

ALICE WANG

SLIPPERY CONTOURS

30 NOV - 13 DEC, 2013
GALLERI DETROIT STOCKHOLM

Roslagsgatan 21
13350 Stockholm, Sweden

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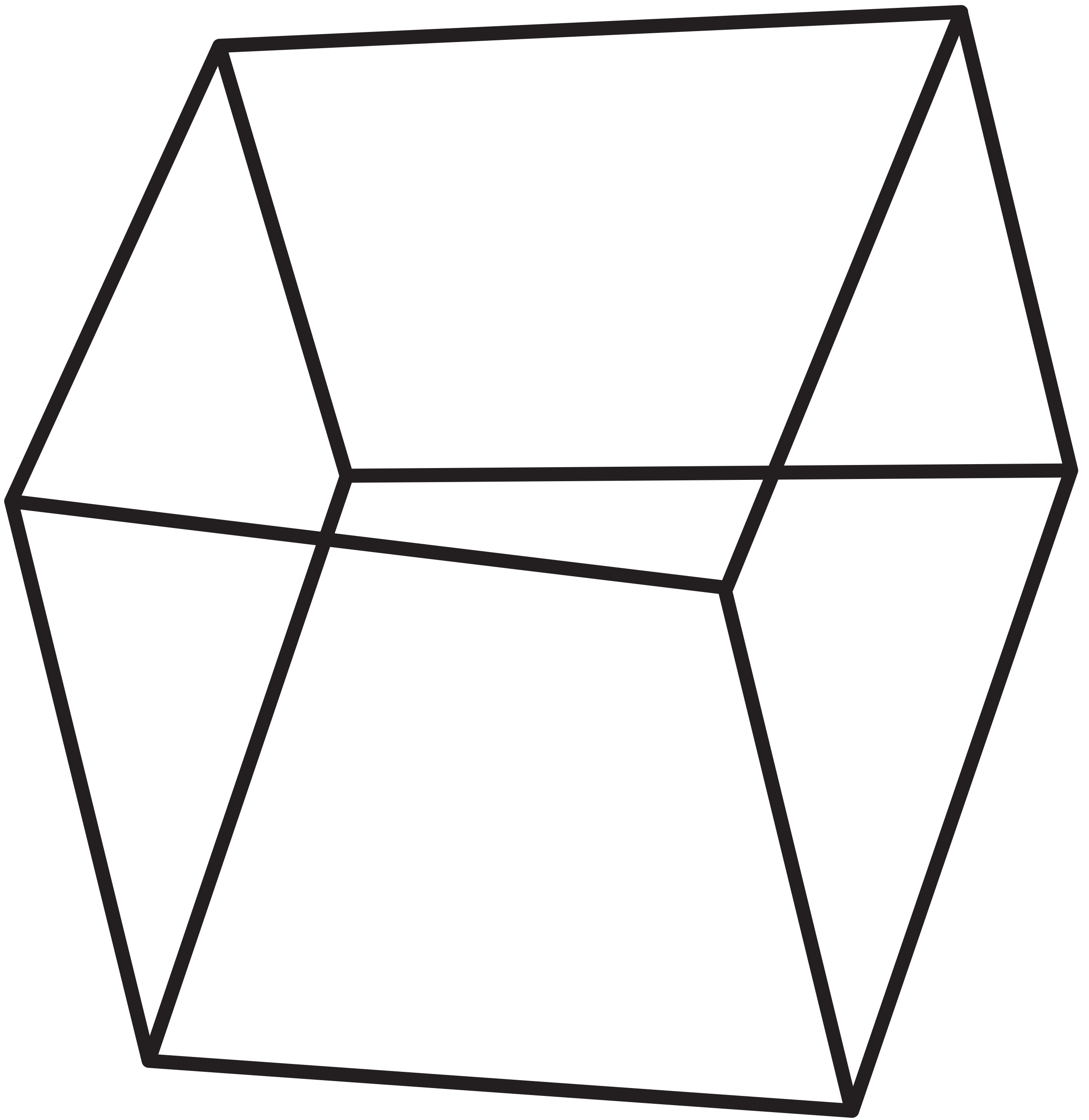
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But art is an imprecise cypher of history; artworks depict the tension between facts & their expression. The artist sweeps across history, elaborating fictions with fictions, compressing information & abstracting ideas into images. Shakiness & low fidelity suggest the materiality of video; but imagine this transposition as a record of loss. Directed at history, a video camera registers mostly the simple outline of an ontological search: the artist's attention.

As if to protest the inadequacy of vision, past present & future, the artist's expression of history takes increasingly alien forms. When the artist draws *The sound of the universe*, her synesthetic rendering abstracts a distorted scrap of science, itself an incomplete picture of an ultimate (universal) materiality, into an aesthetic protocol: a framed drawing in an exhibition. Elsewhere, the artist visualizes a device driver as something like an artist's graph of a black hole. She produces an abstract image out of data & the protocol prints itself.

