continuity amped up, raised to a higher pitch of emphasis" (Bordwell, *The Way* 120). He notes in his extended discussion of the phenomenon (see especially 121–41) that "[f]our strategies of camerawork and editing seem central to the new style: rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements" (Bordwell, *The Way* 121). See his summary of the style in his "Transcultural Spaces: Toward a Poetics of Chinese Films," in which he also observes that "The most obvious instance [of the style] is the work of John Woo, who seems to have mastered all the grace notes of intensified continuity in his films of the mid-1980s. Forget the balletic gunplay for a moment; even in dialogue scenes he displays his indebtedness to this strategy, with constantly arcing and swooping camera movements accompanied by rack focus and abrupt close-up entrances and exits" (Bordwell, "Transcultural" 13–14).

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