

KADIST

Zhou Tao, *The Training* 2 February - 14 April 2013

Zhou Tao: Time on Earth

by Jean-Michel Frodon.

One of Zhou Tao's works is titled *Time in New York*. We see him moving about in his small apartment, with a large ball of string fixed to his belt, and the string thus giving material form to each one of his movements in his home. Little by little a network is woven, increasingly serried and complex, within which he evolves with a peaceful and careful elegance. The system of *Time in New York* might act as software for all the works filmed by Zhou Tao, providing not the key, but a formalization of the active principle. In fact, each one of his works, though in a less explicit manner, tends to apply the effects of a materialization of time. In an anonymous street in a Chinese city, in the middle of a luxuriant forest, along a watercourse, on the boundary between urban zone and wild nature, and on the confines of activities which seem to stem from farm work and craftwork, sport, and games, a string of sequences is in each instance developed, each one focused on a theme, which is often a hypothesis of a narrative in the offing (which will not come to pass) and invariably a particular sensory experience.

One of the most significant and meaningful aspects of what Zhou Tao does relates with the high visual quality of his images. Without any artificial aesthetic effects, the elegance of the frames and the way of accompanying the movements, and the intensity of the presence of human beings, plants, lights and different forms of matter turn out to be a resource involving an intelligence of the world and its shaping by the use of video. With him, beauty is a work tool for casting different eyes on situations, some of which lay claim to their artifice (short dance movements on a sidewalk, electrical apparatus diverted from its purpose in the public thoroughfare, occupation of a bunker invaded and abandoned by the tide), some of which seem captured by chance during a walk or a meeting.

How are we to define this oeuvre? The first formula which springs to mind is that of farcical documentary. Not necessarily comical (even if this is often what it is), but farcical. In the sense of the spirit of logical rupture and physical deregulation which presided over this particular moment in the history of film, synchronous with when the United States toppled over into a modernity with which what China is experiencing in the early 21st century bears some resemblance. And documentary, because the dimension of recording reality, a recording that is composed and given form, is central in this praxis. But the more you look at his work, the more it appears that the reference to cinema is probably not the most appropriate one—even when the materialization of time seems almost to be a definition of cinema. Zhou Tao's works actually function on the basis of another, much more unusual principle. The eye which chooses and gives form

to the images is less a filmmaker's eye than a photographer's. But a very special photographer, a photographer who isolates, like a "decisive moment" to use Cartier-Bresson's words, not a 250th of a second, but a minute or two. Zhou Tao's art is thus like an answer, or rather, let us say, a counterpoint to that of Robert Frank, to the crisis of the special moment implemented, precisely under the influence of film, by a whole school of photographers—who did not realize they were becoming Bergsonian. It is possible to see *Mutual Exercise*, *Power Here*, *The Collector*, *South Stone* and *After Reality* as the practical outcome of a photographic eye, of a vision of singularity rich in meaning and of the mystery of an instant, but an instant in three dimensions (two spatial and one temporal), and not merely the two spatial dimensions which define photography. This is very different from what film does, like, incidentally, it is also different from almost all the varieties of practices which we encompass under the term video art, and which are not based on the concept of instant.

As far as the photos also presented by Zhou Tao are concerned, they have the strangeness of appearing like a clue, a fragmentary trace of what he develops in his videos—it being understood that the said photos can no longer be looked at in the same way, once one has looked at his moving images. This very specific way of going about things turns out to be enhanced by a novel possibility of going to see the world. Not only looking at it by sampling moments that are already there, available elements which it would "suffice" to be able to isolate, nor, needless to say, using it in order to incorporate therein one's own artefacts, but building a path, or, better still, an approach. In the filmed work of Zhou Tao, there is a dynamic, which runs on the blend of artifice and capacity to use already existing currents (movements of nature, people and machines, colour relations, light changes...). Equidistant from inspired observation and creative gesture, this posture turns into a dynamic when it encounters a thoroughly real world, but one which it becomes possible to see differently.

This movement towards the world is also—and this is what creates the melancholy that emanates from his images—a feeling of a movement which, if it does "go towards", also agrees to traverse, and leave it behind. At this point, we must return to the ball of string in *Time in New York*. The materialization of what has been created, what has been made, what has been experienced, engenders an ever denser tangle. Since it does not erase itself as it goes along, but becomes a confusion, and in the end a prison, a spider's web in which the very thing that has given rise to it through its movements, which are its very life, is suffocated and paralysed. On the other hand, the other videos retain the limited trace, a circumscribed one, destined to the disappearance of a gesture, of a journey, of an encounter, of a shared moment, of a situation in the broadest sense. The brevity and, above all, the finiteness of the time-frames "photographed" by Zhou Tao are thus as decisive as what comes to pass in the duration of a shot, and what is suggested as a possible imaginary association, as an environment, and fictional development.

Translated by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods.

Jean-Michel Frodon is Associate Professor at the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) in Paris and Visiting Professor at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) as well as a journalist and a film critic. He is the author of numerous books; he has worked at *Le Monde* and has been the editor in chief of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Jean-Michel Frodon currently writes for *slate.fr*, he is also Editor-in-Chief of the collaborative website *artsciencefactory.fr*.

Zhou Tao was born in 1976 in Changsha (China) and lives and works in Guangzhou (China).

His most recent solo and group exhibitions include: *Seek for Geothermal Heat*, Open Studio at Times Museum, Guangzhou, China (2012); *The Man who Plants Scenarios*, Queens Nails Projects, San Francisco; *On/Off: China's Young Artists in Concept and Practice*, UCCA, Beijing, *Body Talks, Video Art In Public Space*, Maastricht, Holland (2011); *Beyond the Crisis*, 6th Curitiba Biennial, Curitiba, Brazil (2011) or *Moving Image in China, 1988-2011*, Mingsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2011).

WORKS

After Reality, 2013

High definition digital video, colour, sound.
13'08"

Courtesy of the artist.

The man who eats pigeons, 2013

Series of 12 colour photographs mounted on aluminium.
20 x 30 cm (each)

Courtesy of the artist.

The roots of kuzu, and those of gleditsia, walnut shells and pigeons tell us stories of people who confronted unusual situations. Just like pieces of information slowly erasing their own message and placing us in a state of 'emotional reading' you will gradually give up looking for all these clues.

The Collector, 2012

High definition digital video, colour, sound.
20'03"

Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.

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The accompanying publication for this exhibition, with contributions from Jean-Michel Frodon and Hu Fang, will be available from the end of February 2013.

KADIST ART FOUNDATION
PARIS, SAN FRANCISCO

The mission of Kadist Art Foundation is to participate in the contribution of the arts to society, collecting and producing contemporary artworks and conducting programs to promote the artist's role as cultural agent. Kadist's collections reflect the global scope of contemporary art, and its programs develop collaborations between Kadist's local contexts (Paris, San Francisco) and artists, curators and art institutions worldwide.

UPCOMING PROGRAM

Clark House Initiative, Bombay. Curators *Zasha Colah* and *Sumesh Sharma*, will be in residence from March to May 2013. They will present the work of artists Padmini Chettur, Prajakta Potnis and Zamthingla Ruivah in a group show from May to July 2013. (www.clarkhouseinitiative.org)

Colombian artist, **Nicolás Paris** (b.1977) will be in residence from June to October 2013 and a solo show of his work will be held from October to December 2013.

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