But we are suspicious of the way abstraction masks as it summarizes; rulers abuse their subjects in the abstract; events across the ocean take the shape of parabolas & lose their urgency. But our memory does not respect such borders. Humming through our biology is a solipsistic yearning; yet we insist that facts underlie our memories. In our abstraction of history—or of the irreducible units of history—into a coded & colliding sequence, aesthetics lies immanent with truth; the visual permeates the concrete; abstraction finds material form. As we journey deeper into our own psychodelic eyelid movies, the phosphene pattern in the dark express an underlying biological code, a genetic history, a chemical fact: evidence that something of our origins remains.

Imagine that we can program our own movies. Imagine abstraction as the residue of attention & of consciousness that does not simply transcribe but actively splices shared memory. Imagine art that expresses the underlying code in a form that returns to the code changed. Unlike a video, unlike the bones, humans learn; our data codes not for outcomes but for possibilities. A tree fills its container, while the artist abstracts the tree.

Travis Diehl lives in Los Angeles. His videos have been shown at Curtat Tunnel, Lausanne; Anthony Greene, Boston; Human Resources, Los Angeles; and the Centre Pompidou, Paris. His writing appears in P&Co., Night Papers, X-Tra, Salon, and Artforum. He edits the artist-run arts journal *Prism of Reality*.

EYELID MOVIES

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Imagine a softly mutating history, a tightly coiled molecular code for BUSH or TREE, then stunt, starve, prune—affect the code into a miniaturized expression: the bonsai. But the bonsai couldn't care less about aesthetics. But the artist, whose conscious effort may or may not align with her intent as she runs her mind along the contours of history, affects & shapes, clips off strands of code, translates idea into form. The artist unpots & replants a bonsai in a courtyard & renders the tree an artwork.

But the artist's attention cycles inwards, too; her artwork suggests her own biography. Drawing, sculpture, photography, video, concept are the trailing forms of the events bracketing the place & time of this exhibition. But the history expressed here is contiguous with our own; her long, coiling & uncoiling thoughts are full of pockets & studs, receptions & transmissions. When the artist makes a video of a set shaped like a Maoist village or a lens factory in German Qingdao, this compressed footage is a translucent, vignetted clip of data from a shared code. The artist's China is our same China.

The artist makes a clear cubic balloon & channels a deflated memory of Minimalism. Meanwhile, contemporaneous with Judd & Bell & Haacke is Mao's Cultural Revolution. The artist frames her mother's memories of a far-off place & time in a video she titles *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness*.

IN THE VIDEO WORK OF ALICE WANG

by Rachel Kennedy

Contradiction and complexity define the memory-work of Alice Wang. After all, it is therapeutic to describe experiences, especially the conditions that bind what we care to remember. Description is like a sieve: the sands of time fall to the ground; the rocks that remain become memory-works, simultaneously autonomous objects and social constructs hued by tales and deeds. Contradiction is everything but a logical fallacy.

Complexity is active and social. "Hey comrade, what are you shooting there?" Historical materialism had long since been tested, and proven in fact to be the dematerialization of friendship, social relations reduced to ballistics. In that place and time, perhaps indirect speech stood in for direct communication. Meanings were surely still shared, but with a massive gulf between interpretation and certainty. "A tree." A tree, unlike any other. Ms. Wang's words are almost private as she responds to the film studio guard. Her meaning is lost or ignored by her apparent comrade. The residue of the Cultural Revolution lives a double life at Zhenbeibaow Western Film Studios. In this dusty frontier, civic duty is synonymous with first order of distrust, and performed as estranged benevolence. "Why a tree?"

Dear Alice: where exactly did mom and dad go away to, for those two years when you went to Xi'an to live with grandma? To prison? Canada? Was this the same grandmother who heard voices in the rain in the countryside in 1969? With auto-ethnographic clarity and poetic ambiguity, "fallacy" seems to respond that such questions are a fool's game. No direct answer is satisfying, so the indirect combination of shaky footage and shaky voices lets the emotional truth stand in for missing "facts". Thus, we enter a microcosm in China, or with more poetic precision, *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness*.

Part of the Kiautschou Bay concession, a German colony established in 1898-1914, Qingdao was a strategic location for the German naval forces in the Pacific. The fort was constructed to be a larger than life periscope inside a hill by the sea. It has an allegorical function for me, as most of the sites do in part III. The video ends with me running out of the fort, which is the ultimate collapse. The video's opening credits foreshadow this disintegration. In a way, the entire video is a series of collapses, which prevents any straight-forward reading of these histories. You, as the viewer, have to suture the disjointed elements together to create a sense of what the work is about, an intersubjective gestalt.

