This essay is intended as a kind of meditation on stillness, or, more precisely, the stopping power that characterizes Still Life (2006), looming as it does on the border of the real and the imaginary, of time and history, of documentary and fiction, and ultimately, politics and “life.” Many commentators on contemporary Chinese cinema have insisted on the realism of Jia Zhangke’s films and their quasi-documentary aesthetic as a means to deduce their political relevance. But if Still Life really is a film of great political interest, it is not only by virtue of its striving to bear witness to a China in full mutation. How, then, should we envisage the ethical and political tenor of Jia Zhangke’s filmic interventions in relation to their acclaimed realism?

Jia Zhangke’s cinema stands out not least for its concern for blending with the worlds it frames; it is obviously not seeking to “split skulls,” as Eisenstein would have it. In that sense, the challenge of this essay consists in getting as close as possible to the point where Jia’s filmic gesture and the gestures actually filmed become indiscernible. For Jia Zhangke is an intercesseur (mediator), perhaps the greatest living Chinese filmmaker.

The concept of intercession was first shaped by Quebec filmmaker Pierre Perrin and then amplified by Gilles Deleuze in his study. We can say that in the fabulation, the power of the false sion of information the English translation poses the problem. Below I attempt to highlight the qualitative transformations that Jia’s filmic gesture of interces- sion assumes, fostering and supporting in a radically unbelievable world—contemporary China.

Perhaps better than any other work in the realm of contemporary Chinese cinema, Still Life offers a unique opportunity to meditate on the function of intercession in a context of extreme socio-economic mutation and massive destruction of ecosystems and human habitats. In the film, the gesture of intercession ultimately consists of a dive into the eye of (the local, demolition), a passage along the very line of the demolition process, which the character represents both in its fictitious and figuration. Conversely, I will say of (and of other elements we’ll encounter during the analysis) that it is precisely the film’s making an impact of intercession in which the stopping power of Still Life resides.

Intercession and interpelation are the two primary concepts with which I want to enrich Jia’s filmic gestures. The former relates to ideas of coming, and is an obligatory passage for those whom Gilles Deleuze calls “the immanents”; the latter is understood as a through a strong conception of imagining as a properly human faculty, which can be identified with an editing opera tion. The two concepts are complementary in their orientation and inclination toward the immanence of things—they both approach the world “by the middle.” They also both relate to a movement from singular to singular, according to which Giorgio Agamben has called an analog, or paradigmatic, logic that traces “extraordinary constellations,” which can be read as virtual itineries or passages for the coming community. But for a constellation to be formed, the present needs to be immaterialized. It is this constellation of thought that I wish to explore in greater detail below.

Still Life is the closest thing to a demolishing process caught by the construction of the Three Gorges dam. Still Life presents itself as a practice of the non-place, as did the World (2004), Jia’s previous film. But unlike The World, Still Life is not so much about unilater alizing existential malaise as it is a way to frame “progress” in real time, which is to say a way of withstanding this test of destruction in the present tense. In this filmic involvement or mise en jeu, there is an echo of Walter Benjamin’s description of the destructive char acter: “What exists has to reduce to rubble—not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.” Of course, Jia is not responsible for the destruction of Fongjie, a so-called sub-marginal city with more than 2000 years of history. Instead, by taking up the task of putting film on such a critical moment of Chinese history, focusing on the beauty of the gestures and bodies performing the demolition, and witnessing the threshold of illness that insists at the foremost point of the character-enter, Jia avoids the futile cliché of Beijing’s national will to power. In this, he also pays tribute to the anonymous victims of this phanastic project by pro viding them with a truthful reflection of their situation and, above all, in the forefront, the possibility of an encounter.

UFOS and Realism

Strangely and untypically, the apparition of the specter...

—Derrida, Specters of Marx

Around the middle of Still Life, a strange event, one might even say a “pure” event, occurs: a UFO unexpectedly crosses the sky, scaring the characters—and the audience—immobile and speechless, in a state of pure seeing (response). For a few seconds, the world is suspended a spectral moment, a moment that no longer be longs to time; as Derrida would put it, while everything appears in an unreal immobility, halfway between reality and fiction, story is deserted.

