Wang Bing's West of the Tracks — salvaging the rubble of utopia

by Jie Li

In 1999, Wang Bing, a young film graduate in his early thirties, began wandering alone through the Teixi District of Shenyang, China's oldest and largest industrial base, with a small rented DV camera. A palimpsest of not only Chinese but also world history, the first factories of this place were built in 1934 by the Japanese to produce war goods for the Imperial Army and nationalized after World War II. After the Communist takeover in 1949, the Soviet Union supplied additional machinery, dismantled from Germany after the war. As late as the early 1980s, the factories here employed about one million workers, themselves migrants swung by historical upheavals from wars to the Cultural Revolution. As China made the transition from a planned to a market economy, however, these state-owned factories operated at a loss and closed down one by one, while the workers lost their jobs, or "iron rice bowls," along with their homes and social networks.

By 2001, Wang Bing had shot about 300 hours of footage about the remnant factories and the people who worked and lived in the area, which he spent another two years editing into a nine-hour trilogy, *Tiexi Qu* or *West of the Tracks*, with the support of local and foreign friends, ranging from other Chinese avant-garde artists to assistance from the Rotterdam Film Festival. From 2003 to 2005, various versions and parts of this film trilogy circulated at international film festivals to high critical acclaim, especially in France, where it was released in the cinemas and, in 2006, on DVD. Dominique Païni, director of the "Cinéma-Paroles-Spectacles" of Centre Pompidou, introduced the DVD-release, calling *West of the Tracks* "the most surprising thing" he has seen in the cinematic world "after Godard and David Lynch."[1][open endnotes in new window] Patient without redundancy, intimate without sentimentality, this film preserves the integrity of its disintegrating subject's time and space, has stunning cinematography, and is edited into a narrative that maintains a humility of perspective rare in documentary treatments of the working class.

This article seeks to undertake an extensive study of the film's style, inseparable from its subject matter, and questions how this documentary might constitute an "event" in the development of Chinese or even world

cinema. I shall proceed with my analysis in the order of Wang Bing's own arrangement of the trilogy, poetically translated into *Rust*, *Remnants*, and *Rails*. These titles indicate not only their subjects—factory, neighborhood, and the network of tracks linking them to each other and to the world beyond—but also Wang Bing's tactics as a filmmaker. The order of the trilogy also reflects a certain progression from the fixity of a place to the increasingly vagabond human beings who are at once trapped in and driven from it. The overall narrative gradually shifts its emphasis from the area's general and monumental decline to the individuals trying to survive in this place's crevices.

Penetrating a ruin: three establishing units

The opening, a static, high-angle shot of Tiexi District shows a complex of factories covered by thick layers of snow. Below lies an immense ruin, amidst which the high chimneys, once virtual icons of the Northeast, stand like obelisks to China's industrial revolution. The distant but diegetic lull of machinery in the initial shot continues over a sound bridge throughout the scrolling text that informs the audience about the area's history.

The four shots are taken from a camera mounted on the front of a small goods train as it traverses and penetrates Tiexi District's factories and residential areas. Snowflakes stick to the lens as if to one's eyelashes, and this snow sticking, along with the occasional small jerk given to the camera by the old railroad tracks, serves to make the cinematography tangible, vulnerable, almost human. Thus the camera does not just observe or record; it stares, it braves, it searches, and it salvages. Mediated by the camera, the train passes through endless, giant complexes of steel and iron, structures of pure function and mysterious anonymity, and through mushroom clusters of dwarf-like shacks, just as functional and anonymous. Hardly ever displaying the inexorable velocity that characterizes early filmic representations of train travel and the locomotive, the train here insinuates itself into the languid traffic of the city. This section has four separate takes, all with the same framing, so that montage here does not seem to have any function except, as André Bazin puts it, "the negative one of inevitable elimination where reality super-abounds."[2]

Contrast this with the opening of, say, Walter Ruttman's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1928), where montage serves to enhance the

train's kinetic energy as it travels in an unidirectional passage from countryside to cityscape, also marked by factory complexes. If Ruttman's train signals the advent of modernity, the making of history, then Wang Bing's train is a retrogressive "rite of passage into history," bringing us into a "world already destroyed."[3] If Ruttman's train stops when it has arrived at its destination, then Wang Bing's train stops because it has run out of energy and has no choice but to stagnate, left in its place of origin.