If you continue to follow the traces of the past, it will go on indefinitely. "Memory is a dynamic system, not a storage system," it's an infinite extension in time. Within the collapse one has the agency to invent their own histories, which, like life, is choppy and incoherent. The experiential aspect of the work is a kind of perceptual training, to sense but not grasp anything concrete.

EM: Thinking of your use of the North Korean Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo, how can a pavilion function as a 'set', as an island outside the context of its history? Pavilions are idealized sites, in what ways are they like bunkers? How do we create bunkers around our memories, our histories?

AW: It might be useful here to think about the idea of a set; it's basically a collection of scenery, stage furniture, and other articles used for a particular scene in a play or film. The world that we live in is intricately intertwined with our cultural imaginary, and, in a way, we are surrounded by sets. But, it doesn't have to be a negative thing, there is agency in this framework. Because we know that it's culturally constructed, that it's not this one single Truth, the same way a photograph doesn't render reality, the set can change, it's unstable, and new ones are created constantly. It's in this subtle parallax shift in consciousness, which destabilizes the singular perspective, that you can suddenly inhabit an alternate universe.

EM: The physicality of your work in other mediums pulls to the immaterial, to the intangible, to the unstable. As a final question I wanted to ask you how *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness* links to your practice in sculpture, photography and drawing?

AW: I lived in Los Angeles without a car for a while. Walking and biking around the city, I have come to appreciate the wildness of plant life here. Roots from some of the trees would lift the concrete slabs and create jagged edges that pierce the sidewalks. I love this unevenness in the Los Angeles terrain, it makes you pay attention to what you're walking on.

This interview was first conducted live with Alice Wang and guest curator Erik Martinson at the Art Gallery of Mississauga on July 25 during the exhibition of The fallacy of misplaced concreteness, July 18 to September 7, 2013. The text was further developed via correspondence to produce the written version above.

Source: Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

Erik Martinson is an independent curator based in Toronto. He has worked in video art distribution at Vtape since 2005. Erik has curated film/video programs and exhibitions for Art Star 3: Video Art Biennale at SAW Gallery (2007), Vtape's Curatorial Incubator (2009), Rendezvous with Madness Film Festival (2010, 2011), The Images Festival (2012), A Space Gallery (2012), and Art Gallery of Mississauga (2013). He has been a member of the Pleasure Dome curatorial collective since 2006. In 2012 he became co-editor of The Institute of Immaterialism with Cressida Kocienski. Erik was a participant in a Curatorial Intensive on Time-Based Media organised by Independent Curators International in New York (2013).

While cultural history is reconstructed at an old film studio, a different kind of story is framed by a wedding photographer in the courtyard outside a Catholic Church. This story is suited to a romantic public space, but there is something strange about the site. Under the Maoist government, Christian-

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becomes allegorical as accompanied by the Wang construction. Thus, the character of these places of state control, rapid industrialization, and image understanding into China's unique architectural and lenses. This confrontation plants a seed of narratives of international exports like cameras

Ms. Wang gives us a visual story of the construction. As both a national insider and outsider, these features synthesize as an affordance-based factory contrasted against a film studio special-

In a sense, Ms. Wang is fighting for nothing less than the public space of appearances. Her critical inquiry into family secrets, and therefore also state secrets, is overlaid upon radically different sides of China's visual culture industries, a camera lens factory contrasted against a film studio special-

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laden present when materialized in artworks such as *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness*. The political poetics of Alice Wang extracts from her family's experiences during and after the Cultural Revolution. Any sense of local or national duty crumbles under the crushing blow of her cosmopolitan challenge. Ms. Wang is, after all, a Chinese, Canadian, and almost American artist whose work is an investigation into the reality of what she and her family endured from WWII onward. She does not scale their experience to represent all Chinese of that period, but, on the way to a more private reconciliation, manages to render public some critical relations between documentation, obfuscation, and life lived.

AW: I wanted to make something that would be a living thing—messy, incoherent, at times impenetrable. The stories grew inside me and needed to take shape. It had to be indeterminate and uncertain as so much of my experience of looking and listening was. The concrete evidence of this History told another story. One that was recognizable and repeated. Equipped with Kevlar, it was made to be almost indestructible. So this is my attempt at collapse—by deconstructing representation, the technologies of vision, the film set, the camera lens, location set, ... and through a gestalt of glimpses into this history, one senses its meaning. In breaking down the mirage of an impasse, I would restore the flow of memory. In the process of disintegration something else, perhaps otherwise unknown, would come through.

EM: Can you talk about the German Imperial Qingdao Fort that features in Part III, the history of the colony, how it might act as a foil to the story of revelation, family secrets, that you relate in your personal voice over?