The incorrigibility of this apparition is quite surprising, especially given that Jia’s films are usually described as “realistic,” because of their social context and also because of the minimalistic, quasi-documentary aesthetic that characterizes them. The introduction of this purely imaginary element naturally raises questions regarding the meaning of realism in Jia’s films. The passage of the UFO interpolates the narrative, cuts it in two and marks the transition between the two stories around which Still Life revolves: those of Sun Ming, a miner who comes back to his wife after 16 years of sepa rating, and Zhao Tao, who, after being left by her husband without any news for two years, goes to see him at his dam’s construction site where she announces her intention to divorce him. From this perspective, the UFO would be drawing the narrative boundaries of each of these stories from the outside, so to speak, to render their fictitious dimension. This reference to a “transcendental” point from which the story is told problematizes the relationship between reality and fiction. In a manner that remains obscure, the UFO’s passage identifies itself with Jia’s filmic gesture. It seems to signal a hypothetical point of contact (even if a discontinuous one) between fiction (the film) and the filmmaker’s actual reality, something like the cosmic implant of his filmic intervention in the world. In other words, we could say that where the UFO interpolates, a power of the false is at work, which would also correspond to a movement of intervention—interpolation is at the same time and to imagine, to invent and to falsify, to introduce and to disguise.

写实写意“写生” vs. “写实”

It is characteristic that in Chinese we do not say that a form, a figure or a sign have a “signification,” but an “intention,” “the sound of the heart,” evoking the “power of the false.” In other words, we could say that where the UFO interpolates, a power of the false is at work, which would also correspond to a movement of intervention—interpolation is at the same time and to imagine, to invent and to falsify, to introduce and to disguise.

By: Erik Bordeleau

The proximity between these two works gives us an opportunity to think about the complex relationship between realism, documentary and fiction in Jia’s work. When juxtaposed, these two films may even cause some discomfort to the viewer who experiences the blurred di vide between reality and fiction created in the passage between them. But before addressing this issue, we must first ask a question that can hardly be avoided given the title of the film, namely the question of the relationship between cinematographic realism and “still life” as a pictorial style. Originally, Still Life was to be called 写生 (“still life”), the Mandarin equivalent of “still life,” before the Chinese title became 写生.” For a few seconds, the world is suspended a spectral moment, a moment that no longer be longs to time; as Derrida would put it, while everything appears in an unreal immobility, halfway between reality and fiction, story is deserted.

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suspended in still life. In the description of his pictorial gesture, Liu Xiaodong pays special attention to the organization of his own phys-
ical activity (later in Dong, we also see him doing a kind of pong-pong). All of him is “in play in the energetic transcription process, in a way that seems to stand midway between ste-am and air, giving a unique depth to his pictorial realism.” It also seems that his sense of form and the way he gives shape should be understood in relation to the Chinese calligraphic tradition, which has always attached a prime importance to the bodily integration of the writing-painting gestures. In that tradition, it is the whole body that captures and internalizes the figure, which then manifests it spontaneously.

When the calligrapher captures a dynamic figure and internalizes it, it becomes a “pregnant figure.” The Chinese character he utilizes, 生 (life), literally means “figure of intention,” which is to say that the figure carries intention, or is “pregnant with intention.” This expression refers to the dynamic images that we hold within us, which spontaneously tend to express when reactivated: a ges-
ture, an expressive moment that we have internalized. It is in this sense that the figures collected by the body itself are “pregnant” or “charged with expression.”

This description of the “figures of intention” and their relation-
ship to the calligrapher’s body stays closest to the vital process by which an image is made physically dynamic. Liu Xiaodong’s ener-
gic contraction produces a pictorial space saturated with life, con-
centrated in figures that run deep, reaching Xu’s films in a fashion that may be taken part in what Benjamin called a ZhudeKung im-Still-
land, a stillstand dialectic, where images stand on the threshold of movement and immobility, in a tension-charged pause.

Ultimately, the only way to grasp Xu’s filmic gesture in all its complexity involves going further into what could be defined as the question of imaginational impregnation, halfway between traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting, and Benjamin’s dialectic of the imaginal emergence: river, mountain, and mist (notice that in Mandarin, landscape is written “fog” (again, if we add the radical “speech” to 落，we get 落, which means “to speak”). Jia, who studied fine arts and classical painting before devoting himself to film, describes his use of the many panoramic views in Still Life as a “gesture that takes after the rolls of classical painting, that they would unfold like this in space.”