The third establishing shot, a copper smelting site at Shenyang Foundry, is a handheld tracking shot along a platform with railings. The shot heads toward a whirlwind of rising white smoke that assailing and eventually envelops the lens in its foggy mystery. François Bégaudeau, whose review in *Cahiers du Cinéma* is entitled "Après le siècle, en marche (After the century, on foot)," calls Wang Bing's walking cinematography an "invisible line that traverses a shot," which brings a place "into existence."[4] Wang Bing does not, however, walk on a flat surface, but a *layered* ruin.[5] In this sense, as a filmmaker-archeologist, he's trying to salvage the scattered rubble of a socialist utopia that never was. The fragments of the past he'll pick up along the way remain unsorted into chronology, narrative, or any other imposed hierarchy of meaning.

In cinematic terms, it is perhaps useful to recall Bazin's metaphor of the stone bridge of narrative arcs vs. the "big rocks that lie scattered in a ford," whose "reality as rocks" are preserved even if one uses them to cross the river and arrive at meaning.[6] More than rocks in a ford, Wang Bing's shots seem like bits of rubble in the ruin itself, not yet pieces in a museum nor incorporated into a new structure of meaning. Rather, the images invite us to explore and excavate along with the filmmaker, whose presence, though never directly on camera, is always unmistakably felt. In this work the camera does not just objectively record what stands in front of its lens, but it also traces the imprint of its own experience, synonymous with that of the director not just in optical or auditory terms, but also in the sense that it goes through the same trials by cold, heat, and dust as do the director and the subjects he films.

Enunciation and tact in Wang Bing's cinematography

Keeping up a solidarity with its subjects, Wang Bing's narrative never flaunts cinematic editing's own superhuman technological resources. He eschews extra-diegetic music, commentary, or any additional source of illumination other than what there is on location, be it flat, overhead,

fluorescent lighting or a flickering candle. He does not spare us the monotone dullness or clamor of machine sounds, nor their blinding glare or darkness. He takes his camera angles largely from the real or potential perspectives of his subjects, except in the case of interviews, where he often shoots from a low angle, perhaps out of humility and respect. His small DV camera is often placed on the table along with thermos and rags so that the camera seems a banal object stripped of its powers of surveillance. Or if Wang Bing holds it, then it is perceived as just another familiar pair of eyes, neither confronted nor averted by the other eyes in the room. Wang Bing's subjects are at such ease that they are even ready to walk naked in the presence of his camera.

The shots thus have neither a performance's exhibitionist staginess, nor a hidden camera's voyeurism. Nor is the camera fixed to one place only to record everything that comes into the frame, as one might have it in direct cinema. As Bégaudeau describes this kind of cinematography:

"A factory closed down? What to do? Above all not the machine guns of fixed shots, which, redoubling the immobility of the place, would kill it a second time and set a distance, even if it is that of art."[7]

Wang Bing operates with what André Bazin calls cinematic "tact," where "the camera must be equally as ready to move as to remain still."[8] Instead of narratively concentrating on a few characters, Wang Bing allows his camera to be "distracted" if a more striking subject walks into his frame, perhaps even following the latter over a long walk through some slippery or rough passage into a different space. As a result, this kind of cinematography allows the workers' collective movements, so intimate with these inhuman structures of metal and concrete, to sketch out their contours in the workers' habitual arabesques.

Allegorical images of machines and bodies

Rust's true protagonist, in the director's own words, is the factory itself, as industrial reality and social ideal:

"the workers appear as mere appendages of this vast complex."[9]

At this point, I wish to explore the interpenetration of the factory and its workers, of machines and bodies. Their daily rhythms and life cycles intermingle but we also see the final severing of their destinies.