AW: It was a very surreal experience being in Qingdao after spending time in Germany. It gave me a new sense of what history does to a landscape and its people. Qingdao was a German transplant metropolis constructed in the late 19th century to be a modern Bavarian town – equipped with an entirely new infrastructure of sewage and water systems, roads and architecture, schools, even its own beer brewery (Qingdao Beer is actually a German beer).

Rachel Kennedy is a writer, editor, and curator based in Los Angeles. She is the editor-in-chief of digital arts and photography magazine Moholy Ground (moholyground.org) and recently curated Love of Sun (loveofsun.org), an online exhibit juxtaposing works by Chinese and California artists. She is currently a candidate for the MA in Aesthetics and Politics at the California Institute of the Arts (calarts).

The fallacy of misplaced concreteness concretizes the simple fact that disruptive experiences don't in fact get lost or forgotten under authoritative repression, but instead continue on as tense memories embodied by real people in real time. The most important memories are inherited, and will continue to seek unofficial resolution while awaiting a horizon of official legitimization.

It was banned and even today remains deeply marginalized by government hostility. This is just one more layer of China's terrifically complex and oddly sedimented lack of tolerance. The footage, simultaneously presents us with happenstance and constructed circumstance. However, all serve as presentations of the consistency with which locations and structures are charged with their recent past.

Sarily what you'll get in the negative—sometimes there are parallax errors. Where the picture may be taken from a slightly different angle from what the photographer had intended. This margin of error or displacement became a way in for me to the dense and overdetermined history of the Cultural Revolution. I always felt a weighty impasse when I was looking into this past, a political deadlock. Especially considering the current global economic condition, and our recent history since the late eighties—that triumphant end of the Cold War, and perhaps, of the future of Communism. The error allowed me the space to imagine and create a different reality, from an oblique point of view.

I was also obsessed with the idea of parallax; the reason we see in three-dimensions is because we have two eyes, the overlap of images from two angles, or sightlines, creates the world in three-dimensions. This perceptual phenomenon is rich in associations and metaphors. The camera can only register a singular perspective, rendering a flattened reality in monocular view; so, the photograph is a likeness to reality but not quite it. If the photograph of my mom doesn't portray what is really in the frame, then what else was in that frame, what could be that parallax shift which would bring out the three-dimensional view, the lived experience of this very present past?

So I followed the camera, the Seagull, to Shanghai where the factories were located. I was lucky because the state-run Shanghai Seagull Camera Factory was going bankrupt, its factories dissolving. When I visited in 2011, they no longer made Seagull cameras, but instead, made parts for other companies who outsource from them. I also went to Germany, because the Seagull TLR was a Chinese copy of the German Rolleiflex made by Rollei. I went to Braunschweig and Hamburg where the former factories were located. Rollei no longer make their own cameras either, a source from the company told me the manufacturing was all done in Asia. I spent a month in Germany, mostly in Berlin.

Yimo's directorial debut and Gong Li's acting debut. one of the films shot in the studio; it was Zhang Yimo's kungfu fighters and horses. *Red Sorghum* was "Western" genre: instead of cowboys and horses, film studio specializes in Chinese versions of the China. It's a lot of desert land, a dust bowl. The voice fades out, this rhythmic beat enters the aural the entire studio tour. And so, as my mother's the silence is actually the audio I recorded from the entire studio tour. And so, as my mother's the entire studio tour. And so, as my mother's

Alice Wang: Zhenbeibao Western Film Studios is located in Yin Chuan, the northern reaches of China. It's a lot of desert land, a dust bowl. The film studio specializes in Chinese versions of the "Western" genre: instead of cowboys and horses, it's kungfu fighters and horses. *Red Sorghum* was one of the films shot in the studio; it was Zhang Yimo's directorial debut and Gong Li's acting debut.

Erik Martinson: With regard to initiating a conversation around this video I thought of starting close in, on details and sites; elements I wanted to know more about as a way to unfurl the layers in the work. The video's structure of three separate but related parts will also guide the conversation in terms of the ordering of these details.

Alice Wang's video *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness* considers her family history in China, the construction of this history through memory, and the destabilization of knowing through the reflexive properties of the medium. It has a folding feel, back on itself, outward and inward at the same time.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE WANG

by Erik Martinson

While I was shooting the video, I was also working on telephone recordings with my mom, asking her questions about her experience of the Cultural Revolution. It was much later, maybe a year or so later, that I overlaid our conversation with the

EM: How did the relationship between image and sound develop for this section, in particular the voiceover narrative in dialogue with the film set and the absence of diegetic sound?

AW: The sound you hear at the end of Part I, the consistent metronomic rhythm that punctures the silence is actually the audio I recorded from the entire studio tour. And so, as my mother's voice fades out, this rhythmic beat enters the aural sphere. Not sure exactly what it means but it needed to be there.