Another less dramatic element subtly blurs the line separating documentary and fiction seeing San Ming, one of Still Life’s main protagonists, pose as a “simple,” anonymous worker for one of Liu Xiaodong’s paintings. The figure’s and “unreal” immobility of Ming is retroactively interpolated in Still Life’s imagery, creating a kind of duplication of perspective: thus revealing another essential aspect of the complexity of Xu’s filmic gesture. Pictorially speaking, something more than real—a complex of living pictures on the screen—

an imaged contraction—brings reality and fiction into a zone of indiscernibility. It is difficult to conceptualize precisely the tense of the viewer’s malaise created by this blurring of reality and fiction, as if fiction’s effect of plasticity would decompose under the rough contact of documentary. Could this be a bit of pure time, then? The films of the times seem to invite a “chronic time,” a chronos setad in essential rupture with chronological time, which seems to make

for the emergence of what Deleuze might call “de-actualized peaks of present.” From this line of imaginational emergence, our meditation gains a new ground: it is about educating both the cinema-
tographic and ethico-political significance of interpolation as the production of de-actualized peaks of present in Still Life. The stop-
ning power at work in Still Life that manifests itself at the border of the real and the imaginary, of documentary and fiction, must now be sought out at the threshold of time and history.

Still Life’s Temporal Paradox

Still Life is a deeply paradoxical work. On the one hand, everything it is in motion: the construction of the Three Gorges dam gives rise to a huge migratory flux, as thousands of former residents of Fengjie see their city progressively impounded beneath the rising water. As its previous works, Xu shows the effects of China’s ac-
celerated economic development on the lower classes, focusing here on the forced expropriation of the “brave people of the Three Gorges,” as the Mandarin title of the film goes.

On the cinematographic plane, everything seems only to be movement, but a slow, fluid movement, meandering and medita-
tive, merging with the regular flow of the mighty Yangtze, as suggested by the film’s magnificent opening shot. The film also incorp-
porates a number of elements from classical Chinese paint-
ing: river, mountain, and mist (notice that in Mandarin, landscape is written “fog” (shu.); mountain-water). Also, in Chinese tradition, the omnipresent fog of the Three Gorges valley, softening the mountain’s outline and beautifying the landscape, is thought to enhance the fertility of exchange and the fluidity of communica-
tion. In F Ching (Book of Changes), for example, figure 58, 象，“fog,”

“to exchange,” is obtained by the double repetition of the trigram “log” (again, if we add the radical “speech” to it, we get 落, which

means “to speak”). Jia, who studied fine arts and classical painting before devoting himself to film, describes his use of the many panoramas in Still Life as a “gesture that takes after the rolls of classical painting, that they would unfold like this in space.”

And yet, in a less obvious but nonetheless palpable way, Still Life is also charged with a stopping power. In English and German,
respectively, we could say “stalled” and “stillstand,” two expres-
sions that suggest something that resists and holds itself, in a kind of verticalizing but impermanent interruption. In Still Life, something creeps and seeps itself.”

The term “to resist” comes from the Latin resistere, where we find site, “to being.” On a macro-

political plane, as in other works by Xu—and more broadly, the best of the 6th generation’s cinema—Still Life resists by interpolating itself into the flux of Chinese mass-media, short-circuiting the molerizing and sanitized representations from the national market-

ing venture that flooded and formed Chinese public space. However accurate this description may be, this level of analysis falls short by continuing itself to a criticism of representations. We must also examine Jia’s epistemology his subtle way of entering the imaginal intimacy of the forms-of-life—to reveal the planes of consistency

he finds there. It is on the molecular, imaginal level that we must ultimately look for Still Life’s stopping power, and the singularity of Xu’s filmic gesture.

Belief and Time

The criticism of contemporary capitalism as hegemony of subsis-

dence and negation of existence must ask the question of consist-

cy and, as such, of the belief that constitutes it, which is to say, that consists in it.

—Bernard Stiegler, “Resistence et discrédit I”

Le désaccord des économies industrielles

The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link.

—Gilles Deleuze, Time-Image

The construction of the Three Gorges hydroelectric dam is a major symbol of Chinese modernity; one could even say that it somehow summarizes the principal historical episodes of China’s twentieth century. The idea was put forth as early as 1919, by Sun Yat-Sen, founder of the Republican of China, and again in 1949 at the time of the Communist Party’s accession to power. The project aims to con-
trol the Yangtze’s deadly spate, improve navigation conditions, and, of course, produce electricity. In the early years, several feasibility
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studies had been conducted, but because of the political turbulence that affected China it was not until 1979, just as the Cultural Revolution ended, that the exact site of the dam was confirmed. In 1989, with Jiang Zemin and Li Peng overcoming all obstacles (and with the latter’s son a major shareholder in the project), the Three Gorges Project was adopted. The project was voted on at the Chinese National Assembly on April 3, 1992, and the construction began a year later using in-house teams of workers. The scale of the project is enormous. Still Life emphasizes the historical dimension of the Three Gorges project. And in one sequence, the grandeur of the project is emphasized as somebody talking to a man responsible for the construction of a bridge connecting the banks of the Yangtze: “You have achieved Mao’s dream.”

