Life in Movie Stills: Persona Making in "Learning from Bruce Lee: Pedagogy and Political Correctness in Martial Arts Cinema"

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Abstract

How much influence does the cinema of our youth shape persona? When I was thirteen, the personas of myself and my friends were profoundly shaped by the discovery of Tae Kwon Do. Bolstered by hit "karate" films of the 1980's, in our minds we were ninja warriors and martial arts champions. Nearly thirty years later, the memories retained are an articulation of not only of my Tae Kwon Do experience, but the peripheral imagery generated by the 1980's karate media, including martial arts films. These articulated images, imagined as film stills, create for many of us what Meaghan Morris describes as an "inner life." Far from marginalizing this persona making experience, Morris embraces it and investigates the Hong Kong movie genre, not for its impeccable cinematography, but for its rich text and complex implications for cultural studies. In my essay, I use Morris' "Learning from Bruce Lee: Pedagogy and Political Correctness in Martial Arts Cinema" as a lens to look deeply into a cultural form which challenges the reductive tendencies of political correctness and instead celebrates its rough edges as a framework for understanding the creative process and its persona creating properties as narrative for us all.

Keywords

cinema; cultural studies; political correctness

Bruce Lee was a legend. He was a martial artist, philosopher, an actor and a filmmaker who inspired millions of people in their lives. He was one of the most influential martial artists of all time and remains a pop culture icon to this very day. He was named by Time Magazine as one of the most influential people of the 20th century. Bruce Lee’s quotes are not only inspiring, they are also thoughtful and impressive. This is the true key to accomplishing anything in life and finding true fulfillment. Whatever happens to you in your life is all a product of what you focused on. If you focused on the things you can change, and you changed everything for the better, your life becomes better. But, if you focus on all the bad things and don’t make a change, your life will never improve.