I was very surprised at the reactions of the other tourists on set. Around the time of this family trip, I was deeply immersed in the history of the Cultural Revolution, and seeing the way these (educated youth who were sent down to the countryside during the Revolution), interacted with the set gave me a very strange feeling. I think humor was a way for them to digest it. It was an uncanny encounter for them too.

footage of Zhenbeibao. Surprisingly, it worked; the layering of image and sound articulated the disjointed experience I felt as the generation who grew up listening to these stories. It's not understandable in the rational, analytic way, but it makes sense. I wanted to make something that I didn't understand. It's not nonsense, but a particular sensitivity in unknowing. It can be awkward. And that's when I started working towards this intuitive method of unknowing. Particularly, how to materialize the form of uncertainty, and render the experience of the video, as it unfolds in time, to be a lived experience of memory, the physicality and feeling of remembering.

EM: This brings to mind the concept of 'postmemory' that I encountered in the writings of Marianne Hirsch: "...postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."

AW: Right. I wanted to make this work because I wanted to materialize a feeling I had in my own memory. It's a difficult topic, as so much of it seems unmovable, it felt like a historical impasse.

EM: Labour is discussed by your mother in a number of instances, the idea of what constitutes 'real toil'. I'm thinking of when she discussed the PA announcer's duties as compared to those of individuals working in the fields. How does the work of culture, or the labour of art come into this equation? Over the shot of the piggy bank and her portrait on the dresser your mother says: "You

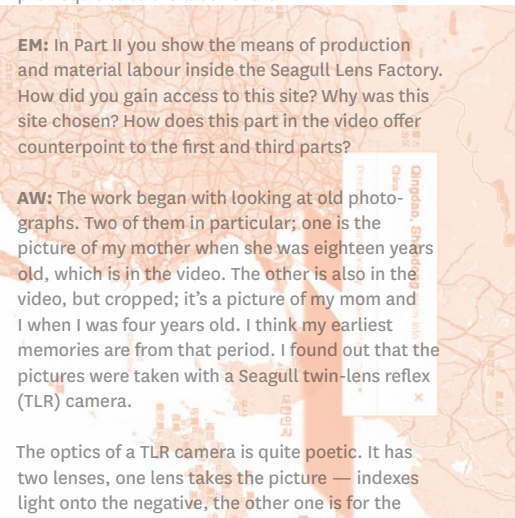
must be diligent and hardworking, not relaxed all day long. Thinking and living in your head is unrealistic. It's not practical." This also reminds me of the shot of the tree and the anonymous individual speaking off-camera who asks why record this tree. How do you navigate ideas of utility and art?

AW: The story of her not taking the job of the PA announcer is interesting. For me, the subtext of this narrative is that she was navigating the structures of power, and discovering her own agency within the repressive Communist regime. Power is a fluid process. Resistance comes in many forms and is contingent upon the time and place of one's actions. It's a daily struggle; I try to invent different strategies. The most recent one is to waste time, but not in a passive way; it's a mental thing. Because so much of my day is occupied by obligations of a social being in the modern world — each minute is spent efficiently to complete all required tasks— I need an outlet from being an utility. This purposelessness is a different consciousness from art-making—which constitutes another temporality—and, different from leisure. I think of it as a pre-requisite to the labor of art.

EM: In Part II you show the means of production and material labour inside the Seagull Lens Factory. How did you gain access to this site? Why was this site chosen? How does this part in the video offer counterpoint to the first and third parts?

AW: The work began with looking at old photographs. Two of them in particular; one is the picture of my mother when she was eighteen years old, which is in the video. The other is also in the video, but cropped; it's a picture of my mom and I when I was four years old. I think my earliest memories are from that period. I found out that the pictures were taken with a Seagull twin-lens reflex (TLR) camera.

The optics of a TLR camera is quite poetic. It has two lenses, one lens takes the picture — indexes light onto the negative, the other one is for the viewfinder — so you can see what the picture will look like. With the TLR, what you see is not neces-



EYELID MOVIES

by Travis Diehl

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But the artist's attention cycles inwards, too; her artwork suggests her own biography. Drawing, sculpture, photography, video, concept are the trailing forms of the events bracketing the place & time of this exhibition. But the history expressed here is contiguous with our own; her long, coiling & uncoiling thoughts are full of pockets & studs, receptions & transmissions. When the artist makes a video of a set shaped like a Maoist village or a lens factory in German Qingdao, this compressed footage is a translucent, vigneted clip of data from a shared code. The artist's China is our same China.

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COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION IN THE VIDEO WORK OF ALICE WANG

by Rachel Kennedy

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Dear Alice: where exactly did mom and dad go away to, for those two years when you went to Xi'an to live with grandma? To prison? Canada? Was this the same grandmother who heard voices in the rain in the countryside in 1969? With auto-ethnographic clarity and poetic ambiguity, “fallacy” seems to respond that such questions are a fool's game. No direct answer is satisfying, so the indirect combination of shaky footage and shaky voices lets the emotional truth stand in for missing “facts”. Thus, we enter a microcosm in China, or with more poetic precision, *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness*.