Still Life reminds us that the Three Gorges dam project is a long-term affair. But beyond the historical aspects, the film essentially questions the very event of the dam, its unbelievable character. Of course the dam is there, present, too present. But paradoxically, the dam is also absent: there is no sufficient to the dam it is we are contemporaries of it. This is because co-presence with the event is never simply chronological: if so, we could not say that something (un)believable happens to us.

For Deleuze, this problem opens to the central question of “belief in the world.” Belief, for Deleuze, is not belief in something (holding a representation as truth), but rather a belief by which the world holds together, and by which becoming is effectuated, a belief that insures the imposiveness of a becoming-time, or the ascription of a determined relationship to time. From this immanent conception of belief, Deleuze short-circuits the direct opposition between reality and fiction and affirms a function of fabulation where fiction is presented as power almost as model. Defined as such, the function of fabulation is immediately political. It is the real character who leaves his private condition, at the same time as the author as his abstract condition. […] It is a word in a speech act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private business from public politics, and which itself produces collective utterances.

As an instance it constitutes itself as a fabulation power, Deleuze can say of cinema that “it becomes a free, indirect discourse, operating in real time.”** 22 The trajectory by which fabulation operates in reality—works, realities, effectuates. If there is a policy in Deleuze, we must look at it for the peak of belief and fabulation, in a complex back and forth between effectuation and counter-effectuation.

The gesture of intersection unfolding in Still Life is nothing less than a break with the present and the event that is the construction of the Three Gorges dam. It is in this context that we should understand the introduction of fantastic elements in Still Life’s narrative: a UFO crossing the sky, a building of surreal architecture suddenly taking off like a rocket, characters from an era that has past using cell phones and playing video games, these imaginary elements problematize the relationship to the real and reveal a necessity for it to be made fictional, in the mode of fabulation. To justify the surrealistic side of Still Life, Liu will simply mention that in China, “unbelievable things happen all the time […] We sometimes have a hard time believing what’s happening.” Filming “from life” is one of the strategies to reach to the fabulation by fusing the real, films that tell us how life is lived in this world. In doing so, he offers a sort of fictional and collective fulcrum for the personal biographies of the victims of the dam’s edification who are also riskers of the dam’s demolition, of being unable to integrate this their difference to this larger-than-life event, and of being swept away by the waves of a fatally distanced time.

Passage: The Eye of Still Life

For the present shape of this world is passing away.

—Paul, Letter to Corinthians

Still Life takes us into the ruins of a city that is disappearing, using the workers’ demolition labour as a common thread. “The first time I saw the destruction of those buildings,” says Liu, “I really felt it that I had met the end of something, but also the beginning of a new era.” Several sequences in the film show different aspects of tension between past, present, and future. At one point, for example, we can see a group of archaeologists working to salvage vestiges of the past. Relation to the past is also very important in the encounter between San Ming and Mark, the young impresario of the famous actor Chee Yun-Fat who dies later in the film. San Ming tells Mark he wants to connect with the woman he had bought 16 years ago. “You can’t forget what we are,” he says—contrasting with the ways of young Mark, who wants to be as modern he can be, and claims to live in a “world of adventures.” At one point, the two exchange their cellphone numbers, and San Ming’s ringtone plays “Long long the brave people.” When he hears it, Mark exclaims: “Fuck! Brave people? None of this stuff!”

In Jia’s words, “the policy of reform and openness taught us that life would not be as it used to be.”** 23 24 25 As a Chinese, I feel I do not understand very well what happened in China during all these years. The evolution went so fast… The male and female characters do not understand either. We are in the presence of a UFO. The policy of reform and openness taught us that we would be reborn. But, up to today, the better life is a UFO. It has not materialized… I think that Deng Xiaoping’s reform is over and what we see today is not China in mutation, but China after the mutation. It’s like the dam. It is finished. And we can even visit it. We have reached a certain level of material life, but a question remains to be resolved how to manage all of this?