The machines and factory workers share a common history of migration or refugee status (in the 1930s and 1940s), nationalization and collectivization (1950s and 1960s, when industry and workers became China's national symbols), and then reform and opening of a new economic era (in the 1980s, when the products of machine processes and their accompanying body gestures became obsolete). On an everyday level, in the early days the machines' tireless rhythm necessitated work shifts that subverted natural rhythms of work and rest. The seasons also have little impact on the working environment, since most factory workshops must be kept at a constant temperature. We see the workers either in uniform or nude, both of which have the same effect of negating any difference among them—or, as Lu puts describes the visual descriptions of the workers in the film:

"the human form is reduced to an object of indifference."[10]

Beyond shared rhythms and physical environment, these bodies are intimate with the machines in another sense. As one of the copper workers confides to Wang Bing's camera, the facemasks they wear could not stop them from inhaling one hundred times the national standard of lead in the air, which led to dire medical consequences such as infertility. In the second half of *Rust*, workers of the bankrupt Lead Foundry receive their last injections to eliminate lead in their blood, a one-month treatment formerly conducted four times a year. That is, they had rendered up their health to the factory, which had promised to care for them in sickness and old age, but that's now a social contract sealed by the toxin in their blood. For this reason, the sequence has a sad valedictory overtone, a final severing of machine from body, since the hospital becomes the final station of their journey to a common destiny.

In Wang Bing's portrayal, machines and bodies bear an altogether different kind of relation to visual representations of factories and workers from China's early days of industrialization. The earlier aesthetic, derived primarily from Soviet Socialist Realism, depicted workers as paragons of strength, placed in exaggerated heroic postures. In filmic terms, this superhuman strength was presented primarily through montage juxtaposing and conflating the workers with the machines, empowering the former by associating it with the latter and anthropomorphizing the latter with the former. In *Rust*, however, the workers appear dwarfed and emasculated by the giant machines they supposedly control. More slaves than masters, they have to use all their

life force and energy to lift a small fraction of a machine's effortless load, as in sequences where they must transport raw material or finished products at a missing junction of the mechanical assembly line. To keep company with machines also means being constantly poisoned, weakened, and even chemically castrated.

Having found his monumental subject in a place of decline, Wang Bing's cinematic vision is allegorical rather than symbolic.[11] The workers appearing before his camera by no means resemble the iconic model-worker image one could find in many Chinese public statues or even once on the nation's currency as symbols of the working class. Rather, as they scramble together the material remnants of their factory and the narrative scraps of their promised utopia, they are confronted with "objects radiant with a significance not their own but reflected off the face of death."[12] Thus, in the second half of *Rust*, Wang Bing's camera returns to haunt the closed factories to memorialize them before they are dismantled piece by piece for scrap to recycle into new private enterprises. He traces out the same paths where he filmed before, now without the workers. He finds there just one fellow scavenger who digs through the piles of garbage left in the lockers or on floors and who picks up, among other useless things, an workers' ID, old accounting sheets, and some faded slogans. For Wang Bing, such found objects could be read as allegories for the workers' lost identities and creeds.

In one exceptional manipulation of cinematic illusion in a film that rarely uses even extra-diegetic sound or montage, the filmmaker walks through a labyrinth of passages in the basement of one factory, where he finds the old workers' bathing room, seen with its big collective bathtub still full of steaming water. Here, the film fades to black, and then the image slowly fades into one of two men bathing in the same tub, their figures indistinct and dreamlike in the mist. One sits cross-legged and is scrubbing his feet briskly. The other is standing in the tub and washing his face with a towel. As if to confirm that this was indeed an illusion, a ghost image, the film then cuts back to the empty bathtub, now cold and no longer steaming.

Figure of the recycler

Part II, *Remnants,* opens with a public raffle in a residential neighborhood of Tiexi District, where the master of ceremony's appeal to the crowd is a tongue-in-cheek collage of stock propaganda phrases from

the Mao era and folk witticisms from the Deng era,

“an approximation of the call to collective Communist discipline and of the liberal incitation to consumerism.”[13]

Filming the stage in close-up with a telescopic lens and without a tripod, Wang Bing, moreover, seems to be shuddering from the cold. Yet the shaky view, complemented by the low angle, also recreates the perspective of the masses watching the show. After the crowd disperses, we see a man picking up discarded raffle tickets from the ground as the wind blows most of them away; they seem like scraps of hope that have nothing to cling to. A scavenger of fortune, the man checks each ticket, just in case one winner had been thrown away by accident, but in vain.