In China, visibility and invisibility are pungent, or repugnant, depending on one's level of sensitivity. We won't rehearse here the obvious polemics of censorship in China, though we should retain that awareness as integral to the first-hand disclosures presented in Ms. Wang's art. Today, many Chinese nationals, immigrants, and expats alike embody a repressed history. This is an inter-generational phenomenon of profound consequence in terms of both representation and politics. While state-repressed collective traumas are fundamentally dishonorable for that state, in this case it is the people who retain the tragedies of history. There is a state version of something called “the 100 years of humiliation” that purportedly ends with the founding of the People's Republic of China, as a vindication for the previous Colonial period in which much of the Eastern coast was occupied by European forces. Yet it is the contemporary state-mandated shaming and shrouding of collective memories that is surely the real embarrassment. It is this scar that has come to be understood by the international community as emblematic of China's bad reputation: a set of human rights violations over the last 60 years, if one is willing to accept an affront on people's memories, on top of accidental and intentional massacres, as a violation of their rights. Yet, repressed collective knowledge becomes a liminal horizon as it is rendered visible. It is lit up in its very materialization. That is, the

true past is ironically opposed to the state's fiction-laden present when materialized in artworks such as *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness*.

The political poetics of Alice Wang extracts from her family's experiences during and after the Cultural Revolution. Any sense of local or national duty crumbles under the crushing blows of her cosmopolitan challenge. Ms. Wang is, after all, a Chinese, Canadian, and almost American artist whose work is an investigation into the reality of what she and her family endured from WWII onward. She does not scale their experience to represent all Chinese of that period, but, on the way to a more private reconciliation, manages to render public some critical relations between documentation, obfuscation, and life lived.

In a sense, Ms. Wang is fighting for nothing less than the public space of appearances. Her critical inquiry into family secrets, and therefore also state secrets, is overlaid upon radically different sides of China's visual culture industries, a camera lens factory contrasted against a film studio specializing in idealizations of the Cultural Revolution. These features synthesize as an affordance-based permission. As both a national insider and outsider, Ms. Wang gives us a visual story of the construction of domestic Chinese cinema and finally also narratives of international exports like cameras and lenses. This conflation plants a seed of understanding into China's unique architectonics of state control, rapid industrialization, and image construction. Thus, the character of these places becomes allegorical as accompanied by the Wang family's story.

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ity was banned and even today remains deeply marginalized by government hostility. This is just one more layer of China's terrifically complex and oddly sedimented lack of tolerance. The footage, simultaneously presents us with happenstance and constructed circumstance. However, all serve as presentations of the consistency with which locations and structures are charged with their recent past.

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Alice Wang's video *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness* considers her family history in China, the construction of this history through memory, and the destabilization of knowing through the reflexive properties of the medium. It has a folding feel, back on itself, outward and inward at the same time.

Erik Martinson: With regard to initiating a conversation around this video I thought of starting close in, on details and sites, elements I wanted to know more about as a way to unfurl the layers in the work. The video's structure of three separate but related parts will also guide the conversation in terms of the ordering of these details.

In Part I, the tour of Zhenbeibao Western Film Studios forms the visuals from your point of view as a visitor. Alice, can you discuss your experience encountering the Cultural Revolution set and how this functions in the video?

Alice Wang: Zhenbeibao Western Film Studios is located in Yin Chuan, the northern reaches of China. It's a lot of desert land, a dust bowl. The film studio specializes in Chinese versions of the "Western" genre; instead of cowboys and horses, it's kungfu fighters and horses. *Red Sorghum* was one of the films shot in the studio; it was Zhang Yimo's directorial debut and Gong Li's acting debut.

I was on vacation in Yin Chuan with my family, and we went to visit the film studio/theme park, expecting the Chinese version of the Universal Studios experience in Los Angeles. But, in the middle of our guided tour, it felt as if we had stumbled upon another universe. The Cultural Revolution set didn't fit in at all with the rest of the theme park.

I was very surprised at the reactions of the other tourists on set. Around the time of this family trip, I was deeply immersed in the history of the Cultural Revolution, and seeing the way these tourists, who were from the generation of zhiqing (educated youth who were sent-down to the countryside during the Revolution), interacted with the set gave me a very strange feeling. I think humor was a way for them to digest it. It was an uncanny encounter for them too.

I sat on the footage for a long time, not knowing what to do with it. Especially because of the way it was shot, very choppy, and incoherent. I also didn't get the audio from the tour guide. It was an accident. I think I forgot to turn on the external mike when I was recording. So all I had was this video without sound, going through the Cultural Revolution set, with the tour guide and tourists coming in and out of the shots.