Liu Yuanchen: You can hardly not be more change.

Liu Yuanchen: We are already at the end of what such reform could bring.

AG: On the question of where China is going, you cannot answer either?

Liu Yuanchen: I make films that simply show what happens. Economy is good or bad health, open or conservative periods, every- thing is mixed up. It is difficult to synthesize. Before, I thought that China’s problem was that the economic development was too quick. Today, I think that quickness is not a problem. It’s problem is cultural and political openness, which are too slow, and the difference between these two rhythms, an accelerated economic development and a slow political change.”** 26

What is particularly remarkable in this passage is that Jia systematically breaks from the story of economic transition and its promise of infinite progress. He highlights the growing gap between economic-numerical progress and the political openness in his country, a discrepancy that is certainly not specific to China, and that Bernard Stiegler defines as a “process of detemporalization,” meaning that “society is diagnosed from the technical system, and this disadaption is already, in itself, a loss of time.”** 27 In his words, this would translate in the following statement: “we have not yet finished digging recent history.” But to trigger a “digestion of

Conclusion: China in the Time After the Mutation

The moment is the Caidi Yoke beneath which fate must bow to the Body. To turn the threatening future into a fulfilled “now,” the only desirable telepathic miracle is a work of bewildering presence of mind.

—Walter Benjamin, One-way Street

In an interview conducted by Agnès Gaudu, Jia directly questions his relationship to Contemporary China and the incredible mutation that his country has experienced since the start of the economic reforms:

Jia Zhangke, a Chinese, I feel I do not understand very well what happened in China during all those years. The evolution went so fast… The male and female characters do not understand either. We are in the presence of a UFO. The policy of reform and openness taught us that we would be reborn. But, up to today, the better life is a UFO. It has not materialized… I think that Deng Xiaoping’s reform is over and what we see today is not China in mutation, but China after the mutation. It’s like the dam. It is finished. And we can even visit it. We have reached a certain level of material life, but a question remains to be resolved how to manage all of this?

Jia Zhangke: There will be no more change.

Jia Zhangke: We are already at the end of what such reform could bring.

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Jia Zhangke: I make films that simply show what happens. Economy is good or bad health, open or conservative periods, every- thing is mixed up. It is difficult to synthesize. Before, I thought that China’s problem was that the economic development was too quick. Today, I think that quickness is not a problem. It’s problem is cultural and political openness, which are too slow, and the difference between these two rhythms, an accelerated economic development and a slow political change.”** 26
history,” we must necessarily find its term, and it would be vain to look for it on a strictly chronological plane.

If the idea of human progress doesn’t hold,” says Sigfried Kracauer, “it’s primarily because it is inseparable from the idea of chronological time as a matrix of a process that carries meaning.” Still Life’s TPO symbolizes, in its own way, the limits of the progressive imagination. It is well known that TPO appears only in the empty sky of progress, when the part’s constellations have lost all readability. They embody the arrow of homogenous time, charging the sensibility with the spectral incursion of the utopia of progress. But paradoxically, their appearance bends the line of chronologically readable. They embody the arrow of homogeneous time, charging the sensibility with the spectral incursion of the utopia of progress. But paradoxically, their appearance bends the line of chronological time. For an instant, the course of time is suspended. We could say that the TPO appears only at the point where the progressive imagination asymptotically approaches its own limit. By saying that we are now facing China “after the mutation,” Jia resists the “informed progressive tendency” to think the present through a requirement for political-cultural completion. Still Life points itself exactly at this gap between the homogenous, empty time of progress and the vital need to stop the present, or rather, give way to a concept of present “which is not a transition, but rather one in which time originates and has come to a standstill.” In his study of masonic temporality, Agamben states: “Our representation of chronological time, as the time in which we are, separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves—spectators who look at the time that flows without any time left, continuously missing themselves.” To rise to the event that is happening to us, we must manage to channel the loss of time, we must literally give ourselves time. To give oneself time, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, is to bring about encounters that will help solve the problems of the world. To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, to reject the “informed progressive tendency” to think the present through a requirement for political-cultural completion.

In my reading of Jia Zhangke’s Still Life, I discussed what Deborah calls the “systematic organization of a breakdown in the faculty of encounter.” In Still Life, by contrast, there is a celebration of the qualified time of the encounter. Significantly, the film is divided into four parts: tobacco, alcohol, tea, and sweets. At the time of planned economy, these luxuries were distributed amongst the population in an egalitarian way. In Still Life’s economy, “they are,” Jia says, “the sign of the persistence of social relations in China.” The interpolation of these intertitles during the film effectively emmestively approximates its own limit.