Such scavenging continues into the next day. The stage has been dismantled and the raffle site turned into an overnight ruin covered by a new layer of snow. A lone man hammers the field until he finds a small repository of scrap iron. Then a scrap iron collector passes by, pays the man, and loads the unwieldy sticks onto his skeletal tricycle. Another recycler passes through the lens, dragging jagged planks of wood behind him, taking advantage of the path made by the iron collector’s tricycle.

These opening images establish the figure of the recycler, who is already at work by the end of *Rust* but only gains prominence in this part of the trilogy. Recycling is, after all, the final means of eking out a living for the unemployed. Everyone, regardless of age, could find and sell reusable waste for a small profit. Their labor puts into use not just waste paper, scrap iron, cans and bottles, wood and bricks and other material waste, but also their own physical and mental energy, which would also otherwise go to waste. Yet their labor is also destructive in that they collaborate with the very same forces of demolition that aim to dismantle their factories and raze their homes to the ground. In the same way that the workers participate in the laying to ruins of the factory, the inhabitants of the about-to-be demolished neighborhood are the first ones to destroy their own homes, taking or selling their fragments to get the most out of this helpless situation. They haggle over every cent, even though (or because) they know that with the onslaught of the new capitalist era and changes in the state, no bargain is possible.

Facing demolition: from tact to tactics

In a rare use of extra-diegetic sound, Wang Bing superimposes an

announcement about the neighborhood's imminent "resettlement" over images shot on the street of residents reading the announcement on electricity poles. Using extra-diegetic sound creates an effect of a panoptic authority's omnipresence. It seems that a state force is about to seize possession of this neighborhood, so that its inhabitants discover, all of a sudden, that they are no longer standing in their own territory.

As their homes are suddenly transformed into "the space of the other," the inhabitants have no choice but respond to state and real estate developers' "strategies" with guerrilla "tactics."[14] With decades of experience telling them that there is little use resisting any state-sponsored action, they break down into small groups to discuss the exact measurements of their homes in order to get the most reimbursement available through laws made without their input. The residents make calculations often directed not just at the state but also at their neighbors or even their own family members. Those with means move out and take the best offers, while those without means try to exclude elder generations or orphans from receiving resettlement claims, all the while negotiating with the authorities. Those who remain understand that every day they stick it out entails a financial loss for the developer, so that staying on becomes their way of manipulating the latter's impatience, which can then either turn into grudging generosity or reckless cruelty.

When the state and developers impose more punitive strategies by cutting off the neighborhood's water and electricity, the residents simply revert to earlier, more primitive ways of existence, not yet entirely forgotten because living simply is just one generation away. As Bégaudeau writes of this section,

"Every change signifies for the working class, once locomotive, the downgrading to a world before steam, the return to an existence of odds and ends, to dirt roads, which the progress had pretended to have covered."[15]

Without electricity, the women try to prepare meals before night falls or rely on candles and gas lamps, which illuminate not only their houses in the dark winter night but also their images as recorded by Wang Bing's camera. Some of them also steal electricity. After all, having been masters of this territory for so many years, they know exactly how to tap

secretly into its network of wires and pipes.

As a one-man documentarist who cannot be in several places at once, Wang Bing chooses to stay with the last residents as the neighborhood empties itself out—staying, as the title*Remnants* tells us, with these remnants, who are not just scrap metal but also "leftovers of human life."[16] Such a "cinematic *being-with*," in Wang Bing's case, is also a "*walking-with*." The trajectories of footsteps through the vast and dense place that is his subject are an essential part of his cinematic tact or tactic. Walking with the inhabitants through their dispossessed neighborhood, Wang Bing adopts their tactic of moving spontaneously, as opposed to a common filmmaking strategy of planned shots with careful framing and smooth movements. For the most part, he follows people rather than anticipate them walking into the frame. And his persistence as a cinematographer eliminates any need to make up metaphors with words or montage. When we see a man selling his books as waste paper and then haggling over a few dimes, we can infer the total inversion of values that has taken place with the changing times. Toward the end of *Remnants*, one of the last families left in the neighborhood gather together all its members to burn "hell money" to pacify the soul of their dead mother so that she might help them get a decent apartment. In the wake of failed promises of a socialist utopia and in a new vacuum of faith, the people revert to time-honored ancestral veneration and tokens of respect.