EM: How did the relationship between image and sound develop for this section, in particular the voiceover narrative in dialogue with the film set and the absence of diegetic sound?

AW: The sound you hear at the end of Part I, the insistent metronomic rhythm that punctures the silence is actually the audio I recorded from the entire studio tour. And so, as my mother's voice fades out, this rhythmic beat enters the aural sphere. Not sure exactly what it means but it needed to be there.

While I was shooting the video, I was also working on telephone recordings with my mom, asking her questions about her experience of the Cultural Revolution. It was much later, maybe a year or so later, that I overlaid our conversation with the

footage of Zhenbeibao. Surprisingly, it worked; the layering of image and sound articulated the disjointed experience I felt as the generation who grew up listening to these stories. It's not understandable in the rational, analytic way, but it makes sense. I wanted to make something that I didn't understand. It's not nonsense, but a particular sensitivity in unknowing. It can be awkward. And that's when I started working towards this intuitive method of unknowing. Particularly, how to materialize the form of uncertainty, and render the experience of the video, as it unfolds in time, to be a lived experience of memory, the physicality and feeling of remembering.

EM: This brings to mind the concept of 'postmemory' that I encountered in the writings of Marianne Hirsch:

"...postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."

AW: Right. I wanted to make this work because I wanted to materialize a feeling I had in my own memory. It's a difficult topic, as so much of it seems unmovable, it felt like a historical impasse.

EM: Labour is discussed by your mother in a number of instances, the idea of what constitutes 'real toil'. I'm thinking of when she discussed the PA announcer's duties as compared to those of individuals working in the fields. How does the work of culture, or the labour of art come into this equation? Over the shot of the piggy bank and her portrait on the dresser your mother says: "You

must be diligent and hardworking, not relaxed all day long. Thinking and living in your head is unrealistic. It's not practical." This also reminds me of the shot of the tree and the anonymous individual speaking off-camera who asks why record this tree. How do you navigate ideas of utility and art?

AW: The story of her not taking the job of the PA announcer is interesting. For me, the subtext of this narrative is that she was navigating the structures of power, and discovering her own agency within the repressive Communist regime. Power is a fluid process. Resistance comes in many forms and is contingent upon the time and place of one's actions. It's a daily struggle; I try to invent different strategies. The most recent one is to waste time, but not in a passive way; it's a mental thing. Because so much of my day is occupied by obligations of a social being in the modern world —each minute is spent efficiently to complete all required tasks— I need an outlet from being an utility. This purposelessness is a different consciousness from art-making—which constitutes another temporality—and, different from leisure. I think of it as a pre-requisite to the labor of art.

EM: In Part II you show the means of production and material labour inside the Seagull Lens Factory. How did you gain access to this site? Why was this site chosen? How does this part in the video offer counterpoint to the first and third parts?

AW: The work began with looking at old photographs. Two of them in particular; one is the picture of my mother when she was eighteen years old, which is in the video. The other is also in the video, but cropped; it's a picture of my mom and I when I was four years old. I think my earliest memories are from that period. I found out that the pictures were taken with a Seagull twin-lens reflex (TLR) camera.

The optics of a TLR camera is quite poetic. It has two lenses, one lens takes the picture — indexes light onto the negative, the other one is for the viewfinder — so you can see what the picture will look like. With the TLR, what you see is not neces-

sarily what you'll get in the negative—sometimes there are parallax errors, where the picture may be taken from a slightly different angle from what the photographer had intended. This margin of error or displacement became a way in for me to the dense and overdetermined history of the Cultural Revolution. I always felt a weighty impasse when I was looking into this past, a political deadlock. Especially considering the current global economic condition, and our recent history since the late eighties—that triumphant end of the Cold War, and perhaps, of the future of Communism. The error allowed me the space to imagine and create a different reality, from an oblique point of view.

I was also obsessed with the idea of parallax; the reason we see in three-dimensions is because we have two eyes, the overlap of images from two angles, or sightlines, creates the world in three-dimensions. This perceptual phenomenon is rich in associations and metaphors. The camera can only register a singular perspective, rendering a flattened reality in monocular view; so, the photograph is a likeness to reality but not quite it. If the photograph of my mom doesn't portray what is really in the frame, then what else was in that frame, what could be that parallax shift which would bring out the three-dimensional view, the lived experience of this very present past?

So I followed the camera, the Seagull, to Shanghai where the factories were located. I was lucky because the state-run Shanghai Seagull Camera Factory was going bankrupt, its factories dissolving. When I visited in 2011, they no longer made Seagull cameras, but instead, made parts for other companies who outsources from them. I also went to Germany, because the Seagull TLR was a Chinese copy of the German Rolleflex made by Rollei. I went to Braunschweig and Hamburg where the former factories were located. Rollei no longer make their own cameras either, a source from the company told me the manufacturing was all done in Asia. I spent a month in Germany, mostly in Berlin.