*Note*

1. Jia Zhangke’s Film


4. Further analyses of the concept of interpolation can also be found in the work of Michel Foucault, “La potenza del pensiero,” in La potenza del pensiero (Vicenza: Boringhieri, 2001), 375. It is also in this article that Foucault first uses the term “TPO.”

5. Agamben, La potenza del pensiero, 375. See Pierre Perreault, “Le discours textuel et transculturel,” in Écriture interculturelle (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), 138. François Julien also offers some elements of an emblematic gesture,” see the chapter “What is a political economy?,” in Cos’è il contemporaneo? (Rome: Nottetempo, 2008), Agamben suggest that the contemporary divides and interpolates time. It is in this tradition that we position our use of the concept of interpolation.

6. For more details on the “paradigmatic gesture,” see the chapter “What is a political economy?,” in Cos’è il contemporaneo? (Rome: Nottetempo, 2008).

7. The concept of interpolation coincides with imagination.

8. “The circumstances surrounding the death remain mysterious. We know only the name: Zheng Wuchang, author of Still Life.”

9. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”

10. For more details on the “paradigmatic gesture,” see the chapter “What is a political economy?” in Giorgio Agamben, Cos’è il contemporaneo? (Torino: Boringhieri, 2008).

11. “In my reading of Jia Zhangke’s Still Life, by contrast, there is a celebration of the qualified time of the encounter.”

12. It is also in this article that Foucault first uses the term “TPO.”


17. The expression “to resist oneself” is a paradigm?” in Giorgio Agamben, “L’arte e la politica in Jia Zhangke’s Film,” China Film 27 (2009): 112–18.

18. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”

19. For an enlightening analysis of this idea, see Stéphane Mas, “Jia Zhangke, peintre et cinéaste: les modes de présence des fantômes, des esprits et des abîmes du temps,” in Jia Zhangke: peintre et cinéaste, documentaire (Brussels Free University. He has recently received a grant from the Research Foundation—Flanders, and is currently working on the book Jia Zhangke: peintre et cinéaste.)

20. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”

21. The expression “to resist oneself” is a paradigm?” in Giorgio Agamben, “L’arte e la politica in Jia Zhangke’s Film,” China Film 27 (2009): 112–18.

22. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”

23. Quoted by Agamben in Andrei, 15.


26. In my reading of Jia Zhangke’s Still Life, I discussed what Deborah calls the “systematic organization of a breakdown in the faculty of encounter.” In Still Life, by contrast, there is a celebration of the qualified time of the encounter. Significantly, the film is divided into four parts: tobacco, alcohol, tea, and sweets. At the time of planned economy, these luxuries were distributed amongst the population in an egalitarian way. In Still Life’s economy, “they are,” Jia says, “the sign of the persistence of social relations in China.” The interpolation of these intertitles during the film effectively emmestively approximates its own limit.


28. Stéphane Mas, “Jia Zhangke, peintre et cinéaste: les modes de présence des fantômes, des esprits et des abîmes du temps,” in Jia Zhangke: peintre et cinéaste, documentaire (Brussels Free University. He has recently received a grant from the Research Foundation—Flanders, and is currently working on the book Jia Zhangke: peintre et cinéaste.)

29. Further analyses of the concept of interpolation can also be found in the work of Michel Foucault, “La potenza del pensiero,” in La potenza del pensiero (Vicenza: Boringhieri, 2001), 375. It is also in this article that Foucault first uses the term “TPO.”

30. For more details on the “paradigmatic gesture,” see the chapter “What is a political economy?” in Giorgio Agamben, Cos’è il contemporaneo? (Torino: Boringhieri, 2008).


33. The expression “to resist oneself” is a paradigm?” in Giorgio Agamben, “L’arte e la politica in Jia Zhangke’s Film,” China Film 27 (2009): 112–18.

34. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”


36. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”

37. The expression “to resist oneself” is a paradigm?” in Giorgio Agamben, “L’arte e la politica in Jia Zhangke’s Film,” China Film 27 (2009): 112–18.

38. “To give oneself time is, for San Ming or Zhao Tao, the best way of saying the will to a time that does not exist apart from a will to say [vouloir dire].”

39. Literature cited at the end of this article is provided online at the journal’s website.