Apart from spontaneous movements and the recycling of found objects/ allegories, Wang Bing may identify with the tactics of the Tiexi residents in one more way. As an underground filmmaker, severed from his earlier association with an official system of media production, he must also scramble to gather all his meager resources to make a film at all. In making this film he never had enough money to buy his own camera, and he did his editing initially at night in local television facilities, to which a friend helped him gain unofficial access.[17]His own precarious status as an underground filmmaker may well account for his sympathy for the people of Tiexi District and, in turn, their trust in him not to abuse their images and stories.

Rails and the archetype of the survivor

Rails, the third and shortest part of the trilogy, follows a small team of railway men responsible for transporting raw materials and finished

products in and out of Tiexi district. Their locomotive is named “East is Red,” after a hosanna to Chairman Mao, a name pregnant with the empty grandeur of history. As factories close down, the men also have little to do and are often filmed sleeping in the driver’s cabin as the locomotive drones through the increasingly deserted landscape across the changing seasons. Tracking shots from the trains, on a much grander scale than those filmed walking, serve to map and multiply the ruins portrayed in detail in the first two parts. If we might call the earlier two parts a “cinema of excavation,” here is a “cinema of accumulation” in a more horizontal sense. The tracking shot from a train is the only way to capture the monumental skeletons of old factories, their windows of broken glass like empty eye sockets, and their last recyclable remnants being carried away by human scavengers.

At the same time that *Rails* multiplies the spaces explored in the first two parts, it also contains a story that synthesizes their various loose strands of human destinies into two individual archetypes of the Chinese survivor. Old Du, who is not an employee of the railroad, lives with his 17-year-old son Du Yang in a makeshift shack of sheet iron built adjacent to a factory storehouse. They make a living by doing menial chores for the railwaymen who have come to tolerate them and who take Old Du on trains from factory to factory so that he might gather (or steal) coal for sale. One day, Old Du is arrested, and Wang Bing’s camera stays with Du Yang through the youth's anxious waiting period. During that time, the lad receives an ultimatum about their imminent eviction from the shack, and then his father is released a week later. Wang films their reunion dinner when Du Yang finally breaks down from the pent-up pressure of the past few days. This scene, one of the film’s most heartrending, ends with Old Du carrying his son home on his back.

In an interview with *Cahiers du Cinema*, Wang Bing is asked if this final focus on Old Du and his son may be a gesture towards narrative. His reply:

"No, my concern was to show a personality representative of the society, more human. He is representative of the people who work at the factory, which are what I wanted to show. Those are 'typical Chinese,' of the low [social] level, but who carry themselves with dignity. He can survive in whatever situation."[18]

Old Du seems more an archetype or “everyman” than a character or

personality, and his life a parable for the common destiny of the millions of workers to whom *West of the Tracks* is dedicated. He is a commoner, not distinguished from the masses by any unique ability or extraordinary experience, but epitomizes their ability to survive and absorb suffering. In addition, his theft of coal, indispensable household fuel in the severe winters of Northeast China, is a modern Promethean act of stealing light and warmth from an authoritarian and corrupt state where big thieves never get caught. Old Du came to clashes with the system before, in the late stages of the Cultural Revolution, when his father had tried to teach him an "honest trade" of pot-stewing meat. Since private business, however small, was considered illegal, all their tools were confiscated and his father thrown into a makeshift jail. The story seems to repeat itself in the next generation with Old Du and Du Yang. The lad, though much more delicate than his father, nevertheless understands the fundamental necessity of his father's theft. On the night after his father's arrest, he sits in a dark room with a single candle. For a good while we see nothing but the tiny light of his cigarette swinging up and down through the darkness, a meager but unmistakable light testifying to his existence and that of the filmmaker-witness. The next morning, when Du Yang waits for his father to come home from jail, he comes into the shack from the desolate landscape outside and fills a stove with coal, rhyming with an earlier gesture of his father's. In the film, this practical act of keeping warm is at the same time an allegorical act of keeping the fire going, of staying alive.