EM: Drawing attention to the mechanics of cinematic language reveals the construction of the moving image, as well as history, and memory. This can have the effect of clarity of the viewer's position within a structure that is fragmenting meaning, resisting desires to know or understand fully, to come to resolution. I find this dynamic really important to the functioning of the video, can you talk about highlighting these elements, for example, the idea of being 'on set' or 'on location', and how these modes of cinematic production embodied visually act as a counterpoint to the related memories and stories told orally?

AW: I wanted to make something that would be a living thing—messy, incoherent, at times impenetrable. The stories grew inside me and needed to take shape. It had to be indeterminate and uncertain as so much of my experience of looking and listening was. The concrete evidence of this History told another story. One that was recognizable and repeated. Equipped with Kevlar, it was made to be almost indestructible. So this is my attempt at collapse—by deconstructing representation, the technologies of vision, the film set, the camera lens, location set, ... and through a gestalt of glimpses into this history, one senses its meaning. In breaking down the mirage of an impasse, I would restore the flow of memory. In the process of disintegration something else, perhaps otherwise unknown, would come through.

EM: Can you talk about the German Imperial Qingdao Fort that features in Part III, the history of the colony, how it might act as a foil to the story of revelation, family secrets, that you relate in your personal voice over?

AW: It was a very surreal experience being in Qingdao after spending time in Germany. It gave me a new sense of what history does to a landscape and its people. Qingdao was a German transplant metropolis constructed in the late 19th century to be a modern Bavarian town – equipped with an entirely new infrastructure of sewage and water systems, roads and architecture, schools, even its own beer brewery (Qingdao Beer is actually a German beer).

Part of the Kiautschou Bay concession, a German colony established in 1898-1914, Qingdao was a strategic location for the German naval forces in the Pacific. The fort was constructed to be a larger than life periscope inside a hill by the sea. It has an allegorical function for me, as most of the sites do in part III. The video ends with me running out of the fort, which is the ultimate collapse. The video's opening credits foreshadow this disintegration. In a way, the entire video is a series of collapses, which prevents any straight-forward reading of these histories. You, as the viewer, have to suture the disjointed elements together to create a sense of what the work is about, an intersubjective gestalt.

If you continue to follow the traces of the past, it will go on indefinitely. "Memory is a dynamic system, not a storage system," it's an infinite extension in time. Within the collapse one has the agency to invent their own histories, which, like life, is choppy and incoherent. The experiential aspect of the work is a kind of perceptual training, to sense but not grasp anything concrete.

EM: Thinking of your use of the North Korean Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo, how can a pavilion function as a 'set', as an island outside the context of its history? Pavilions are idealized sites, in what ways are they like bunkers? How do we create bunkers around our memories, our histories?

AW: It might be useful here to think about the idea of a set; it's basically a collection of scenery, stage furniture, and other articles used for a particular scene in a play or film. The world that we live in is intricately intertwined with our cultural imaginary, and, in a way, we are surrounded by sets. But, it doesn't have to be a negative thing, there is agency in this framework. Because we know that it's culturally constructed, that it's not this one single Truth, the same way a photograph doesn't render reality, the set can change, it's unstable, and new ones are created constantly. It's in this subtle parallax shift in consciousness, which destabilizes the singular perspective, that you can suddenly inhabit an alternate universe.

EM: The physicality of your work in other mediums pulls to the immaterial, to the intangible, to the unstable. As a final question I wanted to ask you how *The fallacy of misplaced concreteness* links to your practice in sculpture, photography and drawing?

AW: I lived in Los Angeles without a car for a while. Walking and biking around the city, I have come to appreciate the wildness of plant life here. Roots from some of the trees would lift the concrete slabs and create jagged edges that pierce the sidewalks. I love this unevenness in the Los Angeles terrain, it makes you pay attention to what you're walking on.

This interview was first conducted live with Alice Wang and guest curator Erik Martinson at the Art Gallery of Mississauga on July 25 during the exhibition of The fallacy of misplaced concreteness, July 18 to September 7, 2013. The text was further developed via correspondence to produce the written version above.

Source: Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge, MA, and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

Erik Martinson is an independent curator based in Toronto. He has worked in video art distribution at Vtape since 2005. Erik has curated film/video programs and exhibitions for Art Star 3: Video Art Biennale at SAW Gallery (2007), Vtape's Curatorial Incubator (2009), Rendezvous with Madness Film Festival (2010, 2011), The Images Festival (2012), A Space Gallery (2012), and Art Gallery of Mississauga (2013). He has been a member of the Pleasure Dome curatorial collective since 2006. In 2012 he became co-editor of The Institute of Immaterialism with Cressida Kocienski. Erik was a participant in a Curatorial Intensive on Time-Based Media organised by Independent Curators International in New York (2013).