In filming Du Yang, Wang Bing incorporates composed close-ups, something quite sparingly used in other parts of the film. The images of the lad are among the film's very few emotionly charged facial close-ups. Perhaps it is because this young face, expressive despite its apparent numbness, is cast out of the same mold as those of his father and grandfather and all the generations before them, thus functioning as a palimpsest of their suffering and resilience. The lad also serves as the guardian of his family history, as he digs out from a flour sack, between nervous puffs of his cigarette, a stack of family photographs wrapped inside layers of plastic. The photographs have the quality of relic, since we know that his mother had abandoned him and his brother at a young age. The electronic clock on the wall now strikes, its flat and cheerful melody here an eerie accompaniment to the large tears welling up in the boy's eyes. This scene, along with the youth's later breakdown, where he keeps blowing his nose and flinging about on the dirty floor, lets us

witness the full extent of his adolescent despair—absurd, grotesque but genuine, unaestheticized by music or soft lighting. Seeing his breakdown leaves us with sharp embarrassment and pain without catharsis.

Coda

While introducing the DVD of *West of the Tracks*, Dominique Païni expressed his belief that "this is not an isolated work," though "it is the first of its kind," referring to the film's special plasticity as a realization of Bazin's "luminous mold of reality."[19] In the context of turn-of-the-century China, this film has yet another dimension of significance: it has captured and preserved on video a vanishing (and by now, vanished) world. There are similar cinematic endeavors, notably around the urban ruins of Beijing and the areas to be flooded by the building of the Three Gorges Dam.[20] These films come into existence as their subjects—places, communities, and ways of life—disappear, so that the films already have the quality of relic as they are first released. To watch nine hours without narrative is trying for any audience, but as Païni observes, the work conveys the sense that things break down more rapidly than Wang Bing can film, that 24 frames per second are not quick enough to compete with the rust that encloses the world we see. The filmmakers' impossible effort at preservation is thus reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History:

"His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress."[21]

So all they could do is to film the mountainous strata of ruins with DV cameras.

Notes

1. Païni, Dominique. "La traversée de la Chine." Interview in *A L'Ouest des Rails* by Wang Bing. 2003. DVD, Mk2, 2006.

2. Bazin, André. *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984. p. 27.

3. Lu Xinyu. "Ruins of the Future: Class and History in Wang Bing's Tiexi District." *New Left Review* 31 (2005): 125-136. p. 125.

4. Bégaudeau, François. "Après le siècle, en marche." *Cahiers du Cinéma* (June 2004): pp. 32-35.

5. One is reminded here of Gilles Deleuze's concept of "stratigraphy" or "the deserted layers of our time which bury our own phantoms" in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. p. 244.

6. Bazin. *What is Cinema?* Vol. 2. Trans. Hugh Gray. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. p. 99.

7. Bégaudeau, p. 34.

8. Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 2. p. 33.

9. Lu, p. 130.

10. Lu, p. 130.

11. According to Walter Benjamin, the symbolic presentation of a natural object is an attempt to render present the absolute form or Platonic idea in which the individual object participates, implying "the unity of the material and the transcendental object." The allegory, on the other hand,

"[divests] the phenomena of their false unity… Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape….Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things."

The Origin of German Tragic Drama. Trans. John Osborne. New York: Verso, 1998. p. 33, 166, 176.

12. Cowan, Bainard. "Walter Benjamin's *Theory of Allegory*." *New German Critique* 22 (Winter, 1981), pp. 109-122. p. 117.

13. Bégaudeau, p. 33.

14. Michel de Certeau defines “tactic” as

“a calculus which cannot count on a proper, nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality... The space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.”

"'Making Do': Uses and Tactics." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven F. Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. pp. 36-7.

15. Bégaudeau, p. 33.

16. Reynaud, Bérénice. “Dancing with Myself, Drifting with My Camera: the Emotional Vagabonds of China’s New Documentary.” *Senses of Cinema*. 28 (2003).

17. Zhang Xianmin. “Kanbujian de Yingxiang” (Invisible Images) in *Shu Cheng*. April, 2004.

18. Wang Bing. “Plutôt agréable,” an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, June 2004. pp. 34-35.

19. Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 2, p. 98.

20. The most famous example is Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life*, which had won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 2006, and Yan Yu and Li Yifan’s documentary *Before the Flood*, which won the Robert Flaherty Prize at Yamagata International Film Festival in 2005.

21. Walter Benjamin. “Thesis on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zorn. London: Pimlico, 1999. p. 253.